

MARCEL PROUST, EMILE ZOLA,
AND THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF THE DREYFUS AFFAIR:
MOCKING THE TRADITION OF MELODRAMATIC EPIC

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Appreciation of the significant comical quality of A la recherche du temps perdu grows with each passing decade. Likewise, understanding of this novel's rich network of references to diverse literary and artistic works also grows steadily.

Leading scholars have described the Recherche as a modern mock epic, and works as varied as Homer's Odyssey and the Thousand and One Nights have been proposed as the primary intertext for the novel's mock-epic dynamic. Such an intertext would provide structure not only for the Recherche's abundant comedy, but also for many other aspects of this novel in which the comic vision is so pervasive.

The present study suggests a different primary intertext for the Recherche. It proposes that an epic tradition born out of the French Revolution fulfills this important role in Proust's novel. Usually called humanitarian or Romantic epic, this post-revolutionary epic tradition envisions a restoration of the religious hegemony that was permanently lost when Catholicism was violently disestablished at the height of the Revolution.

Melodrama is another literary form that scholars agree was born out of the French Revolution's religious conflict. The chief characteristics of this literary mode have been well documented over the past three decades. Yet the many similarities between melodrama and post-revolutionary epic have hardly been noticed.

This study claims that humanitarian, post-revolutionary epic is melodrama's true epic form. The sexual politics of this literary genre, renamed here "melodramatic epic," is typically extreme; and the sexual ethic that it promotes is always highly conservative. The extreme sexual conservatism of melodramatic epic makes it the perfect comic foil for the Recherche's exploration of sexual diversity.

Ongoing nineteenth-century religious conflict in France provided a constantly renewed catalyst for the production of melodramatic epic. Such conflict peaked during the anticlerical campaign that terminated the Dreyfus Affair. This campaign produced Emile Zola's Évangile novels, which are best viewed as melodramatic epics, and which play a vital intertextual role in Proust's Recherche.

Melodramatic epic as a genre is the primary intertext of the Recherche, thus reinforcing the view of Proust's novel as a sophisticated modern mock epic.

Dedicated to my mother and father, Faye and George

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INTRODUCTION:

MARCEL'S PARADOXICAL ENTHUSIASM FOR MICHELET'S PREFACES

Interpréter un texte, cela revient toujours, me semble-t-il, à évaluer son humour. Un grand auteur, c'est quelqu'un qui rit beaucoup.

Gilles Deleuze, Etudes proustiennes VII (99)

Le roman est né non pas de l'esprit théorique mais du sens de l'humour... L'art inspiré par le rire de Dieu est, par son essence, non pas tributaire mais contradictoire des certitudes idéologiques. À l'instar de Pénélope, il défait pendant la nuit la tapisserie que des théologiens, des philosophes, des savants ont ourdie la veille.

Milan Kundera, L'Art du roman (194)

Il est difficile de lire Proust, qui a longtemps passé pour un auteur ennuyeux, sans éclater de rire. Le comique des descriptions, des attitudes, des conversations, ne cesse jamais de se conjuguer avec la beauté des haies d'aubépine et des jardins sous le soleil, et avec l'horreur des ces passions qui torturent les humains.

Jean d'Ormesson, Une autre histoire de la littérature française (252)

In the discussion of Proust's literary work, I have placed his comic vision first because it is essential and because, like Poe's purloined letter, its very obviousness escapes some readers' observation.

Roger Shattuck, Proust's Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time (71)

Marcel Proust's rise to the summit of French literary fame, a rise attested by the thousands of volumes that have been published on his work, is rather remarkable given that he died less than a century ago. In his contribution to Pierre Nora's Lieux de mémoire series, Antoine Compagnon sets for himself the task of explaining how, in such a relatively short span of time, Proust has come to be considered "le modèle incontesté du grand écrivain de la France" and his work considered "la somme intégrale de toute la littérature française" (3856,

3838). In search of an answer to these questions, Compagnon surveys the history of literary criticism on Proust. Compagnon's survey suggests that the comical side of A la recherche du temps perdu long went unappreciated and frequently even went unnoticed. Proust's extensive treatment of sexual diversity, his close examination of minute character traits, and his playfulness with language – all integral features of the Recherche's abundant comedy – were actually long considered by many critics to be defects, if not sick obsessions (3843-3856). In his study, Le rire de Proust, Patrick Brunel conducts his own survey of the critical neglect and misunderstanding that for decades met the comical side of Proust's Recherche (31-36). At the end of his overview, Brunel asks, almost out of frustration, “Le seuil de visibilité du comique d’A la recherche du temps perdu serait-il à ce point problématique ?” (35).

Today, the answer to that question is a resounding “no.” Brunel's own excellent study on Proustian humor is one sign among many of a new scholarly consensus on the significant comical quality of the Recherche. Approximately ten published monographs devoted specifically to the topic of Proust's humor now exist, and most new book-length studies on the Recherche discuss, often in detail, the novel's rich vein of comedy. The best of this scholarship seeks some pattern or organization to the Recherche's complex, sophisticated humor. Malcolm Bowie, one of today's leading experts on Proust, has proposed reading the entire Recherche as a modern mock epic. Bowie has written,

Somewhere between the eighteenth-century mock epic – perfectly embodied in Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (1714) or *Dunciad* (1728) – and the failed or imploding epic of the modern age, a new genre seems to be coming into being in Proust's appropriation of Homer. *A la recherche du temps perdu* is a work which worries about its own claims to epic status and in its ever-renewed hesitancy on the matter seems to acquire a strange tough-mindedness. A constant play of distance and recognition takes place between modern people, including writers, and the gods and heroes of antiquity... (99)

Bowie proposes Homer's Odyssey as a principal epic intertext for the mock-epic dynamic that he finds operating throughout the Recherche. Proust does indeed obtain a great

deal of humor by comparing the gods and heroes of ancient Greece to the much less august fictional characters that people his modern *roman-fleuve*. A fine example of Proust's humorous "play of distance and recognition...between modern people and the gods and heroes of antiquity" occurs during the pivotal gay sexual encounter between Charlus and Jupien at the beginning of Sodome et Gomorrhe. Marcel, the novel's narrator, has been secretly spying on Charlus for some time when he suddenly observes the baron unmistakably proposition the tailor Jupien for sexual favors. Marcel is surprised, not least because he never realized until that moment that Charlus was gay. In recounting his surprise upon discovering Charlus's homosexuality, Marcel refers to a key scene from Homer's Odyssey.

Dès le début de cette scène une révolution, pour mes yeux dessillés, s'était opérée en M. de Charlus, aussi complète, aussi immédiate que s'il avait été touché par une baguette magique. Jusque-là, parce que je n'avais pas compris, je n'avais pas vu...Ulysse lui-même ne reconnaissait pas d'abord Athéné. Mais les dieux sont immédiatement perceptibles aux dieux, le semblable aussi vite au semblable, ainsi encore l'avait été M. de Charlus à Jupien. (15)

Marcel compares himself to Ulysses/Odysseus who failed to recognize the goddess Athena when she visited him to offer advice on recapturing his throne after his many years of voyaging. Charlus himself is compared to Athena, a comparison that is apt, due to the baron's pretensions to greatness and his oft-concealed effeminacy. Charlus and Jupien, who have no trouble perceiving each other's homosexuality, are compared jointly to mythological gods who recognize immediately each other's divinity. Thus, Proust's comical use of Homer is effective here, and the many humorous references to ancient myth scattered throughout the Recherche do create a mock-epic quality to the novel, as Bowie suggests.

Yet Homer is not the sole intertext at work in this comical scene. The Biblical legend of Sodom and Gomorrah also operates intertextually to comic effect. At least in this scene, the Biblical legend clearly outranks Homer's Odyssey in intertextual importance. There is, however, another, arguably even more important intertext at work in this pivotal scene, and

that is the nineteenth-century verse epic Les Destinées by Alfred de Vigny. Proust places a citation from Les Destinées as epigraph to Sodome et Gomorrhe, the key central volume of his vast fictional cycle. The epigraph from Vigny is the following: “La femme aura Gomorrhe et l’homme aura Sodome” (Proust Sodome 3, Vigny Destinées 141). This brief passage from Les Destinées is the only epigraph in the entire Recherche, which indicates the significance that Proust attached to Vigny’s epic. Les Destinées and Vigny’s other verse epic, Poèmes antiques et modernes, incorporate Biblical legend, Homeric myth, and other, more recent sources of myth into a kind of modern religious synthesis.

Vigny’s two epics belong to a nineteenth-century literary tradition that sought to reinvent the epic genre in light of the political, cultural and religious changes set in motion by the French Revolution. The present study will claim that this nineteenth-century French epic tradition constitutes the primary intertext for the Recherche’s mock-epic dynamic, a comical dynamic that provides an elaborate structure for Proust’s entire *roman-fleuve*. This study will also show how this particular epic tradition endured into the early years of the twentieth century, when it was reinvigorated and amplified by the religious disputes of the Dreyfus Affair. Identifying a specific line of post-revolutionary epic as the main intertext for the Recherche in no way slights the many other important intertexts that operate within Proust’s novel. The French epic tradition that will be examined here displays a clear aspiration to synthesize a great deal of humanity’s religious, cultural, and literary heritage. By using this particular epic tradition as the main intertext for his vast novel, Proust automatically acquires a window onto “texts” of all sorts that together comprise humanity’s greatest spiritual, intellectual, and artistic achievements.

Yet the stance of the Recherche vis-à-vis this particular epic tradition is fundamentally a comical one. Put more bluntly, these post-revolutionary epics form the main target of

Proust's sophisticated humor. The reasons that Proust would choose to mock or ridicule this post-revolutionary epic tradition are numerous and sometimes complex. In what follows, I explain why this particular epic tradition constituted a richly deserving target of humor. A crucial step in developing this extended explanation involves defining precisely and then (re)naming this epic tradition. The name that this study will give to this particular line of post-revolutionary texts is "melodramatic epic." Thus, the present study will advance the idea that melodramatic epic is, in fact, the primary intertext of the Recherche. More precisely, melodramatic epic is the primary foil for the Recherche's elaborate mock-epic process, a process that fundamentally structures Proust's entire fictional cycle.

Melodramatic epic also constitutes a foil for the celebrated aesthetic concepts that Proust develops throughout the full length of the Recherche. Melodramatic epics violate the aesthetic promoted in the Recherche, and one way they do this is by their excessive political engagement. Born out of the French Revolution's brutal religious conflict, the genre of melodramatic epic remained engaged in the politico-religious disputes that persisted in France throughout the nineteenth-century. These politico-religious disputes reached their climax – or, more precisely, their nadir – in the vicious anticlerical campaign that concluded the Dreyfus Affair and that resulted in the permanent separation of Church and State in France in 1905. This spilling over of the nineteenth-century's politico-religious disputes into the early years of the next century is a major reason for extending the duration of the genre of melodramatic epic into the twentieth century – indeed, nearly right up to the moment when Proust began composing the Recherche. Melodramatic epic is characterized by an extreme religious ambition which also represents one of the clearest signs of the genre's political engagement. This study will draw upon the excellent theoretical scholarship on melodrama that has been published over the past three decades. This scholarship posits a strong affiliation between the

melodramatic mode of writing and political engagement in general. Literary melodrama was often wielded as a political weapon in nineteenth-century France. Integrated with the epic tradition that will be examined here, melodrama was used to defend one's own religious views and to attack the religious views of one's enemies.

The powerful fusion of this literary genre with its historical context means that the main epic intertext for the Recherche is not merely a unified set of literary works, but rather those literary works combined with the religious conflict that provided the catalyst for their production. At no time was this fusion more complete than during the Dreyfus Affair. Emile Zola, the author of "J'Accuse" and hero of the Dreyfus Affair, wrote at the end of his life three novels that were thoroughly engaged in the turn-of-the-century anticlerical campaign. Zola's final three novels, known collectively as the Évangiles, are melodramatic epics in the tradition of Hugo's Légende des siècles, Chateaubriand's Les Martyrs, Vigny's Les Destinées, and other post-revolutionary epics from earlier in the nineteenth century. Zola's Évangiles not only played a key role in the anticlerical campaign that concluded the Dreyfus Affair, these novels were part of a sharp turn towards cultural conservatism that characterized the Dreyfus Affair's final years.

Another major reason that Proust mocks this particular epic tradition is its consistent promotion of a highly conservative sexual ethic. Any major conflict will have at least two opposing sides, and the ongoing politico-religious disputes that fueled the genre of melodramatic epic did, roughly speaking, have two sides: the Christian and the anti-Christian. The struggle between these two opposing camps centered most specifically on the issue of whether France should preserve Catholicism as its official established religion, but in the heat of political battle – and, even more so, in the heated imaginations of the authors of these epic texts – the stakes were raised to cosmic levels. The debate was often framed as one of heavily

politicized Christianity in mortal opposition to an equally politicized anti-Christianity. Melodramatic epics were written from one or the other of these two polemical perspectives – the Christian or the anti-Christian – and examples of both will be examined here. Yet a major discovery of the present study and a major source of comedy for Proust's Recherche is the fact that these two vehemently opposed sides, both of which employed the genre of melodramatic epic to partisan advantage, resembled each other in their rush to identify themselves with sexual and gender conservatism. Regardless of whether this epic sub-genre was being exploited by the political Left or Right, melodramatic epic invariably promoted an extreme sexual conservatism. Emile Zola was closely allied with the political Left in France, but his final three novels, which this study will read as melodramatic epics, are permeated by a very conservative sexual ethic.

This study will call the period of pronounced cultural conservatism that developed around the turn of the century “the Dreyfus Affair’s melodramatic endgame.” This culturally conservative period represents the conclusion not only of the Dreyfus Affair, but also of more than a century of French religious conflict and of the century-long development of melodramatic epic, the literary genre most closely associated with that religious conflict. As the citation below from Germaine Brée’s The World of Marcel Proust shows, other scholars have already identified a period of literary and cultural conservatism around the turn of the century.

By the mid-1890’s Decadents and Symbolists were under attack on moral and political as well literary grounds. A wave of conservatism had hit France. The society novelist Paul Bourget; the professor and critic Brunetière, newly converted to Catholicism; Maurice Barrès, whose cult of the ego had turned into a cult of the collective past – all were advocating a “return” to national values and traditions. “Moral order” was the leitmotiv of the day, with emphasis on action, energy, and optimism. Under the influence of Tolstoy, Zola had espoused the cause of socialism and, abandoning the detached, clinical view of the Naturalists, was writing novels with an optimistic social message; Romain Rolland was dreaming of a theater of the masses, while Charles Péguy, a student and a convinced socialist at the time, was

writing of the perfect future city. A series of conversions – Huysmans, Claudel, Brunetière – were signs of a trend away from the delights of metaphysical uncertainty and anguish and toward commitment and self-discipline. Dilettantism and estheticism were no longer in fashion. Among young intellectuals, a preoccupation with social and political issues began to supersede the cult of art as the one supreme value. (32-33)

Many of the cultural figures that Germaine Brée mentions above will figure prominently in the remainder of this study. That is especially true in the case of Ferdinand Brunetière and Leo Tolstoy, whose polemical writings from Russia played a major role in the cultural and religious debates that dominated *fin-de-siècle* France. Brée summarizes very well the intellectual climate that prevailed in France shortly before Proust began writing the Recherche, but her study is not designed to show precisely how this climate left its mark on the text of Proust's fictional cycle.

Other scholarly works that serve as more direct precursors to the present study are Susan Suleiman's Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre, Michel Raimond's La Crise du roman: Des lendemains du Naturalisme aux années vingt, Pierre Masson's Le Disciple et l'insurgé: Roman et politique à la Belle Epoque, and Jacques Nathan's La Morale de Proust. These four major scholarly works all describe at some length a dominant *fin-de-siècle* literary movement that blended intense political engagement, on both the Left and Right, with a conservative interest in a return to morality. As his title suggests, Jacques Nathan's La Morale de Proust relates this cultural movement directly to Proust's Recherche, which Nathan even suggests was written as a critical response to the trend toward moralism. Yet these works by Suleiman, Raimond, Masson, and Nathan do not have a sharp focus either on the Dreyfus Affair or on sexual politics, and none of them show how France's *fin-de-siècle* cultural climate flowed directly from developments earlier in the century.

One study that does relate Proust's Recherche to the full nineteenth-century French literary and cultural tradition is Michel Brix's Le Romantisme français: Esthétique

platonicienne et modernité littéraire. Although not evident from its title, Brix's Romantisme français develops a thesis closer to the present study's overall argument than does any other previous scholarly work. Brix discovers within the century-long tradition of French Romanticism a powerful strain of Neoplatonism against which he claims the Recherche reacted. Neoplatonism incorporated, along with many other philosophical concepts, a negative attitude toward sex and the body, an attitude that Brix finds several Romantic authors adopting, including authors that are discussed here. Yet Brix says nothing about the Dreyfus Affair and very little about Zola. Like the other scholarly works mentioned here as precursors to this study, Brix's Romantisme français does not utilize the scholarship either on melodrama or post-revolutionary epic. Most important of all, none of these previous studies relate their findings to the Recherche's abundant comedy, the appreciation of which seems to grow steadily with every passing decade in Proust scholarship.

* * *

A la recherche du temps perdu is the narrative of a quest for a literary vocation. The vast novel's numerous discussions about aesthetics – whether in terms of literature, music, or painting – trace the effort of Marcel the narrator to determine whether he truly has what it takes to become a great writer. One of the novel's best-known digressions on the topic of aesthetics occurs mid-way through the volume La Prisonnière. In this digression, Marcel reflects on the many nineteenth-century writers and musicians who constructed huge cycles of works to which they gave order and meaning only retrospectively, while looking back over their nearly completed labors and discovering a grand scheme that unified them all. Michelet, Hugo, Balzac and Wagner are all cited as examples of massively prolific nineteenth-century artists whose work grew almost organically into a well-structured whole.

Given that the Recherche itself is an enormous fictional cycle that acquires unity retrospectively in its final volume, Marcel's observation about the creative practice of these demiurgic nineteenth-century artists has usually been interpreted as straightforward praise. Indeed, the digression on aesthetics in La Prisonnière is usually read as Proust's open acknowledgement that he learned the proper way to compose and structure a work of enormous size by studying the example of these major artists of the preceding century. For example, Jean-Yves Tadié has written the following about this digression in La Prisonnière "le héros joue au piano la sonate de Vinteuil et réfléchit, dans une page capitale, sur l'attitude des principaux artistes du XIXe à l'égard de leur œuvre : Balzac, Michelet, Wagner, qui tous (annonçant le projet de Proust) ont voulu composer un cycle unique, une grande synthèse" (Proust : La cathédrale 62).

The problem with reading Marcel's comments on nineteenth-century aesthetics as unalloyed praise is that closer inspection reveals a pronounced strain of comedy within his remarks. The comedy is clearly not intentional on the part of the Recherche's fictional narrator. Marcel ponders in earnest the achievements of these hugely prolific writers and musicians. Nevertheless, at least one of his main observations seems completely absurd, almost as if the exorbitance of his praise unexpectedly reveals a kind of criticism of these great creative artists. This criticism in a humorous mode can be perceived either as an expression of Proust's own opinion or simply as part of an autonomous network of comedy that operates within the Recherche. Regardless, the humor in this particular observation, which most readers probably overlook, seems undeniable – and undeniably hilarious – once one pays close attention to it. Its impact has the effect of transforming completely the meaning of this important digression on aesthetics.

The comical observation centers on Marcel's reference to the French historian Jules Michelet. Of all the prolific nineteenth-century artists that he considers in the digression, Marcel decides that Michelet best incarnates both the century and the principle of organic, retroactive organization. This is Marcel's (apparent) praise of Michelet:

Sans s'arrêter à celui qui a vu après coup dans ses romans une *Comédie Humaine* ni à ceux qui appelèrent des poèmes ou des essais disparates *La Légende des siècles* et *La Bible de l'Humanité*, ne peut-on pas dire pourtant de ce dernier qu'il incarne si bien le XIXe siècle, que les plus grandes beautés de Michelet, il ne faut pas tant les chercher dans son œuvre même que dans les attitudes qu'il prend en face de son œuvre, non pas dans son *Histoire de France* ou dans son *Histoire de la Révolution*, mais dans ses préfaces à ses livres. Préfaces, c'est-à-dire pages écrites après eux, où il les considère, et auxquelles il faut joindre çà et là quelques phrases commençant d'habitude par un: "Le dirai-je" qui n'est pas une précaution de savant, mais une cadence de musicien. (666)

Careful inspection of these remarks by Marcel reveals the absurdity of saying that "the greatest beauties" 'les plus grandes beautés' to be found in Michelet's enormous, multivolume histories lie in the small prefaces that the historian wrote after the fact. The prefaces that Michelet wrote for his Histoire de France and his Histoire de la Révolution are indeed minuscule compared to the overall size of the works. The Histoire de France alone encompasses nineteen volumes, while its preface is only forty-four pages long. The disproportion is perhaps even more striking with Michelet's Histoire de la Révolution, which runs nearly three thousand pages, but which had an original preface of only eight pages. For the narrator of the Recherche to say that the greatest beauties of Michelet's enormous historical works lie in their comparatively minuscule prefaces resembles paying a "compliment" to someone who has just purchased an enormously expensive new car by remarking how attractive its hubcaps are.

The actual content of Michelet's prefaces makes Marcel's high praise seem even more peculiar. Hardly anything contrasts with the Recherche more sharply in tone and style than do the prefaces that Michelet wrote for his Histoire de France and Histoire de la Révolution, as

well as the preface for the third of Michelet's works that Marcel praises, La Bible de l'Humanité. La Bible de l'Humanité is a bizarre work that tries to synthesize the spiritual lessons of all past civilizations into a new, modern religion. According to Michelet, all previous civilizations have a chapter to contribute to the new "Bible of humanity." The preface to this work reads like weirdly mystical epic poetry. Marcel, the Recherche's narrator, suggests that the language of Michelet's prefaces aims more for a musical effect than for any actual meaning. Marcel says that the prefaces are pages written after-the-fact "auxquelles il faut joindre çà et là quelques phrases commençant d'habitude par un: "Le dirai-je" qui n'est pas une précaution de savant, mais une cadence de musicien." Marcel is correct in observing the highly personal tone of Michelet's prefaces, but he does not recognize their outright bizarreness. Nothing acquaints a person with the strangeness of Michelet's prefaces like an actual encounter with one. The following are the last two paragraphs from the preface to La Bible de l'Humanité:

Revenant des ombrages immenses de l'Inde et du Râmâyana, revenant de l'Arbre de vie, où l'Avesta, le Shah Nameh, me donnait quatre fleuves, les eaux du Paradis, -- ici, j'avoue, j'ai soif. J'apprécie le désert, j'apprécie Nazareth, les petits lacs de Galilée. Mais franchement, j'ai soif... Je les boirais d'un coup.

Laissez plutôt, laissez que l'humanité libre en sa grandeur aille partout. Qu'elle boive où burent nos premiers pères. Avec ses énormes travaux, sa tâche étendue en tout sens, ses besoins de Titan, il lui faut beaucoup d'air, beaucoup d'eau et beaucoup de ciel, -- non, le ciel tout entier ! -- l'espace et la lumière, l'infini d'horizons, -- la Terre pour Terre promise, et le monde pour Jérusalem. (ix)

Marcel has previously said that Michelet "incarnates" the nineteenth century, and that the purest, most beautiful distillation of this author who incarnates the nineteenth-century can be found in his prefaces. After reading this excerpt from the preface to Michelet's La Bible de l'Humanité, one may be forgiven for laughing out loud or suspecting that there might be a humorous game afoot when Marcel expresses inordinate praise for such texts such as this. Michelet's absurd self-aggrandizement ("ici, j'avoue, j'ai soif"), his pointless display of

erudition through the use of obscure names, and his grandiose vision of humanity's cosmic destiny – all expressed in ultra-serious, pseudo-Biblical language – does not resemble whatsoever the modern sophistication of Proust's masterpiece.

The preface to La Bible de l'Humanité also displays a highly conservative sexual morality, which stands in sharp contrast to the Recherche's famous exploration of sexual diversity. The sexual conservatism of Michelet's "Bible" arises in the context of a distinction that he makes between two different types of civilization. Michelet explains that some civilizations represent "light" while others represent "darkness." The "light" civilizations are the Indian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Celtic, and German. The two main "dark" civilizations are the Egyptian and the Jewish. Michelet states that the contributions of both "light" and "dark" civilizations enrich the "Bible of humanity," but he claims that sexual morality prevalent in the "dark" civilizations is much more lax, thus giving rise occasionally to debauchery. As a result, Michelet emphasizes melodramatically that women and children should read only those chapters from his book dealing with the "light" civilizations. The chapters on the "dark" civilizations pose too great a danger to the moral well-being of women and children, whom Michelet obviously considers too impressionable for such "indecent" material. In terms of the "light" civilizations, however, Michelet writes,

Donc, les types naturels en ont existé de bonne heure et dans une beauté merveilleuse et incomparable.
Pureté, force, lumière, innocence.
Vierges, enfants, venez, et prenez hardiment les Bibles de lumière. Tout y est salubre et très-pur. (v-vi)

As for the chapters in his "Bible of humanity" dealing with the "dark" civilizations, Michelet insists that the only safe exposure that women and children can have to them is by having the man of the family read them aloud, buffering the dangerous content of these sections with his paternal commentary.

La variété de ce livre, son élasticité, ont beaucoup servi, cependant, quand le père de famille...en lisait des fragments choisis, et les interprétait aux siens, les pénétrant d'un souffle qui n'est pas toujours dans le texte. Ce texte, qui oserait le remettre aux mains d'un enfant ? Quelle femme osera dire qu'elle l'a lu sans baisser les yeux ? Souvent il offre tout à coup l'impureté naïve de la Syrie, souvent la sensibilité exquise, calculée, savourée, d'esprits sombres et subtils qui ont traversé toute chose. (vii-viii)

Michelet wrote this preface for La Bible de l'Humanité after the success of the first edition, which explains why he uses the past tense here. He explains how families that had already bought the "Bible" put the "unsafe" sections to good use when the father read them aloud to the more vulnerable family members. Michelet clearly wants this practice to continue. Yet such prudery on the part of the famous Romantic historian could hardly differ more markedly from the attitude toward literary reception expressed in the Recherche. A commonplace of Proustian scholarship is the lack of any firm moral code informing the narrative of the Recherche (May 70-75). The very idea of shielding women, or even children for that matter, from literary works with "risqué" content runs counter to the fundamental impulse behind Proust's masterpiece. As will be seen later in this study, the cycle's final volume, Le Temps retrouvé, soundly rejects literary censorship, especially on moral grounds.

The preface to Michelet's Histoire de la Révolution française also seems quite melodramatic and utterly different from the Recherche. Michelet begins this preface by surveying the Paris of his day, searching for monuments and memorials in honor of the French Revolution. He finds none, or almost none. The sole monument in Paris to an event an epochal as the 1789 Revolution is a flat field, the Champ de Mars. Unfortunately for Michelet, the Champ de Mars has become nothing more than the site for frivolous amusements. Few, if any of the people enjoying themselves there on a balmy mid-nineteenth-century day realize the historical significance of the location. Michelet begins the passage below by actually addressing the French Revolution in an apostrophe, as if the revolution were a living being to whom Michelet could speak.

Tu vis!...Je le sens, chaque fois qu'à cette époque de l'année mon enseignement me laisse, et le travail pèse, et la saison s'alourdit...Alors je vais au Champ de Mars, je m'assieds sur l'herbe séchée, je respire le grand souffle qui court sur la plaine aride.

Le Champ de Mars, voilà le seul monument qu'à laissé la Révolution...

[La] Révolution a pour monument... le vide...

Son monument, c'est ce sable, aussi plan que l'Arabie...

Le héros, n'est-ce pas celui qui fonda le pont d'Iéna ?... Non, il y a ici quelqu'un de plus grand que celui-là, de plus puissant, de plus vivant, qui remplit cette immensité.

« Quel Dieu ? On n'en sait rien... Ici réside un Dieu ! »

Oui, quoiqu'une génération oublieuse ose prendre ce lieu pour théâtre de ses vains amusements, imités de l'étranger, quoique le cheval anglais batte insolemment la plaine... un grand souffle la parcourt que vous ne sentez nulle part, une âme, un tout-puissant esprit... (1)

As in La Bible de l'humanité, a powerful religious note pervades this preface.

Michelet associates the French Revolution with some god, some spiritual force, but clearly not with the god of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Of course, for anyone familiar with the history of the French Revolution, this is quite appropriate, given that the revolution essentially banned Christianity after a certain point. After banning Christianity, the Revolution's leaders discovered that the people needed some outlet for their spiritual aspirations, and so, with Robespierre leading the way, they set about constructing a new religion that was to be celebrated in revolutionary festivals. Michelet's preface specifically praises these quasi-religious revolutionary festivals.

Génie profondément humain ! j'aime à le suivre, à l'observer dans ces admirables fêtes où tout un peuple, à la fois acteur et témoin, donnait, recevait l'élan de l'enthousiasme moral, où chaque cœur grandissait de toute la grandeur de la France, d'une Patrie qui, pour son droit, proclamait le droit de l'Humanité. (3)

The Revolution's moral and spiritual reforms are its greatest achievements, according to Michelet. No physical landmark, such as "le pont d'Iéna," could possibly be more precious than the Revolution's moral accomplishments, accomplishments that Michelet describes in terms that are simultaneously melodramatic and epic. Yet once again, these simultaneously moralistic and grandiose strains that are so pronounced in the prefaces to La Bible de l'humanité and the Histoire de la Révolution française seem quite foreign to the spirit of

Proust's Recherche. Marcel's effusive praise of these overblown texts continues to appear quite peculiar, if not outright hilarious.

The vision at once epic and melodramatic that Michelet puts forward in his prefaces seems fueled largely by his stance toward religion. La Bible de l'humanité, which proposes the construction of a new religion out of the elements of many previous ones, demonstrates how eclectic, unorthodox and ambitious Michelet's religious project was. The foundation of Michelet's religious views, however, seems to have been an intense rejection of Christianity generally, and of Catholicism specifically. One might expect no less from so fervent an admirer of the French Revolution. The preface to Michelet's Histoire de France states clearly his belief that Christianity is doomed to imminent death. Using the strangely self-aggrandizing tone observed by Marcel in La Prisonnière, Michelet tells his readers the specific frame of mind in which he composed those sections of his Histoire de France that deal with the country's Christian heritage. In a word, Michelet does not want anyone to confuse his vigorous manner of relating France's Christian past with any pro-Catholic or pro-Christian sentiment. To Michelet, French Christianity is nothing more than a dying patient that he had to revive temporarily as best he could in order to obtain its cooperation in the telling of this religion's eventful past.

Aux moments très-émus où je couvai, refis la vie de l'Église chrétienne, j'énonçai sans détour la sentence de sa mort prochaine, j'en étais attendri. La recréant par l'art, je dis à la malade ce que demande à Dieu Ézéchias. Rien de plus. Conclure que je suis catholique ! quoi de plus insensé ! Le croyant ne dit pas cet office des morts sur un agonisant qu'il croit être éternel. (xxii)

The story of Ezechias to which Michelet refers is found in the Old Testament Book of Kings. Ezechias was the King of Judah, who fell gravely ill in the middle of his reign. He prayed to God to heal him, and God quickly consented, but only on the condition that there be a precise limit of fifteen years to the remainder of his life. Ezechias did in fact recover

miraculously from his mortal illness, but his life ended precisely fifteen years later (4 Kings 20). Michelet's point in referencing this tale is that, although Christianity may seem vigorous and influential in the pages of his Histoire de France, these signs of health are illusory, merely the result of his own superb literary powers. Like Ezechias, Christianity in France is still fated to die in a relatively short period of time; and the thoroughly anticlerical Michelet would not have it any other way. The conservative moralizing that is evident in Michelet's prefaces might even be interpreted as a kind of compensation for his belief that Christianity would soon die, a death that would require the creation of a new religion in its place, a new religion that Michelet set out to prove would have a moral code every bit as rigorous as that of Christianity. Whether or not this theory of compensation holds in the case of Michelet, his impulse toward moralism and epic grandiosity within his prefaces runs counter to the literary inspiration behind Proust's Recherche, and this in spite of anything that Proust's narrator says in the middle of the fictional cycle.

Marcel's admiration for the preface of another gargantuan nineteenth-century work, Balzac's Comédie humaine, poses just as great a conundrum. The main source of perplexity here is the same as with Michelet's prefaces: Balzac's preface, known more properly as the "Avant-propos de La Comédie humaine," is in many respects bizarre, and it bears little, if any resemblance to Proust's Recherche. In fact, the relationship between Balzac's "Avant-propos" and the rest of his Comédie humaine, a collection of undisputed masterpieces, is a strained and uneasy one at best. In other words, many of the ideas contained in the "Avant-propos de La Comédie humaine" contradict not only the spirit of Proust's Recherche, but also the spirit of the rest of Balzac's own Comédie humaine. As with Michelet, Proust seems to be making the point that the drive for a grand, retrospective unity in the works of leading nineteenth-century artists gave free reign to aesthetic impulses of the most dubious sort. Such an observation

applies even when the artist in question is a writer usually as brilliant as Balzac. Thus, in the aesthetic digression in La Prisonnière, Proust is criticizing the very nineteenth-century aesthetic practice that previous scholars have thought that he was praising, and the vehicle for this criticism is the humorously misguided judgment of his narrator in his youth.

Once again, as in Michelet's prefaces, a curious blend of epic, melodrama, and religion lies at the core of the strangeness found in Balzac's "Avant-propos." In Balzac's case, however, the fundamental religious impulse at work is Roman Catholicism of the most traditional sort, the very religion that Michelet rejects. Thus, Marcel's digression in La Prisonnière sets up an important, albeit tacit, symmetry between two major nineteenth-century French authors whose religious inspirations were significantly at odds with each other: Balzac the arch Catholic and Michelet the fiercely anticlerical illuminist. Marcel's mere reference to the Bible de l'humanité reminds readers of Michelet's unorthodox religious views, as does, to a lesser extent, the mention that Marcel makes of Michelet's Histoire de la Révolution. Marcel is a bit more direct in alluding to the arch Catholicism of Balzac. Later in the same digression from La Prisonnière, Marcel speaks of the "ecstasy" 'ivresse' that Balzac must have felt

quand celui-ci [Balzac], jetant sur ses ouvrages le regard à la fois d'un étranger et d'un père, trouvant à celui-ci la pureté de Raphaël, à cet autre la simplicité de l'Évangile, s'avisait brusquement en projetant sur eux une illumination retrospective qu'ils seraient plus beaux réunis en un cycle où les mêmes personnages reviendraient et ajouta à son œuvre, en ce raccord, un coup de pinceau, le dernier et le plus sublime. Unité ultérieure, non factice. (666-667)

Intimate knowledge of the "Avant-propos de La Comédie humaine" is needed to understand the subtlety of Marcel's reference here, but the effect is, once again, richly humorous. Through the voice of his naïve and earnest narrator, Proust is actually misquoting Balzac's "Avant-propos" to comical effect. The precise passage from Balzac's "Avant-propos" that Proust references will be presented in a moment, so that the humorous misquotation can be understood in full. Nevertheless, the very idea that Balzac would look

back over his nearly completed fictional cycle, a cycle firmly rooted in nineteenth-century French society, and find many of his novels resembling Raphael's idyllic canvases, which are themselves deeply rooted in the Christian piety of the long-distant Italian Renaissance, has to appear far-fetched, if not hilariously preposterous, to any reader who thinks long about such a comparison. Yet so religiously conservative, even reactionary, is the "Avant-propos de La Comédie humaine" that Balzac himself comes very close to making just such a comparison.

One of today's leading Balzacian specialists actually provides authorization to read the "Avant-propos de La Comédie humaine" as anomalous vis-à-vis the rest of Balzac's fictional cycle. The anomaly that Nicole Mozet, author of Balzac au pluriel, finds in the "Avant-propos" is consistent with this new interpretation of the heretofore overlooked comedy in the La Prisonnière digression. Mozet's Balzac au pluriel does not mention the aesthetic views contained in Proust's Recherche, but her study convincingly makes the case that the "Avant-propos" to the Comédie humaine, along with the prefaces that Balzac wrote for individual novels in his vast fictional cycle, are far more sexually conservative than the novels to which they serve as introductions. So brilliantly perceptive is Mozet's analysis of Balzac's prefaces that it virtually proves by itself the necessity of reading Marcel's aesthetic digression in La Prisonnière as comedy. In other words, even without making the connection to Proust, Mozet furnishes most of the evidence one needs to understand that the digression in La Prisonnière, where Marcel praises Balzac's "Avant-propos," could not possibly represent Proust's personal views on aesthetics, much less provide a key to the aesthetic vision structuring the entire Recherche. Mozet's analysis of Balzac's prefaces shows why the aesthetic digression in La Prisonnière must be read with a great deal of skepticism, and even why one should read it as a prime example of Proust's sophisticated humor, famous for its nuance and subtlety.

Mozet takes into consideration a large number of Balzac's prefaces, not just the "Avant-propos" for the entire cycle, but also prefaces for individual novels. She concludes that Balzac's prefaces are deceptive, conveying a sexual and moral conservatism later belied by the content of the novels themselves. Mozet offers several reasons as to why Balzac promotes such conservative views in the short texts that introduce his novels. One simple reason is that Balzac was cleverly trying to evade the sanctions of the literary censors, who likely would pay more attention to the beginning of a work than to its later pages. Another group that Balzac may have been trying to deceive with his conservative prefaces was his average readers, who may well have been discouraged from finishing Balzac's novels if he placed too early in his texts his frequently pioneering analysis of the human sexual passions. In the passage cited below from Balzac au pluriel, Mozet calls the Comédie humaine prefaces a "shield" 'bouclier' that softens the harshness of the later fictional content. Finally, and most interesting of all, Mozet briefly suggests that the prefaces serve less to introduce the novels than to promote some of Balzac's grand philosophical notions. As evident in the "Avant-propos," many of the political, religious and social convictions that Balzac held at the end of his career were quite conservative, but his rigorous practice of writing fiction muted such beliefs in the novels proper.

In the passage below from Balzac au pluriel, Mozet focuses mostly on the preface to Eugénie Grandet, but she makes clear that her comments about this one preface apply to most of the Comédie humaine prefaces, including the "Avant-propos." Mozet leaves no doubt that the one thing above all else that Balzac tries to conceal in his prefaces is the sexual content of his fiction.

La préface balzacienne, liée à un projet totalisant, ne peut se borner à un seul texte et s'épuise forcément à la poursuite des significations futures, qu'il lui est encore plus difficile de maîtriser...La préface est une gageure. Sa fonction n'est pas tellement d'être lue que d'occuper un espace plus ou moins important entre le titre de la

couverture et le début du texte fictionnel, comme s'il était besoin d'atténuer la brutalité d'une première lecture...

Pour mieux jouer son rôle de bouclier, la préface choisit parfois de dire sur le texte qui la suit autre chose que le texte lui-même. C'est pourquoi il est très rare d'y trouver une analyse théorique sur la littérature. Dans le cas de Balzac, il arrive qu'on rencontre dans ses textes préfaciels des éléments importants d'un véritable protocole de lecture. Mais l'essentiel de ce qu'il a à dire sur ses œuvres ne se trouve pas dans ses préfaces, y compris l'*Avant-Propos*. Lorsque dans la préface d'*Eugénie Grandet* il prétend vouloir raconter dans son roman « ce qui se passe tous les jours en province », ce « réalisme » dont il se réclame est essentiellement une protection contre la censure, parce que seul le vrai peut justifier le médiocre, le laid ou l'obscène. Bien sûr, *Eugénie Grandet* est un roman infiniment moins « anatomique » que *La Vieille Fille*, mais c'est quand même du point de vue de la sexualité que l'hiatus est le plus grand entre le texte fictionnel (qui en dit peu) et le discours préfaciel, qui non seulement n'en dit rien, mais encore étouffe le roman sous une lourde carapace de moralisme et de religiosité. Comme *La Vieille Fille*, *Eugénie Grandet* est l'histoire d'un mariage blanc, mais cette fois par la volonté de l'héroïne, dont le choix suffit à trahir l'ampleur de son désir et de ses frustrations. Or, sur ce point la préface de Balzac est encore moins explicite que le roman : non seulement elle renonce à mettre le lecteur sur la voie, mais elle n'hésite pas à l'aiguiller délibérément sur une fausse piste, celle de la chasteté quasi consacrée. (239-241)

Mozet explains that the greatest discrepancy between preface and novel occurs on the subject of sex. She is writing specifically about Eugénie Grandet, but as will be seen in a moment here, the very same thing can be said about the “Avant-propos” vis-à-vis the entire Comédie humaine. Mozet says that the preface of Eugénie Grandet “smothers the novel under a thick layer of moralism and religiosity” and “deliberately leads the reader down the false track” of viewing Eugénie’s unconsummated marriage as a form of pious chastity, rather than as what it really is, the result of seething, unsatisfied sexual passion for a man that will forever be inaccessible to her. Once again, significant and probably deliberate deception on the subject of sex can easily be found in the “Avant-propos,” but this time in relation to the entire Comédie humaine. It is worth noting that, although Mozet’s complaint is ostensibly directed only against the preface to Eugénie Grandet, this leading Balzacian specialist probably refers implicitly to the novel’s preface and epilogue combined. Balzac wrote both an introductory and a concluding essay for Eugénie Grandet, and these two essays operate jointly to deceive

the reader as to the religious and moral content of the novel (Balzac “Épilogue” 1201-1202, “Préambule” 1025-1026)

In the early pages of the “Avant-propos,” Balzac declares his ambition to depict all major segments of contemporary French society in his novels. This is Balzac’s well-known dream of competing with the public records office “faire concurrence à l’État-civil” (10). There is certainly an epic quality to such an ambition, but by itself it lacks the melodrama, the prudishness and the moralism found in Michelet’s prefaces. Balzac wastes little time in catching up with Michelet in these categories of dubious worth, however. By the middle of the “Avant-propos,” Balzac is loudly proclaiming that the main purpose of fiction is moral edification. In defense of this view, he quotes one of the most reactionary of all French social and political thinkers, Louis de Bonald. In the passage below, Balzac admits that his allegiance to the famously counter-revolutionary Bonald might make him seem reactionary, but he simply does not care if others view him as such. Balzac presents Catholicism as a religion that is absolutely necessary for suppressing unruly human passions, and he claims that monarchy is superior to democracy.

« Un écrivain doit avoir en morale et en politique des opinions arrêtées, il doit se regarder comme un instituteur des hommes; car les hommes n’ont pas besoin de maîtres pour douter », a dit Bonald. J’ai pris de bonne heure pour règle ces grandes paroles...L’homme n’est ni bon ni méchant, il naît avec des instincts et des aptitudes ; la Société, loin de le dépraver, comme l’a prétendu Rousseau, le perfectionne ; mais l’intérêt développe alors énormément ses penchants mauvais. Le christianisme, et surtout le catholicisme, étant...un système complet de répression des tendances dépravées de l’homme, est le plus grand élément d’Ordre Social...L’enseignement, ou mieux, l’éducation par des Corps Religieux est donc le grand principe d’existence pour les peuples, le seul moyen de diminuer la somme du mal et d’augmenter la somme du bien dans toute Société. La pensée, principe des maux et des biens, ne peut être préparée, domptée, dirigée que par la religion. L’unique religion possible est le Christianisme...Le Christianisme a créé les peuples modernes, il les conservera. De là sans doute la nécessité du principe monarchique. Le Catholicisme et la Royauté sont deux principes jumeaux...J’écris à la lueur de deux Vérités éternelles : la Religion, la Monarchie, deux nécessités que les événements contemporains proclament, et vers lesquelles tout écrivain de bon sens doit essayer de ramener notre pays...Aussi regardé-je la Famille et non l’Individu comme le véritable élément social. Sous ce

rapport, au risque d'être regardé comme un esprit rétrograde, je me range du côté de Bossuet et de Bonald, au lieu d'aller avec les novateurs modernes. (12-13)

Balzac's remarkable claim that religion and monarchy are the two lodestars of his writerly craft suggests another way in which the Comédie humaine appears as an epic. At least in the pages of the "Avant-propos," if not in fact, the Comédie humaine comes across as an epic attempt to bring about the moral and religious regeneration of France. Balzac states plainly that all writers should put their craft in the service of returning France to monarchy and religion, but Balzac supports these traditional institutions as strongly as he does mainly out of a belief that only they can return moral order to society. Michelet, the enemy both of monarchy and of Catholicism, expresses rather clearly in his prefaces the same dream of moral regeneration on an epic scale. In fact, although the religious views of Balzac and Michelet appear radically opposed on the surface, there seems to be fundamental agreement between them that the preservation of a conservative moral order, especially in the sexual domain, is the primary justification for the widespread adoption of their preferred religions, Catholicism for Balzac and a new, syncretic religion for Michelet. Thus, the intense concern that each of these writers expresses about religion ultimately amounts to little more than a desire to enforce traditional roles of sex and gender. The promotion of such an ultra-conservative sexual politics is almost certainly what Balzac has in mind when he writes that he considers the family the cornerstone of society: "Aussi regardé-je la Famille et non l'Individu comme le véritable élément social."

Given that the "family values" promoted here by Balzac ostensibly accord with the ideas of the reactionary Louis de Bonald, there can be little doubt as to their arch conservatism. Some of Bonald's more notorious views on these matters include the following: that the state has the right to decide who is fit to marry and who is not, that wives should be fully subordinate to husbands and children to parents, that the state ought to intervene actively

in family life to ensure this patriarchal structure, that divorced couples should lose all custody of their children, that women after divorce should be confined permanently to religious institutions, and that anyone failing to uphold these gender and sex norms should be excluded from social and political life, with the state providing the necessary enforcement (Klinck 110-114). Thus, even if only for the sake of appearance, Balzac in the “Avant-propos” is swearing allegiance to one of the most right-wing of all social agendas. Proust could hardly have been unaware of this, just as he could hardly have approved it, given the appreciation for sexual diversity that permeates the Recherche. Of course, it cannot be stressed enough that this interpretation of Balzac’s and Michelet’s sexual politics is limited strictly to their prefaces, but this limitation derives entirely from the fact that Marcel claims to admire those very prefaces.

The obsession with sexual morality becomes clearest in the “Avant-propos” when Balzac attempts to defend his novels against charges of immorality. A great deal of the “Avant-propos” is taken up with Balzac’s indignant replies to critics who complained about the supposed immorality of his Comédie humaine novels. Balzac had genuine reason to be concerned about such charges. While he was writing the “Avant-propos,” the Vatican was deliberating whether to place the entire Comédie humaine on its Index of banned books. Unfortunately for Balzac, the political, religious and sexual arch-conservatism that permeates his “Avant-propos” availed him nothing with the Catholic hierarchy. Only a few months after the appearance of this short introduction to his fictional cycle, the Vatican did indeed condemn the Comédie humaine (Pierrot 375-379).

In trying to stave off such a crisis, however, Balzac goes to extremes in the “Avant-propos” to prove the morality of his novels. In the passage below, he actually counts all the sexually chaste and virginal female characters that he created in the course of writing the Comédie humaine. Shortly prior to this passage, Balzac asserts that his novels are completely

moral, because crime and sin always ultimately receive punishment in their pages (14-15). Regardless of whether this assertion of morality is true, such heavy-handed claims by Balzac disprove the possibility that Proust could have overlooked the sometimes flawed practice of finding retrospective unity in large nineteenth-century literary creations, while still admiring the idea of such unity in the abstract. Balzac's example suggest that the particular kind of unity sought by the demiurgic nineteenth-century artists was inextricably bound up with a moral vision at odds with that of the Recherche. At least in the "Avant-propos," the more Balzac takes a global perspective on his work, the more moralistic he sounds, and thus the less suitable he becomes as any kind of model for the extremely sophisticated and nuanced Recherche.

The extremely moralizing passage below is also the one with the absurd mention of Raphaël to which Proust alludes in La Prisonnière. Balzac begins by saying that he has surpassed the English novelist Samuel Richardson in the depiction of sexually pure young women.

J'ai eu cent fois à faire ce que Richardson n'a fait qu'une seule fois. Lovelace a mille formes, car la corruption sociale prend les couleurs de tous les milieux où elle se développe. Au contraire, Clarisse, cette belle image de la vertu passionnée, a des lignes d'une pureté désespérante. Pour créer beaucoup de vierges, il faut être Raphaël. La littérature est peut-être, sous ce rapport, au-dessous de la peinture. Aussi peut-il m'être permis de faire remarquer combien il se trouve de figures irréprochables (comme vertu) dans les portions publiées de cet ouvrage : Pierrette Lorrain, Ursule Mirouët, Constance Birotteau, la Fosseuse, Eugénie Grandet, Marguerite Claës, Pauline de Villenoix, Mme Jules, Mme de la Chanterie, Ève Chardon, Mlle d'Esgrignon, Mme Firmiani, Agathe Rouget, Renée de Maucombe... (17)

The mention of Samuel Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe underscores the importance of melodrama to the ideology that Balzac and Michelet develop in their respective prefaces. The sentimental novelist Samuel Richardson was one of the key precursors of melodrama, at least according to Peter Brooks, a leading expert on this mode of fiction (Melodramatic Imagination 13, 19, 65, 75). As will be seen later in this study, an emphasis on female sexual purity is one

of the primary motifs of melodrama. In the passage above, Balzac insists that he has surpassed the proto-melodramatic Richardson in the depiction of female chastity.

Melodrama is also why Balzac mentions so prominently the Renaissance painter Raphaël, famous for his idyllic images of the virginal Madonna. Raphaël's canvases are not melodramatic, but they do vividly portray youthful innocence and purity of the sort that melodrama will later exaggerate and obsess over. As stated earlier, Proust has Marcel misquote this line in La Prisonnière. Marcel says that, looking back on his nearly finished literary labors, Balzac finds a retrospective unity by noticing how many of his novels resemble paintings by Raphaël, as well as the Gospels of the New Testament. In reality, Balzac regrets that his novels do not resemble Raphaël's paintings more closely. Balzac says that literature has difficulty making the depiction of perfect virtue interesting, rather than boring and repetitive. He worries that, "Pour créer beaucoup de vierges, il faut être Raphaël. La littérature est peut-être, sous ce rapport, au-dessous de la peinture." In the La Prisonnière digression, Proust humorously calls Balzac's bluff by implying that the Comédie humaine novels really do resemble Raphaël's pious canvasses. Proust has his narrator Marcel virtually declare that the abundant piety found throughout the Comédie humaine is what gives unity to Balzac's cycle. Of course, Proust knew the Comédie humaine very well and understood that the overblown religious claims that Balzac makes for his novels in the "Avant-propos" lack credibility. The author of the Recherche ridicules such absurd pretensions to piety accordingly.

Although Balzac's "Avant-propos" does not reflect accurately the rest of the Comédie humaine, another nineteenth-century preface extolled by Marcel in La Prisonnière does fully reflect the enormous literary cycle that it introduces. The literary cycle in question is Victor Hugo's La Légende des siècles, a vast collection of poems that together form a true

nineteenth-century epic. La Légende des siècles has always been considered an epic and was even called such by Hugo himself. This fact is important, because while Proust mocks the impulse toward epic in the prefaces of Michelet's histories and Balzac's cycle of novels, in the case of Hugo's La Légende des siècles, Proust aims his ridicule more squarely at epic as a distinct literary genre. More precisely, Proust aims his ridicule at the category of nineteenth-century French epic that Hugo's poetic cycle represents. The present study will demonstrate that works like Hugo's Légende des siècles form a distinct sub-genre of epic, a primary feature of which is the use of melodrama on a grand scale. The existence of this epic sub-genre that can best be referred to as melodramatic epic, the prevalence of this sub-genre in nineteenth-century French literature, and Proust's adoption of this sub-genre as the primary intertext for the sophisticated comedy found throughout his Recherche constitute three main contentions of this new reading of Proust's masterpiece. The important role played by nineteenth-century French political and religious history, especially the Dreyfus Affair, in the creation both of melodramatic epics and of Proust's Recherche constitutes another major element of this study's argument.

An outline of this study's overall argument will follow shortly, but a brief examination of Hugo's preface to La Légende des siècles is in order first. Just as with the Michelet's and Balzac's prefaces, a quick look at the text that introduces Hugo's verse epic leaves little doubt that Marcel's praise in La Prisonnière should not be taken seriously. Epic, melodrama, religion, and stern moralism combine in Hugo's preface to make a text quite unlike the Recherche and even antithetical to it. La Légende des siècles actually has two prefaces, one in prose and one in verse. The prose essay that introduces the epic's first volume is entitled simply "A la France." As with Michelet's La Bible de l'Humanité, Hugo declares the aspiration of formulating something like a new religion for all humanity, a religion to be

comprised of concepts and lessons acquired from earlier civilizations and centuries. The explicit ambition to create a new religion, or to re-establish on a substantially new basis an already existing religion, especially Christianity, will be the chief characteristic that distinguishes melodramatic epic from standard literary melodrama. Hugo, for one, is quite explicit about the grand religious ambition behind the creation of La Légende des siècles. He says that the Légende des siècles will synthesize “histoire, fable, philosophie, religion, [et] science” and that his epic amounts to “a religious hymn of a thousand stanzas” ‘une espèce d’hymne religieux à mille strophes.’

Cet ensemble, que sera-t-il?

Exprimer l’humanité dans une espèce d’œuvre cyclique ; la peindre successivement et simultanément sous tous ses aspects, histoire, fable, philosophie, religion, science, lesquels se résument en un seul et immense mouvement d’ascension vers la lumière ; faire apparaître dans une sorte de miroir sombre et clair...cette grande figure une et multiple, lugubre et rayonnante, fatale et sacrée, l’Homme ; voilà de quelle pensée, de quelle ambition, si l’on veut, est sortie *la Légende des Siècles*...

Or, l’intention de ce livre est bonne.

L’épanouissement du genre humain de siècle en siècle, l’homme montant des ténèbres à l’idéal, la transfiguration paradisiaque de l’enfer terrestre, l’éclosion lente et suprême de la liberté, droit pour cette vie, responsabilité pour l’autre ; une espèce d’hymne religieux à mille strophes, ayant dans ses entrailles une foi profonde et sur son sommet une haute prière ; le drame de la création éclairé par le visage du créateur, voilà ce que sera, terminé, ce poème dans son ensemble ; si Dieu, maître des existences humaines, y consent. (16-17)

Hugo’s emphasis on the gradual perfectibility of human societies is a common feature of melodramatic epic, which until now has typically gone by the name of humanitarian or romantic epic. This study has multiple reasons for renaming this widely recognized, but infrequently studied nineteenth-century sub-genre of epic. The reasons will be discussed in depth in a later chapter, but one justification for the renaming is the significant amount of clearly identifiable melodrama that usually runs through these works. A great deal of superb scholarship has been done over several decades exploring the similarities and boundaries between romanticism and melodrama, both of which flourished in the nineteenth century. The

present study aims in part to initiate a new scholarly discussion about the relationship between romanticism and melodrama within the context of epic literature.

The preface in verse for the La Légende des siècles appears at the beginning of the epic's second volume. This verse preface, entitled appropriately "La Vision d'où est sorti ce livre," picks up many of the same themes mentioned in the prose preface. Yet the verse preface conveys more clearly the melodrama and moralism prevalent in Hugo's epic cycle. In this prefatory poem, Hugo (or his poetic narrator) says that the vision for the entire epic came in a wild dream, virtually a nightmare. In this dream, he saw an enormous wall with painted images representing the course of human history. As evident from the excerpt below, the images on the wall are bleak and terrifying, indicating that the view of human history provided in Hugo's epic cycle will be darkly Manichaeian. As the dream progresses, the wall changes shape, becoming a grand edifice that eventually resembles a temple in ruins. Living, writhing figures seem to emerge directly from the stony material of this edifice. The dream-induced edifice and the threatening images it conveys are characterized by wild, wicked abandon and a lack of moral restraint. "Orgiastic" describes many of these dream-induced images, and Hugo even mentions the condemned Biblical city of Gomorrah at one point below. As will be seen later, the Sodom and Gomorrah theme is common in melodramatic epic, and its use in these solemn, religiously ambitious texts usually serves to condemn sexual "perversion" and human sexual diversity. The case will be made later that Proust's pervasive use of the same Sodom and Gomorrah theme, but in humorous mode, refers back in mock-epic fashion not simply to the Genesis story of fire and brimstone but primarily to the invidious exploitation of this Biblical legend by nineteenth-century melodramatic epic. This is part of Hugo's terrifying dream:

J'eus un rêve : le mur des siècles m'apparut.
C'était de la chair vive avec du granit brut,

Une immobilité faite d'inquiétude,
 Un édifice ayant un bruit de multitude,
 Des trous noirs étoilés par de farouches yeux,
 Des évolutions de groupes monstrueux,
 De vastes bas-reliefs, des fresques colossales ;
 Parfois le mur s'ouvrait et laissait voir des salles,
 Des antres où siégeaient des heureux, des puissants,
 Des vainqueurs abrutis de crime, ivres d'encens,
 Des intérieurs d'or, de jaspe et de porphyre ;
 Et ce mur frissonnait comme un arbre ou zéphyre ;
 Tous les siècles, le front ceint de tours ou d'épis,
 Étaient là, mornes sphinx sur l'énigme accroupis...
 Quel titan avait peint cette chose inouïe ?
 Sur la paroi sans fond de l'ombre épanouie
 Qui donc avait sculpté ce rêve où j'étouffais ?
 Quel bras avait construit avec tous les forfaits,
 Tous les deuils, tous les pleurs, toutes les épouvantes,
 Ce vaste enchaînement de ténèbres vivantes ?
 Ce rêve, et j'en tremblais, c'était une action
 Ténébreuse entre l'homme et la création ;
 Des clameurs jaillissaient de dessous les pilastres ;
 Des bras sortant du mur montraient le poing aux astres ;
 La chair était Gomorrhe et l'âme était Sion ;
 Songe énorme ! c'était la confrontation
 De ce que nous étions avec ce que nous sommes... (370-371)

Such an ominous introduction to the Légende des siècles suggests strongly that Hugo's epic leaves little room for humor of any sort. In fact, in his epic's prose preface, Hugo admits that comedy is almost entirely absent from the work. The reason Hugo gives for comedy's absence from his epic is its supposed absence from human history itself: "Les tableaux riants sont rares dans ce livre; cela tient à ce qu'ils ne sont pas fréquents dans l'histoire" (17). The encyclopedic and supremely comical Recherche gives the lie to such a facile assumption. Proust's massive novel mines a huge span of political and cultural history for a great deal of brilliant comedy. The intrinsic humorlessness of melodramatic epics such as La Légende des siècles make these works perfect intertexts for a sophisticated mock-epic like the Recherche, whose author demonstrates perfect comprehension of comedy's inner workings. For example, comedy often works through the figurative shrinking of what

previously seemed large and threatening, thereby releasing suddenly the pent-up energy of apprehension, a release often expressed as laughter. The Recherche employs numerous literary mechanisms – some local and brief, others complex and developed over hundreds, if not thousands of pages – that shrink to comical effect all manner of grandiose concepts and events. The “Songe énorme !” at the base not only of Hugo’s epic vision but of melodramatic epic itself, as this grandiose kind of vision is referred to in the second-to-last line above, is an intertextual monstrosity that the elaborate mock-epic dynamic of the Recherche shrinks down to comical size.

Even the trope of text as architecture is one that the Recherche will turn to brilliant comical effect. The architectural quality of Hugo’s disturbing epic vision is one shared by the other melodramatic epics to be discussed here later. Images of churches and temples suddenly collapsing are favorites of melodramatic epic, whose ambitious religious project often requires a violent clearing of the pre-existing spiritual terrain to get firmly underway. Proust’s Recherche, on the other hand, is famous for being conceived lovingly and humorously as an elaborate cathedral in the manner of the great medieval churches, but secularized. Proust’s comical transposition of melodramatic epic’s architectural theme is one that will be discussed in much more detail. Excellent commentaries on architecture in the Recherche, studies such as Luc Fraisse’s L’Œuvre cathédrale : Proust et l’architecture médiévale and Stéphane Chaudier’s Proust et le langage religieux : La cathédrale profane will lend valuable support to this new interpretation.

In summary, Marcel’s extravagant praise for the prefaces of Michelet, Balzac, and Hugo seems highly suspect, and the comical dubiousness of his praise opens the prospect of indentifying an entire epic sub-genre that serves as the primary intertext for the Recherche’s mock-epic dynamic. Marcel himself finally gives a clear indication that something is very

wrong the digression on aesthetics in La Prisonnière. He ultimately expresses great unease with all his previous observations about the magnificence of the nineteenth-century prefaces. In other words, Marcel spends the entire multi-page digression praising the organic force and structure of the works by the great prolific nineteenth-century writers and musicians, and yet then, at the very end, he raises serious doubts. He says that the work of these artists suffer from a certain “allégresse du fabricant” “joy or enthusiasm of the creator.” He refers to this problem also as “cette habileté vulcanienne” “this volcanic skillfulness.” Marcel worries that the success of the nineteenth-century artists in adding ever more parts to their huge cycles may have resulted more from the volcanic force with which they labored than from any truly organic process. He even wonders whether such a process constitutes art at all, and he concludes the digression with a wonderfully humorous metaphor comparing the enormously forceful nineteenth-century artists – such as Wagner, Michelet, and Hugo – to powerful, yet noisy airplanes that will take a person high into the ether, but make so much noise in getting there, that passengers cannot appreciate the silence of the heavens.

Mais alors,...j'étais troublé par cette habileté vulcanienne. Serait-ce elle qui donnerait chez les grands artistes l'illusion d'une originalité foncière, irréductible en apparence, reflet d'une réalité plus qu'humaine, en fait produit d'un labeur industriel? Si l'art n'est que cela, il n'est pas plus réel que la vie et je n'avais pas tant de regrets à avoir.... Peut-être comme les oiseaux qui montent le plus haut, qui volent le plus vite, ont une aile plus puissante, fallait-il de ces appareils vraiment matériels pour explorer l'infini, de ces cent-vingt chevaux marque Mystère, où pourtant si haut qu'on plane on est un peu empêché de goûter le silence des espaces par le puissant ronflement du moteur! (667-668)

It is remarkable that commentaries on the aesthetic digression in La Prisonnière rarely mention this conclusion, which seems to undo nearly all the praise that Marcel has previously lavished on the great demiurgic artists of the nineteenth century. In fact, Marcel's claim here that there is something very “noisy” about their gargantuan works seems to accord with a very different and much more famous discussion of aesthetics from later in the Recherche, the

sixty-page digression in Le Temps retrouvé, where Marcel finally concludes that he does indeed have a genuine literary vocation. This sixty-page digression from the very end of the novel is where Marcel comes to understand the workings of involuntary memory and the indispensable contribution that this psychological phenomenon makes to the process of literary creation. Silence is an essential component of the experience of involuntary memory as Marcel ultimately appreciates it in the Temps retrouvé digression. The crucial importance that Marcel will attach to silence in his final, most authoritative epiphany on aesthetics suggests that the “noisy” nineteenth-century writers discussed in La Prisonnière and elsewhere in the Recherche violate in some fundamental way the aesthetic that Proust practices in the Recherche. The final chapter of this study will closely examine the sixty-page digression from Le Temps retrouvé, where Proust’s final revelation on aesthetics refutes and/or significantly modifies all discussions of this subject from earlier in the Recherche.

CHAPTER 1

MELODRAMATIC EPIC: A NEW KIND OF EPIC FOR THE NINETEENTH CENTURY – PART I

The origins of melodrama can be accurately located within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath. This is the epistemological moment which it illustrates and to which it contributes: the moment that symbolically, and really, marks the final liquidation of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarch), the shattering of the myth of Christendom, the dissolution of an organic and hierarchically cohesive society...Melodrama represents both the urge toward resacralization and the impossibility of conceiving sacralization other than in personal terms.

Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (14-16)

Ce n'était pas peu de chose que le mélodrame ! c'était la moralité de la révolution !...A la naissance du mélodrame, le christianisme n'existait pas plus que s'il n'avait jamais existé. Le confessionnal était muré, la chaire était vide...Où les hommes seraient-ils allés puiser des enseignements propres à les diriger dans les anxiétés toujours renaissantes de la vie, si ce n'eût été au mélodrame ?

Charles Nodier, Introduction to Théâtre choisi de G. de Pixérécourt (vii-ix)

La révolution qui mit un terme au régime politique instauré en France depuis près de mille ans entraîna des bouleversements dans tous les domaines de la civilisation, et donc dans les arts et les lettres...En ce qui concerne l'épopée, ce genre va se renouveler du fait des transformations sociales et culturelles survenues entre 1789 et 1815...Le tourbillon qui secoue l'Europe pendant vingt-cinq ans, les changements des mentalités sous la pression des événements, l'espoir de lendemains prometteurs, nourrissent des épopées qui chantent le progrès ou le destin radieux de l'humanité. L'influence de Milton est très nette dans ces œuvres romantiques aujourd'hui oubliées. En revanche, deux écrivains laisseront une trace durable dans l'histoire de l'épopée française, Chateaubriand et Hugo.

Georges Bafaro, L'épopée (87-88)

...Victor Hugo invented for modern epic a form which stands in very much the same relation to classical epic as melodrama stands to classical tragedy...

Herbert Hunt, The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France (289)

Anatole France's comic novel, L'île des Pingouins, is a humorous retelling of European history from the seventh century to the early twentieth. Given the vast time span covered, the surprisingly large number of pages devoted to spoofing the Dreyfus Affair may simply be due to the fact that L'île des Pingouins was published soon after the scandal ended. On the other hand, Anatole France may well have decided that the Dreyfus Affair was one of European history's richest targets for satire. To be sure, in his humorous version of the Affair, France creates a counterpart to Emile Zola, a character by the name of Colomban, a hugely prolific and successful writer. As Zola did in the Dreyfus Affair, Colomban plays a central role in what Anatole France calls "L'affaire des quatre-vingt mille bottes de foin." In France's comical retelling, a Jewish army officer named Pyrot is fraudulently convicted of giving eighty thousand bundles of high-quality hay to the nation that is the principal enemy of his own country, Penguinia. Colomban/Zola eventually takes the lead in defending the innocence of Pyrot/Dreyfus, a courageous effort that earns the famous writer the wrath of many of his compatriots. Of course, Penguinia is divided into bitterly opposed Pyrotist and anti-Pyrotist camps, just as France was riven by the Dreyfus Affair. The usual social categories line up just as would be expected. Aristocrats and the Church are largely anti-Pyrotist, while intellectuals and the Jewish community are Pyrotist. The anti-Pyrotists accuse Pyrot's defenders of being grossly unpatriotic, since the particular kind of hay passed to the enemy has military significance, being the special feed of war-horses. In reply, the Pyrotists, just like the Dreyfusards, cry out loudly for truth and justice.

The single funniest scene in L'île des Pingouins' spoof of the Dreyfus Affair involves a radical confusion of identities among the leading adversaries. Following a chance encounter

in public, a fervently anti-Pyrotist/anti-Dreyfusard aristocrat, the Prince des Boscénos, physically attacks a man he believes to be Colomban/Zola. The prince has made a terrible mistake, however, for the man he attacked is in reality his staunchest ally in the anti-Pyrotist/anti-Dreyfusard movement and thus, at least putatively, Colomban/Zola's polar opposite. The victim of the prince's assault is none other than M. Bazile, the leader of Penguinia's official anti-Pyrotist association. Furthermore, the prince is not alone in mistaking the intensely anti-Pyrotist Bazile for the passionately Pyrotist Colomban, as this hilarious passage explains:

Une de ces nuits glorieuses, comme le prince des Boscénos sortait, en compagnie de quelques patriotes, d'un cabaret à la mode, M. de La Trumelle, lui désignant un petit homme à binocle, barbu, sans chapeau, n'ayant qu'une manche à son habit, et qui se traînait péniblement sur le trottoir jonché de débris :

--- Tenez ! fit-il, voici Colomban !

Avec la force, le prince avait la douceur ; il était plein de mansuétude ; mais au nom de Colomban son sang ne fit qu'un tour. Il bondit sur le petit homme à binocle et le renversa d'un coup de poing dans le nez.

M. de La Trumelle s'aperçut alors, que, trompé par une ressemblance imméritée, il avait pris pour Colomban M. Bazile, ancien avoué, secrétaire de l'association des antipyrots, patriote ardent et généreux. Le prince des Boscénos était de ces âmes antiques, qui ne plient jamais, pourtant il savait reconnaître ses torts.

--- Monsieur Bazile, dit-il, en soulevant son chapeau, si je vous ai effleuré le visage, vous m'excuserez et vous me comprendrez, vous m'approuverez, que dis-je, vous me complimenterez, vous me congratulerez et me félicitez quand vous saurez la cause de cet acte. Je vous prenais pour Colomban.

M. Bazile, tamponnant avec son mouchoir ses narines jaillissantes et soulevant un coude tout éclatant de sa manche absente :

--- Non, monsieur, répondit-il sèchement, je ne vous féliciterai pas, je ne vous congratulerai pas, je ne vous approuverai pas, car votre action était pour le moins superflu ; elle était, dirai-je, surrogatoire. On m'avait, ce soir, déjà pris trois fois pour Colomban et traité suffisamment comme il le mérite. Les patriotes lui avaient sur moi défoncé les côtes et cassé les reins, et j'estimerais, monsieur, que c'était assez.

A peine avait-il achevé ce discours que les pyrotins apparurent en bande, et trompés, à leur tour, par cette ressemblance insidieuse, crurent que des patriotes assommaient Colomban. Ils tombèrent à coups de canne plombée et de nerfs de bœufs sur le prince des Boscénos et ses compagnons, qu'ils laissèrent pour morts sur la place, et s'emparant de l'avoué Bazile, le portèrent en triomphe, malgré ses protestations indignées, aux cris de « Vive Colomban ! vive Pyrot ! » le long des boulevards... (279-80)

With its sudden reversals both psychological and physical, this passage is a masterpiece of comic writing. It also encapsulates the same wisdom that informs Proust's much more elaborate treatment of the Dreyfus Affair, the insight that bitter adversaries can paradoxically resemble each other in their equally extreme passion. The very idea that the Prince des Boscénos would expect praise from the man he has just punched in the nose merely because the prince's intention had been to punch their hated common enemy shows Anatole France's profound understanding of extreme partisanship's frequently absurd results. At the end, the image of the prince being attacked in turn by a pack of Pyrot supporters, who also mistake the anti-Semitic Bazile for Colomban/Zola and who defend him against the prince and then carry him high on their shoulders in gratitude for everything they think he has done for Jews, hilariously swings the pendulum to the exact opposite of where it was at the scene's start.

The most obvious reason for confusing the anti-Pyrotist/anti-Dreyfusard Bazile with Colomban/Zola is their strong physical resemblance in the novel, but this physical resemblance is simply comic shorthand for a deeper, ideological similarity. The suggestion of an ideological similarity is what makes this caricature of Zola and his enemies so funny. The physical similarity in the novel is Anatole France's brilliant comic vehicle for capturing an underappreciated aspect of Dreyfus Affair politics. The characters Bazile and Colomban do look like each other, and Anatole France quite appropriately gives them both the appearance of Emile Zola. The description "[u]n petit homme à binocle, barbu, sans chapeau" captures in broad outline Emile Zola's physical features at the end of his life. Thus, Zola is absolutely central in this scene, and the implication is that his ideology converged over time with that of his fiercest adversaries, which is a significant but little known feature of the Dreyfus Affair. The narrator's exasperated complaint that the resemblance between Bazile and Colomban was

“insidieuse” and “imméritée” has to be taken as very tongue-in-cheek, because Zola’s many ideological parallels with his enemies, although surprising, were in reality neither “insidieuse” nor “imméritée.” The theory of melodrama and its patient application to a variety of texts published late in the Dreyfus Affair, most especially Zola’s propagandistic Évangile novels, will explain how this astonishing adversarial parallelism came about. Such a scholarly project, the undertaking of this chapter and the next, will then be put to use as an excellent new tool for unlocking many of the most fundamental dynamics of Proust’s Recherche.

The peculiar name “Columban,” which Anatole France gives to the character impersonating Zola in L’île des Pingouins, provides a valuable clue about what is perhaps the most striking similarity between leading Dreyfus Affair adversaries. Columban is the name of a medieval saint known for his fiery zeal and for establishing an extremely ascetic monastic order in Gaul. The mission of this religious order was to re-convert backsliding medieval inhabitants of present-day France to Christianity (Bullough 1-28, Jonas 17-33, Riché 59-72, St. Columban November 23). Anatole France ensures that even readers unfamiliar with medieval Catholic history will grasp the humor in his “re-christening” of Zola as Columban by including at the start of L’île des Pingouins a prominent mention of this medieval saint and his religious works (26). The wittiness of this name stems from the fact that Emile Zola was ferociously anticlerical when he wrote his Évangile novels, partly in retaliation against the support that many leading Catholic figures gave to the anti-Dreyfusard cause. As will be shown in a moment, the most pronounced aspect of Zola’s anticlericalism was his opposition to the celibacy imposed by the Catholic Church on its priests and monks. Thus, for Anatole France to name Zola’s double in L’île des Pingouins after one of the most ascetic and self-mortifying of all Catholic saints – the founder of a harsh monastic order with a missionary purpose no less – indicates that a shocking but quite hilarious similarity developed over time

between Zola and his many Catholic adversaries in the Dreyfus Affair. In one sense, the goal of this study's examination of Zola's Évangiles will simply be to explore Anatole France's insight that the author of "J'accuse" eventually came to resemble an ascetic like the medieval Saint Columban. Nowhere was this resemblance more conspicuous than in the realm of attitudes toward sex.

Quite a few scholars, several of whose names appeared at the beginning of this dissertation, have already revealed basic similarities between the Dreyfus Affair's warring camps, such as their analogous use of gross rhetorical excess. This kind of observation about the scandal, at a certain level of generality, is thus not exactly new. As shown previously, A. Debidour in L'Église catholique et l'état sous la Troisième République (206), Richard Griffiths in The Use of Abuse: the Polemics of the Dreyfus Affair and its Aftermath (7), and Theodore Zeldin in his colossal study History of French Passions (1: 679-82) all emphasize similarities between the pro- and anti-Dreyfus forces. Nonetheless, this theme of resemblance between the Affair's fierce antagonists possesses many additional facets yet to be illuminated by scholarship, and those new facets are among the most fascinating intellectually. To take a somewhat extreme example as suggestive of all that remains to be uncovered in this area, Theodore Zeldin, it will be recalled, frankly admits thinking that the Dreyfus Affair was a distasteful spectacle from the past. He implies that histories of the period would do best to minimize its role as much as possible. Zeldin's bias against the Affair, almost a prejudice that the famed historian has few qualms owning up to, leads him to devote exceedingly few pages to the scandal in his massive account of the French Third Republic. What makes Zeldin's attitude still more remarkable is that elsewhere in his magisterial History of French Passions he constructs a brilliant theory suited perfectly to exposing the illusoriness of many antagonisms provoked by the Dreyfus Affair. In other words, Zeldin develops a kind of theory

about unexpected similarities between historic enemies, but he then chooses not to apply his theory fully to the one episode from the Third Republic that produced the bitterest of all enemies, the Dreyfus Affair. If, in one sense, this study will expand upon Anatole France's insinuation that Zola during the Affair resembled a Catholic monk, then in another, equally valid sense, it will also carry out the task that Theodore Zeldin refused to do in the History of French Passions, namely reveal how the Dreyfus Affair richly substantiates his own theory of adversarial parallelism. Scholarship on such compelling topics is worth doing for its own sake, of course, but the chief reward here turns out to be the light all this will shed on Proust's Recherche.

Humor's unique ability to expose surprising and unwanted similarities will make it the perfect mode of writing for Proust's extended criticism of the Affair, but his elaborate, subtle fiction can obscure the original historical basis for his criticism. This chapter and the next will provide specific evidence about how the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics brought about an exceptionally powerful example of adversarial parallelism. Just as Zola had been central in the effort to exonerate Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the world-famous French author would also be a leader in the campaign of sexual politics waged by the Dreyfusards against their enemies. Zola's Évangiles were the last novels he ever wrote and also the primary means by which the author of "J'accuse" engaged in the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics. The Évangiles, veritable "romans de combat," appeared over the course of four years in L'Aurore, the same highly partisan newspaper that had published "J'accuse." Serialization of these novels in L'Aurore began soon after the defenders of Dreyfus felt confident about winning the struggle to prove his innocence and at the precise moment when they launched a massive campaign of retribution against their unsuccessful opponents. The Évangiles take La Débâcle's vision of two Frances divided by sexual morality in a radically Manichean direction. Within the

Évangiles, Zola places his fictional surrogates for the anti-Dreyfusards squarely on the side of ruinous sexual corruption. By dissecting the Évangiles' peculiar sexual ideology and by showing how Zola's final novels functioned as counterattack to the venomous sexual politics of his anti-Dreyfusard enemies, this chapter and the following one will make visible a primary source of the Recherche's comic energy, a source that stays mostly concealed within Proust's exceedingly complex, multilayered novel.

While the goal here is to account for the Recherche's potent comical dimension, some humor will likely result directly from this close study of the Dreyfus Affair's extraordinary sexual politics. This chapter and the next one will therefore re-activate, albeit only partially and in a different mode, the selfsame dynamic on which the Recherche depends for its famed comedy. Scholarship tinged with humor, in effect a reenactment of the Recherche's comical critique of the Dreyfus Affair, may in fact be the best method of explicating Proust's masterpiece.

The very idea of a distinct sexual politics emerging out of a national security crisis like the Dreyfus Affair may partake of the comic intrinsically to at least some degree, so absurdly irrelevant do sexual issues seem at first appearance. After all, the Dreyfus Affair was at bedrock a rather straightforward case of military espionage. Accordingly, the numerous attacks on Zola in the anti-Dreyfusard press depicting him as a priapic pornographer appear genuinely funny, if only because of the audacity of the attempt to win political points with such irrelevant accusations. This kind of humorousness, which is not really what the anti-Dreyfusards intended even when they were ridiculing Zola, in no way diminishes the obvious mean-spiritedness of their attacks, of course. Two superb collections of anti-Zola cartoons demonstrate this inherently comic quality of the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics. The collections are Bertrand Tillier's Cochon de Zola! and John Grand-Carteret's L'affaire

Dreyfus et l'image, both of which were cited much earlier in this study. Yet the cartoons in these collections represent only one aspect of the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics, the aspect that happens to be the best known, but without being the most significant or for that matter the richest in comic potential. Many individuals with a solid education in history, to say nothing of scholars and specialists, already know that Zola was frequently accused of sexual depravity by the anti-Dreyfusards. These scurrilous attacks were sure to attract great popular attention in fin-de-siècle France, and in a certain sense they have continued to do so ever since. Yet this kind of sexual politics hardly seems substantial enough, intellectually or otherwise, to draw the sustained attention of a novelist as sophisticated as Marcel Proust. Even a potential discovery that Zola and other leading Dreyfusards debased themselves by responding in kind to such cheap attacks does not seem like a phenomenon that could serve as the primary historical foundation for a virtually peerless masterpiece like the Recherche.

In addition, there is the vital issue of the Recherche's mock epic status to consider here. This project set out to demonstrate that Proust's vast fictional cycle forms a mock epic with the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics serving both as primary epic intertext and primary target of ridicule. This is a daunting project, not least because, before close textual study of the Recherche can even begin, the sexual politics of the Dreyfus Affair must be shown to possess two qualities that seem mutually exclusive, the epic and the absurd. The second of these qualities, the absurd, may seem almost too obvious and easy to prove concerning something like the sexual politics of what was originally a rather circumscribed case of military espionage. Yet the extremely obvious simply will not do in this circumstance. The Recherche's humor, which is never cheap or facile, cannot draw solely upon historical sources that are cheap, tawdry, and facile. The main font of absurdity tapped by Proust probably lies buried within the history of this period, as hidden as it is fabulously rich. The task here is to

uncover it. As for discovering epic qualities in the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics, that is even more difficult. If the Dreyfus Affair has long suffered from a lack of respect among many historians – and it has, as was previously shown – then extraneous aspects like its sexual politics are exactly what have repelled these scholars. Historical works that have deigned to cover the scandal's sexual politics, such as Griffiths's The Use of Abuse, have made no pretense that there was anything noble about it. Nonetheless, if the present study is to locate the historical foundation of the Recherche's mock epic quality within the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics, then ideally both the epic and the absurd will be located strictly within that one aspect of the world-famous scandal.

This is admittedly a refinement of how the problem was expressed in the introductory chapters, where the Dreyfus Affair in its entirety was said to be comically deflated through Proust's mockery of its absurd sexual politics. Although such a process does occur within the Recherche, and although several examples of this will appear in the last chapter, the case for reading Proust's cycle as a gargantuan mock epic probably should be made more rigorously in terms of the scandal's sexual politics. It is not hard to see why. Instead of simply showing how a grave national security crisis was made ridiculous through the injection of irrelevant sexual controversy, the absurdity of which Proust exploits, the case will be much more interesting if the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics can be shown possessing within itself the surprising dual qualities of the epic and the absurd, which then is what Proust primarily ridicules. This study's argument will be more focused and truer to the Recherche's brilliant, unpredictable humor if it can be made in that way. Yet this requires finding epic qualities within a historical phenomenon that appears to have absolutely nothing epic about it. Zola's La Débâcle and his Évangiles are all novels that explore the consequences of sexual impropriety on a tremendous, national scale. They are also texts that escaped the domain of the literary and functioned as

political lightning rods during the Dreyfus Affair. Although preoccupied with sexual matters and although enmeshed within a major historical episode as few texts ever are, not even these epic novels by Zola can by themselves demonstrate that there was anything epic about the scandal's sexual politics. In fact, the Évangiles, which clearly strive for epic grandeur, can appear simply foolish and embarrassing if they are not considered in light of their participation in a larger socio-cultural movement, a movement that in many ways transcended the Dreyfus Affair. What is needed is something or someone to set in opposition to Zola so as to show that an epic battle occurred specifically on questions of sex; and it goes without saying that Zola's typical anti-Dreyfusard adversaries, vastly inferior to him intellectually and otherwise, simply cannot serve this purpose. Of course, this requisite opponent of Zola cannot be invented, but must really have existed. A worthy rival, like Hector was to Achilles or Circe to the crafty Odysseus, is what is needed.

Before identifying that rival, a recapitulation of key concepts regarding the mock epic genre will help clarify things further. To state the obvious somewhat simplistically, a mock epic needs an epic to mock. More specifically and more typically, though, a mock epic ridicules a contemporary event that it considers overrated, but it does this by using a truly grand epic intertext to achieve a hugely deflating comparison. Few things make an overrated contemporary event look more absurd than implicit or explicit comparison to an epically grand literary classic. So patently unequal are the two terms being juxtaposed that the comparison serves only to diminish further the already lesser of the two. For example, James Joyce's Ulysses conspicuously uses Homer's Odyssey as intertext for the purpose, among other things, of making fun of contemporary Dublin. Michael Seidel in Epic Geography: James Joyce's Ulysses states, "The very translated and reduced spaces of Dublin provide a commentary, often parodic, on the larger and longer movements of the Homeric original (xi)." In her

brilliant study, Byron and Joyce Through Homer, Hermione de Almeida foregrounds the mock epic dimension in both Ulysses and Byron's Don Juan. She perfectly captures the way in which this mode of writing typically deflates the contemporary world through a comically invidious comparison to august antiquity:

Any attempt to address Homeric precedent necessitates a consideration of epic tradition and its mock-heroic, picaresque, and comic epic mutants. Nor can the discussion cease at these, for the innovative Ulysses and the novelistic Don Juan face forward and invoke their times. Any attempt to recall the early Greek manual for noble action and civil behavior within the *polis* as a foil for present conduct requires that one reflect, also, on not only the unlikely prospect of distinctive action in a democratic milieu, but on the inevitable mutations in human behavior that have contributed to the state of the polity of Europe's decadent courts and Dublin's slums. (3)

Dublin's slums in Ulysses and Europe's decadent courts in Don Juan can hardly stand comparison to the majestic Greek polis in the Odyssey, and the result is mock epic diminishment of the contemporary world. Andrew Gibson in his recent study, Joyce's Revenge: History, Politics and Aesthetics in Ulysses, also shows how Joyce employs techniques like those of mock epic to laugh at Irish history and its excessive impact on modern nationalist politics (19-20, 107-126).

The contrast with Zola's use of the epic register in La Débâcle could not be clearer. The concept of *xenia*, prevalent throughout the ancient Greek canon, but most notably in Homer's Odyssey, provides the ethical standard for judging conduct, both collective and individual, within Zola's great novel of the Franco-Prussian War. The violations of *xenia* that La Débâcle judges most severely are those relating to sex and gender, and Zola's novel achieves epic grandeur by leveraging individual sexual transgressions into symbols of the corruption of the entire French Second Empire, a regime bound to collapse before the Prussian forces, more disciplined and more respectful of *xenia*'s ethical code. Zola directly transposes the ancient epic register within La Débâcle, and very little in his war novel is comical,

especially not given the many horrifying death scenes that fill its pages. La Débâcle is most definitely not a mock epic. Joyce's Ulysses, however, is something quite different, and not merely because it uses Homer's Odyssey much more heavily and overtly than does Zola's war novel. Although this clearly cannot be the place for any kind of analysis of Joyce's terrifically complex masterpiece, some very general observations by way of contrast with La Débâcle can shed useful light on the mock epic genre. Very generally speaking, both Ulysses and La Débâcle bear an important relation to the Odyssey, and both treat of sexual issues openly and extensively. Yet Leopold Bloom, Joyce's modern equivalent to Odysseus, is a masturbating cuckold prone to flights of sexual fantasy as he goes about his day. His cheating wife, Molly, is surely a parody of the heroically faithful Penelope.

What gives Ulysses its mock epic flavor is that each of its abundant similarities to Homer's Odyssey collapses almost as soon as it is recognized, due to the humorous banality of Bloom's life. The fragmented modern world, or at least the mundane slice of it that Joyce chooses to depict, is little match for ancient epic grandeur. Narrated correctly, the Franco-Prussian War can withstand the comparison, however, and Zola ensures that his version of it will, by making the intimate aspects of his characters' lives hugely symbolic of the unfolding national calamity. This is not to say that La Débâcle possesses the Odyssey's literary merit, but simply that the former attains a degree of the epic that the latter possesses in abundance. Ulysses, on the other hand, achieves something very different and very comical, as the many excellent studies on its humor attest, signal examples of which include Robert Bell's Jocoserious Joyce, Zack Bowen's Ulysses as a Comic Novel, and Hugh Kenner's Dublin's Joyce.

No recapitulation of mock epic basics would be complete without an acknowledgement that permutations of the standard method do exist, and some are found

within exemplars of the genre. As stated in a previous chapter, Alexander Pope's The Rape of the Lock, which chiefly makes fun of a contemporary event, the theft of a lock of hair, occasionally elicits gentle laughter at the expense of its epic intertexts, Homer's Iliad, Vergil's Aeneid and Ariosto's Orlando Furioso. Helen Deutsch writes, "The Rape's triviality is its best defense against any authority but its own beautiful surface. To attempt to speak at all seriously about this poem is to be somewhat embarrassed at making such an ado about nothing. From the perspective of this miniature epic, even the ancient poets seem overly serious" (67). The grandeur of the epic original can sometimes appear silly or pretentious, and when that happens, the ancient suffers comic deflation as much as the modern. Ulrich Broich agrees, noting that occasionally in The Rape of the Lock, "...the parodic parallels between epic heroes and *beaux* and *belles* bring about an ironic devaluation of *both* groups" (123).

Proust's Recherche is even more of a permutation on the standard method. The case being advanced here is that the Recherche is an elaborate mock epic that takes a single contemporary event both as its primary intertext and as the chief target of its comedy. The contemporary event performing this dual function is, of course, the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics. Carrying twice the load as in most mock epics, the principal contemporary referent is thus even more important in the Recherche than is usually the case. There should be no confusion about the very real limits of this argument, however. The Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics may be the top-level epic intertext around which the Recherche is structured, but it is not the only epic intertext within Proust's long fictional cycle. Traditional literary epics – the same great classics that have been the lodestars of the best mock-heroic folly for centuries – also sustain much of the humor in the Recherche, but in a much more sporadic and fragmentary fashion. Proust's masterpiece is celebrated for its dazzling display of erudition, including as it does many allusions to the epics of Dante, Homer, and Vergil, as well as to the

Bible, and The Thousand and One Nights. The vast corpus of Greek and Roman myth makes frequent appearances in the Recherche in manifold guises, often through allusion to Racine's myth-inspired dramas. The many weighty texts of which Proust shows mastery are by no means limited to those just mentioned, and scholarship on humor in the Recherche has amply demonstrated how such time-honored literary classics frequently serve as comic intertext within the fictional cycle.

Indeed, five book-length studies devoted exclusively to the subject of Proustian humor have been published, and four of them agree that Proust frequently compares contemporary life to literary classics in a comically deflating mode (Brunel 214-19, Donzé 128-9, Mansfield 163-6, Slater 156-62). One of these five scholarly works, Patrick Brunel's Le rire de Proust, comments at length on the pronounced mock-heroic strain running throughout the Recherche (214-19). Another of the studies, Maya Slater's Humor in the Works of Marcel Proust, goes so far as to claim that the many comic allusions to classic literature in the Recherche give the sprawling masterpiece a useful kind of coherence (160). Yet the sheer number of epic and epic-like texts to which the Recherche alludes – a breathtaking variety that Slater herself acknowledges – leaves one wondering whether there is not a single, unifying top-level referent. Indeed, Jack Murray's The Proustian Comedy worries that scholarship on this subject has for far too long contented itself with “catalog[ing], in taxonomic fashion, different categories of the comic in Proust's works. The result is like a room full of stuffed birds in a natural history museum: the creatures are dead, their happy voices still, their eyes dull, their feathers dusty and lusterless” (vii). Murray thus describes vividly, if not exactly diplomatically, what might be called a problem in the decades-long collaborative scholarly effort to explain Proustian comedy. The problem has to do with whether there exists a single

animating and unifying force behind the exceedingly rich and diverse comedy in the Recherche. Whatever its flaws, the present study puts forward one possible such force.

Again, the example of the mock epic dimension in Joyce's Ulysses is illuminating, both for its similarities and its differences vis-à-vis the Recherche. The differences are perhaps more striking. This is so, mainly because it is virtually impossible to argue that Proust patterns the Recherche after any one classic text or any cohesive group of texts as methodically as Joyce does with Homer's Odyssey in Ulysses. The meticulousness with which Joyce maps the ancient Homeric epic onto modern Dublin is legendary and one of the best-known features of Joyce's masterpiece. The prominent Joycean scholar Hugh Kenner has written about Ulysses,

Joyce was Homer's scrupulous apprentice. It was Homer, we've seen, who held his wild book together, to an extent he acknowledged in dropping his pretense of nonexistence long enough to affix the enigmatic title. Year after year, explaining what he was up to, he commenced his explanation to this or that newcomer not with Bloom nor with Dublin but with the Odyssey. His chisel was set, that meant, to the hardest stone: his way was Homer's way, confronting a subject like Homer's. (64)

No study of Proust's comedy has dared make a similar claim about the Recherche, and that is not because Proust's "chisel" was not "set to the hardest stone." The reason is that Proust does not rely on a single classical epic to the same degree as Joyce does in Ulysses. Alexander Pope resembles Joyce in this respect, not Proust. His Rape of the Lock models the Iliad and the Aeneid much more rigorously than the Recherche does with any classic literary text to which it alludes. If the Recherche is a genuine mock epic – and two prominent Proustian specialists, Malcolm Bowie and Patrick Brunel, claim that is, at least in large measure – then some cohesive text(s), event(s) or blend of the two probably need to function in Proust's masterwork in a way fairly similar to the Odyssey in Ulysses. Now not even this study is going to claim that the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics provides as close a model for the Recherche as the Odyssey does for Ulysses. Nevertheless, the capital importance of this event, which includes the appearance of key contemporary polemical works of literature, such

as Zola's Évangiles, will be demonstrated here. Of course, the daunting problem mentioned a while ago still remains, namely to find that rare blend of the epic and the ridiculous within a single event, an event more precise than the entire Dreyfus Affair and one that would later become central to the creation of Proust's masterwork. Such a strong emphasis on the role played by the contemporary in Proust's comic vision may seem to sharpen further the differences between his Recherche and Joyce's Ulysses, a work that maintains a fine balance between the ancient and the modern. Yet a more fundamental conclusion that will emerge at the end of this project, namely that the Recherche constitutes a mock epic much more than generally realized, should provide the basis for an eventual extended comparison between it and Ulysses. Joyce's most famous work will only rarely be mentioned again in these pages from this point forward, but an utterly fascinating question with Ulysses at its core will likely preoccupy all who find themselves persuaded by this study's argument. That question is how and why were two of the greatest mock epics of all time written simultaneously in the early twentieth century.

Another great literary classic, the last these preliminary remarks will adduce, can shed useful light on the contemporary focus of the Recherche's mock epic process. The classic in question is Don Quixote, one of the foremost examples of comic writing the West has ever produced. A single prominent feature of Don Quixote justifies, indeed virtually requires that space be found in these already crowded pages for a brief discussion of Cervantes's masterwork. From its very start, Don Quixote identifies a unified set of contemporary texts that the novel states it will undermine through relentless comic imitation. In other words, Don Quixote functions in many ways like a mock epic, but with a select and cohesive group of contemporary texts serving both as primary intertext and as chief target of ridicule. This is

basically the same permutation of the standard mock epic process found in Proust's Recherche, at least according to the interpretation being advanced here.

A brief reminder of how this process works in Don Quixote is in order. As early as the prologue, Cervantes bluntly declares his intention to mock the chivalric romances that enjoyed widespread popularity in his day. To be rigorously exact, it is the Cervantine narrator who declares this to be the novel's purpose, but the usually important distinction between author and narrator matters less in this instance, because Don Quixote so openly and tenaciously attacks sixteenth-century chivalric romances. The very last lines of the celebrated novel are these: "...all I ever wanted was to make men loathe the concocted, wild-eyed stories told as tales of chivalry, nor can there be the slightest doubt that this truthful history of my Don Quixote has already begun to pull those books to the ground, just as surely as it will bring down every last one of them. 'Vale [Farewell]'" (746). Cervantes's preface to the novel laments the current popularity of these stories, "despised by so many, yet adored by so many more," and the narrator's later description of Don Quixote's obsessive reading habits makes clear that chivalric romances written by contemporary or near-contemporary Spanish authors are the texts causing so much controversy (11, 13-14). The prime example of such texts is Amadis of Gaul, of which many popular Spanish versions appeared throughout the sixteenth century (Place 11-12; Williamson 36-69). Amadis of Gaul was "the first of the Spanish sub-Arthurian romances of chivalry, whose eponymous hero was to become the acknowledged mentor of Don Quixote" (Williamson 37). Given that Don Quixote the character forthrightly declares his plan to re-live the adventures found in such contemporary romances – a project which causes the other characters, including the narrator, to laugh at him and call him mad – the text of the novel can thus be seen virtually trumpeting its plan to imitate mockingly a

particular kind of popular literature. Luis Murillo agrees that Don Quixote therefore constitutes a form of mock epic,

“That an *hidalgo* should fancy himself to be an heroic *caballero* is of course comical and satirical. But it will make no difference to insist that his book is only a comic epic, or a comic epic in prose, because his situation is in any case that of the epic hero. The narrative depicts him [Don Quixote] as having assumed for himself the elect status of hero, and it presses the point that the entire apparatus of himself related to supernatural enchantments, and magical and mythological entities, is a pathological delusion. (55)

Of course, nothing should be taken merely at face value in a work as richly paradoxical as Don Quixote. The passage from the very end of the novel, where its purpose is said to have been the destruction of chivalric romances, also claims that the knight of La Mancha’s story is “truthful.” This is a useful reminder never to place blind faith in the narrator. Furthermore, there has been debate about whether Cervantes may have exaggerated his ambition to refute fantastical popular stories, perhaps to make his novel appear morally edifying, which likely would have helped it pass the censors (Nabokov 39-50). Further complicating the picture is that, just as with Proust’s Recherche, a wealth of secondary intertexts operates within Don Quixote. As Michael McGaha writes, “Don Quixote abounds in allusions – some obvious and some oblique – to literary works of all periods and genres” (37). Recent scholarship has even shown that the great ancient epics, particularly the Aeneid, play a major intertextual role in Don Quixote (De Armas 42-45, McGaha 34-50). The popular romances that Don Quixote mocks most directly were themselves inspired by much older literary works, including the earliest elaborations of medieval myths and legends. In The Half-way House of Fiction: Don Quixote and Arthurian Romance, Edwin Williamson traces these chronologically distant connections. Thus, it can be said that Don Quixote was written partly in mocking imitation of texts that were already hoary classics in Cervantes’s own lifetime. The

ancient and modern divide, the comic anachronism on a vast chronological scale that informs standard mock epic, is therefore certainly not absent in Don Quixote.

Yet in spite of all this complexity, a coherent set of roughly contemporary texts still functions as the top-level referent in Don Quixote's mock-epic/mock-heroic dynamic. The very popularity of these texts is one thing that Cervantes ridicules through the mishaps of his obsessive title character, who takes them far too seriously. Therein lies the similarity to Proust's Recherche, which exploits the untapped comic reserves of an all-consuming contemporary political event and a class of texts that its ardor helped produce. Howard Mancing has written regarding Cervantes's masterpiece, "Without the romances of chivalry, Don Quijote [the character] does not exist...In order to understand what is happening in Don Quijote, the protagonist's book-inspired existence must be acknowledged" (25-26). The books to which Mancing refers, the ones that Don Quixote cites most often and passionately, are popular contemporary ones. Proust's narrator is also fascinated by contemporary trends in art and literature, and the trends that preoccupy him are much more connected to the Dreyfus Affair than commonly realized. Don Quixote and the Proustian narrator commit many errors in estimating the value of art and literature; they both also make numerous mistakes in understanding the relationship of art to life.

The similar critiques of popular trends within the works of Proust and Cervantes bring about another resemblance between their novels: some of their characters are aware of being enmeshed in a mock-epic process. These characters are in on the central joke, at least in part; and through their awareness, the mock-epic dynamic actually becomes diagetic and internal to the plot. This represents a major difference from standard mock-epic practice. For example, the characters of Ulysses do not know that Joyce is comparing their lives to the plot of Homer's Odyssey any more than the characters of the Rape of the Lock are aware of a

humorous resemblance between their conflicts and those of the Iliad and Aeneid. Although it may seem strange to refer to the highly experimental Ulysses as “standard” in any way, Joyce’s masterpiece does follow mock-epic tradition at least in its choice of an ancient primary intertext and in the non-diagetic relation of that intertext to the plot. Broich’s history of comic epic at the start of his landmark study helps in understanding this (6-74). In the novels of Cervantes and Proust, on the other hand, at least some of the characters understand the massive comic deflation that is taking place and know what the main target of that deflation is. That is because in both Proust and Cervantes the main comic target is a popular phenomenon that looms very large in the contemporary background of their plots. The characters of Don Quixote and the Recherche cannot help but be aware of their novels’ top intertexts, which prominently inhabit the same time frame as the plots. Just as inevitably, some of the characters learn of the slow and steady, but usually very humorous erosion of the top intertexts’ pretentiousness. In Don Quixote, certain characters even help accelerate this process. Large portions of Don Quixote involve secondary characters comically indulging Don Quixote’s chivalric fantasy by drawing upon their own knowledge of the genre’s many tropes. The final thirty-three chapters of volume I involve the priest, the barber and Dorotea tempting Don Quixote back to his home village by pretending to have a chivalric mission for him (Chaps 29-52). In volume II, the Duke and Duchess entertain themselves maliciously by creating a faux-chivalric world for Don Quixote and Sancho Panza (Chaps 30-57).

Of course, the figure in Don Quixote most painfully aware of that novel’s mock-epic quality is the title character himself, and nowhere more so than at the novel’s end, when he emphatically renounces knight-errantry and admits how silly his earlier delusions had been (742-745).

My dear gentlemen, congratulate me, for I am no longer Don Quixote de La Mancha but Alonso Quijano, whose way of life made people call me “the Good.” I am now the

determined enemy of Amadis of Gaul and all his infinite herd of descendents; all those blasphemous stories of knight errantry are odious and hateful to me; I recognize my foolishness and the danger in which I placed myself, reading those books; by God's infinite mercy, I have finally learned from my mistakes, and now I loathe them. (742)

This is clearly one of the most important passages in Don Quixote, the one where Cervantes's great fictional creation repudiates the massive dichotomy between delusion and reality that structures the entire novel, thereby bringing its brilliant comedy to a resolution. Amazing as it may sound, there is actually an equivalent passage at the conclusion of Proust's Recherche. Just as Don Quixote finally perceives the foolishness of Amadis of Gaul and of the other "blasphemous stories of knight errantry," books he had idolized for many years but to harmful effect, Proust's narrator finally realizes the many errors of a class of books that he, too, once took very seriously but whose influence prevented him from understanding correctly his vocation as a author.

In the Recherche, the first-person narrator is the character most keenly aware of that novel's profound comedy. Not only is he most definitely a character in the novel, the Proustian narrator is by far the most important one, interacting frequently with most of the other characters. Like Don Quixote, the narrator of the Recherche undergoes a slow process of disillusionment in mock epic mode, ultimately realizing how absurdly grandiose his previous worldview had been. Also like the Cervantine hero, Proust's narrator is repeatedly and intentionally deceived by the other characters, albeit in a much less orchestrated way. Finally and most important, however, is that every character in the Recherche, and not just the narrator, participates directly in the central mock epic dynamic, much as in Cervantes's masterpiece. Through their knowledge of the evolution of their own and others' myriad opinions about the Dreyfus Affair and related cultural trends, the characters of the Recherche

have at least some small consciousness of the comic process operative in Proust's gargantuan novel.

There are, of course, significant differences between the Recherche and Don Quixote, even in terms of their mock-epic dimension, the only point on which they are being compared here. The biggest difference between them in this respect is that the Recherche takes for its top intertext a major political event and its literary/artistic penumbra, whereas Don Quixote uses one category of fictional works for this purpose, that category being sixteenth-century chivalric romances. This means that the primary intertext in the Recherche is not as sharply focused as in Don Quixote, nor is it anywhere near as obvious. None of this is to suggest, of course, that either of these two canonical works is somehow "better" than the other. The mock-epic quality of the Recherche is simply more muted and requires more patient and elaborate explanation to be perceived. Even the previously mentioned passage from the end of the Recherche, where the Proustian narrator rejects a class of texts in a way remarkably similar to Don Quixote's final disavowal of chivalric romances, will require substantial explanation to make visible its many retrospective ramifications for the earlier volumes of Proust's vast fictional cycle. With such explanation, however, this study will demonstrate that the mock-epic aspect of the Recherche possesses a spectacularly beautiful unity comparable to that found in Don Quixote, or for that matter in Joyce's Ulysses. One of the key components of this demonstration will involve making heretofore unseen connections between the Dreyfus Affair and a particular literary culture that flourished at the height of the scandal.

Melodrama will be the key concept in making these necessary connections. The next chapter will show how the Dreyfus Affair vastly accelerated a new trend toward literary melodrama that started in the 1880s. The Affair's rapidly expanding and escalating polemics subsumed this trend and pushed it toward its apogee. No texts demonstrate the impetus that

the Affair gave to literary melodrama better than Zola's Évangiles. Nor was the Dreyfusard camp alone in hastening this trend. Important and extreme examples of literary melodrama emerged from the anti-Dreyfusard camp as well, and the next chapter will examine several of those. The fact that both sides of the Affair contributed to this cultural development demonstrates perfectly the adversarial parallelism that is at the bedrock of the Recherche's comedy. Indeed, adversarial parallelism, a certain mirroring effect in the tactics of bitter enemies, may be endemic to melodrama at its most Manichean, or at least that is the suggestion of major theoretical works on the genre. These works have elaborated in superb detail the kind of theory of melodrama that is so obviously required by the present study, due to its reliance on the concept as both a literary classification and a key cultural descriptor. These theoretical works offer a precise, functional, and historically-sensitive definition of melodrama, substantially different from the common understanding of the term, which is much too vague to be of any help in sophisticated textual analysis. With the help of this powerful theory, the next chapter will be able to show how the end of the Dreyfus Affair was a moment in time permeated by melodrama. In its politics, the Dreyfus Affair at its close turned into a ferocious anticlerical campaign, which itself exhibited many classic signs of melodrama. Most important, the theory explains how a conservative sexual ethos lies at the root of nineteenth-century melodrama, and the melodrama of the late Dreyfus Affair conforms perfectly to the theory in this respect. This theoretical turn toward melodrama will also recuperate the critically important epic dimension. So powerfully and transcendently melodramatic are the literary works under examination here, they embody a peculiarly nineteenth-century form of popular epic, providing an ideal target for Proust's mock-epic humor.

Supremely melodramatic texts that both symbolize and play an active part in the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics thus function within Proust's Recherche in roughly the same way as chivalric romances do in Cervantes's Don Quixote. Proust mocks a contemporary obsession with melodrama as Cervantes mocks a contemporary obsession with chivalric fantasy. Although such a claim must be accompanied by the careful qualification that has already been provided – mainly that one of these novels is much far more overtly mock-epic than the other – the establishment of a close and multidimensional analogy between the primary intertexts of Don Quixote and the Recherche is the point toward which this discussion has always been leading. The purpose of the analogy has simply been to make more manageable and comprehensible the immense complexity both of the Recherche and of its main comic target, the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics. All the various mock epics mentioned in this study serve that purpose to some extent, but Don Quixote has been especially key, because its mock-epic dynamic is probably the one most similar to that found in the Recherche.

The theory of melodrama provides even more valuable purchase on the Recherche's complex mock-epic process than comparisons to other comic literary masterpieces do. In particular, the theory of melodrama brings coherence to the unruly historical phenomenon that this study claims is the Recherche's main intertext, namely the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics. An important function of the primary intertext of any mock epic is to bring some order to the elaborate comedy, and it can do this in various ways. One basic way is by imparting its own internal organization to the mock epic, such as can be seen in the Odyssey's contribution to Joyce's Ulysses, where the events of each chapter parallel specific books of Homer's epic. The main intertext can also (or instead) help in organizing a mock epic thematically. This method, too, can be found practiced in Ulysses, where the great Homeric

themes of wandering and homecoming help unify the experiences of the characters Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. Yet no main intertext can contribute to a mock epic's organization without having some discernible structure of its own. A gift is always premised on prior possession, which is an axiom that holds true whether the transaction is between people or between texts. An intertext, particularly a top-level one, must have a clear structure before it can bestow structure to a mock epic.

The question thus immediately arises as to whether the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics had any internal organization of its own. If it did, the principles uniting the varied forces at work in this phase of the famously complex and chaotic scandal are by no means obvious. Making matters more difficult is that no history of the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics per se has yet been written. There is no widely recognized, pre-established chronology to follow, much less any theory that has been convincingly applied to explain this aspect of the Affair. Nor does the Recherche offer much help here, because, if its main intertext is less conspicuous than those of other mock epics, then that intertext's role in structuring Proust's novel is also much less visible. Incidentally, this search for an organizing principle is not obviated by means of the concept of adversarial parallelism, the way in which Dreyfus Affair enemies resembled each other in their similar use of vicious polemics. Adversarial parallelism is too generic a notion to fill this role. What is needed to tie the many disparate strands together is something more organic to the Dreyfus Affair, something that, if not exactly unique to this very famous scandal, at least manifested itself in an unprecedented way during its years of extreme turbulence. The key unifying principle at work turns out to have been melodrama, a concept with a much more specific, concrete and significant meaning in the nineteenth century than today. Scholars who have patiently studied melodrama have shown that it can be more than just a literary genre or a vague term for displays of extreme emotion.

In the nineteenth century, broad-based cultural and political manifestations of melodrama arose periodically, and adversarial parallelism was actually one of several distinguishing characteristics of such movements.

Yet amid all this talk of melodrama, the epic dimension will not be neglected. The rule that mock epic must have an epic to mock still obtains, and this requirement is easily fulfilled by the Recherche in that its top intertext possesses in equal measure both the melodramatic and the epic. Indeed, these two characteristics are inextricably connected within the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics. The epic aspect of this extraordinary instance of historical melodrama can be approached from various directions. An amalgam of political, cultural and literary forces that were fused together in the crucible of the Affair, the Recherche's top intertext displays epic and melodramatic qualities along all three of these dimensions. For the time being, however, the simplest way to demonstrate how melodrama attained epic proportions in this famous historical episode is to focus on the literary dimension. Simply put, the Évangiles, Zola's brazen *romans à thèse* deeply engaged in the Dreyfus Affair's political combat, could best be described either as epic melodramas or as melodramatic epics. It hardly matters which combination of terms is chosen, because the Évangiles are just as much epics as they are melodramas.

Precisely how these very peculiar novels meet the requirements of both genres will be discussed later, but they are actually not the only literary works from nineteenth-century France to achieve this synthesis. Indeed, there is scholarship to suggest that the combination of epic and melodrama was a prevalent and respected literary form in nineteenth-century France, and for reasons that stayed basically the same throughout the century. Such a discovery takes nothing away from the strangeness of the Évangiles. They are still peculiar literary works, even for their time period, but what makes them so is the intensity of their melodramatic and

epic qualities, not the mere fact of this combination. Their intensity comes from the fury of the Dreyfus Affair, but this specific blend of genres is traceable back to the French Revolution. In other words, the French Revolution initiated a trend of writing melodramatic epics, a trend that would endure throughout the nineteenth century. In many ways, the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics marked the culmination of this century-long trend, which made it especially suitable as the primary intertext for Proust's Recherche.

A discussion of the prevalence of melodramatic epic throughout the nineteenth-century in France is in order here. Although the overall focus here cannot be taken off the Dreyfus Affair for long, the justification for such a discussion is manifold. First, given that the appellation "melodramatic epic" has never been applied to the Évangiles before, any evidence of a precedent for this blended genre will make much more plausible such a categorization of Zola's final novels. Second, evidence that the French Revolution gave birth to an enduring new form of literary epic will dovetail perfectly with the scholarship on melodrama on which this study so heavily depends, because one of the key findings of the latter scholarship is that the French Revolution was also the cradle of melodrama. If both melodrama and a new kind of epic emerged for the very first time out of the cauldron of the French Revolution, then the historicity of these literary forms, their intimate connection to their historical context, will have been largely established. The burden of proof for the claim that another major historical episode, the Dreyfus Affair, gave rise to extreme examples of these same literary forms, but blended together, will be somewhat lessened as a result.

In truth, the statement from a moment ago about there being published research showing the prevalence of melodramatic epic in nineteenth-century France is accurate only up to point. What actually exists is, on the one hand, scholarship describing a significantly new form of literary epic created in nineteenth-century France and, on the other hand, different

scholarship explaining why nineteenth century France was the golden age of melodrama. The possibility that one set of cultural forces might have produced both literary developments, the creation of a new kind of epic and the birth of melodrama, and the added possibility that these two new literary forms might on more than one occasion have fused together seem hardly to have been suspected by anyone. Simply put, no one seems yet to have merged the findings of the research on French melodrama with the findings of the research on nineteenth-century French epic. The failure so far to do this has nothing to do with the quality of the research in either field, because the theoretical sophistication of both is evident. Nor is it due to any inherent lack of correspondence between the two kinds of scholarship, because the similarities of their conclusions are numerous and striking, as the identical claim of French Revolutionary parentage attests. In fact, the two kinds of research, the one on nineteenth-century French epic and the other on French melodrama of the same period, frequently ground their claims on the exact same cultural phenomena that they interpret in similar ways, but using only slightly different vocabulary in the process. The disconnect between these two scholarly fields is as much due to the fact that each reached its peak in a different period of the twentieth century as to the fact that the genres of melodrama and modern epic both suffered from unsavory reputations for many years. In terms of the large time gap separating the moment when each field reached its peak, the single greatest study by far on nineteenth-century French epic was published in 1941, whereas the best research on melodrama is much more recent, having been published in the past three decades.

In terms of the two genres' poor reputations, the taint that still often attaches to the term "melodrama" speaks volumes, and epic for its part is commonly thought of as having experienced a tremendous crisis in modern times (Greene 411-418, Hainsworth 145-150, Newman 401-402). This crisis is supposed to have been especially grave for modern epics

written in verse, as were the great ancient epics (Bafaro 111). Yet pedantic imitation and passionate adherence to fixed notions of what the epic genre must be constitute the very impulses that have done the most harm to the reputation of modern epics, even those written in prose (Hainsworth 147-148, Newman 402). In modern times, a large-scale novel or film can borrow the mere flavor of epic and still win critical praise, but any work that adheres to strict epic conventions in an effort to achieve grandiosity seems more than likely bound for critical rejection. To the detriment of their subsequent reputation, many nineteenth-century French epics followed this latter approach, but with a twist. As will be shown in a moment, the French Revolution truly did usher in a new form of epic, and yet its distinctive features quickly turned into literary conventions in their own right. Strict adherence to these new conventions within many subsequent literary works helps explain why the nineteenth-century French epic as a class has long suffered from a bad reputation. It also explains why, even within the field of French literary studies, most scholars probably know next to nothing about many of the genre's most representative examples. Amazing as it may sound, the best study on the genre, Herbert J. Hunt's The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France, forthrightly declares virtually all the works that it examines to be failures (404-406). Although Hunt never mentions the Évangiles, Zola's final series of novels fits perfectly into the tradition of nineteenth-century epic for many reasons, not the least being that they, too, were long considered failures.

An absolutely key point to make here is that disdain toward this class of literature was mostly the product of the twentieth century. Epic, both old and new, was not disdained in nineteenth-century France – far from it. Epic of the most conventional kind enjoyed popularity and influence in this period, as indicated by the large number of authors, many of them now obscure, who tried their hands at the genre (Bafaro 87-88; Hunt 4-8, 403-404). Herbert Hunt speaks of a “tremendous effort in epic-making” that began early in the nineteenth century and

continued right up to its very end (403). Hunt goes further, stating that one cannot attain a correct appreciation of nineteenth-century French literature without some understanding of the special position that epic occupied in the thinking of contemporaries (403-404). Nonetheless, it is probably safe to say that few, even among specialists of French literature, have followed Hunt's advice in studying these literary works that he himself frankly admits are not very good. A final clarification that needs to be made is that the poor reputation of serious epic in modern times emphatically does not apply to mock epic, because the comic form of the genre is always free, whenever the need arises, to make fun of the failures of serious epic (Greene 417). Indeed, mock epic in its various forms seems to have directly profited from modern epic's perceived weaknesses (Bafaro 112).

French melodrama long suffered the same sorry fate within the critical literature as nineteenth-century French epic has. One of the first aims of the movement to study melodrama seriously that started around 1970 was to demonstrate that the genre was indeed worthy of sustained scholarly attention. In his pathbreaking study on melodrama, Peter Brooks actually wrote a large part of the first chapter "in explication [and] justification of the word melodrama, its appropriateness as a critical term, the reasons for choosing a label that has a bad reputation and has usually been used pejoratively" (11). In another study on the genre from the 1970s, James Smith wrote rather defensively, "The aesthetic expression of this view of life need not be trivial and second-rate. To be sure, melodrama is responsible for a great deal of popular trash, but this does not mean that *all* melodrama must be trashy. Like any genre, it affords a wide range of excellence" (11). These defensive moves and even more so the high quality of the early scholarly work on melodrama have paid handsome dividends, if judged by the steady stream of publications on the genre over the past two decades. Nonetheless, another specialist in this area complained as recently as the mid-1990s that Peter

Brooks's landmark study, while highly influential and cogent, has mostly brought about a new appreciation of melodrama as a cultural force, without necessarily spurring close study of many of the genre's most characteristic literary texts. Jacky Bratton worries that scholars to this day unfortunately find many melodramatic texts too off-putting to pay them careful attention (38). Clearly, a field as young as melodrama studies still is and one that had to take such pains to justify its very existence was always unlikely, without some very compelling reason, to apply its hard-earned results to a class of literature with an even lower reputation today than melodrama, a class such as nineteenth-century French epic.

A very compelling reason has now been furnished by the present study. Melodrama and epic need to be studied jointly, if only because these two genres merged within a set of nineteenth-century French literary works that went on to serve as top intertext for the comedy in Proust's Recherche, one of the greatest of all French novels, arguably the greatest. In fact, there is an abundance of reasons for building a theoretical bridge between nineteenth-century melodrama and nineteenth-century epic, but none may be more important than shedding light on the pervasive humor in the work of the author who, as Antoine Compagnon recently declared, appears "comme le géant de la littérature française que, d'une certaine manière, il absorberait en entier" ("La Recherche" 3836). Of course, not all nineteenth-century French epics are melodramatic, any more than all nineteenth-century melodramas are epic in dimension. Such an obvious clarification should go without saying, but exceptional clarity is needed in this instance, because the claim here is that a genre that has gone mostly unrecognized within scholarship, the melodramatic epic, performs the crucial intertextual function within the Recherche. The term "melodramatic epic" is not exactly an invention of the present study, but this blended literary form has not yet been defined within the theoretical scholarship on literary genres. As indicated above, there has not yet been any cross-

fertilization between the theoretical work on melodrama and the equivalent scholarship on epic. The term “melodramatic epic” has appeared in two very narrow areas of scholarship, and these areas will be discussed briefly later. Nevertheless, previous usage of this term has not been theoretical in nature, which means that no effort has yet been made to explain what makes this literary form truly distinct, rather than just a random mishmash of epic and melodramatic conventions. If melodramatic epic truly looms as large in the pages of the Recherche as this study claims, then a precise definition of the genre must be formulated. The definition provided must be sensitive to historical context, because the melodramatic epics that play the most significant role in the Recherche are those that were produced in the context of the Dreyfus Affair’s sexual politics.

What is required here, then, is a merger of the best theoretical work on melodrama and on nineteenth-century French epic, respectively. Although not simple, this task will actually be easier than it may at first seem, due to the many powerful, albeit heretofore unrecognized, correspondences between these two fields of research. By far the most significant correspondence is the near unanimity within both fields that their respective genres emerged, not only out of the French Revolution, but out of precisely the same phase of the Revolution, namely the struggle over religion’s cultural and political role in the newly democratized France. In other words, both melodrama and the new form of epic emerged out of the brutal Revolutionary fight over the role of Christianity in French politics, culture and society. This chapter’s epigraphs make this point abundantly clear.

The first epigraph, taken from Peter Brooks’s celebrated study, shifts rapidly from a discussion of the French Revolution overall as the matrix of melodrama to a focused explanation of how the disparagement and diminishment of religion during the Revolution specifically gave birth to melodrama as a kind of compensation. Once stripped of its status as

the official state religion by anticlerical forces in the ascendant during the Revolution, Catholicism forever lost much of its aura of inevitability, inescapability, and its previous taken-for-granted naturalness. Not even Napoleon's subsequent restoration of Catholicism as the French state religion could undo all the damage done to its prestige. The Revolution took additional, much bolder actions against religion than the mere disestablishment of Catholicism. External manifestations of worship, such as the very popular religious street processions, were banned (Ozouf, Festivals 262-264). The Revolution also promoted a resolutely, even aggressively secular "Cult of Reason," along with a later permutation called the "Cult of the Supreme Being," which was supposed to be a substitute for all traditional religions (Fehér 188-194; Kselman 65-72; Ozouf, Festivals 267-282). The virtually official atheism of the French Revolution after a certain point (1793-1794) might be seen as having the effect of casting into permanent doubt the inevitability of all religion, and not just Catholicism.

In spite of these major anticlerical and anti-religious developments, however, the thirst for what Brooks calls "the traditional Sacred" endured and remained intense. The longing for religion invested with the full prestige and power enjoyed by Catholicism prior to disestablishment, a religion that could function as a unifying force for the entire nation, was very strong. Melodrama represents, according to Brooks's famous formulation, first, a foredoomed effort to recapture the traditional Sacred, followed by second, a rapid and sudden collapse of that effort, ultimately to end in third, a turn as last resort to the championing and even sacralization of personal morality, the only area of life still fully amenable to being invested with religious significance. Brooks convincingly makes the case that all attempts, whether actual or symbolic, to return to the religious status quo ante of the *ancien régime* were doomed to failure from the very start and that this is what sets in motion the melodramatic

dynamic. What Brooks does not specify, however, is how elaborate, developed, and vigorous the attempt to restore the traditional Sacred might become in melodrama before the absolute certainty of failure precipitates its ultimate collapse, to be inevitably followed, of course, by the later and compensatory sacralization of the personal.

Presumably, the drive to recapture the traditional Sacred is merely implied in standard melodrama, because most melodramatic texts do not depict – not even symbolically – the kind of religious revolution or counter-revolution that clearly would be required to restore religion to the exalted position it occupied in politics and culture prior to the French Revolution. Religion is, in fact, an important element in many melodramatic texts, but Brooks's influential theory on the genre describes a hugely ambitious, even grandiose dynamic that probably has to be looked upon as a mere potentiality or precondition within most melodramas. In other words, it is probably safe to say that most melodramatic plots unfold only in the aftermath of an implicit, totally unmentioned effort to recapture the traditional Sacred. Something similar must be the case even for the texts analyzed by Brooks in The Melodramatic Imagination, because none of them show an actual attempt to restore religion to a status similar to the one it occupied prior to the Revolution. In order for the melodramatic impulse to remain intense, the push to recapture the traditional Sacred would presumably have to renew itself periodically, perhaps even frequently, but, once again, few if any of the texts commonly classified as melodramas actually show such a renewal process.

Speculation about whether there could possibly exist a form of melodrama depicting so colossal an effort as the restoration of religious hegemony may seem like making the mistake of reading Brooks too literally, except for the fact that melodramatic epic fits this description perfectly. Melodramatic epic is the genre that fills what might be called the “missing link” in Brooks's theory. In all fairness, “missing” may not be the best word in this

case, because the current theory of melodrama functions admirably well without positing the existence of an epic form for the genre. Nevertheless, having established melodrama theoretically upon a comprehensive restructuring of religion, but without presenting any works of literature that actually describe a comprehensive restructuring of religion, Brooks and other theorists have left open the possibility that there might exist a form of melodrama expansive and ambitious enough as to concretize their own speculations about the fundamental impulse behind the genre. In other words, melodramatic epic should make real and concrete the attempt at a thorough religious reconfiguration that remains only an implicit aspiration within standard melodrama. Of course, just as Brooks's theory predicts, the attempt to restore religious hegemony – whether hypothetical and implicit as in standard melodrama, or concrete and real as in melodramatic epic – should always fail just the same, triggering the same process of retreat toward an emphasis on personal morality, which will include an emphasis on sexual morality. Thus, if melodramatic epic truly exists as a genre, it will display all the characteristics of standard melodrama, but only following or alongside a large amount of ambitious and sweeping material overtly concerned with the reworking of religious first principles. The present study suggests, of course, that melodramatic epic does indeed exist and that it is the same as or at least very closely related to the new, nineteenth-century form of epic previously identified by scholars working in fields other than melodrama. In addition, this study will claim that melodramatic epic is the genre to which Zola's Évangiles belong and around which Proust's Recherche builds its comic superstructure. Of course, many more details about melodramatic epic and its relation to melodrama will be provided a bit later. For the moment, what matters most is Peter Brooks's profound insight about the religious foundation of melodrama.

Brooks is by no means the only scholar to comment upon melodrama's powerful ties to religion, and especially to the religious conflict that took place during the French Revolution. Julia Przybos, another leading specialist of melodrama, has made similar observations. She writes,

Par leur soin de tout rationaliser et leur mépris de l'intuition, le siècle des Lumières et la Révolution ont fortement ébranlé les fondements de la transcendance chrétienne...[L]orsque disparaît le sacré religieux fondé sur la transcendance, le sacré social prend forcément la relève. Or celui-ci présuppose la soumission de l'individu à une société déifiée. Envisagé sous cet angle, le mélodrame s'apparente au rituel, en ceci qu'il rassemble un nombre considérable d'individus qui sont progressivement amenés à partager sur le traître et la victime et, à un deuxième niveau, sur la société traditionnelle et les lois qui la gouvernent des sentiments analogues...A pleurer ensemble et à huer à l'unisson on refait la solidarité du groupe. (*L'Entreprise* 189)

This passage provides further confirmation of the theory placing melodrama's origin within the religious crisis engendered by the French Revolution. Even more important, Przybos agrees with Brooks that the Revolution forever changed the status of religious authority in society and that melodrama represents a kind of attempt to recapture what was lost. This is clearly what she means when she writes, "...[L]orsque disparaît le sacré religieux fondé sur la transcendance, le sacré social prend forcément la relève." The most significant contribution of this passage to the argument here, however, is the way it can be made to speak to the issue of melodramatic epic. This matters a great deal, of course, because the claim here is that the *Recherche*'s primary intertext is not melodrama per se, but instead melodramatic epic. The problem then becomes one of defining melodramatic epic, a blended form that the theoretical scholarship on genres has not yet described.

The slight discontinuity in the transition from theory to application that was noted in Peter Brooks's work on melodrama can also be seen in perhaps more salient form in this passage by Przybos. Although the term "missing link" has the obvious shortcomings noted earlier, it still likely is the most convenient shorthand reference for the one opportunity within

the theory of literary genres that will make possible the connection between melodrama and epic. Theoretical space simply must be opened up for Zola's Évangiles, which are extremely melodramatic novels in many respects, but which also vastly exceed the limits of standard melodrama. In fact, so polemically audacious are the Évangiles that they also vastly exceed many of the limits of the typical nineteenth-century novel. Yet the Évangiles' relation to epic is equally complex and problematic. The only way to create the requisite theoretical space for these novels is by showing that something like an opening or gap exists in the current theoretical literature. Not only will a suitable descriptive category for the Évangiles thereby be created, the theoretical scholarship on literary genres should benefit to some degree as well. By proposing melodramatic epic as the genre that fills the missing link or gap, this study merges two highly accomplished fields of study, showing how they marvelously reinforce each other.

In the case of Przybos, the discontinuity is most visible when she speaks about the deification of society as a substitute for the traditional Sacred founded on transcendence. What Przybos does not say, because the thematics of standard melodrama do not allow her to say it, is that the literary works she uses to illustrate her theory actually go so far as to make the deification of society literal and explicit. The melodramatic impulse likely is premised on the elevation of social welfare to a status where it rivals religious transcendence, but this does not mean that any given melodrama portrays this elevation fully and explicitly, with the many implications of such a move spelled out. Indeed, when Przybos gets around to describing the mechanics of this process, she admits that it takes place at a rather significant remove. She says the audience of a theatrical melodrama is supposed to make the jump from collectively booing the villain and pitying the innocent victim to understanding the implications of this emotional experience for their views on society at large and the laws governing the nation.

Although melodrama often does elicit a politically engaged response to some degree, the intellectual leap in understanding that Przybos describes is still quite a large one for an audience to make, and even still it is many steps short of the complete and actual deification of society, in other words the creation of a substitute religion. Again, in fairness to Przybos, this discontinuity does not constitute a flaw in her theory vis-à-vis standard melodrama. Nevertheless, it does reveal a kind of opening within her conceptual scheme, an opening that could be filled by melodramatic epic, which would take the deification of society quite literally.

As a matter of fact, one of the names most often used to refer to the new kind of epic that was born out of the French Revolution is “humanitarian epic,” precisely because this form of epic deifies humanity. The full title of the foremost study on the new epic is The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France: A Study in Heroic and Humanitarian Poetry from Les Martyrs to Les Siècles Morts. Hunt and other experts on the new epic use the term “humanitarian” in a way virtually identical to how Przybos uses the term “deification of society,” all of which suggests that this is one of the major points of convergence that will allow a merger of the scholarship on melodrama with the scholarship on the new epic. The details of this point of convergence will have to be postponed until after a summary of the research on the new epic. Several other key issues will need to be examined then, as well. Most obviously, more explanation will need to be provided as to the meaning of “the deification of humanity” and about why this tendency of new epic differentiates it sharply from earlier, traditional forms of epic. Furthermore, the relationship between the the deification of society/humanity and the effort to recapture the traditional Sacred as described by Brooks will be examined. These actually turn out to be two different steps in a sequence of steps that together comprise the melodramatic process. The final step in the process is the one most important for the argument

of this dissertation, and that is the one involving a focus on a highly conservative sexual ethic. Also to be explained later is why the author of The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France, Herbert Hunt, never once mentions Zola's Évangiles, even though these novels fit his model of the new humanitarian epic very well. One clue is evident even in Hunt's subtitle: he confines his research almost exclusively to the epic poetry of nineteenth-century France. Finally, additional reasons will be given as to why the present study proposes the name "melodramatic epic" as either a replacement or synonym for "humanitarian epic."

Both melodrama and melodramatic epic implicate a substantial amount of religious reform, but the scale of the reform is vastly different in the two cases, and close study of the passage from Przybos suggests how. Very revealing is the way Przybos calls theatrical melodrama a substitute for religious ritual – "le mélodrame s'apparente au rituel" – but she does not call it a fully developed new theology. A key characteristic of melodramatic epic and one that clearly distinguishes it from standard melodrama is that the former aspires overtly to the creation of a new theology, if not an entirely new religion, whereas the aspirations of the latter to religious reform are much more modest, and may merely be implicit. This difference in the scale or ambitiousness of the religious reform aimed for by these two related genres will be demonstrated later through reference to specific literary texts. Yet whether the goal is the creation of a new ritual or instead of a new theology, whether the dimension involved is standard or epic, the aspiration toward religious reform inherent in melodrama always ultimately collapses into a fixation on personal morality. On this point, Przybos definitely agrees with Brooks, although she uses a different vocabulary to describe this final stage of the process. Przybos speaks of a fundamentally conservative ideology of personal morality, including sexual morality, that melodrama propagates during pauses in its tumultuous, highly eventful plots. Przybos insists that this ideology of personal morality, and not some

combination of plot twists or any other feature, is what always determines the final outcome of the melodramatic storyline (178-179).

Incidentally, Przybos deals exclusively with theatrical melodrama in the study by her that is being referenced here, but although this fact is worth acknowledging, it is not essential. Melodrama's most basic elements transcend the artistic medium being used and recur fairly predictably regardless of whether one is dealing with theater, cinema or literature. Peter Brooks famously blurs distinctions of medium in The Melodramatic Imagination, applying as he does the same basic standards to theatrical works and novels. A novel can certainly be a melodrama, and Brooks convincingly shows that many are. Yet a novel can instead be something closely related but still different, namely a melodramatic epic, and that is what Zola's Évangiles are.

Brilliant and insightful as the remarks of Peter Brooks and Julia Przybos are, the most convincing evidence of melodrama's ties to religion comes from a contemporary source, Charles Nodier. "Contemporary" in this instance means that Nodier was an eyewitness to the birth of melodrama in the final years of the French Revolution. He also experienced firsthand the development of the genre throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century. Nodier was a close personal friend of the playwright who is widely referred to as the "father of melodrama," Guilbert de Pixérécourt. In 1841, Nodier edited a four-volume collection of Pixérécourt's best-known melodramas, and for that collection Nodier wrote a lengthy introduction that amounted to a history of the genre from its beginnings up until that time. In his introduction, Nodier could not be any more emphatic about the invention of melodrama to serve as a surrogate religion at a time when many forms of traditional religion were banned as a result of Revolutionary anticlericalism. This chapter's second epigraph comes from Nodier's introduction, and it is only one of several passages that could be cited in support of the claim

that melodrama arises out of religious or quasi-religious aspirations. The epigraph contains one of the most famous definitions ever given of melodrama: “c’était la moralité de la révolution !” Nodier goes on to explain this startling declaration. He says that melodrama provided moral instruction at a time when traditional religion could not, because Christianity hardly existed anymore in France, the confessionals were closed, and the pulpits were empty: “A la naissance du mélodrame, le christianisme n’existait pas plus que s’il n’avait jamais existé. Le confessionnal était muré, la chaire était vide...” (viii). At the end of this passage, Nodier states quite simply that melodrama was the only place to which people in those turbulent times could turn for moral instruction.

The succinctness of this passage and the directness with which Nodier relates melodrama to the Revolutionary context are quite remarkable. Nodier’s claims acquire greater force from his status as a leading author of the period who actually lived through these experiences. In his essay “Dernières réflexions de l’auteur sur le mélodrame,” Pixierécourt himself substantiates Nodier’s claims. Pixierécourt virtually admits that he created the genre with religious motives in mind and with the express purpose of providing moral instruction. He writes, “C’est avec des idées religieuses et providentielles; c’est avec des sentiments moraux que je me suis lancé dans la carrière épineuse du théâtre” (493). In this statement, Pixierécourt is referring at least in part to the play of his that is commonly agreed to be the first fully developed melodrama, Coelina, ou l’enfant du mystère produced in 1800, near the end of the French Revolution. One reason for emphasizing here melodrama’s emergence out of the cauldron of the French Revolution has always been to demonstrate how very rooted this particular genre is in history. If the turbulent French Revolution gave birth to melodrama, then the tumultuous Dreyfus Affair could plausibly have given rise later to one of the greatest outpourings ever of the genre.

From its beginning, melodrama was deeply enmeshed in political, social and religious disputes that were closely interrelated. These disputes eventually subsided, but without ever disappearing fully in nineteenth-century France; and they erupted again with spectacular vehemence during the Dreyfus Affair. Yet Nodier illustrates how melodrama was also, from very early on, the subject of a debate over aesthetics that was nearly as intense as all the other disputes. Like the other conflicts, the one over aesthetics would break out anew during the Dreyfus Affair. The debate over melodramatic aesthetics may well be the single most important conflict for the purpose of this study. That is so for three reasons. First, the aesthetics debate actually has the most direct relation to the Dreyfus Affair's sexual politics.

Second, as clearly as do the religious quarrels and even more so than the political conflicts, the debate over aesthetics demonstrates the basic continuity in melodramatic practice from the French Revolution until the end of the Dreyfus Affair. The demonstration of this continuity is even more important than it may seem, primarily because the term "melodrama" disappeared from these major debates by the time of the Dreyfus Affair. Pixérécourt proudly called his plays melodramas, but Zola did not do the same with his Évangiles. Nor, for that matter, did he label them melodramatic epics. The word "melodrama" clearly lost its prominence and probably much of its respectability by the time of the Affair, but the practice of melodrama was still widespread and central to the anticlerical controversy that came to dominate the Affair at its conclusion. This is, of course, one of the major claims of the present study. Yet given that the leading Dreyfus Affair combatants did not call melodrama by its proper name, unlike adversaries at the start of the nineteenth century, what will allow the full application of melodrama theory, based significantly on the French Revolution and its near-term aftermath, to the Dreyfus Affair will be fundamental similarities in areas such as content, practice and context. No similarity is more striking, however, than the

debate that took place both in the wake of the French Revolution and during the Dreyfus Affair over morally edifying literature. Melodrama is an inherently moralizing genre, a fact that has always won it at least as many detractors as adherents. Even supporters of imparting a moral message in art and literature can disagree among themselves about the best way to use melodrama to that end. These are the basic outlines of the debate over melodramatic aesthetics that will be crucial to the rest of this study.

The third reason this dispute over aesthetics will take on increasing importance here has to do with its prominence within the Recherche. The Recherche includes a lengthy discussion of the controversy over melodramatic aesthetics that took place at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. The terms in which the Recherche discusses this dispute are the same as those used by the adversaries, which means that the discussion is framed in terms of how much moralizing, if any, is permissible within art and literature. In other words, Proust does not mention melodrama by name any more than Zola does. Nevertheless, the aesthetics debate to which Zola contributed and on which Proust commented developed along very similar lines as the earlier debate over melodrama from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The explanation for this similarity, of course, is that a prime aesthetic issue at stake both at the very beginning and at the very end of the French nineteenth century was melodrama, even though Dreyfus Affair adversaries chose not to use the word. Proust's lengthy discussion of this dispute will, of course, be closely analyzed in the later chapter here on the Recherche. Overt philosophical speculation about aesthetics is absolutely vital to Proust's fictional cycle, and much of this speculation will be shown here to have been written in response to the moralizing artistic trend that accompanied the Dreyfus Affair. Such evidence will go a long way in helping establish the mock-epic status of the Recherche. The issue of morality in art is integral to all melodrama, regardless of the scale on which it unfolds, standard or epic.

Charles Nodier mounts a vigorous defense of morally edifying art in his introduction to Pixierécourt's collected works. Nodier couples his promotion of morality in art to a defense of the artistic quality of Pixierécourt's melodramas. While these two purposes may seem inextricably connected on first reading, they are actually distinct. Nodier does much more than introduce Pixierécourt's plays in this well-known essay. He makes a general artistic statement, one that comes close to subordinating aesthetic considerations to moral concerns. In the following passage, even as he insists that Pixierécourt's plays are superb examples of the dramatist's art, Nodier says that what he cherishes most about them are the moral lessons they impart.

Je lui sais moins de gré pourtant, de ces brillantes qualités dramatiques dont les distributeurs en titre de gloire littéraire auraient dû lui tenir compte avant moi, que du sentiment profond de bienséance et de moralité qui se manifeste dans toutes ses compositions. C'est que je les ai vues, dans l'absence du culte, suppléer aux instructions de la chaire muette, et porter sous une forme attrayante qui ne manquait jamais son effet, des leçons graves et profitables dans l'âme des spectateurs. (ii-iii)

Nodier once again speaks here about how melodramas performed the function of religious sermons in the wake of the French Revolution. Ever so subtly, however, Nodier can be seen suggesting that a play's artistry matters less than its moral content. He says he feels less gratitude toward Pixierécourt for the "brilliant dramatic qualities" that his plays most assuredly possess – regardless of what the arbiters of literary merit may think – than for the profound sense of propriety and morality that emanates from all his writings. Admittedly, this falls far short of a categorical statement that moral issues always trump aesthetics, but it is nevertheless one step in that direction.

Nodier takes another step in that direction later in the essay. He claims that Pixierécourt possessed more than mere literary genius and had more than a mere literary vocation. Pixierécourt's greater mission lay precisely in the moral instruction of the French people after the chaos of the French Revolution, and his greater genius lay in pursuing that

that mission to completion. While similar to ideas expressed in earlier excerpts, the argument this time by Nodier emphasizes more strongly the superior claims of “moral utility” over against aesthetics. Once again, the implications of the following passage clearly extend beyond Pixierécourt himself.

Il fallait une sorte de génie pour comprendre cette mission, il fallait autant de courage que du talent pour la remplir. Elle exigeait quelque chose de plus encore, c’est-à-dire une abnégation mille fois plus rare que le talent, car M. de Pixierécourt n’ignorait pas qu’on tient peu de compte dans les arts de l’utilité morale, et que les succès légitimement acquis dans les grands théâtres ne lui feraient point pardonner d’être descendu jusqu’aux petits. (ix)

Pixierécourt comes across in this passage as an extremely rare kind of hero, and one capable of immense self-sacrifice. His mission was the moral instruction of the French people, already mentioned in the passages by Nodier cited previously. For the sake of this mission, Pixierécourt voluntarily surrendered his literary reputation, the applause and approval of critics and pundits, who do not value morally edifying art: “on tient peu de compte dans les arts de l’utilité morale...” Pixierécourt’s courage and abnegation are a thousand times rarer than talent, with such rarity inevitably suggesting superiority. Nodier all but says that the artistic community and its notions of aesthetics are badly confused for not taking into account the immense importance of morality. Elsewhere in his essay, Nodier complains bitterly that drama since Pixierécourt’s heyday has become worse than bad, but rather “infernally” dangerous, for not including moral lessons (iv). Such a complaint has implications far beyond Pixierécourt.

Nodier’s essay on Pixierécourt is a foundational text for literary criticism on melodrama. Frequently cited and even more frequently alluded to, this essay stands as probably the single most influential commentary on melodrama ever written, and its influence has not been diminished by its author’s very partisan approach. Yet Nodier is clearly commenting on standard melodrama and not on melodramatic epic, a fact evident in the way morality is the only aspect of religion that he acknowledges. Peter Brooks, who credits Nodier’s pioneering

role in literary criticism, shows how melodrama eventually reduces religion to personal morality (Imagination 43). Nodier's essay, which is much more than just a work of literary criticism, actually amounts to primary source material written by a contemporary and friend of the first melodramatists. As such, it provides even stronger support for Brooks's description of the melodramatic collapse into a fixation on personal morality. Although Nodier never specifically says so, he writes in the essay as if morality is all there is to religion. Morality is certainly the only element of religion that he says melodrama replaced in the wake of the French Revolution. Yet morality is just that, one element of religion, which usually also includes some combination of the following: a history of the universe, from creation to ultimate end; a history of humanity; a system of spirituality; a tradition of mysticism; an understanding of the nature of divinity; a concept of the afterlife; and some general instruction as to the proper stance vis-à-vis government and society at large. The hegemony enjoyed by *ancien régime* Catholicism, the religion in the absence of which early melodrama most specifically tried to fill the void, arose from its enormous influence in all these areas. Nodier does not dismiss these other aspects of religion; he just hardly discusses them at all.

The closest Nodier comes to mentioning the kind of grand vistas afforded by traditional religion appears in a complaint about the French Revolution. Nodier laments that the common people began imitating the grandiose and specious language of the leading revolutionaries, and that such language came to monopolize discourse in France (x-xii). Although not explicit on this point, Nodier seems to be referring to, among other things, the effort by the revolutionaries to create a new, substitute religion of their own. Thus, Nodier says that, in addition to providing instruction in morality, Pixérécourt wanted to re-program the very way people spoke and understood language, in order to cancel out the trend toward grandiloquence started by the Revolution (xiii). This is valuable information, because it

indicates the fundamentally counter-revolutionary aim of Pixierécourt's melodrama. Nevertheless, this is by far the weakest section of Nodier's essay, because he gives no explanation as to how melodrama could counteract the awe-inspiring, grandiose language of the French Revolution. Furthermore, this section of the essay confirms Peter Brooks's analysis that the ambition of melodrama is always much greater than what the genre actually accomplishes. According to Brooks, melodrama at least implicitly attempts to restore a kind of religious hegemony, when all it can really muster is lessons in personal morality.

Although melodramatic epic will emphasize personal morality in a similar fashion, it will begin from a much more overtly ambitious position. Melodramatic epic will be explicit in its aim to restore the traditional Sacred. It will speak openly of the grander aspects of religion beyond mere human morality; and it will try, actually or symbolically, to recreate or find substitutes for those other dimensions of religion. Everything Nodier and Brooks say about melodrama will apply equally to melodramatic epic, including most especially the collapse into morality. Yet the distance traversed in the collapse will be much greater on the epic scale, because the initial aspiration will be so much higher and more overt. The fall from the greater height means that the ultimate collapse in melodramatic epic will be explosive, often leading to what might be called a secondary collapse or reduction beyond what usually transpires in melodrama. Standard melodrama reduces religion to personal morality, but melodramatic epic will often reduce personal morality itself to little more than sexual morality. Like so much else in melodramatic epic, the trajectory that leads from the search for a new religion to a fixation on sexual morality will occur very conspicuously and noisily. In melodramatic epics such as Zola's Évangiles, a very conservative sexual morality becomes the measure of virtually everything. The three Évangile novels, but especially Fécondité, could not be any more forceful on this point. Indeed, this highlights another difference between melodrama on the

standard and epic scales. While Charles Nodier rushed to the defense of standard melodrama out of the belief that no one else was answering attacks against it, melodramatic epic will incorporate within itself a vigorous, often aggressive defense of its own moralizing tendencies. This defense will involve portraying the collapse into sexual morality as something quite different from a collapse, rather as the discovery of the cosmic ramifications of the sexual choices that humans make. In turn, Proust's Recherche will see through this rationalization, perceive the collapse for what it is, and mock it in a classic, highly sophisticated process of comic deflation.

The description of melodramatic epic being presented here will soon be substantiated with evidence in this chapter and also in the next. A look ahead simply contextualizes in a most useful way Nodier's important essay and helps appreciate the exact contribution that it makes to this project.

Another kind of scholarship will be consulted briefly here before turning to the new epic, however, and that is current scholarship on French religious history from 1789 to the end of the nineteenth century. The best historical work amply confirms the insights of literary scholars such as Peter Brooks and Julia Przybos. This is key, because the theory of melodrama is grounded in history, especially French religious history during the Revolution's long aftermath. Any historical evidence that demonstrates a strong and steady yearning for the kind of religious hegemony that was destroyed by the Revolution greatly buttresses melodrama theory, since leading theorists like Brooks and Przybos emphasize the role of this yearning in the melodramatic process. Research on the French Revolution does, in fact, show that this religious longing was experienced not only by reactionary, traditionalist Catholics, but also by leading Revolutionary figures. A void was keenly felt, especially after the suppression of Christianity, and that feeling of emptiness traversed the entire political spectrum, from the

extreme right all the way to extreme left. Even many of those who had fought for the suppression of religion experienced a powerful kind of regret. In her innovative study, Festivals and the French Revolution, Mona Ozouf describes how the Cult of Reason and the Cult of the Supreme Being constituted a deliberate attempt by leading revolutionaries such as Robespierre to produce a revolutionarily acceptable substitute for the unifying and emotionally satisfying experience of traditional religion. The originality of Ozouf's study lies in her examination of the French Revolution from the perspective of its many festivals and public celebrations. Given that public rituals and festivals were the principle means by which Revolutionary leaders tried to propagate their substitute religion, Ozouf ends up including within her study plenty of valuable information about religion's role during the Revolution. She writes,

The men of the Revolution themselves had few illusions as to the meager nourishment offered popular religiosity by the Revolutionary festivals...This is because the authorities chose not to follow the gentle methods recommended in 1789 by Rabaut de Saint-Etienne...Instead of "gradually reducing the processions, confraternities, ceremonies in square and street"...they chose to empty everyday life of religious acts, brutalizing, breaking up, and prosecuting them. Such a vacuum was abhorred on two accounts: either people were convinced that without rituals, any life declines into idleness or incoherence..., or it was predicted that that the vacuum thus left by the expulsion of the marvelous might be filled by something even more fearful...When a cult, even an unreasonable one, is destroyed, La Révellière declared, it has always proved necessary to replace it with others; otherwise, it has, so to speak, "replaced itself in rising from its own ruins." The whole thinking of the Directoire, from Tracy to Madame de Staël, is agreed on the *horror vacui* left by the persecution of Catholicism and the imperious need to replace it. (267-268)

Although this passage from the historian Mona Ozouf deals exclusively with the Revolutionary period, it illustrates two crucial phenomena that will continue to operate in France throughout the nineteenth century, up to and including the period of the Dreyfus Affair. The first phenomenon is the decidedly nonpartisan nature of the yearning for the traditional Sacred, meaning that attempts to recapture a kind of religious hegemony came from both the Right and the Left, from extreme religious conservatives and from extreme religious

liberals. Even atheists could make the attempt, although the yearning for lost religious hegemony would introduce an undeniably contradictory element into atheism. This contradiction will be no more striking, however, than the theological contortions that melodrama also imposes on orthodox religion, as will be shown in a moment. In any event, the key point here is that both sides, the (far) Left as well as the (far) Right, can and will try to reclaim the traditional Sacred during the nineteenth century. Ozouf shows such an incongruity happening as early as the French Revolution itself. The Directoire, mentioned in the final sentence of the passage above, was the phase of Revolutionary government that ruled France from August 1795 until November 1799, when Napoleon assumed power. Ozouf paints an arresting picture of the Directoire obsessed by the dangers of a religious vacuum, a vacuum that many of its own leaders had helped create through the suppression of Christianity. In a similar vein, Charles Nodier's commentary on Pixérécourt shows the most famous of the early melodramatists obsessed with the same vacuum, but attempting to solve the problem from the opposite, counter-revolutionary direction. Ozouf's description of this bipartisan phenomenon – using the notion of the abhorrence of a vacuum, "*horror vacui*," within the religious domain – corresponds perfectly with Peter Brooks's most basic insight about melodrama, namely that it is always associated at least implicitly with a grasp for the lost, deeply regretted traditional Sacred. That regret and that grasp can occur anywhere on the political spectrum, including and perhaps even especially at the opposite political extremes.

The second phenomenon illustrated by Mona Ozouf is the irretrievability of *ancien régime*-style religious hegemony, meaning that the quest to restore it will always be unsuccessful. This is the point made so brilliantly by Peter Brooks, who concludes that the foredoomed effort to recapture the traditional, hegemonic Sacred is what produces melodrama. Merely reestablishing Catholicism as the official state religion would not be sufficient,

because the Revolution introduced an irreversible strain of pluralism into modern thought and practice, and this pluralism prevents the regeneration of the kind of theological and ideological hegemony in existence prior to 1789. Yet the yearning would remain, the attempt still would be made, and melodrama would unavoidably result. Ozouf's chapter on religion during the Revolution presents significant historical evidence illustrating the failure of such an enormous ambition. Although Ozouf never makes a categorical statement as Brooks does concerning the inevitability of failure in these circumstances, one may be permitted to reach that conclusion after reading her description of the often ludicrous efforts of the Revolutionaries to create an ersatz religion (262-282). Of one thing, at least, Ozouf is completely certain, and that is the utter failure of the Revolutionary experiment in fabricating a new religion. She writes, "The liturgy that, in their fear of the void, the men of the Revolution were trying desperately to establish was, therefore, even for those who suspected its religious coloring, a failed liturgy. Very few regarded it as a transfer of sacrality" (271).

There is an important corollary to the discovery that both the Right and Left occasionally felt the need to re-claim the traditional Sacred, and it could not be more fundamental to the present study's thesis. The corollary's importance may seem belied by its obviousness and simplicity. It is merely this: the fact that both sides – even, or especially, at their extremes – believed the reestablishment of some form of religious hegemony to be an important endeavor constitutes a surprising point of agreement between bitter enemies. This is the distant, often veiled origin of the adversarial parallelism that is inherent to all melodrama, especially melodrama that is politically engaged. Yet this original cause of adversarial parallelism is neither distant nor obscure within melodramatic epic, due to the fact that religion in its varied forms is the central and nearly constant topic of discussion in the expanded form of the genre. The other source of adversarial parallelism in melodrama has to

do with the collapse into personal morality, which proceeds in a similar fashion regardless of whether the ideological impulse behind a given melodramatic work is conservative or liberal, radical or reactionary. Scholars who have already written on this second source of adversarial parallelism in melodrama will be cited later in this chapter. Of course, within the Recherche, Proust will brilliantly exploit the comic potential of both kinds of melodramatic adversarial parallelism.

Any historical scholarship that carried forward the story of the repercussions ensuing from the Revolutionary crisis over religion would be highly beneficial to the present project, and the deeper into the nineteenth century that these repercussions were tracked, the better. Of particular utility would be historical scholarship comparing the religious situation during the Third Republic at the end of the nineteenth century to the religious situation at the beginning of the century in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution. Finally, any historical study indicating that a dynamic similar to adversarial parallelism in the area of religion persisted throughout the nineteenth century would also be very helpful. Fortunately, an anthology on nineteenth-century French history published by Oxford University Press in 2002 contains essays by two historians that make these very points. Malcolm Crook, the editor of the anthology and also one of its contributors, writes,

A major reason for the longevity of this [revolutionary] conflict was the entanglement of religious divisions with the political struggle...In 1788 an anxious Louis XVI was apparently reassured by one of his ministers that, unlike seventeenth century England, religious quarrels were not involved in the crisis he was facing. Yet it was not long before altar, like throne, was being fundamentally challenged in France. The schism between Church and state may have resulted from miscalculations on the part of the revolutionaries, but their inability to grasp the spiritual dimension, or at least to consign it to the private sphere, had disastrous consequences. Under Napoleon, there was more of a truce than a solution to the breakdown in relations, which ebbed and flowed during the nineteenth century, as a clerical and religious revival occurred. Religion, whether Christian or civil, played a vital role in the political war that was waged up to and including the creation of a Third Republic. (Introduction 3)

Malcolm Crook could not be any clearer about the long-term persistence of the religious conflict that began with the French Revolution. He says that it continued through to the Third Republic at the end of the nineteenth century. Two crucial themes undergird Crook's analysis in this passage: first, the theme of a chronic failure to strike the right balance between religion and politics; and second, the theme of adversarial parallelism. As for the first, Crook writes cogently that the "inability [of the revolutionaries] to grasp the spiritual dimension, or at least to consign it to the private sphere, had disastrous consequences," consequences that were to endure for a very long time, long after the 1789 Revolution itself. The intervention of religion into politics, and vice versa, continued to cause significant strife throughout the nineteenth century in France.

The second crucial theme, that of adversarial parallelism, emerges distinctly in only one short phrase. Nevertheless, that phrase could hardly be more consequential, because it casts the entire passage in a new light. It consists of just three words, "Christian or civil," as in "Religion, whether Christian or civil, played a vital role in the political war..." By referring to civil religion(s), Crook is acknowledging the persistence of alternative, secular "religions," many of which were merely proposed, but a few of which were actually put into practice on some level. These civil religions frequently strove to elevate the principles of republicanism to the level of theology, and they were often put forward explicitly as replacements for Christianity. Thus, the Cults of Reason and of the Supreme Being, those famous revolutionary experiments in creating a new religion, spawned similar attempts throughout the nineteenth century. In fact, Zola's Évangiles are their direct progeny. These highly unusual novels by Zola depict the creation of a new, secular, and civil religion of republicanism, promoted specifically as a way to eliminate Christianity. As for the idea of adversarial parallelism, it emerges implicitly from Malcolm Crook's claim that, just like Christian triumphalism, the

assertiveness of these new civil religions contributed to political strife. Bitter enemies that did their utmost to undermine each other, the civil religions and politically engaged Christianity both “played a vital role in the political war that was waged up to and including the creation of a Third Republic.” That is a kind of parallelism between hated adversaries, the kind that Proust would make fun of in the Recherche.

In truth, Malcolm Crook’s discussion of nineteenth-century religious strife does not technically go to the very end of the nineteenth century, which includes those last several years that witnessed the extraordinary discord of the Dreyfus Affair. The Oxford anthology that Crook edited ends mostly with the 1880 election that swept from power parliamentary leaders with monarchist sympathies who had been working behind the scenes for yet another restoration. If successful, their machinations would of course have meant an abrupt and early end to the Third Republic. The basic end point of the Oxford anthology is thus the moment when the Third Republic’s stability and the permanence were assured, which was around 1880. Nevertheless, this chronological limitation poses less of a problem than one might think for the use being made here of Crook’s ideas. Both Crook and Thomas Kselman, the other contributor to the anthology who writes about religious history, mention briefly that the religious conflict would continue beyond the consolidation of the Third Republic and into the period of the Dreyfus Affair (Conclusion 209; 91). Crook and Kselman take readers to the doorstep of the Dreyfus Affair and the new religious conflicts that it generated at the twilight of the nineteenth century. The present study, in particular the chapter on Zola’s involvement in the Dreyfus Affair’s religious discord, will pick up the story from there.

The anticlerical campaign that was fought at the very end of the Dreyfus Affair is a historical episode about which a great deal still remains to be written. Indeed, the same could be said about nineteenth-century French religious history in general. Malcolm Crook laments

that the religious history of this period has received insufficient attention from scholars, the result of a longstanding preference for economic and social perspectives. This relative neglect may be one major reason why the crucial role of melodramatic epic within Proust's Recherche has not been detected before, because the genesis and impact of this unusual genre cannot be properly understood apart from the religious conflict that served as its primary historical context. Yet according to Malcolm Crook, the religious conflict in nineteenth-century France was little studied for many years. Crook writes in terms of the historiographical approach that was dominant in the twentieth century,

Religious aspects found little place in the narrative of revolutionary France that was shaped by Marxism and which accorded priority to economic and social dimensions of the upheaval. If the French Revolution was above all a 'bourgeois revolution', then the hundred years that followed witnessed the prolonged struggle of the bourgeoisie to consolidate and defend the gains initially made during the 1790s...The eventual triumph of the bourgeoisie was perforce a protracted affair, only completed after 1870 with the advent of the Third Republic. (Introduction 3-4)

Crook hastens to concede that economic and social histories have made significant contributions to our understanding of nineteenth-century France. Nevertheless, he stands by his essential point, which is that the religious is not coterminous with the economic and the social, a fact long overlooked by the dominant modes of historiography (4). This relative neglect of religious history has resulted in limited awareness of the powerful upsurge in religious and political activism on the part of French Catholics during the nineteenth century.

Crook writes,

Nor was the Church condemned to extinction in the same way as the Throne. Republicans were anxious to combat its influence precisely because they recognized a powerful, even resurgent opponent, not the ailing enemy that some have depicted. Contrary to received opinion, the nineteenth century in France was a period of religious revival as much as a time of decline. (Conclusion 208)

The key phrase here is "contrary to received opinion," which serves as a subtle rebuke of what long was a dominant belief in the scholarly community, namely that nineteenth-

century religious history was a backwater and deservedly so. It is important to remember that Malcolm Crook wrote these lines for a prestigious historical anthology published in 2002, with contributions from leading historians from around the world. The “received opinion” about which Crook complains must still exert influence today, if he felt justified in writing this as recently as 2002. The republicans to which Crook refers seem to include all nineteenth-century French activists who worked for a republican form of government, as opposed to monarchy or Napoleonic imperialism. Most prominent in this very large group, however, were the leaders of the Third Republic, who tried to reduce Catholicism’s profile in France through legislation as early as the 1870s. Their anticlerical agenda, which was official government policy, given that these republicans actually held the reins of power, vastly expanded and picked up intensity during the Dreyfus Affair, as will be shown in the chapter on Zola’s Évangiles. Of course, the chief thrust of this passage by Crook is that a Catholic resurgence took place in France during the nineteenth century and that this is what republicans felt they needed to respond to. In fact, a new and powerful Catholic revival began in France in the years just before the Dreyfus Affair, and this trend was especially pronounced among the upper and educated classes. This late nineteenth-century religious revival had a large impact on the sexual politics of the Dreyfus Affair and on the melodramatic epics that accompanied the Affair. This is yet another topic that will be discussed within these pages in the chapter on the Évangiles.

Amid all this talk of religious conflict, a brief comment about anti-Semitism is in order here. Anti-Semitism will figure less prominently than one might imagine in the epic/mock epic dynamic that this project is highlighting. To be sure, what used to be called “the Jewish question” can never be far removed from any discussion of the Dreyfus Affair, and that will be just as true of the present project, as well. Indeed, while the Affair’s

anticlerical campaign seems to have been somewhat neglected by scholars, the same can hardly be said about the scandal's rampant anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is one part of nineteenth-century French history about which historians have written extensively, particularly in terms of its deleterious role in the Dreyfus Affair. In addition, literary scholars have meticulously studied the theme of Jewishness in Proust's Recherche. In spite of the fact that religion is the central concern of melodramatic epic, however, anti-Semitism is not the kind of religious combat that this genre primarily addresses. Issues of Jewishness and of anti-Semitism do appear in some melodramatic epics, including in Zola's Évangiles, but this overlooked genre has a special approach to religion that prevents such issues from taking center stage for very long. Previous studies focusing on the theme of anti-Semitism in the Recherche but not taking into account the particular approach to religious questions practiced in melodramatic epic were bound to miss this genre's significance in the creation of Proustian humor.

Anti-Semitism is about much more than religion, and this is a major reason why it is not a central concern of melodramatic epic. Religious disagreement is only one factor in anti-Semitism, and often it is very far from being the most important factor. In his excellent study L'Anti-sémitisme: Le Juif comme bouc émissaire, the sociologist Yves Chevalier notes at least four components to this complex type of bigotry: the economic, the political, the racial and the religious. Chevalier discovers that the proportion between these four components has varied greatly in different historical manifestations of anti-Semitism throughout the centuries (377). In a similar vein, Hannah Arendt has written that anti-Semitism in modern times has been mostly political in origin, rather than economic or religious (28-29). Arendt clearly includes the anti-Semitism of the Dreyfus Affair in this observation.

In melodramatic epic, however, religious conflict is always front and center. Politics and economics certainly do figure in the genre – politics especially does – but the principal argument is always framed in religious terms, and quite conspicuously so. Even more important, melodramatic epic concentrates on one particular kind of religious conflict, conflict over Church-state issues, especially over the role of official state religion. It goes without saying that Judaism was not the official state religion of any country in the world at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, but that Christianity in various forms was established as the state religion in most of Europe. Ever since Napoleon I overturned the French Revolution's official policy on religion by signing a concordat with the Vatican in 1801, Catholicism had again been the established religion in France. This explains why the Dreyfus Affair's anticlerical campaign became so important for the genre of melodramatic epic, because the campaign's main target was Catholicism, especially Catholicism in its role as France's state religion. In fact, this is the historical episode that resulted in the final disestablishment of the Catholic Church in France, in 1905. The religious disagreement that fueled this *fin-de-siècle* anticlerical campaign gave rise to a very public discussion of issues relating to gender and sexuality, as debate swelled about the necessity of established Catholicism and of Christianity more generally in preserving the moral order in France. Melodramatic epic was the supreme literary manifestation of this bitter dispute over established religion and its role in preserving sexual morality. The evidence for these claims will of course appear in chapter on Zola's Évangiles.

What this means for the Recherche is that even anti-Semitism, which is clearly one of its major themes, is viewed largely through the comic lens that Proust fashioned in light of the anticlerical campaign's astonishing sexual politics, and particularly in light of melodramatic epic's highly impassioned depiction of that sexual politics. This is not to deny the sexual dimension of anti-Semitism. Among the many bizarre notions that have comprised this bigotry

through the ages, a theory of the Jewish people's inherent sexual perversity and sexual inferiority has occasionally loomed large. Sander Gilman documents the intersection of anti-Semitism with sexism and homophobia in his book Freud, Race, and Gender. In spite of its title, Gilman's study primarily concerns the sexual component of anti-Semitism in modern times. Sigmund Freud's celebrated career in psychoanalysis and his Jewishness provide Gilman with the perfect framework for this groundbreaking study of an underappreciated strain of anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, Gilman says absolutely nothing about the Dreyfus Affair, even though the famous scandal falls squarely within the period that he examines. Gilman's silence on the Affair in a study on the sexual politics of modern anti-Semitism speaks volumes, but then so does the absence of any work within mainstream scholarship on the Affair to attempt a global view of the scandal's sexual politics. All of this suggests that the most coherent and forceful sexual politics to emerge out of the Dreyfus Affair came not from the most obvious place, which would be the scandal's anti-Semitism, but instead from somewhere else. That somewhere else is the anticlerical campaign at the end in the Affair.

To say that the Recherche views anti-Semitism through the comic lens afforded by the unusual sexual politics of the anticlerical campaign is not tantamount to saying that sexual issues count for more in the Recherche than Jewish issues do. That is most definitely not the claim of the present study. The claim here is simply that the anticlerical campaign's sexual politics structures comedy within the Recherche, a comedy that encompasses a vast array of topics, prominent among them being Jewishness and anti-Semitism. What allows the anticlerical campaign's sexual politics to play this role in the Recherche are the extreme notions of sex and gender that it produced and then propagated in highly visible ways. These extreme notions about sex and gender were claimed to apply to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, and leading figures on both sides of the religious controversy promoted similar versions

with equal ferocity; hence the concept of adversarial parallelism, which is so important to the Recherche. Adversarial parallelism, which is integral to Proust's aesthetics, transcends both Jewishness and sexuality; but the anticlerical campaign's sexual politics gives Proust the most direct access to it in the Recherche.

In a major new study on religion in Proust's fiction, Margaret Topping clearly distinguishes between Jewish and Christian themes in the Recherche, explaining further that the latter category has received less critical attention than the former. Thus, Topping makes the same preliminary interpretive move concerning Judaism and Christianity in the Recherche as is being performed here. Topping's study is entitled Proust's Gods: Christian and Mythological Figures of Speech in the Works of Marcel Proust. In her prologue, Topping acknowledges the abundant and excellent scholarship on Jewishness in the Recherche, which is one reason she gives for deciding to focus instead on the many Christian and mythological motifs in Proust's long novel. She writes,

...a great deal has already been written on Judaism in Proust. Such critics as Juliette Hassine have extended this area of Proust studies with a breadth and depth of insight that cannot be matched in a study which also proposes to explore the already extensive fields of mythology and Christianity. These latter, in contrast, are fields where much work needs to be undertaken. (4)

Topping's book appeared in the year 2000, which means that her statement about Christianity and mythology being two "fields [in Proustian studies] where much work needs to be undertaken" still retains much of its validity. Apart from the question of the amount of research published on these respective topics, Topping correctly insists that Christianity and Judaism are largely separate themes in the Recherche. She makes this point when justifying her use of certain basic terminology,

To reflect this focus, therefore, the category "Christian and biblical" is used throughout the discussion, rather than, for example, "Judeo-Christian" or "Judeo-Christian and biblical" – terms which might, in addition, give the impression that it is

impossible to disentangle Judaism and Christianity in the novel...Proust's handling of the Bible suggests that the two are consciously differentiated by him. (4)

There will be many occasions to return to Topping in the chapter here on the Recherche. The findings of this research project will harmonize perfectly with Topping's conclusions, because she emphasizes the importance of Christianity in the Recherche. Still, the present project is in some ways more focused than Topping's study, because the goal here is to identify precisely the set of writings that together function as the Recherche's top intertext. Although these texts happen to be greatly preoccupied with Christianity – they either vehemently support it or vehemently oppose it – what makes this set of texts important to the Recherche is their similarly extreme sexual politics. Needless to say, Topping's work does not anticipate the argument being developed here. She examines Christianity and mythology as motifs in Proust's fiction; her book's subtitle refers to them as "figures of speech." She does not explore the history associated with Proust's use of these motifs, even though the Recherche contains numerous direct references both to the Dreyfus Affair overall and to the anticlericalism that dominated the scandal's concluding phase. Topping says very little about the Affair and nothing at all about anticlericalism. Finally, Topping does not discuss a single one of the texts that this study claims function together as the primary intertext in the Recherche. Without mentioning the possibility of an epic/mock-epic dynamic, Topping does, however, examine at length and very skillfully the comic uses to which Proust often puts his many references to religion (97-157). As one of the most recent and most complete studies on Christianity in the Recherche, Proust's Gods by Topping gives a good indication of the current state of research in one of the fields most closely related to this project.

CHAPTER 2

MELODRAMATIC EPIC: A NEW KIND OF EPIC FOR THE NINETEENTH CENTURY – PART II

The theory of melodrama as it currently stands makes large claims about the genre's enduring relation to religious conflict of the profoundest, most intense kind. Yet because the theoretical scholarship does not currently recognize an epic form of the genre, there seems to be a discrepancy between accounts of the genre's grand origins and the typical melodramatic texts that are put forward in support of the theory. Religion does often play a role in these standard melodramas, but hardly ever in the form that the theory might lead one to expect routinely from the genre, which is as a bold ambition to bring about a comprehensive restructuring of religion. Such grand religious designs are hard to find, at least in explicit form, within typical melodrama. This discrepancy led to the suggestion earlier here that there exists a missing link within published research on the genre. The appellation "missing link" might have seemed at the time both impudent and audacious. In fact, the best evidence that it is neither of those things comes from a prestigious anthology on melodrama published about a decade ago. In that anthology, a leading scholar on melodrama makes the same observation about a theoretical discrepancy. Perhaps this relevant previous work should have been cited earlier, but now it can serve as the transition between discussion of scholarship on melodrama and discussion of scholarship on new, humanitarian epic. The aim here is to build a solid bridge between these two fields – to merge them, in effect – by claiming that new, humanitarian epic is the melodramatic genre's true epic form, of which Zola's Évangiles are a

perfect illustration. The scholar who previously noted a discrepancy within melodrama theory did not propose the existence of an epic form of the genre to solve the problem that he identified. Nevertheless, the solution he did propose is completely compatible with the idea of melodramatic epic and even points in the direction of such a literary form. The mere fact that this scholar identified the very same problem that is being worked on in the present study is significant. This precedent from such a distinguished source largely removes any appearance of recklessness in the effort being made here to merge two heretofore unrelated fields.

Bruce McConachie is the scholar who observed this discrepancy in melodrama theory, and he made it the subject of an entire essay within the anthology Melodrama published by Cambridge University Press in 1992. McConachie begins his essay in the following way,

Critics and historians have noted the religious function of nineteenth-century melodramatic theatre. Commenting on performances of the plays of Guilbert de Pixérécourt during the Napoleonic period before the widespread re-establishment of Catholicism in France, romantic critic Charles Nodier stated, “I have seen them, in the absence of religious worship, take the place of the silent pulpit.” Recent scholarship on Pixérécourt, whose melodramatic formulations established the conventions and dominated the popularity of the genre in the West for the first third of the century, has examined his plays’ conservative political ideology, their legitimation of patriarchal gender roles, and their formal similarity to the dynamics of the Terror during the French Revolution. Surprisingly, scholars have yet to investigate the implicit theology of Pixérécourt’s early melodramas, despite the relevance of the plays’ religious orientation to their ideology. (87)

In summarizing research on melodrama’s ties to religion, McConachie makes virtually the same, key distinction being advanced here as the primary difference between standard melodrama and its epic counterpart. This distinction is between morality, which is often religion at its most practical, and theology, which can be religion at its most abstract. According to the formula developed here, standard melodrama overtly emulates religion only at the level of personal morality, whereas melodramatic epic overtly emulates religion both at the level of morality and also at the much more abstract level of theology. In other words, both the standard and epic forms of the genre depict the very last stage of the collapsing

melodramatic process as defined by Peter Brooks, namely a fixation on personal morality, but only melodramatic epic actively portrays the hyper-ambitious initial stages of the process, the doomed effort to recapture a kind of religious hegemony in a post-revolutionary world. An inevitable component of that ambitious project is the reformulation of theology, and it is the melodramatic restructuring of theology that McConachie ponders throughout his entire essay.

Yet McConachie faces two problems in trying to determine how melodrama reworks theology, and both problems stem from the fact that the only examples of the genre that he has before him to examine are of the standard type, melodramatic epic not yet having been recognized within the theoretical criticism. The first problem is that all the previous scholarship that McConachie cites dwells at length on the genre's relation to the moral dimension of religion, while saying very little about the theological. McConachie does not use the words "moral" or "morality" in the citation above, but when he remarks that other scholars have already described melodrama's "religious function," he is clearly referring to the moral edification that the genre provides. As was shown earlier here, moral training is the only religious function ascribed to melodrama by Charles Nodier, whom McConachie cites very prominently. The second problem faced by McConachie is even more difficult, and it is the main reason why earlier scholarship hardly ever explored melodrama's relation to theology. It is simply this: standard melodrama rarely, if ever, deals openly with theology. Theology exceeds the usual limits of standard melodrama, a fact that McConachie tacitly acknowledges in the final sentence above. He writes, "Surprisingly, scholars have yet to investigate the implicit theology of Pixérécourt's early melodramas..." While this calls attention to the void in scholarship on the issue of theology, the most important word by far is "implicit." McConachie is saying that the theology underpinning standard melodrama, as represented by the plays of Pixérécourt, is never more than implicit. The merely implicit nature of theology in

standard melodrama is exactly what this study claims distinguishes it from melodramatic epic, in which the treatment of theology is quite open. The agenda of McConachie's entire essay is to uncover this implicit theology, which, as he goes on to describe it, is quite innovative indeed, in spite of the fact that Pixierécourt presented himself as religiously orthodox. McConachie has digested a large number of Pixierécourt's plays, which allows him to say with authority that the theology in these archetypal melodramas never rises above the implicit. Indeed, McConachie will reiterate this very point much more forthrightly in his essay's conclusion, as will be shown momentarily.

First, however, the path by which McConachie arrives at his conclusion deserves some comment. Not long after the citation above, McConachie remarks again upon the missing link within current melodrama theory. He writes the following about the dean of melodrama studies: "As critic Peter Brooks notes, there's a 'cosmic ambition' at the heart of Pixierécourt's melodrama. But what is the theological nature of this ambition?" (88). He agrees with Brooks that Pixierécourt's melodramas are much more ambitious than they appear, but the grand mission of these plays remains merely implied, buried "at the heart" of their action-packed plots. McConachie therefore sets out to deduce the characteristics of melodramatic theology, using Pixierécourt as the epitome of the genre. The theology that McConachie finds undergirding Pixierécourt's plays is a blend of Neoplatonism, Manichaeism, and certain features of medieval Christianity. For the purpose of the present study, however, the most important aspect of this theology is its lack of orthodoxy. McConachie's findings suggest that melodrama always reworks Christian theology in radical ways, even when its explicit aim is to defend religion from attack by reformers, modernizers and atheists. This is key, because melodramatic epics are often written from either an emphatically pro-Christian or emphatically anti-Christian perspective. If melodrama inherently promotes a particular kind of

unorthodox theology, then the two vehemently opposed versions of its epic form, the pro-Christian and the anti-Christian, would end up resembling each other not only in their extreme sexual politics, but also in their unusual theology. McConachie's findings on the theology of melodrama apply perfectly well to the epic form of the genre, even though he does not take this form directly into consideration. In terms of Pixierécourt, McConachie writes,

But Pixierécourt's embrace of Christianity is incomplete; he implicitly rejects any notion of original sin. His melodramas affirm that all good characters, not only saintly mutes, can achieve pure Christian morality if only they try hard enough. "Our religion bids one love his neighbor as himself and we must obey our religion," announces the heroine in *The Dog of Montargis*, innocently assuming that such *agape* is truly possible. Given Pixierécourt's unambiguous segregation of purity from villainy, the heroine's injunction is dramatically believable. Like utopian revolutionaries, Pixierécourt assumed the inherent perfectibility of man, a perfection violently at odds with traditional Christian belief. (90)

The melodramatic emphasis on personal morality anchors McConachie's analysis in this passage. From that emphasis on morality, McConachie deduces a large part of melodramatic theology. Manichaeism, the "unambiguous segregation of purity from villainy," has long been recognized as a foundation of melodrama, and it is the concept that allows McConachie to leverage the melodramatic fixation on morality into an understanding of the genre's theology. Originally a medieval heresy, Manichaeism in nineteenth-century melodrama divides the world unambiguously into good and evil on the basis of personal conduct and morality. Melodramatic characters are often either all good or all evil. This is what leads to McConachie to say that Pixierécourt "implicitly rejects any notion of original sin," with a special emphasis being placed, of course, on the word "implicitly." In the traditional Christian view, nothing human can be considered perfectly good or perfectly moral, given that everyone bears some trace of original sin. By denying this principle, melodrama displays a heretical bent.

By comparing Pixierécourt to “utopian revolutionaries,” however, McConachie suggests that melodramatic Manichaeism could be much more radical on the social level. He also thereby gives a glimpse into the possibility of melodramatic epic. If the virtuous characters in melodrama can attain moral perfection on the individual level, then entire societies and perhaps even humanity as a whole might also be able to achieve perfection through a tremendous, coordinated effort. McConachie writes that Pixierécourt resembled nineteenth-century “utopian revolutionaries,” who believed in the “inherent perfectibility of man.” Utopian revolutionaries worked toward broad social reform in the political realm, but usually with a willingness to use radical tactics, such as the demonization of their enemies, when necessary. According to McConachie’s interpretation, the basic melodramatic impulse, even when not overtly expressed, appears as the merging of religion and politics with the goal of achieving comprehensive social reform, when necessary through the use of radical tactics and propaganda. Of course, Pixierécourt’s plays do not explicitly promote such an agenda; and McConachie does not make clear whether he thinks Pixierécourt was at heart a utopian revolutionary or merely possessed similar beliefs as one. Regardless, this is one way that McConachie’s commentary points directly to new epic. New, humanitarian epic displays a pronounced utopianism, based precisely on the belief in human perfectibility, on the societal level as well as on the level of all humanity. Zola’s Évangiles have frequently been called utopias. Simply put, utopianism is central to new, humanitarian epic, which the present study integrates with melodrama. Most important of all, the demonizing of sexual minorities and of anyone outside the sexual mainstream is a principal way that new epic proposes to bring about utopia. Manichaeism is thus recouped through the polarizing view of sex and sexuality. In fact, the comprehensive social reform that new epic advocates can at times seem like little more than a campaign of sexual purification, making it a classic case of the melodramatic

collapse into morality. Melodramatic epic's Manichaean tendency to divide the world into good and evil on the basis of sex will be made much clearer in the later discussion of specific literary texts, especially Zola's Évangiles.

McConachie comes even closer to relating melodrama to new epic in an altogether different part of his essay. Near the conclusion, McConachie shows how Pixérécourt's melodramas formed part of the post-revolutionary Christian revival that was led by Chateaubriand. This mention of Chateaubriand is hugely significant, because the author of the Génie du christianisme is widely acknowledged as the progenitor of new epic. Chateaubriand defined several of new epic's key features in the Génie du christianisme, published in 1802; and then he set about creating a literary work that would meet the new standards he had just defined (Génie 627-786). The model text that Chateaubriand went on to write is Les Martyrs, which is arguably the first French epic written in the new, post-revolutionary style (Pinel 97-100). Other authors further refined the new epic form in later works, but the crucial pioneering role played by Chateaubriand has been confirmed by Herbert Hunt, the greatest authority on French post-revolutionary epic. Hunt indicates his full agreement with the following statement made by another leading scholar in this field: "l'épopée moderne...a reçu de Chateaubriand l'ébranlement décisif"(45). Not at all coincidentally, Les Martyrs bears profound similarities to Zola's Évangiles, most notably in the way these works link a serious literary treatment of Church/State relations to an audacious sexual politics. A brief discussion of these similarities will appear in the next chapter. Of course, for his part, McConachie says nothing about Les Martyrs and nothing about Chateaubriand's role as the founder of new epic. Yet McConachie does relate early melodrama directly to the Génie du christianisme, Chateaubriand's influential clarion call for a return to Christianity following the religious suppression of the

revolutionary years. Only a few additional interpretive steps are needed to go from the following remarks by McConachie to an understanding of melodrama's close ties to new epic:

Pixerécourt's popular fusion of neoplatonism and traditional Christian belief places his melodramas among the many novels, essays, and musical compositions of the early 1800s that historian Louis Bergeron terms the anti-rationalist reaction in France. The anti-rationalists blamed the excesses of the 1790s on the individualism, empiricism, and materialism of the Enlightenment. "It is to the vanity of knowledge that we owe almost all our misfortunes," claimed Chateaubriand, the leading illuminist of the movement. In his widely read *Genius of Christianity*, Chateaubriand promoted emotional mysticism to salve current distress, a balm touted by other French writers in the first decades of the nineteenth century. In *Suzette's Diary*, for instance, Fievée exalted the lost morality of the *ancien régime* while Mme Cottin praised the nobility and holiness of medieval royal love in her *Mathilde*. At the same time, several French composers turned from writing revolutionary songs to composing liturgical hymns, masses, and requiems, drawing their musical aesthetics from the religious past. In his influential *Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions* and *On the Pope*, Joseph de Maistre used providentialist doctrine to argue for the restoration of the monarchy and an eventual return to papal political authority... Though less explicit theologically and politically than the works of most anti-rationalists, Pixerécourt's plays implicitly reject Enlightenment rationalism and embrace traditional notions of mysticism and authority. (99)

Chateaubriand's leadership in spurring a revival in Christian-inspired art in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution is well known, and the Génie du christianisme was clearly the pivotal text in this regard (Bénichou 64-70; Giraud, Christianisme 2: 182-188). Given that melodrama's origins have been authoritatively located in a post-revolutionary longing for a return to religion, it may come as a surprise that McConachie is the only scholar so far to associate the genre with the influential religious movement led by Chateaubriand. After all, the Génie du christianisme was published in 1802, the very same time when Pixerécourt was establishing through his immensely popular plays the enduring principles of melodrama. Pixerécourt may not have been one of Chateaubriand's many acolytes and imitators. The fact that the play of his now recognized as the first melodrama, Coelina, ou l'enfant du mystère, was produced two years before the Génie suggests that he was not following in anyone's footsteps. Nevertheless, it is easy to demonstrate that these two authors

were responding to the exact same post-revolutionary pressures and were motivated by similar religious impulses. Indeed, the discursive writings in Nodier's 1840 edition of Pixierécourt's collected plays and the introduction to Chateaubriand's Génie read remarkably similar. The essays in the 1840 edition, written both by Nodier and by Pixierécourt, have already been analyzed above, whereas the sections of the Génie relevant to melodramatic epic will be discussed briefly in the next chapter. Both Pixierécourt and Chateaubriand make it abundantly clear, however, that they were writing to fill the religious void created by the Revolution's suppression of religion. As the earliest and possibly the most influential exponents of melodrama and new epic, Pixierécourt and Chateaubriand unwittingly point to a fundamental correspondence between these two genres by enunciating the exact same purpose in pursuing their respective literary innovations. These similarities extend beyond the stated purpose for creating these two new literary forms and into other areas, most notably into the domain of sexual politics.

The specifics of McConachie's argument are just as interesting. He cites prominently the historian Louis Bergeron, who has written about "the anti-rationalist reaction in France" immediately after the Revolution. This is important for two reasons. First, Herbert Hunt attributes the birth and ascendancy of new epic to precisely the same historical development. He says French writers after the Revolution began to distrust the emphasis on reason and philosophy that dominated eighteenth-century thinking and turned instead to a movement that blended together illuminism, theosophy, mysticism, prophesy, and humanitarianism (16-24). Hunt certainly discusses at length the role of Chateaubriand in all this, but he also mentions prominently a thinker such as Joseph de Maistre, who is cited by McConachie above (16-17). De Maistre's seamless transition from anti-rationalism to support for a restoration of papal political authority, an effort mentioned by McConachie, gives further indication of the deep

investment of this literary movement in issues of Church/State relations and established religion.

Bergeron's examination of this historical phenomenon goes into much more detail than McConachie has a chance to convey. Bergeron's study, France under Napoleon, indicates that the anti-rationalist reaction was fueled in large part by an opposition to science. Bergeron writes, "In the last analysis, the most obvious common denominator in the whole camp of Christian apologists, theologians, philosophers, and literary men was their profoundly antiscientific attitude" (199). This explains the second reason why McConachie's use of Bergeron's history is so important: Bergeron's basic description of the intellectual milieu of the early nineteenth century in France could, with only a few modifications, apply equally well to very end of that century. The artistic and intellectual climate that immediately preceded the Dreyfus Affair was also marked by hostility to science, a hostility which expressed itself as a campaign against naturalism, the literary movement led by Zola. As will be shown in the chapter on Zola's Évangiles, this campaign against science and naturalism goes a long way toward explaining the sudden appearance of melodramatic epic at the end of the Affair.

In the Évangiles, Zola paradoxically turns highly mystical and (pseudo-)religious in his effort to defend science and naturalism against their many enemies. Like the leaders of the French Revolution who tried to create a new religion compatible with revolutionary and Enlightenment doctrines, Zola's final response to many years of abuse from religious quarters, abuse that peaked during the Dreyfus Affair, is to conjure up a new religion of science and rationalism. In spite of the project's glaring incongruities, Zola adopts the spiritual tools of his religious enemies in an effort to defeat them, and the place where he puts these tools to work is in his final series of novels, the Évangiles, which are true melodramatic epics. While all of

this interrelated political, religious and artistic maneuvering over many years may seem complicated, extreme views of sex underpin many of these developments and help make sense of them. Views on personal morality, and especially on sexual morality, furnish such a key to so much complexity precisely because of the phenomenon of melodramatic collapse. Bergeron's study helps make sense of this complexity by unwittingly tying together the religious history of the very beginning and of the very end of the nineteenth century in France, in other words between the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution and the final stage of the Dreyfus Affair.

For the crucial distinction between standard melodrama and melodramatic epic, however, the last sentence in the passage above is by far the most important. Although McConachie never acknowledges new epic as a principal literary manifestation of the anti-rationalist movement, he clearly formulates the distinction between standard and epic melodrama in the process of describing Pixérécourt's relation to anti-rationalism. The difference is one of implicit versus explicit. Pixérécourt is in full sympathy with the anti-rationalists, for whom religious issues are indisputably the primary concern. Indeed, one could say Pixérécourt belongs to this movement as much as any other author does, the only complication being that the limitations of his chosen genre, standard melodrama, prevents this from being obvious. The blended religious and political concerns that loom very large in the writings of the anti-rationalists, including within new epic, exist only beneath the surface of standard melodrama. As McConachie puts it, "Though less explicit theologically and politically than the works of most anti-rationalists, Pixérécourt's plays implicitly reject Enlightenment rationalism and embrace traditional notions of mysticism and authority." Since McConachie takes Pixérécourt as representative of all standard melodrama in France during

the first half of the of the nineteenth century, the implicit assumptions he uncovers within Pixérécourt's plays should exist also in the works of many other leading melodramatists.

For its part, new (melodramatic) epic will be the most explicit literary treatment of these same issues, the issues that standard melodrama could address only very indirectly. A study of melodramatic epic also makes clear an important feature of all melodrama, which is the genre's strange ideological adaptability. The unorthodox religious notions at the core of melodrama can be put in the service of either the Left or the Right, as a vehicle for passionate opposition to Enlightenment rationalism or even, surprisingly, as a vehicle for an equally passionate, ostensible defense of Enlightenment rationalism. The ideological reduction to ultra-conservative views on sex plays a key role in this convergence of Left and Right through melodrama. When McConachie writes that "Pixérécourt's plays implicitly...embrace traditional notions of mysticism and authority," one of the forms of traditional authority to which McConachie is most definitely referring is patriarchy. McConachie relies here on abundant previous scholarship exposing the conservative sexual politics of melodrama in general. Indeed, at the start of his essay he alludes to scholarship showing how melodrama serves the "legitimation of patriarchal gender roles" (87). True to the implicit/explicit distinction, the support of conservative notions of gender and sex will be both more overt and more extreme in melodramatic epic.

The fact that the field of melodrama studies has not yet pursued the similarity with new epic indicates how young this field still is and how much work remains to be done within it, despite a surge of scholarly interest over the past two decades. It also suggests that melodrama studies is still affected by its subject's long-standing bad reputation as entertainment for the rabble. Jacky Bratton has already been cited here making this very point, albeit not in relation to new epic. Perhaps no one has yet been able to imagine that melodrama

could be directly related to a genre that once was as prestigious as new epic. For example, Chateaubriand was clearly a far more respected author than Pixérécourt during their lifetimes. Indeed, the same holds true today concerning their relative prestige as authors, but something curious has taken place over the past few decades in the critical fortunes of new epic and melodrama, genres with which each of these authors was respectively identified. Vastly more scholarship has been published on melodrama, and in more prestigious venues, than is the case with new epic, at least as a genre of its own. Chateaubriand's reputation today is considerable due principally to the artistry of the Mémoires d'outre-tombe, not at all because of his epics or, for that matter, the Génie du christianisme. In terms of new epic generally, a tiny number of literary works belonging to the category still enjoy genuine prestige – this is especially true of Hugo's La Légende des siècles – but as will be shown next, they seem to be admired in spite of, rather than because of their status as new, humanitarian epics.

So little has been published on the category of new, humanitarian epic that one justification for re-naming it melodramatic epic is purely practical: re-naming the category will facilitate tapping into the much more abundant and often more sophisticated research on melodrama, the findings of which research usually apply equally well to new epic. For example, the only two book-length studies ever published specifically on the subject of new, humanitarian epic appeared before gender and gay studies securely established themselves as fields within the academy. Thus, the sexual politics of melodrama has been closely studied, but not so with new epic, even though its sexual politics is much the same. A similar observation could be made about other characteristics that these two literary forms share but that have only so far been examined in terms of melodrama. The recent reversal of the nineteenth-century critical fortunes of new epic and melodrama, a reversal that follows hard upon a long period comprising most of the twentieth century when both these literary forms

were virtually despised, means that now is an opportune time to search for their commonalities.

The paucity of scholarship on new, humanitarian epic does not at all indicate a lack of consensus among experts about the originality and distinctness of this literary form. Post-revolutionary, humanitarian epic is widely recognized within nineteenth-century French literary studies as a category unto itself. Nevertheless, the works comprising this category are generally little respected, hence the scarcity of scholarship, the underdeveloped theorization of the genre, and the failure to see its powerful resemblance to melodrama. As will be seen in a moment, even scholars who have conducted research on this genre do not like it much and call it strange. There has been no effort to rehabilitate humanitarian epic comparable to the concerted drive that has boosted interest in melodrama. These peculiar epic texts seem to be studied either as curiosities or, as in the case of the tiny number with strong reputations of their own, for reasons other than their epic qualities. It should come as no surprise, however, that this literary form is recognized as having been quite new and original for its time. That is because the category “humanitarian epic” is not an ex-post-facto invention of twentieth-century literary scholars. The nineteenth century was fully aware that this was a new epic form. Chateaubriand began the process of defining the new form, Lamartine coined the term “humanitarian epic” to name it, and Hugo was generally considered to have refined and perfected it, at least as much as refinement was possible (Lamartine, *Avertissement* iv). A whole host of much less well-known contemporaries worked within this genre alongside Chateaubriand, Lamartine and Hugo. With few exceptions, the authors of these texts overtly labeled their works “epics,” and many of them were conscious of the newness of the form and of their debt to Chateaubriand. Herbert Hunt, the greatest authority on this literary form, makes clear that virtually all these works were conceived as epics and have been known as

such ever since (1-6). Not all epics written in France during the nineteenth century conformed to the new, humanitarian style, but many did; and the new style was the dominant mode of French epic for roughly one hundred years (5, 403-404). Of course, the widespread eagerness to write epics was due to the immense prestige that still attached to the genre, but there was a belief that the epic had to be “modernized” in the wake of the unprecedented events of the French Revolution.

A good place to begin a review of the available scholarship on new epic is with the citation that serves as the third epigraph from Chapter 1. The citation comes from a recent French scholarly handbook concerning the epic from antiquity to the present day. Its author, Georges Bafaro, devotes a brief chapter to nineteenth-century French epic, especially the humanitarian kind that predominated during that century. Admirable for its clarity and concision, the citation from Bafaro explains how new epic emerged directly out of the French Revolution.

La révolution qui mit un terme au régime politique instauré en France depuis près de mille ans entraîna des bouleversements dans tous les domaines de la civilisation, et donc dans les arts et les lettres...En ce qui concerne l'épopée, ce genre va se renouveler du fait des transformations sociales et culturelles survenues entre 1789 et 1815...Le tourbillon qui secoue l'Europe pendant vingt-cinq ans, les changements des mentalités sous la pression des événements, l'espoir de lendemains prometteurs, nourrissent des épopées qui chantent le progrès ou le destin radieux de l'humanité. L'influence de Milton est très nette dans ces œuvres romantiques aujourd'hui oubliées. En revanche, deux écrivains laisseront une trace durable dans l'histoire de l'épopée française, Chateaubriand et Hugo. (87-88)

Among the many similarities between melodrama and new epic, the most important is that both were born out of the French Revolution. Bafaro could not be any clearer about new epic's Revolutionary origin: “l'épopée...va se renouveler du fait des transformations sociales et culturelles survenues entre 1789 et 1815.” Although Bafaro is not as explicit as he could be about the role of religious conflict in the creation of new epic, strongly implied within the following sentence is the significant impact of clashes over religious worldviews: “...les

changements des mentalités sous la pression des évènements, l'espoir de lendemains prometteurs, nourrissent des épopées qui chantent le progrès ou le destin radieux de l'humanité." One of the most important "changes in mentalities" brought about by the French Revolution was certainly in the area of religion. New epic's utopianism, as well as its grandiosity, also shines through clearly in Bafaro's description. Indeed, new epic's attempt to chart "le destin radieux de l'humanité" explains the name "humanitarian epic." In speaking of "ces œuvres romantiques aujourd'hui oubliées," Bafaro also reveals indirectly another name by which new epic occasionally goes: Romantic epic. The birth of new epic coincided with the rise of Romanticism, and many new epicists were also prominent within French Romanticism. Nevertheless, scholars of new epic do not strictly limit the genre to the Romantic period. Herbert Hunt insists that humanitarian epics were written right up to the end of the nineteenth century (367-404). There will be more discussion of this issue in a moment. The single most striking adjective that Bafaro applies to these nineteenth-century epics is "oubliées," which speaks volumes about their abysmal reputation today. It bears repeating that Bafaro wrote these words recently, in the late 1990s. If anything, the reputation of nineteenth-century French epic seems even lower today than when Herbert Hunt published his major study in the 1940s.

Bafaro's most specific indication of religion's central position within new epic is his mention of the influence of John Milton, author of Paradise Lost. Quite a few other famous epics from other time periods and cultures have already mentioned in this study merely by way of comparison and contrast. Paradise Lost, however, happens to be an earlier epic that had a direct impact on the new epic form that was created in nineteenth-century France. Chateaubriand discusses Paradise Lost at length in his widely read Génie du christianisme, and French interest in Milton accelerated from there. Several studies of Milton's impact in

nineteenth-century French have been published, the most recent being Harry Redman's Major French Milton Critics of the Nineteenth Century. Redman explains,

When the French Revolution came to an end, Milton's works, both in verse and in prose, were thus known to certain audiences [in France]. Still, there had not been as much critical comment as one might expect...In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, there was to be a new impetus...At about that same time, Chateaubriand's Génie du christianisme burst upon the scene. Preaching an aesthetic, religious approach to art and literature, it was destined to alter the course of French letters. The book contained a splendid discussion of Paradise Lost. Nothing was said here about the other works [by Milton], but the writer [Chateaubriand] would take care of that later. Meanwhile, Génie du christianisme was the rage. The new book, with its sensitive appreciation of Paradise Lost, was devoured, and serious French Milton criticism got a new start. (4-5)

The primary reason for this surge in French interest in Milton has to do with the overtly religious thematics of his epics, which appealed greatly to writers and artists living in the wake of the French Revolution. Other reasons contributed to Milton's allure for nineteenth-century French writers, however, such as his personal involvement in the English revolution of 1640-1660. Milton was very actively engaged in the seventeenth-century English Revolution. He wrote pamphlets defending republicanism and the 1649 execution of King Charles I; and he eventually accepted a position in Cromwell's government (Wolfe 85, 208-296). Significant grounds therefore exist for a detailed comparison between Milton and the melodramatic epicists, who were greatly preoccupied by their own country's political turmoil and who sometimes took an active role in politics. Yet this obviously cannot be the place for a parallel study of Milton and the melodramatic epicists; and, in any event, some of that work has already been done within the studies on the nineteenth-century French fascination with Milton.

The key point to be made here is simply that Milton's example helps reveal what is unique about melodramatic epic. Nineteenth-century French epicists did not look upon Milton solely as a model to imitate – quite the contrary. Given that the authors of many new epics

stood largely in opposition to the French Revolution, the staunchly republican Milton who defended the English Revolution was just as likely to be considered an example of what not to do (Redman 54-62, 72-75). Also, French authors who admired Milton could depart significantly from his example, seemingly unaware of what they were doing (Redman 70-71). In short, Paradise Lost is not a melodramatic epic; at least, it certainly does not fit the definition of the genre being elaborated in these pages. A brief discussion of what separates Milton's epic masterpiece from the French melodramatic epics, in spite of the obvious similarity of their shared focus on religion, will help isolate the uniqueness of the new, nineteenth-century literary form. This discussion will be little different from earlier ones here treating the similarities and differences between the Recherche and other mock epics, such as those of Cervantes, Pope, and Joyce. In all these instances, the differences are much more illuminating than the similarities, because the differences highlight just how significantly new and original the French texts are.

The place to start is with the difference in the English and French revolutions. As anyone even slightly familiar with the seventeenth-century English Revolution knows, the rebellion against Charles I was motivated in part by religious grievances, especially over the role of bishops in the Church of England ("English Revolution," "Puritanism"). Although substantial, the religious disagreement in the English Revolution was still more limited – indeed, much more limited – than the religious altercation that eventually broke out during the French Revolution. As discussed previously, official atheism and a total reworking of France's religious heritage were at stake in the French Revolution. The religious reform of the English Revolution was simply not that radical. This is essentially the point that A. N. Wilson makes in a major biography of Milton,

Unlike the French Revolution, or the October uprising in Moscow in 1917, the destruction of the English monarchy was a religious act – the fulfilment of the divine

will or blasphemy depending on your point of view. We miss the feel of Milton's position at this date if we choose to read his regicide pamphlets – *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, *Eikonoklastes* or the *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* – in an aridly political light...From the point of view of the mind which created Paradise Lost,... it is not safe to view 1649 as a quaint kind of limbering up for 1789, 1848, and 1917. It was the last date in history in which God acted without ambiguity. Milton, a seer as well as a poet, stirred with the event. He had not been seeking a political career. His appointment as Secretary for Foreign Tongues did not come about as a result of political lobbying...Religious conviction had first pushed him forward into the political arena as a pamphleteer: a conviction that God was working his purpose out, completing the Reformation... (159-160)

As momentous as the execution of Charles I was, it did not lead to religious experimentation as radical as what was attempted during the French Revolution. At most, republican government under Cromwell was informed by a different vision of Christianity than what had guided the Stuart monarchy. The void, the searing and permanent spiritual doubt produced by the French Revolution's hostility to Christianity and, for a while, to all things religious probably could not have formed in the context of the less radical English Revolution. The specter of official atheism raised by the French Revolution was never at issue in Cromwellian England, which promoted an alternative vision of Protestant Christianity, not its wholesale abolition. Indeed, Wilson says there was no ambiguity in Milton's mind about the divinely inspired nature of the revolution in which he participated. The leaders of the French Revolution, however, came to be riven by doubt, haunted by the loss of religion, a loss that their own policies had brought about. Melodramatic epic is, in turn, haunted by the anti-religious radicalism of the French Revolution and reenacts the Revolutionaries' doomed and somewhat frantic efforts to create religion anew. Unlike the melodramatic epicists, the Milton who wrote Paradise Lost does not overtly attempt to re-found Christianity on an entirely new basis or establish an entirely new religion. Paradise Lost is written squarely within the Christian worldview, where the options are, on the one hand, loving and obeying the Christian god, and, on the other, rebelling against and hating that same god. Denying the existence of

the divine does not really enter the picture. The specter of atheism, along with the many social ills that even those sympathetic to it in theory feared would flow from its widespread adoption, does not loom constantly on the horizon of Paradise Lost, as it does in the melodramatic epics.

Thus, in its stance toward religious tradition, Paradise Lost is a noticeably less radical epic than Zola's Évangiles, Chateaubriand's Les Martyrs and Hugo's La Légende des siècles. The driving and fundamental logic of the French epics is that a fundamentally new approach to religion must be adopted, a claim that is stated openly and repeatedly. Regardless of how orthodox or unorthodox one considers Paradise Lost actually to be – and there is some scholarly debate on this point – Milton's epic does not present itself as a thorough re-working of religious tenets (Woodhouse 145). Paradise Lost exudes a confidence and a tone of authority on religious matters that melodramatic epic struggles painfully, yet never successfully or convincingly, to achieve. This very confidence allows Paradise Lost to present a great deal of religious complexity and nuance, as A. S. P. Woodhouse reveals in his study The Heavenly Muse: A Preface to Milton (120-144). In melodramatic epic, on the other hand, the palpable anxiety over religion, combined with the overweening ambition and heavy-handed didacticism, flattens things out, permitting few shades of gray. Characters and issues, most definitely including issues of sexuality, are typically painted in black and white in these peculiar nineteenth-century texts.

Much less visibly conflicted over religious tradition and also far less overtly ambitious to re-shape that tradition, Milton's epic project does not harbor the massive structural instabilities that lead to a melodramatic collapse into an obsession with personal morality. Put simply, Paradise Lost is not moralizing and preachy in the way the epics of Zola, Chateaubriand and Hugo are. Melodramatic collapse is premised on a fundamental failure, the

failure of an attempt to restore lost religious hegemony and/or to thoroughly reformulate theology and its applications. The towering reputation of Paradise Lost seems almost by itself to militate against the idea that Milton's epic suffers from any such fundamental failure in its religious outlook. Without such massive failure, a melodramatic collapse is unlikely, and a less stridently didactic view of personal morality and of sex will likely obtain. In melodramatic epic, the tremendous force of the collapse results in a sexual ethos that is cramped, judgmental and strict, as if the failure of the original, hyper-ambitious religious project compensates by enforcing super-orthodoxy in the one area it can successfully assert control, the sex lives of its characters. A case can even be made that the exaggerated sexual morality of some melodramatic epics, such as Zola's Évangiles, derives mostly from the inexorable logic of the genre rather than from the personal views of the author. In contrast, the sexual politics of Paradise Lost can rather easily be shown to be more humane and tolerant than the prevailing ethos of its time. Scholars also seem to agree that this humaneness derives in large part from the relative broadmindedness of Milton's own views on sex. As A. N. Wilson writes,

In Milton's view, marriage was chiefly a matter of mutual compatibility and companionship rather than primarily a matter of sex. The Anglican view, that a marriage could only be annulled if it had not been consummated, suggested that sex was the be-all and end-all of married life...Far from being a virtue, putting up with marital unhappiness is, in his [Milton's] view, morally dangerous...It is this supreme rule of charity which, he argues, is Christ-like. Christ had taught that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. Marriage, too, was an institution made for mankind, and when it ceased to bring the peace and joy which God intended, it was no virtue to persist in it for purely legalistic reasons. (132-133)

Edward Le Comte, the author of the major study Milton and Sex, agrees fully with this view of Milton's broadmindedness on sexual questions (27-30). The English poet's emphasis on mutual compatibility in marriage actually led him to pen several pamphlets supporting the legalization of divorce, texts to which Wilson alludes in the citation above.

Although such ideas obviously do not seem advanced today, Milton's thinking on marriage and sex was far ahead of his time, and that is what matters most here, because the sexual ethos of many melodramatic epics appears quite retrograde, well behind their own times. When Wilson writes that Milton did not consider marriage to be "primarily a matter of sex," he is not at all suggesting that the author of Paradise Lost was a prude – quite the contrary. Wilson is saying that Milton did not reduce marriage to sex and did not obsess legalistically over the nature of the sexual relations in marriage. As will be shown here in next chapters, the reduction of marriage to sex and of sex to procreation is precisely the moralizing shoals upon which melodramatic epic will often founder.

Le Comte shows how Paradise Lost reflects its author's sexual broadmindedness. The depiction of the marital relationship between Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost conforms to Milton's humane view of marriage. Le Comte writes in Milton and Sex,

The last of the epic poets wishes to unite marriage and romantic love, putting sex in its proper place. Eve must be extremely attractive but Adam must not be the slave to her charms. Her beauty must be felt without becoming an idol to be worshipped. But sex in its proper place, the marriage bed, is given full due, in disagreement with those church fathers who declined to believe there was copulation before the Fall...C.S. Lewis found too titillating "half her...breast," etc. "He has dared to represent Paradisal sexuality. I cannot make up my mind whether he was wise." Milton is ahead of his time in giving full attention to the physical relationship. In Emerson's words, "The praise of licit sex in the poem feels to me a splendid bit of nerve." With the coming of evening Adam proposes to his "Fair consort" (IV, 610) that they withdraw to "their blissful bower" (690)...There is no fussing over such old questions as whether, if the first couple made love before the Fall, they conceived, in which case their first offspring would be free of original sin; or, if they did not conceive, why not (as part of a perfect coition)? (91-92)

The entire thrust of Le Comte's commentary is that Milton's personal views on sex, as well as the sexual politics of Paradise Lost, were very enlightened for their time. Indeed, the sexual ethos of Milton's great epic appears more modern than that of quite a few melodramatic epics. Thus, Le Comte's remark about putting "sex in its proper place, the marriage bed" needs to be understood in context. The quotations from C.S. Lewis and

Emerson expressing shock at the depiction of sex in Paradise Lost further demonstrate how advanced and daring Milton was in this area. Indeed, Le Comte says as much in very direct fashion: “Milton is ahead of his time in giving full attention to the physical relationship [between Adam and Eve].” The relevance of all this to the present project is that exalted religious discourse within epic does not inevitably coincide with cramped, prudish, moralizing discourse on sex. The fact that they do coincide so consistently in melodramatic epic is largely the result of the unprecedented political and cultural forces at work in a century lived in the wake of an event as epoch-making as the French Revolution, many battles of which were to be reprised during the Dreyfus Affair. Incidentally, Le Comte’s reference to Milton as “the last of the epic poets” at the very start of the long citation above is yet another small reminder of the crisis that the epic form has experienced in modern times. What Le Comte means, of course, is that he considers Milton the last of the great epic poets. Surprisingly, specialists of the nineteenth-century French epic might not object to that estimation.

Marital intercourse is not the only kind of sex depicted in Paradise Lost, however. Angels famously have sex in Milton’s epic, and the description of their intimate relations is surprisingly frank and open-minded. Milton’s vision of angelic sex is even more progressive than his conception of marital intimacy, because the celestial version unabashedly transcends boundaries of gender. At one point in Paradise Lost, Adam politely yet directly asks the angel Raphael whether celestial spirits make love to each other; and Raphael not only answers in the affirmative, but describes angelic copulation in some detail. Milton specialist Edward Le Comte comments upon Raphael’s reply to Adam in the following way:

It is superhuman, polymorphous, bisexual coitus that accomplishes mixing soul with soul in love supreme. It is every man’s dream, and every woman’s. Milton does not blush. He flaunts it, braving the reader’s shocked reaction because of the depth of his own conviction that sex is not merely an animal activity, that “marriage must not be called a defilement,” that flesh leads to spirit – therefore spirits scorn not

flesh...Donne might have approved Milton's bold picture, an extension of Milton's Christian materialism, but there is practically no precedent for it... (93-94)

Whether drawing inspiration from the political Right or Left, whether permeated by the supernatural or rigorously stripped of it, melodramatic epic tends to police boundaries of gender with great severity. Gender non-conformity and minority sexualities are treated harshly in the melodramatic epics to be studied here. The modern religion proposed by Zola's Évangiles is devoid of the supernatural – hence no angels – but references to “polymorphous, bisexual coitus” between humans actually do appear in these final novels by Zola. Yet the French novelist is less open-minded on this issue than is Milton. The Évangiles condemn sexual and gender nonconformity and make them seem tremendously dangerous, mostly so as to make procreative, marital sex appear far superior. So anxious are the Évangiles about maintaining gender distinctions at all times and in all contexts that the contrast to angelic bisexuality in Paradise Lost retains some validity, in spite of the lack of the supernatural in Zola's final novels. In conclusion, a much more extensive study remains to be done comparing and contrasting melodramatic epics with Paradise Lost, but it has been quite illuminating sketching out some of the key issues here.

The greatest authority on new, humanitarian epic is Herbert Hunt, whose study The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France is still cited as the most comprehensive work on this subject, even though it was published decades ago. Hunt's study, which contains a wealth of detailed information about this sub-genre, is particularly useful for the present project, because it tightly organizes its vast material around the same historical phenomenon on which this chapter has been focused, the desperate search for a radically new understanding of religion following the French Revolution. Melodrama did not become a topic of sustained and serious scholarship until decades after Hunt published his study, but his findings are perfectly consistent with the idea that new epic and melodrama are closely related. Indeed, as will be

seen shortly, there are key moments in his study when Hunt remarks upon the similarity of humanitarian epic to melodrama. In the following two citations, however, Hunt states quite authoritatively that new epic was the creation of post-revolutionary religious angst.

Diabolic or providential, the Revolution had brought France to the threshold of a new era, one which promised or threatened great upheavals. How could the eye of reason alone, so impotent in the immediate past, penetrate the mist which shrouded the future? "L'homme, dans son ignorance," says de Maistre... "se trompe souvent sur les fins et les moyens, sur ses forces et sur la résistance, sur les instruments et sur les obstacles... mais la Providence ne tâtonne jamais, et ce n'est pas en vain qu'elle agite le monde. Tout annonce que nous marchons vers une grande unité que nous devons *saluer de loin*, pour me servir d'une tournure religieuse." Such prognostications, from Chateaubriand to Victor Hugo... could be cited ad nauseam. It is not surprising that, with such convictions in their hearts, the intellectual watchmen of the time were inclined rather to consult intuition, interior glimmerings, a prophetic vision which they felt to be in themselves, before "la raison raisonnante" and the evidence of the senses. (16-17)

A few pages later, Hunt shows how this intellectual uncertainty and the concomitant turn toward innovative spirituality produced new, humanitarian epic.

The net result of all this will be the almost unquestioning acceptance of a half dozen "humanitarian" convictions...: the idea that the past offers not only a means of escape from the present but also a source of instruction for the future, the assumption that the whole of humanity is but one great family, all the branches of which have inherited their languages, myths and religious beliefs from one original stock, and that theology and myth, inseparably related to one another, and sooner or later fused in the crucible of national epic, are subject to a continuous development as each race, more enlightened than its immediate precursor or rival, works upon them; finally, the certainty that this continuity is not purposeless, implies enrichment and steady conquest over the domain of the unseen, and shows man as moving forward (or backward, in the illuminist sense) to a state of completion and unity... M. Seillière, analysing the varied manifestations of Romanticism in different stages of European literature, envisages it largely as a misguided attempt at a return to sources, a sort of primitivism calculated (mistakenly) to correct human deviations from the right path of advance. Nowhere is this primitivism in French Romantic poetry more palpable than in the productions of the nineteenth-century epic poets... (23-24)

This last citation gives an idea of the large amount of detail provided by Hunt, but the present study can establish its argument without delving into the details concerning the various attempts to establish a new theology. All that needs to be demonstrated is that major reforms in religion and theology are indeed proposed within new epic, particularly within the

examples of new epic that will be examined here, and that these proposals for major reform fail dramatically, precipitating a melodramatic collapse into a fixation on personal morality, especially sexual morality. Hunt provides more than enough evidence – indeed, far more than enough – to make such a case, but the abundance of detail will not distract from the key issues here. For example, almost all of the humanitarian concepts that Hunt describes as underpinning new epic can be found in Zola's Évangiles, but the peculiar sexual politics of Zola's final novels is at least as interesting as its theology and will be the primary, albeit not exclusive focus, of the analysis here. Writing well before issues of gender and sexuality became widely accepted subjects of academic research, Hunt does not speak directly about the sexual politics of these epics. Nevertheless, Hunt's explanation of the simultaneous emphasis on progress and primitivism within new epic has great relevance to the genre's sexual politics. The very forward-looking and utopian aspect of new epic combines with a drive to "return to sources, a sort of primitivism calculated (mistakenly) to correct human deviations from the right path of advance." A primary aim for this retrogression turns out to be an effort to recapture the imagined sexual purity of primitive times. Thus, new epic contains a major contradiction in supporting cutting-edge, often utopian vision of progress while simultaneously promoting an old-fashioned, often downright reactionary sexual ethic.

As for Hunt's mention of Romanticism and poetry in the last citation, these are two issues that can be disposed of quickly. Romanticism was clearly the literary movement most closely identified with new epic, as Hunt's matter-of-fact discussion of Romanticism here demonstrates. Nevertheless, nothing that Hunt says in this citation or elsewhere confines new epic strictly to the Romantic period. On the contrary, he insists repeatedly that epics in the new, humanitarian style were written until the very end of nineteenth-century, decades after most scholars date the end of Romanticism. He even devotes two chapters of his study to late

nineteenth-century humanitarian epics (325-401). Hunt's emphasis on epics written in verse is only slightly more problematic. Hunt ends the last citation by speaking of a kind of primitivism that is palpable in "the productions of the nineteenth-century epic poets." This mention of the poetic form may seem offhand and insignificant, but it betrays much more of a deliberate bias on Hunt's part than his reference to Romanticism does. Hunt never claims that humanitarian epics could only be written in verse, but early in his study he somewhat peremptorily specifies that those are the only epics that will be covered in his study (1-2). He hardly gives any reason at all for limiting his discussion to verse epics. Nevertheless, a very good practical reason immediately presents itself to the perceptive reader: Hunt simply had to find some means to delimit his vast topic, and the poetry/prose distinction was as good as any. A glaring problem remains, even with this solution, however. This glaring problem, which Hunt never even acknowledges, is that the very first humanitarian epic that he studies, Chateaubriand's Les Martyrs, is itself written in prose. So important is Les Martyrs to Hunt's study that he mentions it in his subtitle, and yet it violates his clearly stated preference for verse epics. Indeed, in the preface to Les Martyrs, Chateaubriand himself acknowledges, almost with a tone of embarrassment, that he chose to write Les Martyrs in prose, rather than in verse as were the great epics of the past (37-40). Furthermore, there is a tradition of viewing Les Martyrs as one of the first French novels of the nineteenth-century, and one that had a much greater influence on later novels than its very poor reputation today would seem to allow (Pinel 15, 98-99). The point of all this is simply that humanitarian/melodramatic epic could be written in either verse or prose and that this distinction is not a vital one for the genre.

The failure of the effort to restore religious hegemony and establish religion on a significantly new basis is just as important for the melodramatic process as the attempt itself is. The conspicuous failure of this enterprise is the keystone of melodrama theory, as

elaborated most famously by Peter Brooks. For new, humanitarian epic to be integrated into the genre of melodrama, its grandiose religious designs must meet with dismal failure, a failure that will eventually lead to collapse and an obsession with personal morality.

Fortunately for the present study, Herbert Hunt is adamant about the total failure of the radical religious experimentation that new epic attests and in a certain sense chronicles. Hunt's disdain for this religious experimentation, a disdain that is all the more remarkable coming from an eminent scholar who has written so extensively on the subject, is made manifest repeatedly throughout his study on new epic. Nevertheless, he expresses his opinion on this matter most cogently at the very end of his study, where he renders the following scathing indictment:

Was this experiment [in new, humanitarian epic] so arduously conducted for nearly a hundred years crowned with any measure of success? Did the poets we have had to study prove their contention that epic poetry is still possible in modern times? Can the modern ages propose a faith sufficiently strong and stirring to justify epic by its content, by the message it has to give, as well as by the form in which it is couched? It seems that the answer must be in the negative, if we may judge by the results which the successors of Chateaubriand and Ballanche obtained. The poets whose works followed one another so rapidly from 1809 onwards had no really solid "revelation" to put forward. The eighteenth-century myth of perfectibility, decked in new and seductive garb, dazzled their eyes for a time; but the idea behind it was too vague and nebulous, too unsupported by incontrovertible historical fact to inspire much more than a sort of verbal delirium...The nineteenth century seems to have placed its faith in a false god... (404-405)

The last sentence in particular reads as if it could be inserted with no change at all into Brooks's study The Melodramatic Imagination. Of course, in new epic, this particular kind of religious failure is on display for all to see, whereas it is usually only implicit in standard melodrama. Hunt does not suggest that new epic manifests any awareness of its failure, much less that it ever admits its failure forthrightly. Some new epics may evince such awareness, but the demonstration of such awareness is not a prerequisite for the argument being developed here. Real and glaring the failure nevertheless is, according to no less an authority than Hunt,

and it will pave the way for the melodramatic collapse. In fact, signs of melodrama within new epic, the presence of all the classic characteristics of the genre, will themselves serve as definitive proof of the failure of new epic's religious ambitions. Hunt could not connect the abundant melodrama within new epic to the failure of its religious enterprise, because melodrama studies was not sufficiently theoretical in his day. Yet the recourse to melodrama within new epic is itself a clear sign of failure, not because melodrama is always an aesthetic catastrophe in its own right, but rather because its presence signifies the collapse of antecedent religious ambitions that were quite extreme. Incidentally, Hunt's use of the phrase "nearly a hundred years" in the first sentence clearly indicates his belief that humanitarian epic was not limited to the Romantic era, because there is hardly any dispute among scholars that Romanticism reached its peak in 1830, a date that falls far short of the centenary of the French Revolution, the event that gave birth both to humanitarian epic and to melodrama (D.G. Charlton 13-21).

Although Hunt was not able to relate the failure of new epic's religious ambitions to the melodrama that is plentiful throughout the genre, he most definitely did see the melodrama and identify it correctly. In Hunt's opinion, the new epicist most inclined to melodrama is none other than Victor Hugo. This is significant, because specialists in the literature of this period seem unanimous in viewing Hugo as the exemplar of new, humanitarian epic. Hugo's La Légende des siècles stands as the summa of the genre, and Hunt dwells at length on this work's powerful melodramatic qualities, especially its Manichaeism.

Victor Hugo "a man whose poetic myopia blinded him to the dreary grey pattern of normal human actions in which good and evil motives are so inextricably interwoven, a man for whom the complicated web of human conflicts resolved itself into a simple and easily comprehended duel between right and wrong, between double-dyed villainy and the true blue of angelical virtue...The simplifications of character and action, the neglect of nuance, so important in more sophisticated genres, the presentation of naked issues on a Grand Guignol stage in what M. Jean Cocteau calls "l'éclairage livide et fabuleux du mercure": that is what constitutes the originality of

la Légende des Siècles, and, I would add, for all but the extremely blasé, its greatness too. So, putting aside for the moment the mystic and philosophic aspect of the *Légende* – connecting poems which we have already mentioned, and which...provide, in place of that historic continuity which is so conspicuously lacking, a mythological continuity...– let us admit that, in forging his *Petites Épopées*, Victor Hugo invented for modern epic a form which stands in very much the same relation to classical epic as melodrama stands to classical tragedy, and that his invention nevertheless fulfills the end of all art in furnishing a very real kind of aesthetic pleasure. (288-289)

Theorists of melodrama have identified many more characteristics of the genre than just Manichaeism, the stark contrast of god and evil. Nevertheless, Manichaeism is certainly still recognized as one of the most important of all melodramatic traits, and it is the one that Herbert Hunt finds to be dominant in Hugo's *Légende des siècles*. The most amazing thing about Hunt's analysis of the pervasive melodrama in the *Légende* is that he approves of it. He believes that melodramatic Manichaeism is the only tool that modern epicists can use to recapture the intensity of the tremendous battles that anchor the great epics of antiquity. Hunt still concludes that epic is fundamentally impossible in modern times, but Victor Hugo in his opinion came closest to pulling it off, and the use of powerful melodrama was central to Hugo's near-success. On the other hand, Hunt is far less tolerant of the theological and philosophical side of Hugo's epic. Hunt contrasts those sections of the *Légende* that develop Hugo's abstruse ruminations with other sections that present straightforward melodramatic narrative, narrative that is greatly enhanced by Hugo's peerless verbal artistry. This attempt at a contrast explains why Hunt says that he is "putting aside for the moment the mystic and philosophic aspect of the *Légende*." Hunt speaks as if these two components, the mystic/philosophic and the melodramatic, were perfectly separable. He vastly prefers the melodramatic sections and attributes the *Légende*'s enduring reputation to them and not at all to those other sections where Hugo pours out his theological mumbo-jumbo (290). Referring specifically to the theological sections, Hunt calls the *Légende* Hugo's "weird and colossal epic" (323).

Hunt heartily approves of the abundant melodrama in Hugo's epic, but he is seemingly unable to conceive of the possibility that a genre such as "melodramatic epic" might exist, or that such a label might, in fact, be the best descriptor for Hugo's achievement in this area. Hunt nevertheless comes tantalizingly close to pairing the words "melodrama" and "epic" to produce the name of a distinct literary form. The splendid conclusion to the passage above aptly conveys Hunt's (relatively) high opinion and keen understanding of Hugo's epic: "Victor Hugo invented for modern epic a form which stands in very much the same relation to classical epic as melodrama stands to classical tragedy, and...his invention nevertheless fulfills the end of all art in furnishing a very real kind of aesthetic pleasure." Hunt comes very close to saying, plainly and simply, that Hugo's Légende is melodramatic epic, but the eminent scholar is clearly unable to imagine an epic form of melodrama, which for a long time was considered a strictly theatrical genre. Melodrama studies in its current form disposed of that restriction a few years ago, of course. With a richer and fuller view of melodrama, Hunt may on his own have effected the merger of the fields of melodrama and new epic studies.

Hunt openly uses the example of Hugo to bring about a rapprochement, albeit something less than a full merger, of these two fields. A proper understanding of Hunt's use of the word "invent" in relation to Hugo is necessary to see how the scholar achieves this rapprochement. The larger context of Hunt's study makes clear that "invent" is used to suggest that Hugo brought together the various strands of new epic and deployed them as brilliantly as could possibly have been done. Hunt is definitely not saying that Hugo invented new epic out of whole cloth. This distinction between "consolidating and perfecting" and "inventing from scratch" is crucial. Hunt's chapter on Hugo appears rather late in his study, partly for the mundane reason that the Légende was written in the second half of the nineteenth century, but

also because Hunt wants to present Hugo as the avatar of new epic. Thus, Hunt's comment about Hugo consolidating and perfecting the genre is tantamount to saying that melodrama such as appears frequently in the Légende is and was always integral to new epic. Hugo's genius consists in making blindingly obvious the centrality of melodrama within new epic. The significance of this insight from Hunt for the present study cannot be overestimated, because, as the leading authority on new epic, he provides substantial authorization for one of the main critical moves being attempted here, namely the merger of melodrama and new epic. Of course, Hugo himself is less important in this context than what his example says about the fundamental similarity of new epic and melodrama. Zola will blend epic and melodrama just as thoroughly as Hugo does, although probably not as skillfully from a strictly literary point of view. Although Hugo matters far less to this study than Zola does, the sexual politics of La Légende des siècles will be commented upon briefly in the next chapter, not merely for the light it sheds on Zola's Évangiles, but also because there is evidence to suggest that Proust makes fun of Hugo's epic in the Recherche. The heavy-handed moralism of Hugo's epic proves to be a tempting target for Proust's comedy, and as happens so frequently in the Recherche, Proust finds a way to relate this particular vein of his comedy to the elaborate theme of sexuality in his vast fictional cycle. Incidentally, Hunt's use of the term "Petites Épopées" is simply another way of referring to the Légende, which is a vast epic composed of many smaller, partly self-contained poems, each of which can, in fact, be viewed as a "small epic" of its own.

Even though scholarship on new, humanitarian epic has been sparse, more recent publications confirm Hunt's findings and other claims made here about the genre. An essay about religion and utopianism in a major anthology on French Romanticism published in the mid-1980s by Cambridge University Press discusses nineteenth-century French epic at some

length. Frank Bowman, author of the essay “Illuminism, utopia, mythology,” agrees with Hunt’s conclusions about new epic and shows that, if anything, the genre’s reputation today is even lower than it was in the first half of the twentieth century. In the following passage, Bowman refers to the genre as “Romantic epic,” but his remarks apply equally well to French humanitarian/melodramatic epics published throughout the nineteenth-century.

The dream of unity – cosmic and political – still seemed possible. This dream was not only expressed in political writings; its major literary home was the epic. Romanticism’s contribution to the literary heritage was undoubtedly made in prose fiction, the lyric, and the theatre, but many continued to consider the epic the highest literary form, devoted their major energies to it. At least one such epic, Lamartine’s *Jocelyn* (1836), knew considerable popularity. The Romantic epic differs markedly from the Homer-Virgil tradition. It owes something to the long religious or scientific poems of the Renaissance and the late eighteenth century, something to Milton, Goethe, and Klopstock, a great deal to the cult of history, even more to the redefinition of the poet as a seer. It is highly didactic and philosophical, and often describes the whole course of history...or the events of the antediluvian age, of the end of time...or even of the post-apocalyptic age... Sometimes the epic renews pre-existing myths; at others, it gives history, including biblical history, mythical status...The Romantics were perhaps less good at reinterpreting the symbols of the past than at creating new symbols from history, but they did both, and managed to do so because they quested for meaning, rather than possessing it. That these epics seem illegible today is perhaps to be explained by the fact that we no longer seek that totality of meaning. (94-96)

The main contribution of this cogent, well-written passage is that it demonstrates the continuing validity of Herbert Hunt’s conclusions. Nevertheless, several remarks herein merit closer attention. New epic’s important role as the “literary home” of politicized religious sentiment in the French nineteenth century is made clear at the start. As crucial as the socio-political role played by these texts was during the nineteenth century, Bowman efficiently and devastatingly confirms the near-oblivion in which they languish today. He does this simply by calling the epics “illegible today,” which is tantamount to saying that hardly anyone studies them anymore. This helps explain, of course, why this genre’s importance for the late Dreyfus Affair as well as for Proust’s Recherche has been overlooked until now. Bowman’s comment that “Romantic epic differs markedly from the Homer-Virgil tradition” bolsters the claim that

this was truly an original literary form that emerged out of the chaos of the French Revolution. Bowman's emphasis on the didacticism of these epics will help reinforce their connection to melodrama, because, as will be shown in a moment, specialists of melodrama agree that it, too, is fundamentally a very didactic genre.

Although the merging of new epic with melodrama may still seem like a radical and drastic move, there is actually sound precedent for it. Several leading critics have already fully assimilated Romantic drama to melodrama. Romantic drama has convincingly been shown to be a more philosophical and intellectually complex form of melodrama, but melodrama all the same. This being the case, new epic, which sometimes goes by the name Romantic epic, can plausibly be described as merely an overtly theological and religious form of melodrama. In other words, given that the study of French Romanticism has already experienced the co-option of its theatrical genre by the field of melodrama studies, the incorporation of its sorely neglected epic genre within the category of the melodramatic should provoke less astonishment. Of course, the previous incorporation of Romantic epic within the larger category of nineteenth-century humanitarian epic still holds, making the assimilation of Romantic drama to melodrama a partial, but still a strong and persuasive precedent for the fundamental re-interpretation being carried out in this chapter. One scholar who has emphasized the basic similarity between Romantic theater and melodrama is George Steiner. In The Death of Tragedy, Steiner writes, "Where the theatrical is allowed complete rule over the dramatic, we get melodrama. And that is what French romantic tragedies are: melodramas on a grand scale" (164). Steiner presents melodrama as virtually the antithesis of genuine tragedy, the supposed disappearance of which in modern times he greatly laments in his celebrated study. Put simply, this means that Steiner disapproves of melodrama and is belittling Romantic theater by claiming that it is an elaborate form of melodrama.

Peter Brooks, on the other hand, devotes much of his equally famous study The Melodramatic Imagination to defending his chosen subject of commentary from longstanding disparagement. In spite of this vital difference, Brooks, too, says that French Romantic drama is simply an intellectually embellished version of melodrama. Indeed, all of chapter 4 in The Melodramatic Imagination is designed to locate the melodramatic embedded within the Romantic. He concludes the chapter thus:

French Romantic theatre is of particular interest to us because it institutionalized the melodramatic without that name; it provides a particularly clear instance of an expressive mode that permeates much of Romanticism, and allows us to register the presence of melodrama in other Romantic and post-Romantic literature, whether or not it is literally in touch with stage melodrama. (108)

The end of this passage is particularly useful here. Brooks is saying that the melodramatic cornerstone of Romantic drama authorizes the search for other “Romantic and post-Romantic” literary forms in which melodrama plays the same role. The literary form he has in mind above all others is the novel, and most of The Melodramatic Imagination makes the persuasive case that numerous nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels have a melodramatic foundation. Brooks says absolutely nothing about Romantic epic, but his explicit invitation to search for the melodramatic basis of other Romantic literary forms is, needless to say, quite felicitous and helpful in the present context.

Alexander Lacey has written what is probably the most exhaustive comparison between stage melodrama and the Romantic theater, and he also concludes that they are fundamentally the same. In his study, Pixerécourt and the French Romantic Drama, Lacey writes,

To conclude, therefore, Romantic drama derives, as we have seen, from two incompatible sources: (1) from popular melodrama, as instituted by Pixerécourt, (2) from the Romantic exaltation of the individual, which, in spite of democratic slogans such as “la liberté dans l’art”, was really an aristocratic idea. How could the offspring of such an ill-matched pair avoid being at odds with itself? The new Romantic doctrines necessitated a new dramatic form to give them proper expression. If that

new form had been forthcoming we should have had a truly Romantic drama – lyrical, pathetic, tragic...But Romantic drama as it did exist, was either (as with Dumas) undisguised melodrama speaking the accents of revolt and passion, or else (as with Hugo) lyrical melodrama masquerading under a cloak of pseudo-philosophical symbolism. (85)

Of course, the only justification for citing scholarship on Romantic drama here is the support that it unwittingly lends to the present project of equating new epic with melodrama. Long ago, the critic Alexander Lacey, in a patient and systematic effort at equating Romantic drama with melodrama, followed a roadmap amazingly similar to the one that has been adopted here. Lacey spotlighted the numerous melodramatic characteristics to be found in Romantic drama, and then interpreted the presence of such abundant melodrama as the sign of the failure of the Romantic theater's grand philosophical ambitions. In the passage above, Lacey says, "The new Romantic doctrines necessitated a new dramatic form to give them proper expression." Yet that new dramatic form was not forthcoming, and melodrama resulted instead, in particular "melodrama masquerading under a cloak of pseudo-philosophical symbolism." The surprisingly similar interpretation being advanced here about new epic is that it very assertively did experiment with new forms and new doctrines, especially new religious doctrines, but that the sheer audacity of its ambition, along with its anachronism, led to its collapse into melodrama. What resulted was pseudo-theological symbolism, not at all unlike the pseudo-philosophical symbolism of even the best Romantic drama. Indeed, Lacey even uses the word "collapse" in speaking about Romantic drama. He says Romantic drama collapsed after only a decade or so due to the massive contradictions it harbored: "After a few years the new organism [Romantic drama] failed to function and collapsed entirely. The reason for this collapse lies chiefly in the fact that, while melodrama was intended, first, last and always for the stage, Romantic drama often forgot that it was drama." (84). Romantic

drama could not long sustain the contradictions inherent to its very structure, but melodramatic epic lasted much longer, for over a century.

One bit of business remaining to be done before moving on to the next chapter and the analysis of the sexual politics of specific melodramatic epics is an explanation of the basic characteristics of melodrama. Although the genre's emergence out of the religious turmoil of the French Revolution is its most important feature and the one that it shares so noticeably with new epic, melodrama studies has identified many other characteristics, of which six will be discussed briefly here. The six are these: first, a Manichean view of the world; second, overwrought emotion and pathos; third, repetitious didacticism; fourth, a radically democratic outlook; fifth, political engagement; and sixth, a conservative sexual politics anchored by a sharp focus on the plight of children and/or women. Ben Singer, who synthesizes a great deal of scholarship on melodrama in his impressive new study, cites all of these characteristics but the fourth (44-49). Singer also makes the crucial point that the blend of these traits is what makes a work melodramatic. The presence of just one or two will probably not earn the melodramatic label, because each trait separately is compatible with other genres. The last of these six characteristics, the conservative sexual politics, is obviously the most important by far for the present study, but it cannot be studied in isolation. For example, the melodramatic epics to be studied here promote a conservative sexual ethos through their Manichaeism, starkly dividing the world into the sexually "pure" and the sexually "wicked." Typically in these epics, the characters personifying sexual purity come from humble backgrounds or are at best middle class, whereas the characters personifying sexual wickedness are decidedly upper class and often aristocratic. This kind of sexual politics therefore contributes strongly to a radically democratic outlook, one of the principal features of all melodrama, whether standard or epic. Repetitious didacticism, another classic melodramatic trait, is one of the chief

mechanisms by which these epics practice their sexual moralism. A final reason to discuss briefly these other identifying characteristics of melodrama is that new epic should consistently display multiple such characteristics, if it truly is the epic form of melodrama.

Peter Brooks explains the importance of all these characteristics to melodrama. In The Melodramatic Imagination, Brooks conveys a tremendous amount of information about the genre, discussing not only its origin in the French Revolution, but also its most enduring and defining features. The most relevant sentences and phrases have been italicized for emphasis.

The origins of melodrama can be accurately located within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath. This is the epistemological moment...that symbolically, and really, marks the final liquidation of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarch), *the shattering of the myth of Christendom*, the dissolution of an organic and hierarchically cohesive society ...The Revolution attempts to sacralize law itself, the Republic as the institution of morality. Yet it necessarily produces melodrama instead, *incessant struggle against enemies*, without and within, branded as villains, *suborners of morality*, who must be *confronted and expunged*, over and over, to *assure the triumph of virtue*. Like the oratory of the Revolution, melodrama from its inception takes as its concern and *raison d'être* the location, expression, and imposition of *basic ethical and psychic truths*. It says them *over and over in clear language*, it rehearses their conflicts and combats, *it reënacts the menace of evil and the eventual triumph of morality* made operative and evident...[I]t is in all cases *radically democratic, striving to make its representations clear and legible to everyone*...From amid the collapse of other principles and criteria, the individual ego declares its central and overriding value, its demand to be the measure of all things...*Melodrama represents both the urge toward resacralization and the impossibility of conceiving sacralization other than in personal terms.* (14-16) [Emphasis my own]

In recounting this historical development, Brooks touches directly or indirectly upon all six of the melodramatic characteristics just listed. The talk of ubiquitous villains and of virtue's eventual triumph perfectly fits the definition of Manichaeism. Indeed, Brooks elsewhere uses the term "Manichean" when speaking about the genre's "logic of the excluded middle" (15). Overwrought emotion and pathos are implicit in the talk of an incessant struggle against nefarious, unrelenting enemies who must be "confronted and expunged." The characteristic of repetitious didacticism is simply alternate phrasing for "ethical and psychic

truths” repeated “over and over in clear language.” Brooks here mentions the radically democratic impulse of melodrama directly.

Nothing makes clearer the strong tendency of melodrama toward political engagement than its birth out of the French Revolution. Peter Brooks reveals the fundamental melodramatic urge to recapture the sacred, to restore a kind of religious hegemony that was forever lost when the French Catholic Church was disestablished and dismantled during the revolution. Brooks also indicates that the revolutionaries tried to recapture the sacred through their politics, and melodrama would retain its close ties to politics in France throughout the nineteenth century. Of course, some melodramatic works are much more overtly engaged in politics than others. James Smith describes a heavily politicized sub-genre called “protest melodrama,” which has occasionally succeeded in having the wider political impact aimed for by its creators (15-18). Even when not so conspicuously engaged, melodrama typically has a much stronger connection to its historical context than do other literary genres. Julia Przybos, however, has devised what is perhaps the most succinct formulation of the concept: “Reste néanmoins l’étonnante prédilection pour la forme mélodramatique des sociétés qui traversent une crise anémique aiguë” (*L’Entreprise* 193). In other words, socio-political events on the macro level determine the prevalence and popularity of melodrama, with times of massively destabilizing crisis offering the most fertile ground for the genre. In keeping with its tendency to exteriorize and accentuate traits that are often only implicit or latent in standard melodrama, melodramatic epic will tend toward overt political engagement, and the Dreyfus Affair will provoke just the kind of acute national crisis that scholars have identified as stimulating the production of melodrama.

The focus on the plight of women and children might appear the characteristic of melodrama that is most removed from Brooks’s narration of the genre’s genealogy, and yet

that, too, is implied in the phrase “the impossibility of conceiving sacralization other than in personal terms.” Later in The Melodramatic Imagination, Brooks addresses directly the central importance of children and women to the genre, but in the passage above he speaks more generally about the personal and intimate as the only domain still susceptible to being infused with religious intensity. Through the institutions of parenthood and marriage, children and women have traditionally loomed large in the domain of the personal; hence they do in melodrama, as well. Brooks explains the sexual politics of melodrama more thoroughly later by emphasizing that the personification of virtue is an essential melodramatic role, and the individual(s) filling this role must come under attack by villainy. Villainy in melodrama deserves the defeat it inevitably suffers, but the closer it comes to crushing a defenseless virtue, the more satisfying its final undoing. According to Brooks, women and children personify virtue under attack better than men, precisely on account of their greater vulnerability (32-34). To tap the melodramatic potential of women and children simultaneously, sentimental nineteenth-century theater often foregrounded the maternal bond (Metayer 237-238). A favorite way for virtue to be threatened in these plays is for a child to be forcibly separated from its mother. The plot then revolves around the mother’s desperate attempts to reclaim her beloved offspring (Metayer 237-238).

Overall, melodrama privileges traditional family relationships, but in a rapidly changing world (Metayer 237-238). As for the genre’s depiction of women specifically, Singer says that melodrama reflects society’s conflicting views, a fascination with assertive women who seek their own enfranchisement, but also anxiety over the prospect of women becoming too powerful. This tension results in the morbid delight melodrama obtains by placing admirable, often competent women in danger so grave that they can only survive with outside help, usually from a man (Singer 221-262). Of course, this quasi-sexualized process of

the rescue of the innocent and defenseless typically unfolds within the fictional world created by any given melodramatic text. What makes melodrama theory so powerfully effective in explaining the Dreyfus Affair, however, is that the anticlerical campaign at the scandal's end re-enacted this process of rescue in the context of real-world political debate and decision-making. The turn-of-the century anticlerical campaign was greatly preoccupied by the threat – real, imaginary or merely exaggerated – that the Catholic Church posed to women and children. Anticlerical activists wanted to strip and, indeed, succeeded in stripping the Catholic Church of much of its power, because they were convinced that the Church was brainwashing and corrupting innocent women and children. This attitude is strikingly on display in Zola's Évangiles, and scholarship on melodrama explains it well.

One final characteristic of melodrama that deserves comment is the genre's susceptibility to being used simultaneously by ideological adversaries. This feature was alluded to earlier here, during an explanation of the concept of adversarial parallelism. In some ways, this characteristic is a further elaboration of melodrama's fundamental tendency to be politically engaged. The genre overall is surprisingly ambivalent and malleable ideologically, but the ideological orientation of any given melodramatic texts is usually quite pronounced and obvious. One reason for mentioning this characteristic again is to have the chance to quote Julia Przybos on this subject. She is not the only expert on melodrama to write about this, but she has done so the most eloquently.

Dès sa naissance, le mélodrame remplit plus ou moins discrètement le rôle de propagandiste politique. En bon disciple du théâtre révolutionnaire, il embrasse successivement toutes les tendances politiques, se met au service de tous les régimes... On sait que cette forme ne disparaît pas avec le déclin du mélodrame fabriqué selon la recette de Pixérécourt. Loin de là. Comme elle peut s'accommoder de n'importe quel contenu idéologique, elle reste toujours d'actualité. Le mélodrame, qui perçoit le monde en termes de traîtres et de victimes et qui œuvre à raffermir l'ordre et l'unité du groupe, est une forme esthétique qui peut véhiculer n'importe quelle idéologie. Il existe en effet des mélodrames de toutes les couleurs politiques.

Une fois remontée, la mécanique du mélodrame se met à fonctionner au profit de tout propagandiste habile. (183-194)

Since parties of nearly all political stripes can exploit melodrama's propagandistic potential, adversaries on opposite sides of a particular issue, such as the Dreyfus Affair or of the role of the established Church in France, can resort to this genre with equal facility. Yet when they do, both sides will have in common at least their shared use of melodrama, as well as, of course, all the characteristics that typically comprise the genre. One of the chief characteristics is a conservative sexual politics, which means that both the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards will share an exaggeratedly conservative sexual ethos at the very moment they both resort to melodrama, and this will be nowhere more evident than in their melodramatic epics. Of course, as has already been stated numerous times here, this unexpected similarity between passionate adversaries will trigger much of the comedy in Proust's Recherche.

The very last task to be accomplished in this chapter is to make good on the earlier promise to indicate where in previously published scholarship the genres of epic and melodrama have been brought into close proximity of each other. There truly has been no cross-fertilization on a theoretical level between the fields of melodrama and epic studies, and there certainly has been no attempt so far to define in a comprehensive and theoretical manner exactly what a melodramatic epic would look like. Nevertheless, the terms "melodrama" and "epic" have been brought together with some regularity in the area of cinema studies, and the name upon which these terms converge most often by far is D. W. Griffith, particularly in terms of his highly controversial film The Birth of a Nation. None of the scholarship on Griffith that was consulted for this chapter actually calls his feature-length films "melodramatic epics" or "epic melodramas," but virtually all the studies highlight these films' conspicuous epic and melodrama qualities. Within no single film are epic and melodramatic qualities more frequently identified and commented upon it seems than Birth of a Nation.

Griffith's landmark Civil War film is, too put it mildly, explosively controversial, and there are many good reasons not to mention it at all in a study on the Dreyfus Affair, not the least being that The Birth of a Nation is the product of an entirely different culture and historical tradition. Nevertheless, no analysis of the intersection of melodrama and epic could make any plausible claim to adequacy without at least mentioning Griffith. Furthermore, much of the best scholarship on melodrama, such as Ben Singer's book Melodrama and Modernity, derives from cinema studies, and a certain debt in that direction should be acknowledged, if not fully repaid. Finally, a brief discussion of The Birth of a Nation will actually serve to reinforce the theory of melodramatic epic that has been put forward here, because the most famous of all films combining extremely ambitious epic with stridently politicized melodrama fits the definition of the combined genre rather well.

David Cook, in his monumental study A History of Narrative Film, illustrates perfectly the longstanding critical tradition of finding much that is both melodramatic and epic about The Birth of a Nation, but without ever speculating about the larger significance of Griffith's merging of the two genres. Cook does not even wonder whether the most problematic and controversial qualities of The Birth of a Nation might derive precisely from the combination of two such troubled genres, because the many problems of each separately are almost certainly multiplied further as a result of their combination. The pain in Cook's authorial voice is quite evident in the following three passages, because he simultaneously reveres and abhors Griffith's films, a paradoxical reaction that is especially strong vis-à-vis The Birth of a Nation.

The problem is that Griffith was essentially a figure of paradox. He was unquestionably the seminal genius of the narrative cinema and its first great visionary artist, but he was also a provincial southern romantic with pretensions to high literary culture and a penchant for sentimentality and melodrama that would have embarrassed Dickens. Griffith was the film's first great technical master and its first legitimate poet, but he was also a muddleheaded racial bigot, incapable of abstract thought, who quite

literally saw all of human history in the black-and-white terms of nineteenth-century melodrama. (61)

Epics are concerned with the origins of races, and the “nation” born out of Griffith’s epic was quite clearly White America. It may be true, as a recent biographer has remarked, that Griffith’s “racial bias was almost totally unconscious,” but regional conditioning had so perverted his understanding of American history that his film became in many ways a pseudohistorical tract whose collective hero is the “Aryan” race (Griffith’s term)...In its monumental scale, in its concentration upon a crucial moment in American history, in its mixture of historical and invented characters, in its constant narrative movement between the epochal and the human, and, most significantly, in its chillingly accurate vision of an American society predicated on race, The Birth of a Nation is a profoundly *American* epic. (81)

...Sergei Eisenstein pointed out that Griffith’s constant resort to parallel editing was a function of his dualistic vision of human experience, in which an entire civil war or twenty centuries of human history were reducible to a melodramatic struggle between the forces of Good and Evil. (109)

Thus, according to Cook, even the great Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein commented upon the astonishing mixture of the epic and the melodramatic in Griffith’s works. It bears repeating that neither Cook, nor, apparently, Sergei Eisenstein or anyone else for that matter, has speculated about what the interaction of these two genres within Griffith’s *œuvre* might mean in a much more general, theoretical sense.

The depiction of sex in melodramatic epic is obviously what matters most in the present study, and The Birth of a Nation does not disappoint in giving great thematic weight to sex and in a way that is every bit as controversial and problematic as that found in the literary melodramatic epics produced in France during the nineteenth century. The basis for the nauseating and abundant racism found in The Birth of a Nation is the charge, made repeatedly throughout the film, that liberated black male slaves in the South immediately launched a campaign of sexual intimidation, forced intermarriage and rape directed against defenseless white women. Robert Sklar explains this crucial aspect of Griffith’s epic in Film: An International History of the Medium.

As a southerner living and working in the North and seeking national approbation, Griffith chose to emphasize one particular version of the reconciliation theme: that the southern secession from the union deserved to be forgiven because southern whites had demonstrated to northern whites that their true enemies were not each other, but the threat of dilution of their common race. While proclaiming its fidelity to historical accuracy, Griffith's film subsumes the issues of chattel slavery and the southern secession within its larger subject – that racial equality places white women in danger of sexual assault. (61)

Just as with the French melodramatic epics to be examined here, The Birth of a Nation very simplistically reduces its vast original subject to a question of maintaining sexual purity. As Sklar indicates at the end of this passage, the primary and larger subject of Griffith's epic is not the Civil War nor Reconstruction, but rather the protection of defenseless white women from lascivious, newly empowered black men. A very conservative and peculiar sexual ethos eventually and quite clearly becomes the film's main concern.

The role of religion in The Birth of a Nation constitutes the one major question remaining to be answered before any determination can be made as to whether the definition of melodramatic epic developed here suits Griffith's epic. Does The Birth of a Nation propose radical and significant religious reform of the sort that has been attributed to melodramatic epic in this chapter? Does Griffith's epic envision a religious utopia as Zola's Évangiles do? Finally, if Griffith's epic does present a radically new view of religion, does the film closely relate this new religious view to its melodrama, in particular to its conservative sexual politics? The answer to all three questions is in the affirmative, although most of the religious revisionism in The Birth of a Nation takes place at the end of the film, rather than near the beginning, one might expect to find it. A classic case of melodramatic collapse from failed but ambitious religious reform to a fixation on personal morality, but the collapse takes place mostly retroactively, because the vast religious ambition of Griffith's film only becomes clear at its end. Of course, The Birth of a Nation tells the story of the creation of the Ku Klux Klan, and Christian religious symbols figure prominently in KKK ceremonies. For example,

Griffith's film actually depicts the very moment when the burning cross was selected as the Klan's primary emblem. Yet symbolism of this kind does not by itself indicate a goal of comprehensive religious reform, the kind of awesomely ambitious religious project that is supposed to be the source of melodramatic epic. The end of The Birth of a Nation, however, does indeed outline such a grand religious design, depicting a distant and utterly peaceful Christian future. This religious utopia is shown to be presided over by Christ, but only after the former slaves have been put in their "proper place," their voting rights and their right to bear arms having been stripped from them.

The third-to-last title screen of The Birth of a Nation paves the way for this utopian vision by stating, "Dare we dream of a golden day when the bestial War shall rule no more. But instead – the gentle Prince in the Hall of Brotherly Love in the City of Peace." This vision follows the restoration not only of racial oppression but also of patriarchy, because the images of Christ ruling over a utopian land of peace and prosperity are intercut with seaside images of the double honeymoon of the film's two leading young, white couples, whose love could only flourish once the young woman in each couple had been chivalrously rescued from packs of lecherous "negroes." The women's rescue from power-mad, sex-starved blacks by their white sweethearts visually paves the way in the film for religious utopia, but this grand religious dream retrospectively appears as having been the film's goal all along, because it refers back to the film's beginning, where the introduction of "negroes" to the North American continent is shown having destroyed any hope the young country originally had of tranquility. In other words, religious utopia is the true premise of The Birth of a Nation, even though the amount of screen time spent developing the concept is limited and postponed mostly until the very end of the film. The wan, silly images depicting this unorthodox view of a newfound, terrestrial paradise suggest that the feebleness of this idea quickly became apparent in the making of the

film, resulting in a classic melodramatic collapse into a fixation on sexual morality. This means, of course, that Griffith's notorious film fits the theory of melodramatic epic that has been elaborated here. Mimi White explains the importance of The Birth of a Nation's strange conclusion,

The counterpart of [the film's] prologue is a vision of final union as the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, hovers over a pastoral scene, foretelling of a generalized, as yet unachieved state of global harmony. The nature of the final images strongly suggests a Paradise lost and regained, Edenic union which can only be restored through divine intervention. This vision, asserted as true and total union, is beyond the struggles of both the nation and the White Clan. It literally comes after the restoration of peace and order by the Ku Klux Klan in the South and the reassertion of white supremacy and dominance. In fact, with respect to the film's diegesis, it is a moment which has not yet arrived. However, the family's position and definition in relation to this universal conception of the world is provided by the dissolves which link the two couples on their honeymoon with this final vision. (223)

It goes without saying that The Birth of a Nation has nothing to do directly with the Dreyfus Affair, Zola's Évangiles, or Proust's Recherche. Still, by conforming so well to the theory that has been crafted here to elucidate these products of a famous moment in French history, this most controversial of American films advances our understanding of the peculiar genre of melodramatic epic. Just as in The Birth of a Nation, there is plenty to cause shock and outrage in the French melodramatic epics that will be studied in the next chapter. The blending of religion, politics, morality, and sexuality in a giant Manichaeian metanarrative is bound to give offense, but instead of composing a literary work that merely takes offense, Proust chooses instead to laugh.

CHAPTER 3

CHATEAUBRIAND'S GÉNIE DU CHRISTIANISME FORMULATING THE CONCEPT OF MELODRAMATIC EPIC

Tout ceci soit dit, sans ôter à qui que ce soit le droit de courir
sus aux *Martyrs*, comme épopée. Veut-on que ce soit un *roman* ?
je le veux bien. Un *drame* ? j'y consens. Un *mélodrame* ? de tout
mon cœur. Une *mosaïque* ? j'y donne les mains. Je ne suis point
poète, je ne me proclame point poète... ; je n'ai jamais dit que
j'avais fait un poème ; j'ai protesté et je proteste encore de mon
respect pour les Muses.

Chateaubriand, "Examen des Martyrs" (92)

[Emphasis in original]

Like Cervantes's Don Quixote, Proust's Recherche is dense with literary references and allusions. Although not generally recognized, the Recherche also resembles Don Quixote by employing intertexts in a powerfully coherent, organized manner. As discussed in the last chapter, more than two centuries' worth of Spanish and Portuguese chivalric romances function jointly as the chief epic foils to Cervantes's mock-epic masterpiece. One particular chivalric romance plays a preeminent role in Don Quixote, however, and that is Amadis of Gaul, a text which had been extremely popular in Spain in the decades prior to Cervantes' composition of his masterpiece. The present study set out to demonstrate that Zola's final epic novels function as top intertext in the Recherche, in a manner not dissimilar from the role of Amadis of Gaul in Don Quixote. Yet the best and perhaps only way to make sense of Zola's extremely peculiar final novels, known collectively as the Évangiles, is by setting these works in a rather large literary, cultural and political context, a context that is in fact much larger than even the Dreyfus Affair itself. Establishing this larger context was the work of the last

chapter. The generic and theoretical concept devised in those earlier pages to make sense of Zola's Évangiles is, of course, the concept of melodramatic epic, the roots of which stretch back to the French Revolution. Zola's Évangiles are truly inscribed within a century-long tradition of post-revolutionary French epic. Given this, one may reasonably wonder whether, as with Don Quixote, the Recherche has a specific, roughly contemporaneous top intertext belonging to an older and broader sub-genre, a sub-genre which itself might be seen serving as main intertext, but in a more general sense. The answer to that question would certainly be in the affirmative. Nineteenth-century French melodramatic epics do collectively serve as important epic foils within the Recherche. Thus, broadly speaking, one could state plausibly that melodramatic epic as a sub-genre is the Recherche's top intertext; whereas speaking more specifically, one could state that the examples of this genre produced during the Dreyfus Affair, especially Zola's Évangiles, function as the most immediate foils to Proust's vast cycle of novels.

This chapter and the next will briefly demonstrate the suitability of the concept of melodramatic epic as a description for French epics from earlier in the nineteenth century. Les Martyrs, an epic by Chateaubriand, an author who had a significant impact on the formation of the Recherche, will be examined. Of course, the theory of melodramatic epic from the last chapter was developed primarily to explain Zola's Évangiles, but many good reasons exist to apply the theoretical results here briefly to other, better-known post-revolutionary epics. The first reason is the one mentioned just above, namely that discussion of earlier examples of melodramatic epic will furnish a more complete picture of the Recherche's mock-epic dynamic, since Proust responds on many different and very sophisticated levels to the entire sub-genre, and not simply to the Évangiles, crucial as Zola's final novels are. A second major reason for paying some attention to earlier examples of new epic is that doing so will justify

and substantiate the theoretical innovations of the last chapter. As shown previously, scholars who have written heretofore on post-revolutionary epic have, in fact, sometimes glimpsed the profound correspondence between melodrama and this new kind of epic, albeit without ever attempting to explain the correspondence systematically. The present study has now for the first time accounted for the many similarities between these two long neglected literary forms, but supporting evidence from at least a few exemplary literary texts other than the Évangiles is certainly in order. Of course, a critical move as daring as defining a new genre or re-defining an established one will always require further study to thresh out its merits and any possible weaknesses. Nevertheless, the new critical tool that has been assembled here needs to be put through its paces through application to texts that have been frequently cited and analyzed in support of the previous critical regime.

The fact that Chateaubriand's Les Martyrs has always been considered an epic and is invariably cited in discussions of new epic suggests a third reason for this chapter and the next. The recurrence of many features found in these earlier nineteenth-century works within Zola's Évangiles will greatly help in identifying the kind of literature Zola's final novels represent. This is important, because within the still rather sparse scholarship on the Évangiles, the strangeness of these novels has touched off a debate as to the genre they most resemble (Lasseigne 294-295). No one until now, however, has commented upon these novels' numerous and striking similarities to the new, post-revolutionary epics, which often go by the name of humanitarian or romantic epics. A fourth reason for commenting briefly here upon the Chateaubriand's contribution to new epic is that his inclusion will reflect more accurately a particular, usually overlooked, but deep vein of continuity within nineteenth-century French literature. Fifth and finally, this chapter and the next will help capture a vitally important historical continuity, which is the fundamental continuity in the religious conflict

that began in the French Revolution and extended across the entire nineteenth-century all the way up to the time of the Dreyfus Affair, when the official and final separation of Church and State was enacted into law, giving at least partial closure to one strain of the legacy of 1789. Of course, the fifth and fourth reasons just presented are inextricably connected to each other. As melodramatic epics, these texts do not simply reflect the religious conflict of their time, but they were engaged in it to a significant degree. Political engagement is a major component of a great deal of melodramatic literature, and it certainly is a major component of literature in these texts. What this chapter and the next will trace is a century-long tradition of literature particularly focused on and engaged in the intersection of politics and religion. Not at all coincidentally, this is one literary tradition upon which Proust pointedly comments in a major way within the Recherche.

The texts by Chateaubriand to be examined here include not only his epic Les Martyrs, but also his famous study, the Génie du Christianisme, a work of cultural and literary criticism written at the dawn of the nineteenth century and destined to influence the debate over religion in France for decades to come. Chateaubriand discusses the epic genre at great length in the Génie du Christianisme. He calls for the creation for a new kind of epic, one suited to post-revolutionary times. His vision of the direction that epic should take bears a striking resemblance to melodramatic epic as described in the preceding chapter here. Chateaubriand began writing Les Martyrs not long after the Génie, and when the epic was published, he explicitly presented it as an illustration and application of the new epic principles that he had laid out in his earlier study. His carefully enunciated aesthetic principles, his clear derivation of those principles from his religious beliefs, the significant attention that he paid to epic as a genre, his keen sense that the genre needed to be renewed for post-revolutionary time, and the lasting influence that he exerted on French culture for many

decades make Chateaubriand a marvelous case study for the present project. Most important of all, however, is the simple fact that Les Martyrs meets all the key criteria of melodramatic epic that were laid out earlier in these pages.

A quick recapitulation of the definition of melodramatic epic and of the six basic characteristics of all melodrama should prove beneficial, because these will obviously form the standard against which Chateaubriand's contribution to new epic will be evaluated here. As defined in the last chapter, melodramatic epic is narrative on a grand scale in the service of a genuine, highly visible attempt to restore religious hegemony, an attempt that invariably fails in the post-revolutionary environment. This failure triggers a process of retreat toward an emphasis on personal morality, especially an emphasis on sexual morality. The precise form of the religious hegemony envisioned by each melodramatic epic can vary significantly, from a very traditional Catholicism bolstered by the restoration of many of its temporal powers to a new secular religion that places its faith in human progress and science. Melodramatic epic displays all the basic characteristics of standard melodrama, but in conjunction with this extremely ambitious effort to rework religious first principles. In fact, melodramatic epic makes concrete a process that remains completely implicit in standard melodrama, because theorists hold that the melodramatic mode harks back to a painful sense of loss over the radicalness of the religious reforms initiated by the French Revolution. As for the six basic characteristics of all melodrama, they are the following: first, a Manichean view of the world; second, overwrought emotion and pathos; third, repetitious didacticism; fourth, a radically democratic outlook; fifth, political engagement; and sixth, a conservative sexual politics anchored by a sharp focus on the plight of children and/or women.

Enlarged and amplified to universal proportions, the basic characteristics of melodrama produce two additional features frequently exhibited by melodramatic epics,

including the ones to be analyzed in the next two chapters. The Manichaeism, conservative sexual politics and political engagement common to melodramas of many varieties produce frequently on the epic scale a replication of the Sodom and Gomorrah story in different historical contexts. Standard melodramas are often intimate, portraying the virtue and vice of a few. To recapture the full power of the Sodom and Gomorrah story, however, requires a much bigger canvas, a canvas such as melodramatic epics uniquely provide. Melodramatic epics depict large communities, entire societies, or the even entire human race. Just as in the Biblical story, melodramatic epics tend to pass moral judgment the collective sins and virtues of entire societies. Of course, as in the Bible, a few extremely virtuous individuals can redeem a great deal of iniquity on the part of many others. Yet the wicked can just as easily be punished in one fell swoop of divine vengeance. The Sodom and Gomorrah theme often appears explicitly in melodramatic epic. Zola's Évangiles, Hugo's La Légende des siècles, and Vigny's Les Destinées invoke by name the legend of the condemned Biblical cities. Chateaubriand never mentions Sodom or Gomorrah in Les Martyrs proper, but he does relate his narrative to the well-known Biblical legend in a lengthy essay used as the epic's preface.

The Sodom and Gomorrah theme is perhaps the locus of the most direct and conspicuous impact that the melodramatic epics had on Proust's Recherche. The Sodom and Gomorrah theme pervades the second half of Proust's massive fictional cycle, but in a distinctly humorous and playful manner. This dominant theme in the Recherche is not taken directly from its original literary source, the Bible, but is instead heavily mediated by the striking and unforgettable use of the Sodom and Gomorrah story within nineteenth-century melodramatic epics. These quite opposing uses of the same Biblical legend by leading French authors – tendentious, engaged, and ultra-serious on the one hand; ironic, hilarious, and commenting playfully on contemporary politics on the other – is one of the best pieces of

evidence that this particular category of nineteenth-century French epics serves as the Recherche's true top intertext.

The other key feature born out of the pressures placed upon standard melodrama by the special demands of epic is the tendency to comment stridently upon its own aesthetics. This particular feature of melodramatic epic was touched upon in the last chapter. A lengthy and dense literary work commenting upon the very aesthetic standard according to which it was created is not in itself very remarkable. The Recherche is celebrated for doing just that, and quite brilliantly. The urge of melodramatic epic to comment upon its own aesthetics bears all the marks of melodramatic origins, however. The Manichaeian and moralizing strains within melodrama make the aesthetic commentary often found within its epic form not only remarkable but sometimes downright shocking. This is because this aesthetics is utterly oppositional, in other words as much a rejection – and a vociferous rejection at that – of competing aesthetic visions as a promotion of its own vision. With a breathtaking lack of nuance and restraint, melodramatic epic can denounce aesthetic traditions that have been revered and individual works that have been considered classics since time immemorial. Alternatively, melodramatic epic can distort and re-interpret competing aesthetic traditions very simplistically to make them conform to the expectations of melodrama. As for melodramatic epic's own aesthetic vision, its independence can be severely compromised by the priority given moralizing and political engagement. Simply put, an aesthetics wholly or significantly subservient to heavy-handed moral edification can almost be tantamount to the death of aesthetics, a sort of anti-aesthetics. In fairness to melodramatic epic, none of the examples of the genre considered in this study are actually as bad as their most troubling pronouncements on aesthetics might lead one to expect. The claim being made here is not that any literary work under examination in these pages really represents the death of aesthetics,

but rather that each work contains philosophical or theoretical statements pointing in that direction. The radicalness of the aesthetic commentary found within and attendant upon melodramatic epic was bound to provoke a response, and the Recherche stands in large part as that response, but a response that is chiefly humorous, rather than being stridently oppositional.

Like melodrama and new epic themselves, Chateaubriand's Génie du Christianisme was born directly out of the religious conflict of the French Revolution. Published in 1802, this seminal, wide-ranging cultural study played a major role in renewing interest in epic and in shaping the political debate over religion in France just as the country was struggling to chart a course for itself out of the revolutionary turmoil. As his study's title suggests, Chateaubriand was weighing in on one side of the contemporary political dynamic, on the side of those who longed for the reestablishment of Catholicism as France's official religion. Chateaubriand wanted to show the unique genius of the Christian religion and its perfect suitability for the French nation. Yet in some ways he had an even more basic and practical goal as well, which was simply to encourage the re-opening of churches that were closed during the Revolution or converted to secular uses. Chateaubriand states such an objective at the beginning of one of several prefaces that he wrote for different editions of the Génie,

Lorsque le Génie du Christianisme parut, la France sortait du chaos révolutionnaire ; tous les éléments de la société étaient confondus : ... l'ordre n'était point encore sorti du despotisme et de la gloire. Ce fut donc, pour ainsi dire, au milieu des débris de nos temples que je publiai le Génie du Christianisme, pour rappeler dans ces temples les pompes du culte et les serviteurs des autels. (459)

Chateaubriand says that he wrote the Génie to help restore the celebration of Christian religious services throughout France. Put more simply, he wanted through his study to call priests back to their altars. This is a statement of very engaged intent on the part of the author, although not really as engagement is typically understood. The extraordinary and

unprecedented historical moment in which Chateaubriand found himself goes a long way toward explaining his audacity in believing that he could write a book that would literally reopen churches. As did the Génie, Zola's Évangiles will appear at a critical historical moment, just as the Dreyfus Affair was turning into a focused public debate on the future of Christianity in France. Yet one of the major stated purposes of the Évangiles will be the exact opposite of the Génie's: the Évangiles will aim to close churches down, whereas the Génie wants to rebuild, reestablish and reopen them. What these works by Chateaubriand and Zola have in common, however, is their similar use of melodrama.

The principal way the Génie will boost the standing of Christianity in France is by showing how the religion promotes a specific blend of aesthetics and morality. The full title of the Génie is revealing in this regard: Génie du christianisme ou beautés de la religion chrétienne. The word "beautés" indicates Chateaubriand's emphasis on aesthetics. The case that Chateaubriand makes for the re-establishment of Christianity is based largely on aesthetics, more precisely on the aesthetics that he believes the Christian religion fosters. This may seem somewhat contradictory at first. The practical, engaged side of the Génie may seem irreconcilable with something as abstract as an emphasis on aesthetics. Yet Chateaubriand bridges these two different sides of his study by claiming that Christian aesthetics is morally edifying and therefore utilitarian. In other words, Christianity deserves to be re-established because the morality promoted by its aesthetics is beneficial and healthy for any country in which this religion predominates. In turn, Chateaubriand considers such national moral purification itself to be beautiful, creating a kind of circularity to his argument. Thus, although not exactly obvious from the Génie's subtitle, the beauties of Christianity to which the study will draw readers' attention are principally moral beauties. This fusion of morality, aesthetics and engagement is basically the same fusion that occurs in melodrama. As for the Génie's

keen interest in epic, that will emerge from the vastness of Chateaubriand's aspiration, which is not merely engagement, but engagement in a vast project of re-establishing a national religion on ground from which it had been to a large degree expelled. Within the Génie, engagement, morality and aesthetics feed off each other and grow enormously from the rich nourishment they provide each other, resulting in the concept of melodramatic epic. In short, the Génie defines and promotes the genre of melodramatic epic, but without ever using the term melodrama.

A close reading of a few relevant passages from the Génie will follow shortly, but a glimpse ahead to Les Martyrs will help make the point of epic's centrality to Chateaubriand's vision. As an example of melodramatic epic, Les Martyrs is more important here than is the Génie du Christianisme, but the latter remains significant for the theoretical light it sheds on this new form of epic. In reality, however, these two early works by Chateaubriand are inseparable. In her study Chateaubriand et le renouveau épique : Les Martyrs, Marie Pinel reaches two main conclusions: first, that the Génie and Les Martyrs function together as unit, making analysis of each in light of the other almost obligatory; and second, that the Génie and Les Martyrs jointly touched off a current of writing in the epic mode within France throughout the nineteenth century (100). Pinel insists on, "l'extrême cohérence entre la pensée théorique du Génie du Christianisme et sa mise en œuvre dans Les Martyrs : il apparaît exclu de lire ces derniers indépendamment de l'ouvrage dont ils constituent une illustration explicite" (100). Earlier in her study Pinel writes, "Il est donc essentiel de considérer Les Martyrs dans le prolongement de l'apologie du Génie et d'abord comme une épopée puisque tel est le genre qu'exige la noblesse du sujet" (21). By itself, the extremely close relationship between the Génie and Les Martyrs illustrates the special role that Chateaubriand assigned to epic in his vision of a religious regeneration for France.

Nonetheless, as some other specialists of nineteenth-century epic do, Marie Pinel notes significant differences between Les Martyrs and the kind of epic that would later dominate the genre in France in the middle of the century. In other words, Pinel does not draw a straight line from Les Martyrs to the humanitarian epics, such as those by Hugo, Vigny and Lamartine (8-9, 98-100). This issue will be dealt with later in these pages, because the concept of melodramatic epic actually solves this problem, one of the thorniest in the study of nineteenth-century French epic, by revealing a basic unity that runs as a thread through all these epics, uniting them in spite of their more superficial differences. Apart from the question of how the epic evolved during the nineteenth century, hardly any scholar denies the general and lasting influence that Chateaubriand's early works exerted throughout the nineteenth century (Pinel 98-100, Bénichou 69-70).

In one of the prefaces that he wrote for his epic, Chateaubriand himself acknowledges the close relationship between Génie and Les Martyrs. The quote below shows that Chateaubriand explicitly conceived his epic as an illustration of the aesthetic principles previously advanced in his celebrated cultural study.

J'ai avancé, dans un premier ouvrage, que la Religion chrétienne me paraissait plus favorable que le Paganisme au développement des caractères, et au jeu des passions dans l'Épopée ; j'ai dit encore que le *merveilleux* de cette religion pouvait peut-être lutter contre le *merveilleux* emprunté de la Mythologie : ce sont ces opinions, plus ou moins combattues, que je cherche à appuyer par un exemple. (29) [Emphasis in original]

The phrase, "dans un premier ouvrage," is, of course, the key reference to the Génie in this passage. Chateaubriand proceeds to summarize several of the Génie's major ideas on religion and literary creation, concluding with this crucial phrase: "que je cherche à appuyer par un exemple." The epic Les Martyrs is precisely that illustration or example of the key ideas from the Génie that were just summarized. As for the ideas themselves, they are much weightier

and more politically charged than might they at first seem. Chateaubriand is saying much more than that Les Martyrs illustrate the claims made specifically about epic in the Génie, numerous as those claims are. Chateaubriand's belief that Christianity's contribution to aesthetics is a central reason to re-establish the religion, combined with his belief that epic is the supreme literary genre, means that his comments on epic have a major bearing on his overall world-view (Génie 268). When Chateaubriand speaks in the passage above about character and passions, he is referring to Christianity's supposedly superior ability to mold character and restrain passions, including the sexual passions. In short, Chateaubriand is talking here about morality, and he is saying that Christian epics have an advantage over epics inspired by other religions, because Christianity is far more conducive to depicting morality. The other religion that Chateaubriand mentions directly is ancient paganism, but, as will be shown shortly, he makes a broader point in both the Génie and Les Martyrs, namely that literature of all kinds inspired by Christianity is usually more moral than and, hence, superior to literature inspired by any other religion or inspired by atheism.

The Génie's moralizing, utilitarian aesthetic – in other words, the aesthetic that so greatly resembles melodrama – comes across loudly and clearly from the very start of the study. In the first chapter, Chateaubriand explains that he is embarking on a new kind of defense of Christianity, one appropriate for post-revolutionary France. The idea of defending Christianity in a distinctly new way in the wake of the Revolution's unprecedented events is perfectly compatible with Peter Brooks's description of the religious origins of melodrama. Brooks's oft-quoted claim that melodrama results from the failed drive to "recapture the traditional Sacred" means that the Revolution's extreme religious turmoil gave rise to the feeling either that a new religion needed to be created or that an entirely new basis needed to be found for Christianity. Both of these ambitious projects would ultimately collapse into

melodrama and a fixation on personal morality. Chateaubriand describes a similar process in the passage below, taken from early in the Génie, where he complains about the mistakes of earlier Christian apologists, mistakes that he himself is determined to avoid. Basically, Chateaubriand says the earlier apologists strayed too far into theology and neglected to ground their arguments in simple human morality.

Ce n'était pas les sophistes qu'il fallait réconcilier à la religion, c'était le monde qu'ils égaraient. On l'avait séduit en lui disant que le christianisme était un culte né du sein de la barbarie, absurde dans ses dogmes, ridicule dans ses cérémonies, ennemi des arts et des lettres, de la raison et de la beauté ; un culte qui n'avait fait que verser le sang, enchaîner les hommes, et retarder le bonheur et les lumières du genre humain : on devait donc chercher à prouver au contraire que de toutes les religions qui ont jamais existé la religion chrétienne est la plus poétique, la plus humaine, la plus favorable à la liberté, aux arts et aux lettres ; que le monde moderne lui doit tout, depuis l'agriculture jusqu'aux sciences abstraites ; depuis les hospices pour les malheureux, jusqu'aux temples bâtis par Michel-Ange, et décorés par Raphaël. On devait montrer qu'il n'y a rien de plus divin que sa morale ; rien de plus aimable que, de plus pompeux que ses dogmes, sa doctrine, et son culte : on devait dire qu'elle favorise le génie, épure le goût, développe les passions vertueuses, donne de la vigueur à la pensée, offre des formes nobles à l'écrivain, et des moules parfaits à l'artiste... Ici le lecteur voit notre ouvrage. Les autres genres d'apologies sont épuisés, et peut-être seraient-ils inutiles aujourd'hui. Qui est-ce qui liraient maintenant un ouvrage de théologie ? quelques hommes pieux qui n'ont pas besoin d'être convaincus ; quelques vrais chrétiens déjà persuadés. Mais n'y a-t-il pas de danger à envisager la religion sous un jour purement humain ? Et pourquoi ? Notre religion craint-elle la lumière ?... Le christianisme sera-t-il moins vrai quand il paraîtra plus beau ? Bannissons une frayeur pusillanime ; par excès de religion, ne laissons pas la religion périr. (470)

Chateaubriand's hatred of the Enlightenment philosophes and their post-revolutionary successors is on display here. The term "sophistes" found at the top of this passage is a reference to the irreligious or religiously unorthodox philosophes, authors such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot, among many others. Chateaubriand will later use the same term in the same disparaging manner in his epic Les Martyrs. He complains bitterly here that the sophists/philosophes led the world astray by ridiculing Christianity, by calling it hostile to the arts, human reason, and beauty, and by saying that Christianity enslaved humankind and retarded the spread of human happiness. The philosophes are, of course, celebrated for their

political activism, and Chateaubriand once again demonstrates his own engaged quality as a writer by challenging them and their successors so directly. Yet he declares that the audience for his polemics will not be these irreligious writers themselves, for they are beyond redemption. Chateaubriand says that trying to convert the philosophes is one of the biggest mistakes committed by earlier Christian apologists. Instead, Chateaubriand says that he will target a general audience using arguments of widespread appeal. In particular, he will avoid theological claims. Chateaubriand asks rhetorically and then answers, “Qui est-ce qui liraient maintenant un ouvrage de théologie ? quelques hommes pieux qui n’ont pas besoin d’être convaincus ; quelques vrais chrétiens déjà persuadés.” Chateaubriand’s belief that theology will avail him little to nothing accords perfectly with the theory of melodrama elaborated by Peter Brooks and others. Brooks suggests that the attempted reestablishment of religious hegemony would likely include the reformation of theology or the formation of a new one, but that this would always ultimately fall back to more mundane, down-to-earth justifications for itself, in other words justifications that are moralistic and melodramatic in nature.

This kind of retreat from theology to morality is clearly evident in the previous passage from the Génie. Chateaubriand admits that virtually all his arguments in defense of Christianity will be practical ones. He will certainly rebuff the attacks of the philosophes, by saying that Christianity actually facilitates human freedom, the arts, literature, and science. Nevertheless, the most important practical arguments that Chateaubriand makes are those grounded solidly in morality. The preeminence of Christian morality in Chateaubriand’s thinking is clear from the fact that he waxes most poetic when speaking of it. On the subject of Christianity, Chateaubriand writes above, “On devait montrer qu’il n’y a rien de plus divin que sa morale.” He praises his religion for “purifying taste, developing virtuous passions...and offering noble forms to the writer.” One can see here the moralizing direction in which

Chateaubriand is headed, and in particular the focus on sexuality. A “purified” taste in art and literature, a taste for the depiction of “virtuous passions” is probably not one that will be interested in sexual variations or, for that matter, anything but the most orthodox and traditional sexual behavior. Chateaubriand will later be much more direct on the subject of sexuality, but even he admits that his basic agenda is already transparent: “Ici le lecteur voit notre ouvrage.” The full melodramatic sweep of the Génie du Christianisme may not be evident from this one citation, but the inability to defend religion as in the past, the need to humanize faith and to focus on its moral implications is already clear. Chateaubriand’s reduction of aesthetic beauty to moral beauty, itself based on quite a conservative notion of morality, is also suggested in the lines above. This seems to be meaning of another rhetorical question, “Le christianisme sera-t-il moins vrai quand il paraîtra plus beau ?” Chateaubriand aims to prove the truth of Christianity by demonstrating its beauty, but with a very particular meaning to beauty. A very similar aesthetic debate, also centered on religion and morality, will resurface at the time of the Dreyfus Affair and will prompt a significant response from Proust.

Paul Bénichou is a scholar who has written perceptively on Chateaubriand’s motives for writing the Génie. Bénichou speaks of Chateaubriand’s “projet d’une apologie du christianisme, fondée sur la convenance humaine et la beauté de la religion” (64). Bénichou indicates that several Christian apologists in the decades prior to 1789 had made somewhat similar arguments of a practical nature, but that Chateaubriand’s effort was more overt, adamant and focused. The post-revolutionary period also gave this kind of project an urgency it never could have had during the *ancien régime*.

En tout cas, au XVIII^e siècle était déjà apparu un type d’apologie moderne, franchement opportuniste, parfois qualifié par les historiens de « pragmatique ». Chateaubriand, talent à part, n’innovait donc pas tout à fait. Et d’autre part, dans la science de la persuasion, dont relève toute apologie, c’est un axiome évident qu’il faut

plaire pour convaincre ; il le faut d'autant plus impérieusement en matière religieuse que la stricte vérité des dogmes se trouve plus ébranlée dans les esprits, même si cet argument, trop clairement marqué, risque de choquer les âmes pieuses. Chateaubriand innove en ceci qu'il ne mâche pas les mots pour défendre son livre... L'audace de Chateaubriand répond à un état d'urgence. Il avait éprouvé en lui et autour de lui que le désir de croire cherchait d'autres appuis que ceux de la théologie et de l'argumentation traditionnelle. Cette prise de conscience d'un présent généralement inaperçu confirmait sa conviction générale selon laquelle la société de jadis ne redeviendrait plus jamais la même. On peut regretter l'état de choses disparu, mais c'est en fonction du présent qu'il faut, pensait-il, agir... Il semble que la partie la plus exigeante de l'opinion contre-révolutionnaire de cette époque accepte qu'il soit plus urgent, dans l'intérêt de la foi, de reconforter et de ressaisir la fidélité des tièdes par des arguments à leur portée que de répéter aux plus convaincus ce qu'ils savent déjà. (64-65) [Emphasis in original]

One benefit of this passage is Bénichou's indirect acknowledgement that Chateaubriand was counter-revolutionary and that so is the Génie. To some readers, this may seem like stating the obvious, but this fact nevertheless needs open acknowledgement. Bénichou says that counter-revolutionary opinion leaders cut Chateaubriand some slack over his pragmatic, non-theological defense of Christianity, because they viewed the religious situation at the time to be so dire. The casualness with which Bénichou writes about the counter-revolutionary response to the Génie stems from the fact that Chateaubriand himself belonged to this group. Some awareness of the chief political allegiances of the authors under discussion here is necessary, because melodrama's major presence on both sides of the most fraught ideological divides will be the source of much of the Recherche's humor. The Recherche will lightheartedly cross and re-cross this divide, humorously pointing out the similarly conservative sexual morality on both sides, a morality heavily inflected by melodrama. Paul Bénichou also recapitulates in memorable form a central idea of the theorists of melodrama, the idea that the French Revolution had irrevocably changed the religious landscape: "la société de jadis ne redeviendrait plus jamais la même. On peut regretter l'état de choses disparu, mais c'est en fonction du présent qu'il faut, pensait-il, agir." This changed religious landscape is what made the production of melodrama much more likely, virtually

inevitable, along with the radically conservative sexual ideology that accompanied the more extreme forms of melodrama. Paul Bénichou speaks openly of Chateaubriand's audacity in the Génie, but his greatest audacity may be in an area where Bénichou is silent, in the area of sexual politics.

Chateaubriand's radically conservative views on sex first appear rather early in the Génie. As shown in the last chapter, theorists have described the fundamentally conservative views of sex and family that are promoted in melodrama, regardless of its political affiliation. Given that these same theorists have not yet defined an epic form of melodrama, they have not speculated as to the most likely impact of epic aggrandizement on the already conservative sexual politics. The suggestion was made in the last chapter that the sheer force of the collapse of the grandiose religious project elaborated openly only in the epic form might well further radicalize standard melodrama's already quite conservative sexual morality. Starting from a much more openly ambitious point than the standard form and failing much more spectacularly in its vain attempt to restore the traditional Sacred, melodramatic epic produces not merely a conservative sexual ethos, but an ethos that is extremely conservative, often unrealistic and impractical, and sometimes downright weird. Zola's Évangile novels will advocate procreation to the utmost and disparage virtually any life decisions that do not contribute to the larger goal of increasing the human population. For his part, Chateaubriand goes to the opposite extreme and promotes virginity in the Génie and Les Martyrs, albeit not with quite the same rigor that Zola promotes procreation in the Évangiles. The internal logic of Zola's final novels suggests that every healthy adult should procreate. Chateaubriand's early writings do not go so far as to counsel virginity for everyone, but they do advise sexual abstinence for significant numbers of adults. Both Chateaubriand's and Zola's epics are equally critical of non-normative sexual practices.

A reason why some melodramatic epics would encourage virginity while others would advocate its apparent opposite, maximal procreation, might be found by looking back, once again, to the French Revolution. Melodramatic epics that are Christian in inspiration and that seek the official restoration of the religion disestablished and suppressed by the Revolution would be more likely to promote virginity, whereas melodramatic epics that aspire to invent an entirely new official religion in opposition to Christianity and in the spirit of the revolutionary Cult of Reason would be more likely to celebrate procreation. Although this reasoning may appear strange, it rests on an understanding on the extraordinary emphasis that melodramatic epic places on personal morality. For reasons explained previously, personal morality winds up bearing enormous weight in advancing the grandiose religious agenda of melodramatic epic, and this weighty burden can produce an extreme sexual ethic. For example, Chateaubriand claims that Christianity still deserves its *ancien régime* preeminence largely due to the superiority of Christian personal morality. This places Chateaubriand in the position of having to justify various aspects of Christian views on sex, including the long tradition of promoting celibacy in certain contexts, such as in the Catholic priesthood. He also must deal with the fact that Christ and the Virgin Mary have by tradition been depicted as lifelong virgins. The unusual zeal of his apologetics, combined with his early decision to abjure many types of theological arguments, thus making morality the chief pillar of his ambitious agenda, leads Chateaubriand to endorse lifelong virginity in many more contexts than the priesthood. How he does this will be shown in a moment. Zola, on the other hand, can be seen celebrating maximal procreation in an effort to distinguish the secular religion of reason and science promoted in his Évangiles from Christianity. Zola claims that celibacy and lifelong virginity play a central role in Christianity, a claim which may seem exaggerated. Reading Chateaubriand, however, one can see where Zola might have gotten such ideas from

a French author of the first rank who was also a Catholic partisan. Of course, what is important for the comedy in Proust's Recherche is that, in spite of their many differences, melodramatic epicists agreed on extremism in sexual morality.

In the Génie du Christianisme, Chateaubriand broaches the subject of sex by giving a classic defense of celibacy for priests, explaining that sexual abstinence frees them to devote themselves full time to their special works of charity, prayer, and study (501). Yet Chateaubriand's praise of celibacy and virginity goes much further than defending their appropriateness for priests. He goes so far as to claim that virginity and chastity allow people in all walks of life access to the highest spiritual states attainable. He suggests that celibacy and/or virginity uniquely allow for spiritual perfection in all humans. In the following citation, Chateaubriand subtly expands the discussion of celibacy from the narrow topic of priests and members of religious orders to celibacy for all people:

Dans l'homme, la virginité prend un caractère sublime. Troublée par les orages du cœur, si elle résiste, elle devient céleste. « Une âme chaste, dit saint Bernard, est par vertu ce que l'ange est par nature. Il y plus de bonheur dans la *chasteté* de l'ange, mais il y a plus de courage dans celle de l'homme. » Chez le religieux, elle se transforme en humanité, témoins ces *Pères de la Rédemption* et tous ces *Ordres hospitaliers* consacrés au soulagement de nos douleurs. Elle se change en étude chez le savant ; elle devient méditation dans le solitaire : caractère essentiel de l'âme et de la force mentale, il n'y a point d'homme qui n'en ait senti l'avantage pour se livrer aux travaux de l'esprit ; elle est donc la première des qualités, puisqu'elle donne une nouvelle vigueur à l'âme, et l'âme est la plus belle partie de nous-mêmes. (503-504) [Emphasis in original]

Virginity and chastity elevate humans to the status of angels, according to this passage from the Génie. Chateaubriand approvingly quotes St. Bernard who supposedly said, "A chaste soul is by virtue what an angel is by nature. There is more happiness in the chastity of an angel, but more courage in that of a human." Thus, even angels obtain extraordinary benefits from chastity. This belief shows how far Chateaubriand strays from Milton, whom in many respects he admires, because Milton allows that angels have sex as a matter of course.

Chateaubriand's epic Les Martyrs contains actual angels and devils as characters, but sexual love is associated only with the devils, chiefly in the form of the Demon of Sensuality (237-244). New, post-revolutionary epic – melodramatic epic, in other words – lacks Milton's relaxed, sensible, imaginative attitude toward sex. Such is the case, at the very least, for the epic texts under consideration here. There is no doubt that Chateaubriand recommends chastity to all humans, saying that it is "the foremost virtue, the virtue that invigorates the soul, the most beautiful part of ourselves." He specifically recommends chastity for scholars and those living alone. Elsewhere in the Génie, Chateaubriand notes approvingly that many civilizations have elevated virgins to special status and that nature prizes virginity among animals and plants (502-503). Chateaubriand will later make virginity a central theme of his epic Les Martyrs in a way that resembles the centrality of procreation in the first of Zola's Évangiles, Fécondité.

Chateaubriand's beliefs on sex provide an even stranger and more complete mirror image of Zola's beliefs on the same subject. As just indicated, the Évangiles encourage procreation. Fécondité, the first Évangile, contains a lengthy discussion of natalist theory, the concept that population growth is required for human civilization to thrive. The details of Zola's use of natalist theory in Fécondité will be explored in the next chapter, but some awareness of his approach is needed to appreciate the irony of the peculiar demographic argument that Chateaubriand makes in the Génie du Christianisme. One may reasonably wonder why a study such as the Génie needs an extended discussion of demographics, and an unusual, highly speculative discussion, at that. The surprising presence of such a section probably results from the ferocity of nineteenth-century French religious polemics. Chateaubriand seems to want to preempt all possible criticism and not give his adversaries any quarter. He realizes that his extreme stand on virginity and celibacy could be challenged on

demographic grounds, because if these practices were adopted by significant numbers, as Chateaubriand seems to want to see happen, then the population in France and, indeed, all around the globe might shrink considerably. Far from avoiding this criticism, Chateaubriand attacks it head on, going so far as to assert that a shrinking population would be good, because there are already too many people in the world. This is part of what he says on the subject:

Or, il nous paraît qu'une des premières lois naturelles qui dut s'abolir à la nouvelle alliance, fut celle qui favorisait la population, au-delà de certaines bornes. Autre fut Jésus-Christ, autre Abraham : celui-ci parut dans un temps d'innocence, dans un temps où la terre manquait d'habitants ; Jésus-Christ vint, au contraire, au milieu de la corruption des hommes, et lorsque le monde avait perdu sa solitude. La pudeur peut donc fermer aujourd'hui le sein des femmes ; la seconde Ève, en guérissant les maux dont la première avait été frappée, a fait descendre la virginité du ciel, pour nous donner une idée de cet état de pureté et de joie, qui précéda les antiques douleurs de la mère. Le législateur des chrétiens naquit d'une vierge, et mourut vierge. N'a-t-il pas voulu nous enseigner par là, sous les rapports politiques et naturels, que la terre était arrivée à son complément d'habitants, et que, loin de multiplier les générations, il faudrait désormais les restreindre ? À l'appui de cette opinion, on remarque que les États ne périssent jamais par le défaut, mais par le trop grand nombre d'hommes. Une population excessive est le fléau des empires. (500)

One can probably be forgiven for experiencing a certain degree of shock at the content of this passage. A good case can be made for the existence of the genre of melodramatic epic, to which would belong both Zola's Évangiles and the work for which the Génie serves as prelude, Chateaubriand's Les Martyrs, from the mere fact that Zola's final, epic novels contain passages extremely similar to this one. The passages in the Évangiles are similar, that is to say, in a perfectly inverse way. Zola will make equally peculiar demographic arguments heavily inflected by a kind of religious sentiment, but this time in support of population growth. It is important to remember that, in the case of both Chateaubriand and Zola, the demographic notions are strictly in the service of a moral crusade, a crusade focused on the proper role of sex in society. The hard-to-resist impression that demography is simply being exploited in both cases explains why these writers' ideas on population seem equally unconvincing and peculiar.

Strange as they are, Chateaubriand's demographic arguments merit commentary. The "new alliance" to which Chateaubriand refers at the top of the passage above is the entirely new world conditions created by Christ's coming down to Earth. Chateaubriand asserts that Christ's coming rendered null and void the Old Testament command to "be fruitful and multiply." Christ's arrival signaled that humans should stop having sex to staunch the rising tide of decadence; the already large size of the human population meant that they could afford the inevitable demographic cost if they stopped all sex, including the procreative kind. The "Second Eve," in other words the Virgin Mary, brought virginity down from heaven to (re)instruct humanity about "this state of purity and joy." Chateaubriand's phrasing here suggests, once again, that virginity and/or chastity is the natural state in heaven. Chateaubriand next draws universal significance out of the fact that both Christ and his mother were lifelong virgins. The author's eagerness to claim that Christ was teaching a precise demographic lesson through the example of his own life will surprise many readers today, all the more so in that the lesson Christ was supposedly teaching was to shrink the human population.

Today, conservative religious opposition to abortion and many forms of birth control might lead one to expect that a figure from the past with Chateaubriand's religious leanings would support an expanding population, or at least sexual practices and family arrangements that would likely have an expanding population as one of its results. The opposite expectation might arise for a figure with Zola's generally leftist political orientation. The fact that such expectations, based on today's political alignments, would be so wrong illustrates the danger of interpreting nineteenth-century religious conflict by the standards of today's religious controversies. Some similarities do exist between then and now, but there are at least as many differences. Christian and secular camps appear to have swapped positions on some of these

issues. The evolution of these politico-religious positions and from one century to the next has to be something for other scholars to delineate. The present project, which shows how this debate on sex, religion and demographics unfolded within certain nineteenth-century epic texts and related works of literary criticism, is already sufficiently complex.

The Génie du Christianisme grapples with the same large-scale religious and social issues that would preoccupy the emerging genre of melodramatic epic, but Chateaubriand's famous study also promotes the smaller-scale characteristics that are typical of standard melodrama. This makes sense, because melodramatic epic is most definitely still melodrama and displays many, if not all of the same features as the standard form. The argument being advanced here is that the Génie du Christianisme helped define the new sub-genre of melodramatic epic, but the Génie likely also gave prominence to the melodramatic mode of writing more generally. Chateaubriand wrote and published the Génie in very same years that Pixérécourt was inventing the basic pattern for melodramatic theater, a pattern that would be enormously influential and come to be adopted by writers in various genres for many decades to come. There is a key moment within the Génie where Chateaubriand advocates sentiments and ideas that are characteristic of both the standard and epic forms of melodrama. At the conclusion of the Génie's lengthy first section, Chateaubriand draws an extended contrast between religion and atheism. For Chateaubriand, philosophical atheism, particularly of the sort that motivated many of the 1789 revolutionaries, was the chief ideological adversary against which he was writing the Génie. Consequently, this extended, side-by-side contrast of religion and atheism is very revealing of Chateaubriand's fundamental thought processes, and melodrama seems to be at the core of his thinking. The religion that Chateaubriand principally has in mind while elaborating this contrast is, of course, Christianity, but he occasionally expands his discussion to encompass religion more generally, in order to make that point that

virtually any religion, even including non-Christian ones, is better than atheism. The passage below contains the majority of Chateaubriand's extended contrast. A close reading will follow.

...car s'il était vrai, comme il est faux, que l'esprit tînt la balance égale entre Dieu et l'athéisme, encore est-il certain qu'elle pencherait beaucoup du côté du premier : outre la moitié de sa raison, l'homme met de plus dans le bassin de Dieu tout le poids de son cœur.

On sera convaincu de cette vérité, si l'on examine la manière dont l'athéisme et la religion procèdent dans leurs démonstrations.

La religion ne se sert que de preuves générales ; elle ne juge que sur l'ordonnance des cieux, sur les lois de l'univers ; elle ne voit que les grâces de la nature, les instincts charmants des animaux, et leurs convenances avec l'homme.

L'athéisme ne vous apporte que de honteuses exceptions ; il n'aperçoit que des désordres, des marais, des volcans, des bêtes nuisibles ; et, comme s'il cherchait à se cacher dans la boue, il interroge les reptiles et les insectes, pour lui fournir des preuves contre Dieu.

La religion ne parle que de la grandeur et de la beauté de l'homme :

L'athéisme a toujours la lèpre et la peste à vous offrir.

La religion tire ses raisons de la sensibilité de l'âme, des plus doux attachements de la vie, de la piété filiale, de l'amour conjugal, de la tendresse maternelle :

L'athéisme réduit tout à l'instinct de la bête ; et, pour premier argument de son système, il vous étale un cœur que rien ne peut toucher.

Enfin, dans le culte du chrétien, on nous assure que nos maux auront un terme ; on nous console, on essuie nos pleurs, on nous promet une autre vie :

Dans le culte de l'athée, les Douleurs humaines font fumer l'encens, la Mort est le sacrificeur, l'autel un Cercueil, et le Néant la divinité. (619-620)

Given that the Génie is a work of cultural commentary rather than a work of fiction, the best way to appreciate the significant melodrama contained in the passage above may be by imagining characters who personify the sharp contrast that Chateaubriand delineates here. If one imagined a play in which one character personified all the goodness and sensitivity that Chateaubriand attributes here to Christianity while another character personified the thoroughly despicable meanness that Chateaubriand attributes to atheism, then one might well conclude that this work of fiction was a melodrama. If these two characters were set in conflict with each other, if each clearly symbolized a major division within a vast society, if the fate of an empire or of the entire world rested on the outcome of their conflict, and, finally, if the

drama unfolded against a backdrop of extreme religious turmoil, where the most fundamental religious questions were thrown in doubt and where the future of an official state religion was at stake, then this imaginary work of fiction would in all likelihood be a melodramatic epic. It might well be a melodramatic epic similar to Les Martyrs. Indeed, Chateaubriand's Les Martyrs is a fictional enactment of the sharp dichotomy delineated in the citation above. The fact that, throughout much of the Génie, Chateaubriand is explicitly or implicitly contrasting Christianity with outright atheism, rather than with another religion or an alternative version of Christianity, indicates the intense religious turmoil and doubt that had seeped into the French cultural landscape as a consequence of the 1789 Revolution. The presence of that much uncertainty and turmoil provided the kind of climate most conducive to melodrama.

As for the most common characteristics of standard melodrama, Chateaubriand deploys all six in the long citation above. The six most common characteristics are these: a Manichaeist view of the world, overwrought emotion and pathos, repetitious didacticism, a radically democratic outlook, political engagement, and finally, a conservative sexual politics anchored by a sharp focus on the plight of children and/or women (Lasseigne 298). It bears repeating that the blend of these features is what makes for melodrama. Other modes of writing can adopt one or two of these traits, but a truly melodramatic work displays all or most of them. Furthermore, melodrama is much more than just Manichaeism, the battle between absolute good and absolute evil. Manichaeism in one form or another has been around for millennia, but melodrama in the full sense of the term is much newer. In the long citation above, Chateaubriand's early emphasis on the role of the heart in choosing religion, combined with a constant awareness of the threat of atheism, grounds his apologetics in melodrama. Only the heart feels the pathos that all melodrama exhibits. Unlike the exacting logic of reason, the heart actually enjoys or can at least choose to ignore melodrama's didactic

repetitiousness. Also unlike reason, an attribute in which the educated elite or the very intelligent are supposed to have an advantage, the heart is a much more democratic site. Traditionally if stereotypically, women have been known for their close connection to affairs of the heart, and nothing moves the heart as readily as the plight of a child. Thus, Chateaubriand's invocation of the heart over reason near the beginning of this contrast between religion and atheism automatically opens a direct path to most of the standard melodramatic characteristics.

The overt Manichaeism in the remainder of the passage removes any doubt about the melodrama within Chateaubriand's approach. The Manichaeism derives, of course, from the contrast between religion's complete goodness and atheism's utter evil. At its very end, the passage depicts atheism as taking pleasure in the suffering of humans and as creating more suffering deliberately for its own sinister ends. Admittedly, Chateaubriand's language here is very figurative, but atheism clearly comes across as the source of much, if not most human agony, making it and those who espouse it perfect melodramatic villains. Religion's sanguine view of nature, presented early in passage, does not absolve nature of responsibility in sometimes causing human suffering. Instead, it highlights religion's power to alleviate human pain, whether that pain is brought on by natural causes or otherwise. Regardless, Chateaubriand depicts religion and those who best embody it as the perfect melodramatic heroes. The Manichaeism also clearly extends to sex and family issues, which occupy a privileged place in the last citation. Chateaubriand portrays religion as the natural home of conservative family values and atheism as the antithesis of those values. He writes, "La religion tire ses raisons de la sensibilité de l'âme, des plus doux attachements de la vie, de la piété filiale, de l'amour conjugal, de la tendresse maternelle : L'athéisme réduit tout à l'instinct de la bête ; et, pour premier argument de son système, il vous étale un cœur que rien

ne peut toucher.” Thus, atheism is utterly incompatible with the tenderest feelings known to humans, those born from traditional family bonds. A likely further implication of these lines is that atheism has the power to actively destroy such feelings and bonds whenever it gets the opportunity. The stage therefore is set for an epic conflict between religion and atheism where the stakes are as vast as the entire universe but the main battlefield is as small-scale and intimate as sex and family relationships.

Chateaubriand would soon get the chance to create an epic with precisely that dynamic, as soon as he began writing Les Martyrs. In the meantime, he could write extensively on his conception of the ideal epic and also apply the sentimental, melodramatic standard developed throughout the Génie to previous epics, including those from antiquity and those written in more recent times. This task of literary criticism is the subject of the second of the Génie’s four divisions. The Génie du Christianisme has a great deal to say about epic, both as a literary genre in general and in terms of specific examples of the genre. Chateaubriand’s very peculiar aesthetic judgments come out most clearly in this discussion of epic.

Fundamentally, the objective of the Génie’s second part is to distinguish between Christian and non-Christian literature. Chateaubriand tries to demonstrate that, everything else being equal, any given Christian literary work will always be superior to its counterpart written without the benefit of Christian inspiration. More precisely, however, the goal of the Génie’s second part is to describe what the ideal (Christian) epic would look like. Epic occupies this important place within the Génie’s literary criticism, because Chateaubriand believes that epic is the premier literary form, the most expansive, interesting, and engaging, the one most nearly universal in its scope. Most of the examples that Chateaubriand cites in support of his literary theories are taken from epics from various national traditions and different time periods. The Génie’s heavy promotion of epic helps explain why Chateaubriand played a pivotal role in the

emergence of new epic in the first two decades following the French Revolution. Below, Chateaubriand argues for the preeminence of epic by contrasting it with tragedy, the only other literary form that he believes could plausibly lay claim to this crown.

...l'Épopée est la première des compositions poétiques. Aristote, il est vrai, a prétendu que le poème épique est tout entier dans la tragédie ; mais ne pourrait-on pas croire, au contraire, que c'est le drame qui est tout entier dans l'Épopée ?... Toute espèce de ton, même le ton comique, toute harmonie poétique, depuis la lyre, jusqu'à la trompette, peuvent se faire entendre dans l'Épopée. L'Épopée a donc des parties qui manquent au drame ; elle demande donc un talent plus universel ; elle est donc une œuvre plus complète que la tragédie. En effet, on peut avancer, avec quelque vraisemblance, qu'il est moins difficile de faire les cinq actes d'un *Œdipe roi*, que de créer les vingt-quatre livres d'une *Illiade*. Autre chose est de produire un ouvrage de quelques mois de travail, autre chose est d'élever un monument qui demande les labeurs de toute une vie. Sophocle et Euripide étaient sans doute de beaux génies, mais ont-ils obtenu dans les siècles cette admiration, cette hauteur de renommée, dont jouissent si justement Homère et Virgile ? Enfin, si le drame est la première des compositions, et que l'Épopée ne soit que la seconde, comment se fait-il que, depuis les Grecs jusqu'à nous, on ne compte que cinq ou six poèmes épiques, tandis qu'il n'y a pas de nations qui ne se vantent de posséder plusieurs bonnes tragédies ? (628)

The powerful moralizing tendencies inherent to melodramatic epic can yield peculiar and highly debatable aesthetic judgments, judgments that sparked controversy from the start of the nineteenth century and that would finally lead to a response within Proust's Recherche. Although Chateaubriand does not discuss morality while declaring here the supremacy of epic, he does make sweeping pronouncements of the kind that will raise eyebrows once he begins distinguishing moral from immoral literature. The expression of boundless admiration for epic is perhaps understandable coming from a true advocate of the genre, but Chateaubriand walks on much thinner ice when he makes invidious comparisons to tragedy, especially when he casts doubt on some of the most celebrated examples of that genre. What possible benefit could be derived from saying that Sophocles's Oedipus Rex required less work to write than Homer's Iliad? Chateaubriand suggests that Homer poured the accumulated labor and wisdom of his entire life into the Iliad, whereas Euripides and Sophocles put much less of their time and of themselves into their plays. Chateaubriand also suggests that Homer's talent was more

universal than that of Sophocles and Euripides. It goes without saying, of course, that the reputation and influence of Sophocles and Euripides through the ages have been enormous, so one wonders what the point could be of contrasting them in this way to Homer. There actually is a point, but not the one Chateaubriand is trying to make, and it is integral to an understanding of melodramatic epic. The willingness to make invidious comparisons, to put down competing literary works, genres, and theories – including, most especially, utterly canonical ones – is at the heart of the aesthetic promoted, if not always practiced, by melodramatic epic. Extended to the realm of aesthetics, the Manichaeism within melodrama produces a strong tendency to declare that certain kinds of art and literature are bad, or at least vastly inferior to other kinds which are loudly championed. When the boundary between aesthetics and moral edification blurs, as it often does in melodramatic epic, the value judgments on art and literature become even more problematic. What Chateaubriand says here about Euripides and Sophocles is tame compared to what follows in the Génie, when he speaks more directly to the issue of morality in literature.

For the purposes of the present study, of course, the most important thing about the last citation is the impetus it provides to the epic genre in early nineteenth-century France. At the same time that Chateaubriand is slighting the achievements of Sophocles and Euripides, he gives an implicit but unmistakable call for the resurrection of the epic in post-revolutionary France. A genre as marvelous, stirring and all-embracing as epic appears within Chateaubriand's description would have to tempt ambitious young authors in the Napoleonic period and beyond to try their hands at it. Any author thus intrigued by Chateaubriand's favorite genre would surely take notice, however, of his statement that "on ne compte que cinq ou six poèmes épiques, tandis qu'il n'y a pas de nations qui ne se vantent de posséder plusieurs bonnes tragédies." This bizarre claim that only five or six true epics have ever been

written is in keeping with Chateaubriand's unproductive and sweeping criticisms of tragedy and of two of that genre's greatest ancient practitioners. Chateaubriand discusses many more than five or six epics throughout the Génie, so he clearly is making a provocative statement here with this very low number. Chateaubriand seems to be saying that he well knows that more than five or six works called epics have been written, but that only five or six are truly worthy of the name. Such a reading of this passage is borne out by the rest of the Génie. Within the Génie's literary commentary, Chateaubriand will be just as harshly critical of many epics as he is of literary texts of other kinds. The great Homer himself is not spared serious criticism, which makes sense, given that Chateaubriand aims primarily to demonstrate the superiority of Christian over non-Christian literature. Nonetheless, as will be shown in a moment, even Christian epics such as Milton's Paradise Lost and Dante's Divine Comedy are faulted in fundamental ways. The fact that Chateaubriand has serious complaints about all previous examples of his favorite genre, whether they be Christian or not, lends credence to a claim that will be developed more in a moment, which is that Chateaubriand actually champions the creation of a new kind of epic, but without being so bold as to say so. Chateaubriand will say that he is promoting the continuation of the Christian epic tradition, when in fact he is laboring to define a new kind of epic: melodramatic epic, but without that name.

Two final points need to be made concerning the passage on epic and tragedy. The first, which is rather simple, has been mentioned earlier in these pages and will be mentioned again later. Despite appearances, Chateaubriand's concept of epic is not limited to the kind written in verse. Les Martyrs will be written in prose, as is at least one epic discussed in the Génie, Fénelon's Télémaque. When Chateaubriand writes, as he does at the top of the last citation, that "l'Épopée est la première des compositions poétiques," he is using the most

expansive definition of “poetry,” the one where the term practically becomes synonymous with “literature.” The other point worth highlighting is Chateaubriand’s observation that epic can even include comic tones. He writes, “Toute espèce de ton, même le ton comique...[peut] se faire entendre dans l’Épopée.” This is indisputably true – there is certainly significant humor in the Odyssey, as well as dark humor throughout Dante’s Inferno – but this does not mean that Chateaubriand encourages the use of comedy in the new kind of epic that he envisions in the Génie – quite the contrary. In many ways, comedy is the antithesis of the tone that Chateaubriand wants to predominate in his new kind of epic, the tone that he wants to associate with virtue and morality. At the very beginning of the Génie, Chateaubriand says that Christianity has been attacked by three sorts of enemies throughout its history, and that the worst of these have been comics. The very first lines of the Génie proper are the following:

Depuis que le christianisme a paru sur la terre, trois espèces d’ennemis l’ont constamment attaqué : les hérésiarques, les sophistes, et ces hommes en apparence frivoles, qui détruisent tout en riant. De nombreux apologistes ont victorieusement répondu aux subtilités et aux mensonges ; mais ils ont été moins heureux contre la dérision. (465)

Chateaubriand seems to believe that humorists are and always have been Christianity’s worst enemies. In fact, Chateaubriand rather clearly states that laughter itself is harmful to the faith, not just laughter aimed directly at the Church, that comes overtly at its expense. Laughter destroys all that is good: “ces hommes en apparence frivoles, qui détruisent tout en riant.” Even the heretics and sophists are not as dangerous. It is important to remember that these are the very first lines of the Génie, which indicates the importance that Chateaubriand attaches to his dislike of humor. In fact, an interrelated way of reading these lines, which appear in the section where Chateaubriand finds fault with previous Christian apologists, is that Chateaubriand plans to succeed where others have failed in part by being the first Christian apologist to defend religion against comedy’s challenge. A careful reading of

the Génie and of its companion epic, Les Martyrs, does permit the conclusion that Chateaubriand had an intense phobia regarding humor. This phobia will make the contrast with Proust all the starker and sets the stage for Zola, who also shows a marked dislike for frivolity in his Évangiles and associates it with evil. Since Chateaubriand will write Les Martyrs shortly afterwards to demonstrate the theories contained in the Génie, comedy and frivolity will be associated with evil there, as well.

Chateaubriand's profound appreciation of the epic genre is always clear in the Génie. Much less clear is the degree to which he approves of individual epics, and this uncertainty as to his opinion extends even to the most celebrated epics from the past. Chateaubriand adores the notion of epic; epic is an ideal for him; but he has serious objections to every concrete example of the genre that he takes into consideration in the Génie. What might smack of disorganization or contradictoriness in the Génie's extensive commentary on literature is actually unsureness on Chateaubriand's part as to how radical he wants to appear, most especially on the subject of epic. To some degree, this problem permeates the entire Génie. Chateaubriand forthrightly admits that his defense of Christianity takes place on new and different grounds, quite different from the approach taken by Christian apologists in the past. Yet Chateaubriand never answers the question as to whether a major change in the defense of Christianity is itself tantamount to a change in the substance of the religion, or at least tantamount to a major change in people's understanding of that religion. Likewise, Chateaubriand never answers the question as to whether he is building the theoretical basis for a new kind of epic in the Génie. In passages such as the one below, however, one can catch a glimpse of how Chateaubriand is indeed inventing a new kind of epic, and this process of invention becomes even clearer if the statements below are read in light of other key passages from the Génie's literary commentary. Having already established the primacy of the epic

genre in the abstract, Chateaubriand proceeds to describe the features that make for the best kind of epic. In other words, Chateaubriand tries to set standards and establish guidelines for epic, and yet no example of the genre written to that point in time actually meets the standards he sets.

Posons d'abord quelques principes. Dans toute Épopée, les hommes et leurs passions sont faits pour occuper la première et la plus grande place. Ainsi, tout poème où une religion est employée comme *sujet* et non comme *accessoire*, où le *merveilleux* est le *fond* et non l'*accident* du tableau, pêche essentiellement par la base. Si Homère et Virgile avaient établi leurs scènes dans l'Olympe, il est douteux, malgré leur génie, qu'ils eussent pu soutenir jusqu'au bout l'intérêt dramatique. D'après cette remarque, il ne faut plus attribuer au christianisme la langueur qui règne dans les poèmes dont les principaux personnages sont des êtres surnaturels : cette langueur tient au vice même de la composition. Nous verrons, à l'appui de cette vérité, que plus le poète, dans l'Épopée, garde un juste milieu entre les choses divines et les choses humaines, plus il devient *divertissant*... *Divertir*, afin d'*enseigner*, est la première qualité requise en poésie... le premier ouvrage qui s'offre à nous est la *Divina Commedia* du Dante. Les beautés de cette production bizarre découlent presque entièrement du christianisme ; ses défauts tiennent au siècle et au mauvais goût de l'auteur. (629) [Emphasis in original]

Chateaubriand is not the most systematic of writers. There does exist an internal logic to the Génie's literary criticism, but Chateaubriand's arguments do not unfold in the most logical sequence possible. His invention of new kind of epic, in theory if not yet in fact, emerges from certain key points known about his thinking based upon the above passage and a few others, already cited here. Chateaubriand believes the following things about epic: first, religion is important, but it should remain in the background and not take center stage; second, human passions and pathos should occupy the most prominent place; third, the literary treatment of the passions should above all else serve didactic ends; fourth, Christianity provides a better framework for depicting passions to didactic ends than does any other religion yet known; fifth, many, if not all, previous Christian epics have made the mistake of not focusing sufficiently on human passions; sixth, the tender emotions associated with traditional family relationships are some of the most important passions to depict. The first,

second, third, and fifth of these points are found in the last citation, just above. Point four, concerning Christianity's superiority to other religions for this kind of literary creation, was advanced in two previous passages cited here. For example, in the preface to Les Martyrs, Chateaubriand says that he was demonstrating that "la Religion chrétienne me paraissait plus favorable que le Paganisme au développement des caractères, et au jeu des passions dans l'Épopée" (29). Point six, concerning the importance of traditional family relationships, appeared in another previous citation.

Taken together, these six points provide more than a little support for understanding Chateaubriand as saying that his ideal epic remains to be written. Put another way, Chateaubriand seems to be saying that no epic yet written, not even among the Christian inspired epics, meets his standards. The brutal attack on Dante at the end of the passage above certainly adds credence to this interpretation. Chateaubriand blasts the Divine Comedy for being a "production bizarre" and speaks of the "mauvais goût de l'auteur." Even the complimentary remark that Chateaubriand makes about Homer and Vergil has very real limits. He praises the renowned ancient epicists for striking a good balance between scenes set among the pagan gods in Olympus and scenes set on earth, depicting the unfolding human drama. Yet Chateaubriand will very soon blame these same ancient authors for not infusing enough tenderness or enough pathos in his human scenes, and this is a fault that he blames on the inherent limitations of paganism. For Chateaubriand to say that his kind of epic has yet to be written is really the same as saying that he envisions a new, better kind of epic. In short, Chateaubriand invents or conceives of a new kind of epic, one which happens to bear many similarities to melodramatic epic as defined here.

Chateaubriand attacks Dante's Divine Comedy by name in the last passage, but he levels the following accusation at a much larger number of Christian epics: "il ne faut plus

attribuer au christianisme la langueur qui règne dans les poèmes dont les principaux personnages sont des êtres surnaturels : cette langueur tient au vice même de la composition.”

The key word in this reproach is “languueur,” a literary attribute that Chateaubriand clearly detests, whether found in epic or any other literary genre. “Languueur” in French, along with its English cognate “languor,” literally means a lack of activity, energy and ardor. Used as a description of literature, “languor” can, for all practical purposes, be read as the polar opposite of melodrama. By definition, melodrama has a great deal of passion, activity, excitement and adventure, the very qualities Chateaubriand finds sorely lacking in earlier, languorous Christian epics. Thus, without using the term, Chateaubriand is effectively blaming earlier Christian epics for not containing enough melodrama. Chateaubriand’s failure simply to use the word “melodrama” is not really surprising and does not detract from the claim that the Génie promotes a melodramatic aesthetic, particularly for the genre of epic. As James L. Smith has explained thoroughly, the term “melodrama” was coined or invented at the end of the eighteenth century, and its meaning was still in some flux at the dawn of the nineteenth. The first meaning given to “melodrama” when it was coined was, in fact, very different from the meaning that it would later acquire permanently (Smith 1-5). By the time Chateaubriand finished writing his epic Les Martyrs, several years after the publication of the Génie, not only was he willing to use the word “melodrama,” he was willing to admit that Les Martyrs might indeed be a melodramatic epic, as the first epigraph to this chapter indicates. Of course, as the nineteenth-century progressed still further, the term “melodrama” took on increasingly pejorative overtones, which helps explain why later authors would have avoided applying the term to their writings, but this fear of the pejorative would not have been the reason that Chateaubriand does not use it in the Génie.

In context, Chateaubriand associates languor specifically with Christian poems in which the main characters are supernatural, such as angels or the spirits of the dead, rather than living, flesh-and-blood humans. This might lead one to believe that there must exist a Christian epic written prior to the Génie, with flesh-and-blood humans as main characters, and with a plot sufficiently melodramatic to earn Chateaubriand's full or nearly full endorsement. Yet Chateaubriand never points to any such epic, which, once again, suggests that the Génie gradually and informally postulates a new kind of epic. No Christian epic even came close to avoiding all the mistakes that Chateaubriand claims plagued the genre in the past, or at least Chateaubriand never names a single one that successfully did so. The fact that Chateaubriand is not a systematic writer in the Génie means that no one passage fully encapsulates his thoughts on this matter, but such may be the inescapable conclusion to draw from a reading of all the literary criticism contained in the Génie. Although the idea that the Génie invents a new form of epic may seem inescapable in the present study, where attention is being focused sharply on this issue and where long passages from the text are being read closely, previous scholarship on Chateaubriand's relation to epic have accepted the most overt and obvious claim of the Génie, namely that it simply promotes a Christian aesthetic, both in epic and in all other forms of literature and art. Previous scholarship on this topic will be discussed a bit later in this chapter, but the originality of the argument being advanced here needs to be acknowledged. Of course, the originality of this argument stems from this study's definition of a new form of epic, the melodramatic epic.

The relegation of theology, spirituality, and the supernatural to a distinctly secondary role within epic is central to the claim that the Génie postulates a new form of the genre. By laying down this key prescription for epic properly understood, Chateaubriand can be viewed as paving the way for later nineteenth-century French epics that were not Christian in

inspiration, epics such as Hugo's Légende des siècles, Vigny's Les Destinées and, most important of all, Zola's Évangiles. Although self-evident, it needs to be stated clearly that Chateaubriand in 1802 could not fully predict the evolution of French literature, including the evolution of French epic, throughout the nineteenth century. The important question, therefore, is how much the Génie, along with Les Martyrs, anticipates and paves the way for the later nineteenth-century epics, which are often called humanitarian and which all specialists seem to agree represent a new form in the history of the genre. The Génie's role as the precursor or harbinger of these later epics is actually enhanced by the way that it minimizes the role of theology. By downplaying all that is theologically unique in Christianity and by emphasizing fundamental issues of personal morality, Chateaubriand inadvertently builds a bridge to later literature that might elaborate very new, even revolutionary religious visions – as long, that is, as the later literature places the same strong emphasis on personal morality as does the Génie. In other words, melodramatic morality could unite nineteenth-century French epics more strongly than their disparate religious inspirations divide them, and the Génie can be seen giving a clear preview of that process.

Without question, Chateaubriand does downplay the theologically unique aspects of Christianity in his discussion of epic, just as he does in the rest of the Génie. In the last long citation above, Chateaubriand writes, "...tout poème où une religion est employée comme *sujet* et non comme *accessoire*, où le *merveilleux* est le *fond* et non l'*accident* du tableau, pêche essentiellement par la base." This statement actually applies to all religions, and not just to Christianity. Chateaubriand is saying that whatever religion inspires a given epic, everything unique about it, especially its theology, should serve merely as background. In truth, however, Chateaubriand does not believe that this religious background should be an entirely passive one. As will be seen in a moment, he explains later that even in the

background, theology and religion should boost the prominence of sentimental morality. He will claim that the inherent inability of polytheism to showcase sentimental morality weakened even the best ancient epics. In any event, Chateaubriand continues this theme of religion in the background in his subsequent commentary on Milton, wherein he makes the same criticism that he leveled earlier against Dante: “On peut reprocher au Paradis perdu de Milton, ainsi qu’à l’Enfer du Dante, le défaut dont nous avons parlé : le *merveilleux* est le *sujet* et non la *machine* de l’ouvrage ; mais on y trouve des beautés supérieures, qui tiennent essentiellement à notre religion” [Emphasis in original] (632). This shows yet another Christian epic that displeases Chateaubriand in some significant way, namely Milton’s Paradise Lost. In addition, this statement about Milton further reinforces the emphasis on morality, because as seen earlier, “beautés supérieures” virtually always refers to moral beauties for Chateaubriand, in other words morality.

A potential obstacle to seeing Chateaubriand as a precursor to the later epicists occurs, of course, in the second half of this phrase: “beautés supérieures, qui tiennent essentiellement à notre religion.” Chateaubriand certainly believed that the morality he prized was inseparable from Christianity, but he was looking backward in making this determination, comparing his own religion to ancient paganism and to the much more recent atheism that appeared during the 1789 Revolution. Chateaubriand does not consider the possibility that within a few decades other French authors might conceive new, secular religions that have a focus on morality, sentiment, and pathos similar to the focus that he attributes exclusively to Christianity. The new, secular religions will also possess a similar Manichaeism. Not exactly atheism nor truly complete religions, these ambitious new secular faiths will be much more robust and spiritual than the Cults of Reason and of the Supreme Being from the French Revolution. At least within the epics inspired by these secular faiths, what passes for theology

winds up mattering far less than the melodramatic focus on human suffering. In other words, in the later humanitarian epics, the secular faiths converge with Chateaubriand's version of Christianity on the shared grounds of melodrama.

Chateaubriand's reasonableness and moderation when, in the earlier quotation, he called for maintaining within epic "un juste milieu entre les choses divines et les choses humaines" later turns into moralizing extremism. In addition, his admiration for Homer and Vergil eventually takes on a bizarre light. His praise for the two most famous ancient epicists had, after all, been on very narrow grounds, rather than due to their manifold outstanding qualities. Chateaubriand had praised Homer and Vergil for maintaining his prized "juste milieu," unlike Dante and Milton. Later, however, Chateaubriand turns the tables and claims that ancient epics, no matter how brilliantly crafted, could never possibly have attained the artistic peaks that Christian epics, if equally well constructed, could attain. Of course, no Christian epic earns Chateaubriand's unqualified praise, so there is a certain hypothetical quality to his statement that Christian epics have a significant, inherent advantage over epics from other religious traditions. In the citation below, Chateaubriand makes all these points and more, rendering his aesthetic judgment increasingly questionable.

Une telle religion [le christianisme] doit être plus favorable à la peinture des caractères, qu'un culte qui n'entre point dans le secret des passions. La plus belle moitié de la poésie, la moitié dramatique, ne recevait aucun secours du polythéisme ; la morale était séparée de la mythologie. Un Dieu montait sur son char, un prêtre offrait un sacrifice ; mais ni le Dieu ni le prêtre n'enseignaient ce que c'est que l'homme, d'où il vient, où il va, quels sont ses penchants, ses vices, ses fins dans cette vie, ses fins dans l'autre.

Dans le christianisme, au contraire, la religion et la morale sont une seule et même chose. L'Écriture nous apprend notre origine, nous instruit de notre nature ; les mystères chrétiens nous regardent : c'est nous qu'on voit de toutes parts ; c'est pour nous que le Fils de Dieu s'est immolé...c'est un des caractères distinctifs du christianisme, d'avoir toujours mêlé l'homme à Dieu tandis que les fausses religions ont séparé le Créateur de la créature.

Voilà donc un avantage incalculable que les poètes auraient dû remarquer dans la religion chrétienne, au lieu de s'obstiner de la décrier. Car si elle est aussi belle que le polythéisme dans le *merveilleux*, ou dans les rapports des *choses surnaturelles*,

comme nous essaierons de le montrer dans la suite, elle a de plus une partie dramatique et morale, que le polythéisme n'avait pas. (648-649) [Emphasis in original]

The first observation to make about this passage is how remarkably well it substantiates Peter Brooks's theory of the melodramatic collapse into morality. This phrase alone seems to confirm the theory: "Dans le christianisme...la religion et la morale sont une seule et même chose." Chateaubriand presents this total reduction of Christianity to its morality as if the notion were timeless and indisputable, which hardly seems the case. After all, Chateaubriand admitted at the start of the Génie that there was more to Christianity than personal morality, but explained that he would focus on that one aspect for tactical reasons, to make his apologetics more persuasive. This shifting of position, genuine if unacknowledged, indicates a radicalization of Chateaubriand's ideas as the Génie progresses, and the radicalization takes place in the direction of melodrama. It is also worth observing that Chateaubriand does not display the slightest doubt about what "Christian morality" actually is. For him, there is only one Christian code of conduct, clear-cut and indisputable.

The precise terms of Chateaubriand's praise for Christian morality could actually apply almost as well to the subsequent secular faiths that would inspire the humanitarian epics. First, Chateaubriand comes close to merging God and man: "c'est un des caractères distinctifs du christianisme, d'avoir toujours mêlé l'homme à Dieu tandis que les fausses religions ont séparé le Créateur de la créature." The Humanitarian epics will do something similar, literally deifying humankind and its relentless march of progress. Second, Chateaubriand praises Christianity for teaching "ce que c'est que l'homme, d'où il vient, où il va, quels sont ses penchants, ses vices, ses fins dans cette vie, ses fins dans l'autre." As will be briefly shown later here, the secular faiths of the humanitarian epics will also try to answer these same big questions. These and other fundamental similarities explain why the present study subsumes

Chateaubriand's concept of the ideal "Christian" epic along with the later humanitarian epic model under the broad, umbrella category of melodramatic epic, a category that would also include similar texts from the very end of the nineteenth century, including Zola's Évangiles.

Although not a single one meets his standards for the genre in every respect, Chateaubriand relies on prior Christian epics to prove his point that Christianity provides far better religious inspiration for literature than ancient polytheism ever did. In the next portion of the Génie, Chateaubriand performs a side-by-side analysis of a large number of celebrated literary works, many but not all of them epics. At every stage of this long and tendentious contrast, the Christian text that Chateaubriand selects as an example is invariably declared superior to the ancient text chosen as its parallel. The Christian literary work is presented as superior both in its artistry and in its moral message, but saying this is a redundancy, because Chateaubriand's whole point is that these two qualities are inseparable. The side-by-side contrasts of actual literary texts are arranged topically, and many of the topics concern sex and family matters. Put another way, Chateaubriand marshals an abundance of precise examples in an attempt to show that Christian works of literature are almost always more melodramatic than ancient texts with which they share similar plots and characters. For Chateaubriand, of course, this melodrama is a decidedly good thing. The very idea of contrasting canonical literary works side-by-side and declaring one a decisive "winner" in moral content is troubling enough, but making matters worse is the way Chateaubriand exaggerates the melodrama and sentimentality found within the Christian texts that he references. He exaggerates to illustrate better his tendentious point, but even with such exaggeration, Chateaubriand still finds the Christian texts lacking in sufficient melodrama.

The most egregious of the side-by-side contrasts may be the one between Torquato Tasso's epic Jerusalem Delivered (*Gerusalemme liberata*) and Homer's Iliad. Chateaubriand

sets out to demonstrate that the knight Godfrey in Jerusalem Delivered behaves more morally and is therefore a greater literary creation than the Homeric warriors Achilles and Agamemnon. The language in the passage below could hardly be any blunter, and this bluntness makes the conclusion that Tasso is superior to Homer all the more startling.

La barbarie et le polythéisme ont produit les héros d'Homère ; la barbarie et le christianisme ont enfanté les chevaliers du Tasse.

Qui, des *héros* ou des *chevaliers*, méritent la préférence, soit en morale, soit en poésie ? C'est ce qu'il convient d'examiner.

En faisant abstraction du génie particulier des deux poètes, et ne comparant qu'un homme à homme, il nous semble que les personnages de la *Jérusalem* sont supérieurs à ceux de l'*Illiade*.

Quelle différence, en effet, entre les chevaliers si francs, si désintéressés, si humains, et des guerriers perfides, avares, cruels, insultant aux cadavres de leurs ennemis, poétiques, enfin, par leurs vices, comme les premiers le sont par leurs vertus !

Si, par héroïsme, on entend un effort contre les passions, en faveur de la vertu, c'est sans doute Godefroi, et non pas Agamemnon, qui est le véritable héros. Or, nous demandons pourquoi le Tasse, en peignant les chevaliers, a tracé le modèle du parfait guerrier, tandis qu'Homère, en représentant les hommes des temps héroïques, n'a fait que des espèces de monstres ? C'est que le christianisme a fourni, dès sa naissance, *le beau idéal moral*, ou le *beau idéal des caractères*, et que le polythéisme n'a pu donner cet avantage à chanter d'Ilion. (679-680) [Emphasis in original]

Chateaubriand carries the invidious comparison forward for several more pages. Still

contrasting the Christian knights in Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered to Homer's warriors,

Chateaubriand writes,

Le chevalier s'en allait à travers le monde, secourant la veuve et l'orphelin. – Voilà la charité de Jésus-Christ.

Le chevalier était tendre et délicat. Qui lui aurait donné cette douceur, si ce n'était une religion humaine, qui porte toujours au respect pour la faiblesse ? Avec quelle bénignité Jésus-Christ lui-même ne parle-t-il pas aux femmes dans l'Évangile !

Agamemnon déclare brutalement qu'il aime autant Briséis que son épouse, parce qu'elle fait d'aussi beaux ouvrages.

Un chevalier ne parle pas ainsi. (683)

Chateaubriand is correct up to a point: Tasso very much wanted the leading Christian characters in Jerusalem Delivered to finish on the side of morality by the epic's end (Kates 58-60, 71-74). Yet Chateaubriand badly ignores the subtleties and evolving postures that Tasso

incorporates in the moral dilemmas faced by his Christian knights. Through this unnuanced interpretation, Chateaubriand transforms Tasso's Christian knights into nearly flawless heroes in the melodramatic mold, heroes who care about little more than the rescue of widows and orphans, those stereotypical melodramatic victims. Chateaubriand seems to equate the complex code of chivalry motivating Tasso's Christian knights with the much simpler, more Manichaean values of nineteenth-century melodrama. Chateaubriand then compounds this critical recklessness by saying that Jerusalem Delivered read in this melodramatic way outclasses Homer's Iliad. To Chateaubriand, Homer's magnificent warriors are little more than "des espèces de monstres." This is quite simply Chateaubriand's aesthetic judgment being overwhelmed by his Manichaean, melodramatic bent; he wants his epic protagonists to be perfectly good, or very nearly so. Probably few literary critics today or of any previous era would share Chateaubriand's overall evaluation here in ranking Jerusalem Delivered over the Iliad. In terms of sexual behavior, Chateaubriand's cramped and prudish literary standard leads him to castigate Agamemnon for loving adulterously the slave girl Briseis. Amazingly, Chateaubriand contrasts this behavior with what he depicts as the sexual restraint of medieval knights. As if he had never heard of the near standardization of adulterous love within the chivalric code, Chateaubriand suggests that Christian knights such as Tasso's would not indulge in a relationship such as that between Agamemnon and Briseis. A bit later in the Génie, Chateaubriand abundantly praises the knight Goffredo (Godefroi) from Jerusalem Delivered for carefully avoiding all situations where he might succumb to the temptations of illicit love. Chateaubriand says that Goffredo is much more admirable in this respect than Vergil's hero Aeneas (684).

Brief reference to some first-rate scholarship on Jerusalem Delivered will indicate how much Chateaubriand distorts Tasso. Jerusalem Delivered fictionalizes the history of the

First Crusade, when Christian knights succeeded in retaking the holy city of Jerusalem from the Muslims. Tasso's three leading knights are Goffredo, Rinaldo, and Tancredi.

Chateaubriand writes extensively about Goffredo, who truly is a virtual saint, but he says much less about Rinaldo and Tancredi, whose immense character flaws seriously undermine his suggestion that Tasso's Christian knights are paragons of virtue (Kates 89-92). In fact, these three characters acquire meaning only from their interaction with each other, interaction that is both concrete and symbolic. As Judith Kates explains in Tasso and Milton: The Problem of Christian Epic, Tasso's epic is as much about the internal weaknesses and conflicts within each of his Christian knights as it is about their military campaign against the Muslims. The sole exception is the nearly perfect Goffredo, but even he is not as central a figure as the flawed Rinaldo and Tancredi.

When Tasso begins to unfold his story, he presents the internal weaknesses of the Crusaders themselves as the major obstacles in their path. His language associates those weaknesses with the tradition of chivalric romance. Goffredo's task was: "sotto a i santi / Segni ridusse i suoi compagni erranti" (he led his wandering comrades back under sacred banners)...[W]e read in the phrase "compagni erranti" not only chivalric "knights errant," but, in that very character, "erring," wandering from the physical and moral plane where they belong. The gesture of making Goffredo the sole commander becomes a metaphor for the final goal. The rest of the epic moves toward its realization in the chivalric warriors' struggle to adhere to the ideal embodied in Goffredo. For they are "erranti" through the poem. They act as knights of romance have traditionally acted, and in so doing, wander away from their own highest purposes. This enactment of conflict most engages the imagination of the poet and our responses as readers, not the marble perfection of the supreme commander. His fulfillment of the collective vow stands as the end of the drama and as the abstract standard by which to judge the great Christian warriors. With this clear, static ideal of the Christian hero as background, the other Christians, whose prowess and dedication are essential to the Crusade, occupy the foreground – Tancredi, with his absorption in a solitary dream love, Rinaldo, in his role as "avventuriere" and wanderer to a mythical island of magic and sensuality...Around these figures the poet also centers his most complex vision of the Crusade as both physical and moral struggle. It becomes a literal battle for power over an earthly city...[b]ut Tasso also conceives of the Crusade as an internal battle. From this point of view, Christian failure to conquer immediately and overwhelmingly results from the presence of affinities to evil within the great warriors, whose complete dedication is necessary for victory. This representation of fallen man depends on a complex sense of the inherent ambiguity in human nature. (89-92)

Ambiguity and conflict within each human personality are precisely what melodrama does not allow. Robert Heilman, whose major contribution to the study of melodrama has been to distinguish it clearly from tragedy, writes about the absence of inner conflict in melodramatic characters.

In the structure of melodrama, man is essentially “whole”; this key word implies neither greatness nor moral perfection, but rather an absence of the basic inner conflict that, if it is present, must inevitably claim our primary attention. Melodrama accepts wholeness without question; for its purposes, man’s loyalties and his directions are neither uncertain nor conflicting. He is not troubled by motives that would distract him from the outer struggle in which he is engaged...It is in tragedy that man is divided; in melodrama, his troubles, though they may reflect some weakness or inadequacy, do not arise from the urgency of unreconciled impulses. In tragedy, the conflict is within man; in melodrama, it is between men, or between men and things. (70)

For much of Jerusalem Delivered, the knights Rinaldo and Tancredi are divided within themselves and against their comrades in arms, and this fundamental conflict jeopardizes the entire Crusade. Judith Kates specifically reads this internal conflict and division as constituting a deep vein of classical tragedy within Tasso’s epic. (89-102). Yet one would not detect any of this from Chateaubriand’s flattening commentary on Jerusalem Delivered. In the last paragraph, it was stated that Chateaubriand says little about the deeply flawed characters Rinaldo and Tancredi. In fact, the little that Chateaubriand does say is actually deceptive, because he whitewashes the flaws of these characters: “Qu’ils sont aimables tous ces chevaliers de la Jérusalem, ce Renaud (Rinaldo) si brillant, ce Tancrede (Tancredi) si généreux...!” (684). One gets the impression from reading Chateaubriand that Tasso’s Christian knights hardly ever succumb to temptation. Yet Rinaldo and Tancredi do yield to sexual lust and the pleasures of the flesh, a fact that Chateaubriand chooses to ignore. Jerusalem Delivered depicts other kinds of temptations, as well: pride, wrath, the destructive quest for self-glorification, and the lust for revenge, (Kates 66-88). Melodramatic epics, on the

other hand, will have characters are much flatter and more completely identified with either good or evil. This is the certainly case for Chateaubriand's Les Martyrs and Zola's Évangiles.

By conscripting Jerusalem Delivered to his cause of proving the superiority of Christian literature and of the Christian religion itself, Chateaubriand inverts a basic religious dynamic of Tasso's epic. Chateaubriand's ultimate claim is that the nearly perfect virtue of Tasso's Christian knights proves the superiority of Christianity over polytheism and atheism. Within the larger context of the Génie, Chateaubriand bolsters support for a weakened religion, namely post-revolutionary Christianity, by pointing to fictional characters who supposedly personify that religion but whose virtue and strength he exaggerates. This suggests that humans or human fictional characters need to come to the rescue of a gravely threatened religion, something they can achieve only through the shining example of their own virtue, which is exaggerated to unreal dimensions. In Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered, however, the actual religious dynamic is the reverse of this. In Tasso's epic, God comes to the rescue of deeply flawed human characters, whose ambitious enterprise, the retaking of Jerusalem, could never succeed without divine aid and intervention. Writing about Jerusalem Delivered, Judith Kates explains,

The conditions of battle, revealing human deficiencies in physical and moral power, demonstrate repeatedly that good in the human sphere can be victorious only with the constant, particular attention from heaven. Neither the individual heroes nor the whole virtuous army of this epic can summon enough power to achieve their own highest goals alone. God must continually reinforce and redirect them, often in answer to their prayers, and just as frequently without their formal turning to heaven. In a schematic view, the poem's structure dramatizes the Christian idea of grace...The possibility of divine grace governs the outcome of the action in the *Gerusalemme liberata*, allowing a victory impossible for man in his fallen state. Within this narrative structure, however, Tasso devotes his greatest attention to that fallen condition itself. The holy warriors need heavenly aid because, to Tasso, the state of being "fallen" essentially means the inability to crush evil. (92)

There is surely a fundamental lesson to be learned here about melodrama. So far in the present study, the basic melodramatic process has been described in terms of a collapse of

great religious ambition resulting in an obsession with morality. Peter Brooks uses a description similar to this in his groundbreaking study on melodrama. Looked at from a slightly different perspective, however, Brooks's analysis permits another description of the same process. In a climate of intense religious turmoil, which Brooks presupposes, the followers of a religion ambitious to grow in power and influence may be forced to depict either themselves or fictional representations of themselves as exceptionally, even unrealistically virtuous. They would do this to bolster the standing of their religion and to fight off competition, which in a time of religious upheaval, could come in many forms and from many different directions. The religious turmoil in the wake of the French Revolution being historically unprecedented – the very idea of established religion was thrown into question and atheism of various sorts gained adherents – personal morality may have become the only effective and widely understood basis on which to justify an entire religion or an entire quasi-religious worldview. This new interpretation turns out to be only a slight twist on Brooks's original theory. Yet it is an important twist, because it may create a useful way to distinguish the melodramatic attitude towards religion from its pre-revolutionary counterpart. According to this new perspective, there is greater leeway in a secure religion to depict all humans, including the faithful, as weak and struggling, in desperate need of rescue by the deity. In a religion that feels besieged and insecure, however, the human faithful may feel compelled, in effect, to rescue their own religion through the shining example of their personal morality. Thus, in the first case, religion saves humans; in the second case, humans essentially try to save religion.

These opposing dynamics would, of course, carry over into the literary realm, helping to distinguish pre-revolutionary Christian epic from post-revolutionary, melodramatic epic. It would distinguish celebrated works as Jerusalem Delivered, Paradise Lost, and the Divine

Comedy from Les Martyrs and the Évangiles. If this distinction were to hold, it would suggest all by itself that Chateaubriand does not simply advocate the continuation of a longstanding literary tradition, namely that of Christian epic, but instead that he invents a significantly new kind of epic in the Génie du Christianisme and in Les Martyrs. Successful demonstration of this point would, of course, provide significant support to the central claims of the present study.

Chateaubriand's severe criticism of Jerusalem Delivered in a different section of the Génie provides further evidence that he is enunciating a new kind of epic vision. In spite of preferring Tasso's epic in many respects to such august predecessors as the Iliad and the Aeneid, Chateaubriand is very far from considering Jerusalem Delivered an ideal example of the genre. It is, of course, possible that Chateaubriand could have found all previous Christian epics to be seriously deficient, without seeming to propose a new form of the genre. This might have been possible, if Chateaubriand's objections to each epic differed significantly from his objections to all the others. Yet that is not the case, because a consistent viewpoint on epic clearly informs all of Chateaubriand's remarks, even though he does not summarize his vision in one, neat paragraph. Chateaubriand may not admit that he is formulating a new epic sub-genre, but his silence on this point cannot undo the powerful, cumulative effect of numerous remarks that together build a consistent epic vision. The many criticisms of Jerusalem Delivered that Chateaubriand posits elsewhere in the Génie emerge out of this unified epic vision. Indeed, one or two of his criticisms resemble complaints that he makes about Paradise Lost and the Divine Comedy. All these complaints, regardless of the epic to which they are directed, are informed by something like a melodramatic aesthetic. Thus, when Chateaubriand decides to disparage Jerusalem Delivered rather than to praise it, he basically

faults it for not being sufficiently melodramatic. The passage below begins with an analysis of Tasso's female characters and then branches out into more comprehensive criticisms.

Quant aux femmes, la coquetterie est peinte dans *Armide*, la sensibilité dans *Herminie*, l'indifférence dans *Clorinde*. Le Tasse eût parcouru le cercle entier des caractères des femmes, s'il eût représenté *la mère*. Il faut peut-être chercher la raison de cette omission dans la nature de son talent, qui avait plus d'enchantement que de vérité, et plus d'éclat que de tendresse...D'après la *Jérusalem [délivrée]*, on sera du moins obligé de convenir qu'on peut faire quelque chose d'excellent sur un sujet chrétien. Et que serait-ce donc, si le Tasse eût osé employé les grandes machines du christianisme ? Mais on voit qu'il a manqué de hardiesse. Cette timidité l'a forcé d'user des petits ressorts de la magie, tandis qu'il pouvait tirer un parti immense du tombeau de Jésus-Christ qu'il nomme à peine, et d'une terre consacrée par tant de prodiges. (630-631) [Emphasis in original]

The complaint that Jerusalem Delivered should have depicted women as mothers from a perspective imbued with tenderness calls upon Tasso to employ a figure common in melodramatic literature. Chateaubriand is unhappy that Tasso's leading female characters – Armide, Herminie, and Clorinde – are not mothers. Women's centrality in melodrama, especially as mothers, has been well established in scholarship (Brooks 27, Julia Williams 246-248). A perfectly melodramatic situation, which Chateaubriand may have had in mind when thinking about changes he would make to Tasso's epic, would have been for a mother to lose her child and go through many ordeals before one of Tasso's Christian knights heroically reunited them. This is very hypothetical, of course, but the reunion of mother and child after many peripeties, especially if the reunion is effected by a powerful and beneficent male figure, is a classic melodramatic device (Lasseigne 301, Metayer 237-238). The rest of Chateaubriand's complaint centers on aspects of Jerusalem Delivered that distract from the pathos for which Chateaubriand has previously indicated a strong preference in epic. He seems to associate effective pathos with a certain amount of realism, complaining that Tasso's talent "avait plus d'enchantement que de vérité." Jerusalem Delivered does have a significant amount of magic, and Chateaubriand seems to think the magic distances the reader, preventing

an appreciation of the epic's pathos. Earlier, Chateaubriand complained the too many supernatural elements created a languor that had this same harmful effect. In a similar vein, Chateaubriand complains that Tasso has a lack of "hardiesse" and suffers from "cette timidité." The example of Les Martyrs bolsters that claim that Chateaubriand wants really intense emotion in epic, almost no matter what the price, and here he complains that Tasso falls far short in this domain. He also does not think Tasso exploits the unique dramatic possibilities of his epic's setting, the Holy Land. Finally, in a backhanded compliment, Chateaubriand says, "D'après la Jérusalem [délivrée], on sera du moins obligé de convenir qu'on peut faire quelque chose d'excellent sur un sujet chrétien." This peculiar phrasing implies that Jerusalem Delivered revealed the potential in Christian epic, but that Tasso never came close to achieving that potential. Chateaubriand's ideal epic remained to be written.

Any manual of French literary history will attest to the enormous success of the Génie du Christianisme and to its lasting influence throughout much, if not all of the nineteenth century. The influence almost universally attributed to the Génie is somewhat amorphous, however, having to do with such things as the poetic style in which Chateaubriand wrote his study and the premium that he placed on sentiment. Nevertheless, Chateaubriand is said to have been an immediate and direct precursor to French Romanticism. Previous scholarship has been more cautious, however, in crediting Chateaubriand with a significant influence over the development of nineteenth-century French epic. Scholarship on this specific point is conflicting, although no one seems so far to have detected a marked desire on Chateaubriand's part for a significantly new departure in the epic genre. Although some are willing to admit that Chateaubriand inadvertently and from a distance touched off the invention of new, humanitarian epic, the Génie's discussion of epic overall has not struck scholars as being sufficiently innovative to have directly initiated such an original literary movement.

Chateaubriand's promotion of specifically Christian epic is certainly responsible for preventing earlier scholars from perceiving deeper connections between, on the one hand, the Génie and Les Martyrs, and, on the other, the dominant form that French epic would take at the peak of the century. Inadequate attention has been paid to the originality and uniqueness of Chateaubriand's concept of the ideal epic. In addition, the theoretical tools fashioned by recent scholarship on melodrama may offer the only means to bridge the genuine, but ultimately superficial differences between Chateaubriand's idea of Christian epic and the epics written at Romanticism's peak. Yet these tools have not so far been put to such a use. Oddly enough, Chateaubriand's advocacy of Christianity in the rest of the Génie has not blocked appreciation of the work's lasting influence in other, diverse areas of literature. A summary of scholarly opinion on Chateaubriand's relation to nineteenth-century epic will follow this chapter's analysis of Les Martyrs. Some idea of the Génie's enormous impact more generally, however, will provide a useful introduction to commentary on the epic that was supposed to serve as an illustration of the study's principles.

In his biography, Chateaubriand : L'Homme épris de grandeur, Michel Robida nicely captures the cultural, political and religious tidal wave set off by the Génie du Christianisme. As Robida explains, the Génie enjoyed immediate and immense success, due partly to the fact that its release nearly coincided with Napoleon's signing of the Concordat with Rome. The Concordat reversed the French Revolution's official hostility to Christianity and re-established Catholicism as the state religion of France.

Tel qu'il apparut au public de 1802, *le Génie du christianisme* fut un immense, un triomphal succès. Du jour au lendemain, son auteur connut, non plus la célébrité, mais la gloire. Les circonstances, la politique, l'asservissement de la critique à cette même politique, semblaient eux-mêmes vouloir y contribuer. Le 8 avril, le Corps Législatif et le Tribunat votèrent enfin le Concordat. Le 14, paraissait *le Génie du christianisme* ; le 18, le Premier Consul, au visage d'ivoire dans son habit rouge, assistait à Notre-Dame à un Te-Deum solennel en présence de trente évêques, de l'archevêque de Paris, et du légat pontifical. Dans le *Moniteur*, Fontanes chantait les louanges du *Génie du*

christianisme, « ouvrage longtemps attendu, commencé dans des jours d'oppression et de douleur, qui paraît quand tous les maux se réparent et quand toutes les persécutions finissent ». Les cloches des cathédrales, le carillon des couvents, le tintement des églises de campagne qui n'avaient plus sonné que pour le glas ou le tocsin, sortaient de leur longue léthargie, et semblaient se mettre en branle à l'appel de l'écrivain pour rendre au pays, en cette aube de Pâques, une de ses voix familières. (125)

The excitement and commotion surrounding the Génie's release illustrates, perhaps in somewhat exaggerated form, the distinctly engaged quality of melodramatic epic and of its attendant texts. The Génie du Christianisme, a study famously enmeshed in conflict over Church/State relations, promoted a melodramatic form of epic; and melodramatic epics themselves later reflected and took part in this very same conflict. Robida's commentary above also shows the continuity of French religious disputes throughout the century. Indeed, the entire century forms a nearly perfect arc, framed on one end by Napoleon I's signing of the Concordat and framed on the other end by the Third Republic's success in finally separating Church and State during the Dreyfus Affair's last stages. The other key dates in this century will be the two revolutionary years of 1830 and 1848 and, of course, 1870, the year of the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the crisis that paved the way for the creation of the Third Republic. These other key dates in nineteenth-century French political history will also have a marked impact on the genre of new, melodramatic epic.

Many other scholars attest to the lasting intellectual and literary influence exerted by the Génie du Christianisme. In particular, experts emphasize the role played by the Génie in paving the way for French Romanticism. Victor Giraud has written, "Pour toute la génération romantique, le Génie du christianisme a été une sorte de Bible, et Chateaubriand l'homme qui, selon l'heureuse formule de Théophile Gautier, a 'rouvert la cathédrale fermée'" (2: 179).

Also speaking of the Génie, Jean Malignon writes "Au lieu d'une génération de placides dévotes, Chateaubriand amènera derrière lui un siècle entier de poètes romantiques" (113).

This quotation from Malignon is important for acknowledging that the Génie's influence

transcended and in some cases utterly bypassed the study's ostensibly Christian purpose. Of course, the same thing could be said concerning the Génie's role in the formation of new epic. In a similar vein, Pierre Lepape has written, "Pour rendre le christianisme délicieux, Chateaubriand a inventé une écriture, cela s'appellera le romantisme" (405). Once again, the Génie is described as Romantic not due to its Christianity per se, but rather due to the original concepts and approaches that Chateaubriand invented in the process of defending Christianity. Given the widespread agreement about Chateaubriand's major role in helping give rise to Romanticism in France, the reluctance of some scholars to see Chateaubriand's connection to humanitarian epic, one of French Romanticism's iconic literary forms, seems more than a little anomalous. This reluctance may arise simply from the meagerness of the scholarly attention that has been paid to nineteenth-century French epic, as well as to the under-theorization of the emergence of this new form of epic.

As for Chateaubriand's influence in the years following Romanticism's peak, Victor Giraud addresses this subject directly. Giraud says that appreciation for the author of the Génie du christianisme fell in the years following the century's mid-point but then surged in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and in the first decade of the twentieth (179-182). It is not a coincidence that these years are the very ones that led up to and included the Dreyfus Affair. Thus, there is a link between Chateaubriand and the religious conflict that played out at the end of the nineteenth-century in France. The three literary critics and cultural commentators most responsible for spurring new interest in Chateaubriand at that time were Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, Émile Faguet, and Ferdinand Brunetière, all three of whom were central figures in the cultural conflict that swirled around the Dreyfus Affair (Giraud 179-182). There will be more discussion of this subject in a later chapter.

CHAPTER 4

CHATEAUBRIAND'S LES MARTYRS: AN EARLY EXAMPLE OF MELODRAMATIC EPIC

Abraham ose entrer en contestation avec le Seigneur, sur la destruction des villes coupables :

« Seigneur, dit-il, perdrez-vous le juste avec l'impie ? Peut-être y a-t-il cinquante justes dans cette ville ; les ferez-vous aussi périr ? »

« Si je trouve dans Sodome cinquante justes, dit le Seigneur, je pardonnerai à cause d'eux à toute la ville. »

La Puissance éternelle, pour ainsi dire vaincue par la voix suppliante du patriarche, se réduisit à demander dix justes : ils n'y étaient pas !...Magnifique privilège de larmes de l'homme... Qui sait si ce Tout-Puissant, qu'on nous veut peindre inflexible, ne nous a pas pardonné nos excès criminels, par le mérite du sang et des larmes de quelques-unes de nos victimes ?

Chateaubriand, "Examen des Martyrs" (51-52)

Allez, allez, allez, allez !
Esclaves d'hier, tristes hommes,
Hors des bagnes, hors des sodomes,
Marchez, soyez vaillants, montez ;
Ayez pour triomphe la gloire
où vous entrez, ô foule noire,
Et l'opprobre dont vous sortez !

Victor Hugo, "Progrès" L'Art d'être grand-père (561)

Bientôt, se retirant dans un hideux royaume,
La Femme aura Gomorrhe et l'Homme aura Sodome,
Et, se jetant, de loin, un regard irrité,
Les deux sexes mourront chacun de son côté.

Alfred de Vigny, "La Colère de Samson" Les Destinées (141)

The first thing to remember in turning to the Les Martyrs is the string of citations presented earlier indicating the powerful degree to which this religious epic carries forward the Génie's aesthetic and political project. These citations came both from Chateaubriand and

from scholars who have written about him. Les Martyrs reflects back on the Génie, making even clearer the melodramatic quality of the aesthetic that Chateaubriand promoted in his earlier study. Epic is the Génie's preferred literary genre, and Chateaubriand's study lays out a vision for a new form of the genre. Thus, the supreme manifestation of the Génie's aesthetic can be said to be a new kind of epic; Les Martyrs is one of the first published examples of this new sub-genre; and melodrama is at its core. Although Chateaubriand never uses the word "mélodrame" or any of its variants in the Génie, he does do so in Les Martyrs. More precisely, Chateaubriand does so in an essay that he wrote at an early date to defend his epic against detractors. The essay goes by the name "Examen des *Martyrs*" and it has served as the preface to the third and many subsequent editions of the epic. One by one, Chateaubriand refutes criticisms directed against Les Martyrs, including the criticism that it is not a true epic. The last chapter's epigraph contains part of Chateaubriand's reply. It is this:

Tout ceci soit dit, sans ôter à qui que ce soit le droit de courir sus aux *Martyrs*, comme épopée. Veut-on que ce soit un *roman* ? je le veux bien. Un *drame* ? j'y consens. Un *mélodrame* ? de tout mon cœur. Une *mosaïque* ? j'y donne les mains. Je ne suis point poète, je ne me proclame point poète... ; je n'ai jamais dit que j'avais fait un poème ; j'ai protesté et je proteste encore de mon respect pour les Muses. (92) [Emphasis in original]

In the long section that immediately precedes this citation, Chateaubriand insists that Les Martyrs meets the standards for epic. Here he does two additional things. First, he unmoors new epic from the absolute requirement of versification. He does this not simply because he did not consider himself a poet – "Je ne suis point poète" – but also because there is nothing inherent to new epic that requires versification. Even a novel could qualify as a new epic, as indicated by the fact that Les Martyrs, partly because it is written in prose, does indeed strongly resemble a novel (Pinel 98-100). In addition and much more important, Chateaubriand acknowledges the newness of the kind of epic that Les Martyrs represents. Chateaubriand admits the composite quality of his epic, with the most striking new element

being its abundant (melo)drama. His admission that Les Martyrs contains a great deal of drama should not surprise anyone who has read closely the literary criticism contained in the Génie, because one of the chief complaints that Chateaubriand leveled there against earlier Christian epics is that they did not put enough drama on display. Surely, Chateaubriand was not going to make the same mistake when crafting his own epic, an epic designed specifically to demonstrate the ideas of the Génie. By far the most significant part of the above citation is Chateaubriand's unabashed and unapologetic use of the word "melodrama": "Un *mélodrame* ? de tout mon cœur." In other words, Chateaubriand is answering the question about whether he is willing to call Les Martyrs a melodrama, and he basically says, "Yes, with all my heart." Thus, from Chateaubriand's own pen comes significant support for the present project of demonstrating that new, humanitarian epic is the true epic version of melodrama. Chateaubriand's brief admission here does not by itself make all the necessary connections for so sweeping a claim, but its unabashed frankness, combined with its unequivocal use of the key term "mélodrame," does carry a great deal of weight.

Les Martyrs is a heavily politically engaged text, as are all melodramatic epics. Its political engagement is perhaps less conspicuous now than in Chateaubriand's own lifetime, however. That is because Les Martyrs ostensibly tells the story of a period far removed from early nineteenth-century France. Les Martyrs tells of the establishment of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire by the emperor Constantine. More precisely, Chateaubriand's epic concerns the religious and political conflict that preceded Constantine's decision to change the Roman Empire's official religion, a decision that certainly ranks as one of the most consequential ever made by any leader in human history. Chateaubriand emphasizes the extreme turmoil, both religious and political, that raged over the approximately two decades prior to Constantine's ascension to the imperial throne and his

decision to replace polytheism with Christianity as state religion. Thus, Les Martyrs is actually much more about the reign of Diocletian, the longest-serving emperor among Constantine's immediate predecessors, than it is about the reign of Constantine himself, which does not get underway until the epic's very end. For the most part, Les Martyrs depicts the turbulent final years of Diocletian's reign, during which time the last of the great Roman persecutions of Christians began. Chateaubriand will depict these horrible persecutions as the final tribulation that ancient Christians must endure before they can enjoy all the benefits that will come from Constantine's elevation of their sect to the status of official imperial religion. This is Chateaubriand's description of the religious situation that prevailed in the Roman Empire just before the plot of Les Martyrs unfolds.

La terre reposait en paix. Dioclétien tenait dans ses mains habiles le sceptre du monde. Sous la protection de ce grand prince, les Chrétiens jouissaient d'une tranquillité qu'ils n'avaient point connue jusqu'alors. Les autels du vrai Dieu commençaient à disputer l'encens aux autels des idoles ; le troupeau des Fidèles augmentaient chaque jour ; les honneurs, les richesses et la gloire n'étaient plus le seul partage des adorateurs de Jupiter : l'Enfer, menacé de perdre son empire, voulut interrompre le cours des victoires célestes. L'Éternel, qui voyait les vertus des Chrétiens s'affaiblir dans la prospérité, permit aux Démones de susciter une persécution nouvelle ; mais, par cette dernière et terrible épreuve, la Croix devait être enfin placée sur le trône de l'univers, et les temples des faux dieux allaient rentrer dans la poudre. (106)

Although set in a remote past, the story of Les Martyrs resonated deeply with the early nineteenth-century French, because to the point of distorting history, Chateaubriand emphasizes the similarities between the tribulations of Christians during Diocletian's reign and the tribulations of Christians during the French Revolution. In short, Les Martyrs is a kind of retelling of the French Revolution's religious history, albeit transposed to ancient Rome and told from Chateaubriand's own highly partisan perspective. In this respect, Les Martyrs strongly resembles the last of Zola's Évangiles, the novel Vérité, which retells the Dreyfus Affair by transposing the scandal's central elements to a very different setting composed of a group of grammar schools in the French provinces. With anticlericalism in an academic

setting its major theme, Vérité is every bit as partisan and every bit as concerned with religion as is Les Martyrs. Furthermore, both Chateaubriand's epic and Zola's novel qualify as melodramatic epics, because both make grandiose, universal religious claims based on their plot details, religious claims which ultimately collapse into an obsessive focus on personal morality, especially sexual morality. The passage above from the start of Les Martyrs contains a strong hint as to the importance that morality will assume in the subsequent plot. The narrator claims that God was unhappy with the moral laxity that set in among Christians during the early, prosperous years of Diocletian's reign: "L'Éternel, qui voyait les vertus des Chrétiens s'affaiblir dans la prospérité permit aux Démon de susciter une persécution nouvelle." Horrific as the subsequent persecutions will be, Les Martyrs will depict them as beneficial, chastising and cleansing the ancient Christians. Chateaubriand's epic will find an even more effective way to show God punishing the Christians' enemies. Strangely enough, Chateaubriand does not depict Diocletian himself as one of the enemies of Christianity, hence the laudatory phrases "ce grand prince" and "tenait dans ses mains habiles le sceptre du monde." Les Martyrs will blame the persecution of the Christians on powerful subordinates to Diocletian, an emperor who unwisely allows his decision-making to be influenced by unscrupulous advisors.

As previously stated, one reason the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine suit Chateaubriand's polemical needs so well is that this period of ancient Roman history witnessed the dissolution of one state religion and the establishment of another. This is not unlike what happened during the French Revolution, where Christianity was stripped of its official status, banned, replaced briefly by a secular religion, and finally restored to official status by Napoleon. Yet the passage above suggests another, equally important similarity between the religious climates of these two ages. Chateaubriand's description suggests that,

like the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in France, the age of Diocletian and Constantine was characterized by extreme religious uncertainty among the population: “Les autels du vrai Dieu commençaient à disputer l’encens aux autels des idoles ; le troupeau des Fidèles augmentaient chaque jour ; les honneurs, les richesses et la gloire n’étaient plus le seul partage des adorateurs de Jupiter.” This kind of intense religious confusion among the people, especially when the status of the official state religion was at stake, created in nineteenth-century France an intellectual climate conducive to the production of melodramatic epic.

The strongly polemical quality of Les Martyrs, its deep engagement in contemporary political and religious conflict, is routinely recognized in scholarship on Chateaubriand’s epic. In spite of disagreements about other aspects of Les Martyrs, all scholars seem to agree that the ancient Roman setting functions at least in part as a ruse, a curtain behind which Chateaubriand attacked his enemies. The scholar who has written the most perceptively on this subject is Gustave Rudler in his study, La politique dans les Martyrs de Chateaubriand. Rudler explains how Les Martyrs is one long, counter-revolutionary diatribe. He writes,

La réalité contemporaine se glisse sous la réalité antique. Le sens ostensible, et d’ailleurs vrai, en recouvre un autre, qui n’a rien de secret, dont Chateaubriand ne se cache pas, qu’il avouera ou proclamera dans ses notes, car il a voulu que ses lecteurs reconnussent et maudissent la « philosophie » et la Révolution, et son but serait manqué s’ils laissaient échapper ses allusions. Il ne s’est donné la peine de déguiser ses arrière-pensées que dans la mesure où le caractère antique de son épopée l’y obligeait. *Les Martyrs* sont une vaste allégorie, et une allégorie transparente...Chateaubriand n’a pas manqué de mettre, comme toute son école, la Révolution au compte de la « philosophie », et toutes deux au compte de Satan. La hantise révolutionnaire se décèle partout dans *les Martyrs*. (3-5)

Rudler is using the term “allegory” in a somewhat unusual, very broad sense. He simply means that Les Martyrs is a profoundly engaged work of literature, one that has just as much to do with contemporary politics as with ancient Roman history. Unlike in most allegories, the basic outlines of the plot in Les Martyrs are factual. As in all allegories, however, Chateaubriand’s epic carries out an extended metaphor, with close and repeated

similarities between ancient Roman history and the political situation of Chateaubriand's own time. As Rudler puts it, "La hantise révolutionnaire se décèle partout dans les *Martyrs*." Rudler is quite correct in saying that Chateaubriand makes no attempt to conceal this partisan stratagem, "qui n'a rien de secret, dont Chateaubriand ne se cache pas." Zola's *Vérité* is an allegory in the same sense, largely based as it is on real-life stories of the tribulations of teachers in secular French public schools located in fervently Catholic provinces. At the same time, *Vérité* is also very clearly a symbolic recapitulation of the Dreyfus Affair, this in spite of the many differences between the Parisian État-major and a group of isolated and obscure provincial grammar schools. The main difference between *Les Martyrs* and *Vérité* is simply the chronological gap between the two levels of meaning, the ostensible and the latent. The chronological gap is tremendous in Chateaubriand's epic, but much less in Zola's.

Later in the same study, Rudler concisely summarizes the significant polemical quality of Chateaubriand's epic: "Ses *Martyrs* sont dans une large mesure une allégorie de sens tout moderne, une œuvre étroite de circonstance et de parti, un acte de polémique, un essai de représailles, un libelle « antiphilosophique » et antirévolutionnaire" (13). Rudler's application of the term "antiphilosophique" to *Les Martyrs* is very important to an understanding of Chateaubriand's epic. Rudler makes a similar claim in the earlier citation, where he says that Chateaubriand blames the French Revolution on "philosophy" and then blames both the Revolution and philosophy on Satan ("Chateaubriand n'a pas manqué de mettre, comme toute son école, la Révolution au compte de la « philosophie », et toutes deux au compte de Satan"). By "philosophy," Rudler is certainly referring to the political, literary and theoretical positions of the eighteenth-century writers and activists known as the philosophes. Chateaubriand was seen attacking the philosophes and their nineteenth-century successors in a passage quoted earlier from the *Génie*. In the epic *Les Martyrs*, Chateaubriand

creates ancient Roman equivalents to the French philosophes, and they are thoroughly despicable figures. As will be shown in a moment, Chateaubriand calls the ancient Roman “philosophes” atheists, and he places nearly the entire blame for the persecutions and for the supposed moral corruption of the imperial capital city squarely on their shoulders. When Rudler says that Chateaubriand associates “philosophy” with Satan, he is not exaggerating in the least. The Manichaeism of Les Martyrs is positively overwhelming, no less so than the Manichaeism of Zola’s Évangiles.

Chateaubriand frankly acknowledges the allegorical/polemical nature of Les Martyrs directly in the pages of his epic. When the last of the great Roman persecutions of Christians is about to get underway in the epic’s storyline, Chateaubriand inserts this highly revealing statement:

Ah! Si la Muse sainte soutenait mon génie, si elle m’accordait un moment le chant du cygne ou la langue dorée du poète, qu’il me serait aisé de redire dans un touchant langage les malheurs de la persécution ! Je me souviendrais de ma patrie : en peignant les maux des Romains, je peindrais les maux des Français. Salut, épouse de Jésus-Christ, Église affligée, mais triomphante ! Et nous aussi, nous vous avons vue sur l’échafaud et dans les catacombes. (399)

The following are by far the most important and revealing words: “Je me souviendrais de ma patrie : en peignant les maux des Romains, je peindrais les maux des Français.” The entire time that he is describing the sufferings of the ancient Christians of Rome, Chateaubriand admits that he is thinking of the recent sufferings of Christians in France. Yet Chateaubriand admits to much more than just this aspect of his mental, creative process. He admits that the ancient Romans in Les Martyrs are quite simply surrogates for the contemporary French. This clearly indicates Chateaubriand’s wish for Les Martyrs to be read in light of contemporary politics. At the end of the passage, Chateaubriand employs the literary trope of apostrophe and greets the Christian Church, telling it that the people of his own time have seen it crushed and persecuted just as the ancient Romans had: “Et nous aussi, nous vous avons vue sur l’échafaud

et dans les catacombes.” The “nous” here certainly means Chateaubriand and all his contemporaries who had lived through the French Revolution and were still living through the turbulent Napoleonic period.

Noting the polemical aim of the numerous parallels between contemporary political events and the ancient Roman events described by Chateaubriand has become a mainstay of scholarship on Les Martyrs. The concept of politically engaged literature, specifically engagement in politico-religious conflict, is so central to the present study that a few more citations on this aspect of Les Martyrs are in order. Of course, what makes the concept of engagement so very important here is its later importance within Proust’s Recherche. The Recherche is conceived in large part in humorous opposition to this specific kind of engaged literature, as such literature was written during the Dreyfus Affair and, more generally, throughout the nineteenth century. Chateaubriand is the starting point for a century’s worth of engaged writing of this kind; and, unlike the non-fictional Génie, Les Martyrs is where he gets to put his ideas on this subject into practice. One of the largest studies ever written on Les Martyrs is B. D’Andlau’s Chateaubriand et Les Martyrs : Naissance d’une épopée. Patiently developing his thesis with the support of archival material unavailable to previous scholars, D’Andlau reaches the same conclusion as does Gustave Rudler concerning the thoroughly partisan tenor of Les Martyrs. The originality of D’Andlau’s study lies in the way it traces Chateaubriand’s composition of Les Martyrs from the epic’s earliest conception as a novel that was going to be entitled Les Martyrs de Dioclétien. According to D’Andlau, the longer Chateaubriand labored over this novel, the more the work became epic in sweep and engaged in contemporary politics.

Plus encore que dans *Les Martyrs de Dioclétien*, roman, transparait dans *Les Martyrs*, épopée, et sous la peinture du IIIe siècle, une satire du temps présent. Autant que preuve des théories du *Génie* sur le merveilleux chrétien, l’œuvre va servir d’arme de combat. L’auteur trouvera dans l’épopée un admirable prétexte pour donner libre

cours à ses sentiments. Sentiments multiples ; attachement à la royauté... ; haine de la Révolution, non pas certes des idées de liberté qu'elle incarnait, mais des excès auxquels elle avait conduit ; horreur, enfin, de la tyrannie... (255)

Zola's Évangiles have also been called "arme[s] de combat," so blatant is their engagement in some of the most contentious politics of their time (Bory 1002). D'Andlau uses the term "une satire du temps présent" very broadly, much as Rudler uses the term "allegory." D'Andlau certainly does not mean that Les Martyrs is satirical in a humorous way, because Chateaubriand's epic contains almost nothing that would qualify as humor. D'Andlau is simply using his own preferred vocabulary for indicating the sustained double meaning throughout all of Les Martyrs, a double meaning based on the similarities between the ancient and the contemporary. D'Andlau's reference to the Génie du christianisme is useful, serving as a reminder that Les Martyrs illustrates the theories expounded in Chateaubriand's study and also scores points on the major political issues of the day.

In the introduction to the Pléiade edition of Les Martyrs, Maurice Regard agrees that the epic is fundamentally engaged. In the passage below, Maurice Regard speaks of Les Martyrs.

Chateaubriand s'en prend à l'esprit du XVIII^e siècle, aux Illuminés, aux excès de la Révolution. Sa pensée s'apparente à celle de Bonald et de Maistre sur l'origine démoniaque de l'esprit révolutionnaire auquel le 18 Brumaire a mis heureusement un terme. Satan, chantant *La Marseillaise* et destructeur de l'ordre, le démon de la Fausse Sagesse corrompateur de l'humanité par son idéologie, les Sophistes sont les vrais adversaires. A travers ces allégories frénétiques qui font de cet Enfer trop décrié un beau morceau d'art baroque, l'ouvrage prend position contre les idéologues. (21)

Maurice Regard compares the Chateaubriand of Les Martyrs to Bonald and de Maistre, two leading French religious conservatives who employed their literary talents to oppose many of the accomplishments of the French Revolution. Regard thus leaves no doubt as to the counter-revolutionary inspiration of Les Martyrs. Satan and God both being minor characters in Chateaubriand's epic, Regard notes how closely Les Martyrs associates Satan with the

Revolution. Regard mentions a scene that takes place in Hell, where Satan, the prince of the Underworld, rouses his devilish compatriots with a speech containing words taken directly from the revolutionary anthem “La Marseillaise” (Chateaubriand Martyrs 238-239). Regard also points out that the real villains in Les Martyrs are sophists (“les Sophistes sont les vrais adversaires”). The sophists, who constituted a genuine intellectual movement or school in ancient times, will become in Les Martyrs the surrogates for Chateaubriand’s hated eighteenth-century philosophes and their successors. In Les Martyrs, the sophists/philosophes will be portrayed as atheistic brutes who are the real instigators of the persecution of the Christians (Rudler 10-11). The brunt of the denunciation contained in Les Martyrs is therefore directed not at the followers of ancient Roman polytheism, although they receive a share of the criticism, but instead against the “atheistic” sophists/philosophes. Gustave Rudler explains it thus, “Chose curieuse, le paganisme a bénéficié de la haine que Chateaubriand a toute réservée à la philosophie” (11).

The chief complaint leveled by Les Martyrs against the sophists/philosophes, and especially against their leader Hierocles, will actually be their gross sexual corruption. More than anything else, Les Martyrs is a sexual morality tale written on an epic scale. The epic’s protagonists, Eudore and Cymodocée, are two fictional young people whose sexual purity is designed to contrast as sharply as possible with the sexual depravity of the sophists/philosophes. Nevertheless, neither Maurice Regard nor any other scholar who has published commentary on the political engagement of Les Martyrs has had much to say about the epic’s sexual politics. An analysis of the sexual politics of Chateaubriand’s epic remains to be written almost from scratch, particularly in the sense that Les Martyrs constitutes a barely disguised attack on Chateaubriand’s enemies. If, as everyone seems to agree, Les Martyrs is one huge allegory or satire, with the ancient setting barely concealing Chateaubriand’s

complaints about the French Revolution and its aftermath, then the epic's Manichaean treatment of sexuality probably performs the same kind of conspicuous transposition. In other words, Les Martyrs's denunciation of the sexual depravity of the ancient sophists almost surely constitutes an attack on the sexual practices of Chateaubriand's political enemies. Gustave Rudler makes this very claim about Les Martyrs, but his observation is brief and wrapped up in a discussion of the overall immorality of the epic's villains (12-13). Rudler's observation is only marginally more helpful than the silence that greets this subject in other published scholarship. In general, scholars have elided the sexual politics of Les Martyrs within a discussion of how the epic reflects Chateaubriand's contemporary philosophical and ideological disagreements. Yet to be acknowledged in print is the central importance of this epic's sexual politics, the feature of Les Martyrs that, more than any other, makes it heavily melodramatic. This is also what makes Les Martyrs powerfully resemble Zola's Évangiles, which similarly launch a prolonged attack on the sexual practices and sexual inclinations of Zola's enemies, including but not limited to the leaders of the French Catholic Church. Finally, the sexual politics of Les Martyrs is what makes this epic an intertext for Proust's Recherche.

One final scholar who has written significantly on the engaged quality of Les Martyrs is Bertrand Aureau in his study Chateaubriand penseur de la Révolution. Aureau agrees on all major points with the other scholars already cited here on this subject. In particular, he agrees that the ancient sophists in the epic are stand-ins for French philosophes and for similar contemporary thinkers (200). Aureau goes somewhat further, however, by integrating within Chateaubriand's larger political outlook the inflammatory politics that smolders just below the surface of Les Martyrs (200-203). Yet Aureau, too, says nothing directly about the sexual politics of Chateaubriand's epic.

Late Roman imperial history provides the backdrop upon which Chateaubriand paints his grand tale of sexual morality. Diocletian is emperor at the opening of Les Martyrs, but Chateaubriand puts to effective use the details of the imperial administration at this precise moment in ancient history. The Roman Empire had grown so vast by this time, Diocletian found it necessary to share his executive power and duties with what effectively became three co-emperors. Diocletian remained pre-eminent among the four, but each co-emperor was given jurisdiction of a different region of the empire. The tremendous geographic expanse of the Roman Empire meant that each of the four had essentially unimpeded control of his domain. Eudore, the male protagonist of Les Martyrs, explains this unusual governmental structure early in the epic, while recounting his youth spent in the capital city: “Lorsque j’arrivai à Rome, le pouvoir tombé aux mains de Dioclétien était partagé comme nous le voyons aujourd’hui : l’Empereur s’était associé Maximien, sous le titre d’Auguste, et Galérius et Constance sous celui de César. Le monde ainsi divisé entre quatre chefs, ne reconnaissait pourtant qu’un maître” (163). As Eudore explains, Diocletian’s associate administrators were not actually called “co-emperors.” The one most nearly Diocletian’s equal in prestige and power had the title “Augustus.” This position was occupied by the historical figure Maximian, who is of little real importance for this epic’s plot. Diocletian and Maximian each had a powerful deputy emperor, with the title “Caesar.” Maximian’s deputy was Constantius, the father of Constantine; Diocletian’s deputy was Galerius. Eudore’s, or rather Chateaubriand’s explanation of the imperial government is historically accurate up to this point, as any relevant history book or encyclopedia entry will attest (Cousin “Diocletian”).

Diocletian’s deputy emperor, Galerius, is going to be the vector by which the evil, atheistic sophists exert leverage over the imperial throne. The sophists will poison the mind of Galerius, who in turn will prejudice Diocletian against the Christians. Still later, Galerius will

employ evil machinations to ascend to the supreme imperial throne, replacing Diocletian himself and bringing to a peak the last great Roman persecution of the Christians. Yet the actual persecutions do not begin until late in the epic, and Galerius finds reasons to hate the Christians long before then. The character that Chateaubriand presents as most responsible for turning Galerius against the Christians is Hierocles, Galerius's top advisor and also the governor of the Roman Empire's Greek provinces (Martyrs 166). As stated earlier, the thoroughly evil Hierocles is the principal villain of Les Martyrs. As top advisor to the "Caesar" Galerius, Hierocles is only a few steps removed from the emperor Diocletian within the imperial hierarchy at the moment the epic opens. The most interesting thing about Hierocles, however, is not the immense political power that he wields. It is instead Chateaubriand's depiction of him as the leader of the sophists, that evil band of atheists who are supposed to be as perverse sexually as they are intellectually. In the key passage below, Chateaubriand paints an exceedingly sinister portrait of the sophists and of their leader, Hierocles. The notion of sexual depravity permeates this description and really stands as Chateaubriand's worst accusation against Hierocles and the sophists.

Rome vieillie et dépravée nourrit dans son sein un troupeau de sophistes...dont les mœurs et les opinions seraient un objet de risée, si nos folies n'étaient trop souvent le commencement de nos crimes. Ces disciples d'une science vaine attaquent les Chrétiens, vantent la retraite, célèbrent la médiocrité, vivent aux pieds des grands, et demandent de l'or...[Les] uns voient tout dans la pensée ; les autres cherchent tout dans la matière ; d'autres prêchent la république dans le sein de la monarchie : ils prétendent qu'il faut renverser la société afin de la reconstruire sur un plan nouveau ; d'autres, à l'imitation des Fidèles, veulent enseigner la morale au peuple : ils rassemblent la foule dans les temples et au coin des rues, et vendent sur des tréteaux une vertu que ne soutiennent point les œuvres et les mœurs. Divisés pour le bien, réunis pour le mal, gonflés de vanité, se croyant des génies sublimes, au-dessus des doctrines vulgaires, il n'y a point d'insignes folies, d'idées bizarres, de systèmes monstrueux que ces sophistes n'enfantent chaque jour. Hiéroclès marche à leur tête, et il est digne en effet de conduire un tel bataillon...Ce favori de Galérius,...c'est un de ces hommes que les révolutions introduisent au conseil des grands...Les mots de liberté, de vertu, de science, de progrès des lumières, de bonheur du genre humain, sortent sans cesse de sa bouche ; mais ce Brutus est un bas courtisan, ce Caton est dévoré de passions honteuses, cet apôtre de la tolérance est le plus intolérant des

mortels, et cet adorateur de l'humanité est un sanglant persécuteur. Constantin le hait, Dioclétien le craint et le méprise, mais il a gagné la confiance de Galérius. (166-167)

Supremely evil, Christian-hating Hierocles obviously represents a chief bugbear of at least some Christian partisans in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. Hierocles and the other sophists represent intellectuals who believe that reason and logic can substitute for traditional religion. In modern French history, this intellectual tradition can be traced at least from the philosophes in the eighteenth century to the naturalists in the late nineteenth, with Zola as one of its leaders at the end of this period. The clearest sign that Chateaubriand associates Hierocles with the modern philosophes is that he has the Roman leader spouting their favorite catchwords: "Les mots de liberté, de vertu, de science, de progrès des lumières, de bonheur du genre humain, sortent sans cesse de sa bouche." One grand irony in all this is that the same description applies equally well to Zola and the Dreyfusards at the time of the Affair. Zola will repeatedly invoke the same modern, progressive ideals, both in his Dreyfusard polemics and the pages of the Évangiles. Zola's anti-Dreyfusard enemies will then make accusations of hypocrisy and sexual immorality against him just as Chateaubriand does here against Hierocles. This similarity suggests a basic continuity in the politico-religious debate in France at least from the French Revolution until the end of the Dreyfus Affair. Chateaubriand makes clear that the Galerius's favorite was the leader of the sophists ("Hiérocès marche à leur tête") and that Hierocles was a thoroughgoing hypocrite ("cet adorateur de l'humanité est un sanglant persécuteur"). The description of the other sophists' theoretical projects also leads to the conclusion that they closely resemble the French philosophes and their nineteenth-century heirs. One of melodrama's least appreciated characteristics, its radically democratic outlook, is manifest in the complaint above that the sophists considered themselves superior to ordinary people. The sophists are "gonflés de vanité, se croyant des génies sublimes, au-dessus des doctrines vulgaires."

Sexual morality, however, is the grounds on which Les Martyrs launches its most personal and bitter attack against Hierocles and the sophists. Although Chateaubriand's language regarding sex is not as blunt and overt here as it will be later in the epic, the passage above abounds with nearly direct references to sexual immorality. At the very beginning, the narrator calls Rome "vieillie et dépravée." Then there is discussion throughout the passage about corrupt "mœurs," which is almost certainly in part a euphemism for sexual practices. The narrator complains that the sophists "vendent sur des tréteaux une vertu que ne soutiennent point les œuvres et les mœurs." The phrase "vendent sur des tréteaux" 'sell on a stage' might include an oblique reference to prostitution. The sophists also have the audacity to try to teach morality to the people, just as the Christian faithful do: 'à l'imitation des Fidèles, [ils] veulent enseigner la morale au peuple.' The clearest reference to sex, however, applies to Hierocles, who is "consumed by shameful passions" 'dévoreré de passions honteuses.' Any residual doubt about the meaning of this phrase is soon eliminated, when the evidence of Hierocles's sexual depravity becomes unmistakable.

The primary victim of Hierocles's sexual depravity will be Cymodocée, the female protagonist of Les Martyrs and also the epic's principal personification of sexual purity. Eudore, the male protagonist, will fall in love with the virginal Cymodocée; and their chaste love will serve as the emotional anchor of Les Martyrs. Eudore and Cymodocée will, in fact, become engaged to marry in the middle of the epic; but their death as Christian martyrs at the end will prevent them from every marrying in the ordinary sense. Most important is that their love remains unconsummated until the end. From the very start of the epic, however, the wicked Hierocles lusts after the beautiful Cymodocée, however, and he is determined to take her from Eudore and, if he cannot persuade her to love him, to impose himself sexually on her.

Eudore and Cymodocée are entirely fictional characters, but as commonly occurs in epic, they interact with real figures from history. Diocletian, Galerius and Constantine are certainly real historical figures, but so is Hierocles, although Chateaubriand lets his imagination run wild in depicting the wickedness of the latter (Cousin “Diocletian”). Les Martyrs also depicts several historical leaders of the early Christian Church, leaders such as Saints Jerome and Augustine (162-172). Although fictional, Eudore and Cymodocée must obviously become involved in major events that truly happened. Most conspicuously, they die as martyrs in a historically documented religious persecution. Long before this, however, Eudore serves as a leader in the imperial army during a historically attested military campaign in Gaul (Cousin “Diocletian,” Chateaubriand Martyrs 173-230, 245-274). Shortly before joining the imperial army, Eudore, who was raised a Christian, abandons his family’s faith under the influence of the sophists and the cultural decadence of the imperial capital. Unlike Cymodocée therefore, Eudore is not a virgin, having indulged in the pleasures of the flesh offered by the capital city and by faraway Gaul (168-172, 260-274). Eudore returns to Christianity and to chastity several years later, only to pay the ultimate price for his spiritual reawakening during the persecutions initiated by Galerius and Hierocles. By this time, the still youthful Eudore has fallen in love with Cymodocée and made plans to marry her in the appropriate Christian ceremony.

The virginal Cymodocée, who eventually personifies the sexual purity of the Christian faith, initially represents one of the main challenges to Christianity in ancient times, namely paganism or polytheism. In other words, Cymodocée is a pagan virgin at the start of Les Martyrs, and only after her conversion does her virginity take on the universal religious significance typical of melodramatic epic. Both before and after Cymodocée’s conversion, her virginity is mentioned in almost every passage where her name appears. For Cymodocée, the

term “vierge” practically functions as a classic epic epithet, much as the famous epithets “pious Aeneas,” “swift-footed Achilles,” or “resourceful Odysseus.” Yet the religious valence of her virginity changes completely over the course of Les Martyrs, and this is obviously not a trivial matter. Just as Eudore was raised in the early Christian Church, Cymodocée was raised in the much older tradition of polytheism. Chateaubriand adds an important twist by depicting Cymodocée and her family as members of a Homeric sect. They worship the great poet and epicist Homer as a god, exactly as they do Jupiter, Venus or Mars. Due to Chateaubriand’s stated desire to use this epic as an illustration of the principles set forth in the Génie du Christianisme, making Cymodocée and her family members of a Homeric sect has the special advantage of creating space for an open discussion of comparative aesthetics directly within Les Martyrs. Démodocus, the father of Cymodocée, is a priest in the Homeric sect, and at the time of Les Martyrs’s opening, he is training Cymodocée to be a priestess in the same sect. Her sacerdotal training consists of learning the Homeric epics by heart and then learning to recite excerpts beautifully in front of an audience. Her priestly duties also require her to remain a virgin (109-113). Although not stated overtly, the figure of Cymodocée initially appears to be in the pagan tradition of the Vestal Virgins. From the start, Cymodocée is presented as both virtuous and virginal, which is quite revealing, because Chateaubriand is unwilling to admit that atheistic sophists can possess either of these characteristics. This supports the claim that, for Chateaubriand, any religion, even a non-Christian religion, is better than atheism.

Falling in love with Eudore furnishes the occasion for Cymodocée to consider converting. In fact, the former Roman military leader, himself recently re-converted to Christianity, will not marry Cymodocée unless she, too, becomes a Christian (315). Yet conversion will require Cymodocée to first renounce and reject paganism. Given the

particular, Homeric sect to which her family belongs, such a renunciation is virtually a rejection of the aesthetic principles embodied in all of ancient epic. The passage below relates the exact moment of Cymodocée's renunciation, which takes place inside a temple of the Homeric sect. The only characters present are Cymodocée herself and her father Démodocus, a Homeric priest. Démodocus performs a ritual sacrifice just before Cymodocée carries out the final gesture of renunciation, hanging her lyre on the altar for the last time, symbolic of the fact that she will never again use the instrument to accompany her recitation of Homeric verses.

Démodocus et sa fille arrivaient au temple d'Homère. Les feux n'étaient point encore éteints sur les autels domestiques ; Démodocus les fait aussitôt ranimer. On conduit au sanctuaire la génisse aux cornes dorées, on apporte au prêtre des dieux une coupe d'argent ciselé... Une main savante avait représenté sur cette coupe Ganymède enlevé par l'aigle de Jupiter ; les compagnons du chasseur phrygien paraissaient accablés de tristesse, et sa meute fidèle faisait retentir, de ses aboiements douloureux, les forêts d'Ida. Le père de Cymodocée remplit cette coupe d'un vin pur ; il se revêt d'une tunique sans tache, il couronne sa tête d'une branche d'olivier... Démodocus répand la libation aux pieds de la statue du poète. La génisse tombe sous le couteau sacré ; Cymodocée suspend sa lyre à l'autel ; ensuite, adressant la parole au cygne de Méonie :

« Auteur de ma race, ta fille te consacre ce luth mélodieux que tu pris soin quelquefois d'accorder pour elle. Deux divinités, Vénus et l'Hymen, me forcent de passer sous d'autres lois : que peut une jeune fille contre les traits de l'Amour et les ordres du Destin ?... »

Tels furent les adieux de la prêtresse des Muses au chancre de Pénélope et de Nausicaa. Les yeux de la jeune vierge étaient humides de larmes : malgré le charme de son amour, elle regrettait les héros et les divinités qui faisaient une partie de sa famille, ce temple où elle retrouvait à la fois ses dieux et son père, où elle fut nourrie du nectar des Muses au défaut du lait maternel. Tout la rappelait aux belles fictions du Poète, tout était dans ces lieux sous la puissance d'Homère ; et la Chrétienne désignée se sentait, en dépit d'elle-même, domptée par le génie du père des fables : ainsi, lorsqu'un serpent d'or et d'azur roule au sein d'un pré ses écailles changeantes, il lève une crête de pourpre au milieu des fleurs, darde une triple langue de feu, et lance des regards étincelants ; la colombe qui l'aperçoit du haut des airs, fascinée par le brillant reptile, abaisse peu à peu son vol, s'abat sur un arbre voisin, et, descendant de branche en branche, se livre au pouvoir magique qui la fait tomber des voûtes du ciel. (319-320)

It is well-nigh impossible to comment on this remarkable passage without beginning at the end, with the very troubling epic simile that serves as its conclusion. After going

through the formal renunciation ceremony, Cymodocée starts feeling pangs of regret. She reflects on the many fond memories that she possesses in relation the religion she has just walked away from. Chateaubriand then creates a classically elaborate epic simile to explain the momentary, but painful remorse that grips Cymodocée. The shocking thing about Chateaubriand's epic simile is how sinister and nefarious it depicts the great poet Homer. The "père des fables" is compared to "un serpent d'or et d'azur." The serpent that Homer is said to resemble is highly dangerous but deceptively attractive and multi-colored. Its glistening beauty tempts a dove, the symbol both of Christianity and of the newly converted Cymodocée, down from the heavens where it has been flying. The implication is that the serpent's awful magic will either kill the dove or at least prevent it from ever again reaching the heavenly heights. If taken seriously, as Chateaubriand clearly intends it to be taken, this simile stands as a devastating indictment of the aesthetics of ancient epic. In this simile, ancient aesthetics appears to be utterly contrary to the Christian aesthetics that Chateaubriand is promoting. By extension of being compared to a serpent, Homer becomes Satan, and the entire enterprise of ancient epic, whether practiced by Homer or any other poet, seems thoroughly evil. As stated earlier, melodramatic epic often contains internal commentary on aesthetics that reflects back on the principles of its own creation. This aesthetic commentary is typically very radical. More precisely, or looked at from a different perspective, this aesthetic vision is extremely reactionary. Melodramatic epic, in fact, rarely if ever conforms to the principles of its own internal aesthetic commentary, because doing so would allow little space for any artistic creation. The obsession with morality at the core of this extreme concept shoves aside almost completely any independent notion of aesthetics within art, if indeed what would remain after putting such a concept into practice could be called art. This issue of aesthetic extremism will arise later and in an even more shocking context later in Les Martyrs.

The scene of Cymodocée's renunciation of paganism is also full of sexual symbolism. To begin with, the image of Homer as a serpent lends itself readily to a sexual interpretation. The snake can be interpreted as a phallic symbol menacing the virginal purity of the dove. This reading gains credence from the fact that Cymodocée the "dove" truly is a virgin. The polytheistic religion that Homer the "serpent" represents is thus identified with sexual danger and promiscuity. The renunciation ceremony preceding the extended simile also associates polytheism with sexual perversity and promiscuity. Démodocus, the father of Cymodocée and a Homeric priest, ritually sacrifices a "génisse" or heifer, meaning a cow that has never mothered a calf. The sacrificial cow is thus a virgin just like Cymodocée, and the slaughter of this cow symbolizes that paganism has no use for a virgin that refuses to worship at its altar. Unlike Christianity, which Chateaubriand would say encourages morality even among non-Christians, paganism admires virginity only in the service of its own (misguided) faith. Démodocus, who remains a Homeric priest to the end, never reconciles himself to his daughter's conversion, a fact that supports this interpretation (479-481). Although ancient paganism allowed for and even required virginity in certain contexts, the notion of sexual purity and innocence within paganism seems completely undermined by the epic simile and the sacrifice of the heifer. Also undermining this notion is the image beaten into the ritual cup from which Démodocus pours the wine before the sacrifice. The cup depicts the homosexual ravishing of the youth Ganymede by Jupiter disguised as an eagle. The depiction of this particular ancient myth on a sacred object reminds readers that, unlike the Christianity that Chateaubriand promotes, paganism accommodates a certain amount of homosexuality, or worse still, a certain amount of pedophilia.

The virginity of Cymodocée assumes epic significance once she converts to Christianity. At the end of Chateaubriand's epic, the martyrdom of the newly chaste Eudore,

combined with the sacrificial death of his virginal ladylove, “désarmera le courroux du Seigneur, et replongera Lucifer dans l’abîme” (148). God in heaven utters the preceding quotation. That is because Les Martyrs contains a certain amount of the supernatural, the element that Chateaubriand in the Génie most complains about when it predominates within epic. Yet Chateaubriand never says epic should exclude the supernatural, just that its amount must be strictly limited. So it is in Les Martyrs: a small number of scenes take place in heaven and in hell. In one of the celestial scenes, God explains to the assembled hosts that the holy sacrifice of the virginal Cymodocée during the impending persecution will make possible the spread of Christianity to the pagans. Specifically, God says “Les Païens auront aussi leur hostie : car les Chrétiens et les idolâtres vont se réunir à jamais au pied du Calvaire. Cette victime sera dérobée au troupeau innocent des Vierges, afin d’expier l’impureté des mœurs païennes. Fille des beaux-arts qui séduisent les faibles mortels, elle fera passer sous le joug de la croix les charmes et le génie de la Grèce” (148). God refers here to the fact that Cymodocée and her family are Greek, not Roman. The martyrdom of the formerly pagan Greek virgin will expiate the pagans’ numerous sins, which surely include sexual sins. The martyrdom of Cymodocée appears even more epic when viewed in conjunction with Eudore’s impending death. Their deaths will together constitute the foundation for the establishment of Christianity as the imperial religion (147-148). Cymodocée is thus the “vierge timide qui doit accroître les douleurs, les joies et la gloire du Martyr.” Capitalized in this way, “Martyr” refers specifically to Eudore, the most important victim of the imminent persecution. Chateaubriand ultimately depicts the fate of most of humankind hinging on Cymodocée’s virginity and Eudore’s renewed chastity. Proust, on the other contrary, will deflate and shrink the seriousness of sex, thereby mining the subject for humor. In doing this, the Recherche takes as its mock epic foil ultra-serious melodramatic epics in the tradition of Les Martyrs.

In Chateaubriand's epic, the sexual purity of Eudore and Cymodocée truly is the prerequisite for the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire by Constantine. The observation was made earlier that melodramatic epic does not primarily show religion saving humans, but instead depicts exceptionally moral humans saving religion in turbulent times, making possible the secure establishment of a new official religion. A different part of God's speech to the heavenly hosts makes this dynamic clear within Les Martyrs. God explains that Christianity will replace paganism as the imperial state religion, but only with the help of a sacrificial victim who is highly moral. Above all, God gives no theological explanation for why the official establishment of Christianity is necessary at this time. God does not show how establishment fits into an elaborate plan of his own design. God really gives no explanation at all, other than that the time is right for Christian churches to replace pagan temples throughout the empire, and that a morally outstanding victim is needed to make the transition possible. The passage below illustrates this melodramatic collapse of religion into morality. The term "le nouveau Cyrus" is a reference to Constantine. The phrases "Celui qui doit expier leurs crimes" and "Cette victime qui doit vaincre l'Enfer" are references to Eudore.

Assez longtemps l'idolâtrie éleva ses temples auprès des autels du Fils de l'homme ; il faut qu'elle disparaisse du monde. Déjà est né le nouveau Cyrus qui brisera les derniers simulacres des Esprits de ténèbres, et mettra le trône des Césars à l'ombre des saints Tabernacles. Mais les Chrétiens invincibles sous le fer et dans les flammes, se sont laissé amollir aux délices de la paix... Il faut, avant que le monde passe sous leur puissance, qu'ils soient dignes de leur gloire ; ils ont allumé le feu de la colère du Seigneur, ils n'obtiendront point grâce à ses yeux qu'ils n'aient été purifiés. Satan sera déchaîné sur la terre ; une dernière épreuve va commencer pour les Fidèles : les Chrétiens sont tombés ; ils seront punis. Celui qui doit expier leurs crimes par un sacrifice volontaire, est depuis longtemps marqué dans la pensée de l'Éternel... Cette victime qui doit vaincre l'Enfer par la vertu des souffrances et des mérites du sang de Jésus-Christ ; cette victime qui marchera à la tête de mille autres victimes, n'a point été choisi parmi les princes et les rois... En lui la religion va triompher du sang des héros païens et des sages de l'idolâtrie. (146-147)

God speaks these lines with great authority, as if he is in complete control. Yet careful examination reveals that Christianity cannot acquire the privilege of official status without Eudore and Cymodocée. God practically admits this, and without really providing any interesting theology to explain that his divine hand is still constantly at work in the background. The passage's last sentence indicates that Eudore is the one who will bring about the change in state religion: "En lui la religion va triompher du sang des héros païens et des sages de l'idolâtrie." The persecutions ordered by Diocletian will certainly strike down many Christians, but in Chateaubriand's scheme, the martyrdom of Eudore and Cymodocée play the linchpin role in Christianity's rise to state religion. The space that Chateaubriand carves out for the historical figure Constantine in this process will be explained later. What makes Eudore and Cymodocée appropriate for this great task is principally the shining example of their sexual morality. The present study focuses on Cymodocée's virginity, because it is more striking and easier to explain.

The story of Eudore's chastity is more complex and will have to be the subject of a later study. In short, however, Eudore is said to have indulged in sexual sin while in Rome and fallen in love with a Druid priestess of noble birth while in Gaul. All of this happens during his years away from Christianity. Yet the books recounting these events and Eudore's military exploits actually enhance his image and make him seem more admirable (168-172, 260-274). Eudore is never depicted as a wretch; he is never morally despicable. He does eventually feel guilt about having abandoned the Christian faith, but his image does not change significantly upon his re-conversion. Once reconverted, he clings to his chastity, even after falling in love with Cymodocée. Eudore and Cymodocée will undergo martyrdom before they can be regularly married, thus preserving their respective chastity and virginity until the epic's last

moment when their great sexual morality will serve as the foundation of the established Church. This last step in the process will be shown here shortly.

Two final points deserve mention concerning God's pronouncement in heaven. The first has to do with an apparent contradiction between Les Martyrs and one part of the Génie. In a section of the Génie that was closely studied above, Chateaubriand extols virginity, just as he does in Les Martyrs. Yet elsewhere in the Génie, he celebrates motherhood. Chateaubriand wanted Tasso to portray motherhood in Jerusalem Delivered. How does Chateaubriand reconcile his emphasis on virginity with his interest in motherhood? Simply put, he does not. Both motherhood and virginity have significant melodramatic potential. In the Génie, Chateaubriand celebrates both, although in different parts of his study. In Les Martyrs, he prizes virginity and chastity more than motherhood. Motherhood will be supremely important in Zola's melodramatic epics, the Évangile novels. Yet Zola will be arguing against Catholicism, which he perceives as promoting a life-negating virginity, a perception that little in Chateaubriand would disabuse him of. The second point to be made about God's pronouncement is that Chateaubriand manages to slip in among the divine words a brief but harsh criticism of the arts. God describes Cymodocée, the former Homeric priestess-in-training, as a "fille des beaux-arts qui séduisent les faibles mortels." This is one of the most anti-aesthetic statements in a literary work that contains quite a few of them.

A melodramatic peak is reached in Les Martyrs when the wholly evil Hierocles confronts the virginal Cymodocée, the woman after whom he has long lusted. Hierocles himself arranges this confrontation by using his vast political power to have Cymodocée arrested and brought to his palace. By this rather late point in the epic, Chateaubriand has shown the deputy emperor Galerius nefariously forcing Diocletian to resign so that he can become emperor in his place. This particular incident is not historically accurate: Diocletian

did indeed resign, but voluntarily (Cousin “Diocletian”). Galerius’s coup d’état happens to be one example of how Chateaubriand falsifies the historical side of his epic to heighten the melodrama. Chateaubriand’s melodramatic agenda requires that Galerius, the chief architect of the Christian persecutions, seem as evil and dastardly as possible. Of course, Hierocles, the favorite of Galerius, is depicted as even more evil than the new emperor. Upon assuming supreme imperial command, Galerius promotes Hierocles to be his prime minister, an administrative position which may well be an anachronism in Les Martyrs. In any event, Hierocles acquires even more political power as a result of this promotion. Galerius also rewards Hierocles by allowing him to live in the main imperial palace, which at this moment in history was the palace constructed by Galerius’s predecessors Titus and Nero. Hierocles now possesses more than enough authority to have Cymodocée arrested and brought to the palace so that he can do as he pleases with her. This is precisely the plan that Hierocles puts into action, but before Chateaubriand portrays the melodramatic clash of evil and innocence, he inserts a lengthy description of the luxurious imperial palace. This becomes an opportunity for yet another profoundly anti-aesthetic statement, because Chateaubriand dwells on the art decorating the palace. Once again, morality, especially sexual morality, becomes practically the sole criterion by which art is evaluated – and condemned.

Le nouvel empereur habitait ce beau palais. Hiérocès, son digne ministre, occupait un des portiques de la demeure du maître du monde. Les appartements du philosophe stoïque surpassaient en magnificence ceux même de Galérius. Sur les murs polis avec art étaient représentés des paysages charmants, de vastes forêts, de fraîches cascades. Les tableaux des plus grands maîtres ornaient des baignoires enchantées et des cabinets voluptueux : ici paraissait la *Junon laciniée* : pour servir de modèles à ce chef-d’œuvre, les Agrigentins avaient jadis offert leurs filles nues aux regards de Zeuxis ; là c’était la *Vénus* d’Apelles sortant de l’onde, digne de régner sur les dieux, ou d’être aimée d’Alexandre. On voyait mourir d’amour le *Satyre* de Protogène : l’habitant des bois expirait sur la mousse à l’entrée d’une grotte tapissée de lierre ; sa main laissait échapper sa flûte, son thyrsos était brisé, sa tasse renversée ; et tel était l’artifice du peintre, qu’il avait su réunir ce que Vénus a de plus matériel dans la brute, et de plus céleste dans l’homme. Malheur à celui qui fit sortir les beaux-arts de temples de la Divinité, pour en décorer la demeure des mortels ! Alors les œuvres sublimes du

silence, de la méditation et du génie, devinrent les causes, les éléments, les témoins des plus grands crimes, ou des passions les plus honteuses. (430-431)

As before, the punch that this passage delivers comes at the very end, and quite a shocking blow it is. Chateaubriand or the narrator – can there really be any doubt here that they are one and the same – declares that secular art causes moral decay, sexual corruption and monstrous crimes. The conclusion strongly suggests that all art should be religiously inspired and be found only in places of worship, never in private homes. Once again, the melodramatic obsession with morality produces an extreme, truly reactionary aesthetic statement.

Technically, Chateaubriand's pronouncement here is limited to the fine arts – painting, sculpture, and the like – but the insistence on placing the most moralistic restrictions on creativity almost certainly applies to literature as well. As for the art in Hierocles's palace lodgings, Chateaubriand repeatedly emphasizes its lasciviousness. From the painting of Juno, for the creation of which many young girls posed nude with their pagan parents' permission; to the painting of Venus, the goddess of love; to the painting of a Satyr dying of sexual passion – the decadent artworks are supposed to reflect the corrupt and evil imperial official whose home they adore.

Hierocles is that imperial official, and the extremely tense sexual encounter between him and Cymodocée peaks with a verbal exchange in which the former defends the concept of sex for pleasure. Hierocles at least tries to persuade Cymodocée to become his lover before he resorts to more aggressive tactics. His propositioning of Cymodocée is surprisingly restrained. He defends the concept of sexual pleasure for its own sake, but does not call for anything like an orgy, as the previous harsh denunciations of his character might lead the reader to expect. At least according to some modern ethical systems, the ideas expressed by Hierocles in his exchange with Cymodocée below might seem almost reasonable, were it not the case that he is

holding her in the palace against her will. Of course, given that Hierocles is an atheist, his code of sexual ethics is one in which religious notions play no part.

--- Nymph divine, s'écria Hiérocès transporté d'amour, relève-toi ! Ne vois-tu pas que tes charmes détruisent l'effet de tes prières ? Et qui pourrait te céder à un rival ? La sagesse, enfant trop aimable, consiste à suivre les penchants de son cœur. N'en crois pas une religion farouche qui veut commander à tes sens. Les préceptes de pureté, de modestie, d'innocence, sont sans doute utiles à la foule ; mais le sage jouit en secret des biens de la nature. Les dieux n'existent point, ou ne se mêlent point des choses d'ici-bas. Viens donc, ô vierge ingénue, viens : abandonnons-nous sans remords aux délices de l'amour et aux faveurs de la fortune.

A ces mots, Hiérocès jette ses bras autour de Cymodocée, comme un serpent s'enlace autour d'un jeune palmier ou d'un autel consacré à la pudeur. La fille de Démodocus se dégage avec indignation des embrassements du monstre.

Quoi ! dit-elle, c'est là le langage de la sagesse ? Ennemi du ciel, tu oses parler de vertu ? Ne m'as-tu pas promis de sauver l'Eudore ? (432-433)

At least by today's standards, the moderate language of the character who is supposed to be evil incarnate only makes the Puritanism advocated in the rest of Les Martyrs seem all the more extreme. Following the penchants of one's heart in matters of love 'suivre les penchants de son cœur' hardly seems very sinister today. According to the internal logic of Chateaubriand's epic, however, Hierocles's language is designed to offer an absolute contrast to the sexual morality personified by Cymodocée and Eudore. Nothing could be more alien to the sexual morality promoted in the rest of this epic than Hierocles's plea to enjoy without regret the delights of love and to ignore any grim religion that presumes to dictate one's physical pleasures. There are very real limits to the moderation and reasonableness of Hierocles, however. He threatens to take Cymodocée sexually by force if she refuses to yield to his persuasion (432-434). Hierocles thus earns the label of monster that Les Martyrs has worked so hard to apply to him all along. Cymodocée later manages to escape from her palace prison, her virginity intact, only to fall victim to the persecution of Christians that Galerius and Hierocles had previously set in motion. Cymodocée and her fiancé Eudore will shortly after be thrown to a ravenous tiger in a giant Roman amphitheater, their punishment for

proclaiming the virtues of Christianity. As the tiger feasts on their bodies, she and Eudore will die in each other's arms, without ever having consummating their love. An analysis of that scene will come in just a moment.

Before Chateaubriand presents his own version of the "Christians being thrown to the lions" theme, he tries his hand at a Sodom-like spectacle played out in the heart of Rome. The persecution of Christians ordered by Diocletian and Galerius will be a very large affair indeed. Realizing that such a large offensive will need popular support, Satan comes to earth in disguise to whip the pagan population of Rome to a frenzy in preparation for the roundup and slaughter of Christians (464-465). The Satan-inspired bacchanal described in the passage below is most noteworthy for the sexual mayhem that predominates. Sexual anarchy appears as the prerequisite for mass murder.

D'imprudentes largesses, dont la source était dans la ruine des citoyens, et surtout dans la dépouille des Fidèles, avaient renversé l'esprit de la foule. Toute licence était permise, et même commandée. A la lueur des flambeaux, dans la voie patricienne, une partie du peuple assistait à des prostitutions publiques : des courtisanes nues, rassemblées au son de la trompette, célébraient par des chants obscènes... Galérius montaient au Capitole sur un char tiré par des éléphants ; devant lui marchait la famille captive de Narsès, roi des Perses. Les danses et les hurlements des Bacchantes variaient et multipliaient le désordre. Des outres et des amphores sans nombre étaient ouvertes près des fontaines, et aux carrefours de la ville. On se barbouillait le visage de lie, on pétrissait la boue avec le vin. Bacchus paraissait élevé sur un tréteau. Ses prêtresses agitaient autour de lui des torches enflammées, des thyrses entourés de pampres de vignes, et bondissaient au son des cymbales, des tambours et des clairons ; leurs cheveux flottaient au hasard : elles étaient vêtues de la peau d'un cerf, rattachée sur leurs épaules par des couleuvres qui se jouaient autour de leurs cous. Les unes portaient dans leurs bras des chevreaux naissants ; les autres présentaient la mamelle à des louveteaux ; toutes étaient couronnées de branches de chêne et de sapin ; des hommes déguisés en satyres les accompagnaient, traînant un bouc orné de guirlandes. (465-466)

This extremely lurid passage almost speaks for itself. The fornicating in the open air, the naked courtesans singing obscenely, the wild dancing and yelling of the Bacchants, the outrageous costumes, the women breast-feeding wolf-calves: all this resembles fanciful popular notions of the orgiastic excess that prevailed in Sodom and Gomorrah before God

destroyed these doomed ancient cities. Nowhere in Les Martyrs do the names of Sodom and Gomorrah appear, but just as Chateaubriand finally admitted the melodramatic quality of his epic in an essay written in response to critics, he invokes the name of one of these supremely decadent cities in the same essay. This is the essay called “Examen des *Martyrs*”, which began serving as the epic’s preface soon after it was written. The invocation of Sodom appears as the second epigraph to this chapter. Chateaubriand recalls the famous scene where the patriarch Abraham negotiates with God in an attempt to save the city. Without denying the corruption of Sodom, Abraham simply asks that the city be spared if he can find an increasingly small number of just residents. Of course, Sodom is still destroyed, because Abraham cannot find any just residents other than his own family. The parallel with Les Martyrs is obvious: corrupt imperial Rome requires a few just residents to redeem it, and the sexually irreproachable couple, Eudore and Cymodocée, will bring this about through their martyrdom. Clear and unmistakable is the implication that modern Paris, too, is sexually corrupt and in need of virtuous Christians, along with a powerful and established Catholic church, to save it from collapse. Such puritanical implications for nineteenth-century France are what makes melodramatic epics like Les Martyrs primary intertexts for Proust’s Recherche, where the amusing diversity of Belle Époque sexual habits is a primary theme, arguably the most important theme of all. Zola’s censorious Évangiles will surpass Chateaubriand’s Les Martyrs in the fierceness of its attack on modern French sexual habits.

The martyrdom of Eudore and Cymodocée takes place in the Amphiteater of Vespasian, where they will be thrown to a ravenous beast in front of a cheering crowd, the same crowd that earlier joined in the open-air bacchanal. Once placed in the arena to die, but before the beasts are loosed upon them, Eudore and Cymodocée decide to marry each other on the spot and in the sight of God. This utterly last-minute, irregular ceremony consists of

Eudore giving Cymodocée a ring to symbolize their marriage. The ring is drenched in the blood of Eudore, who was tortured before being thrown into the arena (494-495). The impromptu ceremony is finished without a moment to spare. A wild tiger is let loose, and the beast soon tears the newlyweds apart (498). There may be little humor to milk from this ugly, violent death in itself, but the elaborate ideological message that melodrama constructs around its pathos is certainly fair game for comedy.

Chateaubriand drives home that ideological message very clearly in the final paragraphs of Les Martyrs. The epic leaves no doubt that the martyrdom of the celibate newlyweds makes possible the establishment of Christianity as the new state religion. The epic's conclusion relates Constantine's military challenge to Galerius, the new emperor as a result of a coup d'état. A string of military victories soon place Constantine on the threshold of supreme command in Rome. Chateaubriand wastes no time in showing Constantine crowned Roman emperor. Although not historically accurate, Constantine then immediately proclaims Christianity the new state religion. The now dead Eudore and Cymodocée, the epic's real heroes, are depicted as central to these momentous proceedings. Their deaths set off a chain of events, including the collapse of the Amphiteater of Vespasian and the tumbling down of pagan religious statues from their pedestals. Following his rapid military conquests, Constantine chooses to receive the imperial crown and to proclaim the new state religion quite literally on the tomb of the saintly, celibate, recently martyred couple. These are the epic's final paragraphs:

Les époux martyrs avaient à peine reçu la palme, que l'on aperçut au milieu des airs une croix de lumière, semblable à ce Labarum qui fit triompher Constantin ; la foudre gronda sur le Vatican, colline alors déserte mais souvent visitée par un Esprit inconnu ; l'amphithéâtre fut ébranlé jusque dans ses fondements ; toutes les statues des idoles tombèrent, et l'on entendit, comme autrefois à Jérusalem, une voix qui disait :

« LES DIEUX S'EN VONT. »...

Constantin paraît aux portes de Rome. Galérius succombe aux horreurs de son mal ; il expire en blasphémant l'Éternel. En vain un nouveau tyran s'empare du pouvoir suprême : Dieu tonne du haut du ciel ; le signe du salut brille ; Constantin frappe ; Maxence est précipité dans le Tibre. Le vainqueur entre dans la cité reine du Monde : les ennemis des Chrétiens se dispersent...Constantin vole aux lieux où l'on avait entassé les corps des victimes : les deux époux conservaient toute leur beauté dans la mort. Par un miracle du Ciel, leurs plaies se trouvaient fermées, et l'expression de la paix et du bonheur était empreinte sur leur front. Une fosse est creusée pour eux dans ce cimetière...Sur la tombe des jeunes martyrs Constantin reçoit la couronne d'Auguste, et sur cette même tombe il proclame la religion chrétienne religion de l'empire. (498-499) [Emphasis in original]

The instant crumbling of the amphitheater where Eudore and Cymodocée died, the tumbling down of the pagan idols, and the voice from on high declaring the departure of polytheism do not much enhance the role of the Christian God in Les Martyrs, even though these events are clearly supernatural. These are simplistic, (melo)dramatic flourishes designed to convey as concretely as possible the victory of good and over evil and the triumph of the favored religion. Zola will employ a similar device in the Évangiles, which depict the sudden collapse of hated Catholic churches at the moment when the triumph of the new secular religion becomes manifest. The perfect timing of these spectacularly vindictive events will be just as unbelievable as the events themselves. Proust's Recherche will contain multiple counterpoints to the melodramatic, blatantly partisan device of churches or pieces of churches that suddenly fall to the ground. Indeed, the Proustian narrator will compare the composition of the vast novel of which he is the protagonist to the construction of a cathedral. This elaborate simile comparing the Recherche itself to a cathedral will not be partisan, at least not in any obvious way, but will instead contain an abundance of finely shaded meanings, many of them quite humorous.

The redefinition of new/romantic/humanitarian epic as melodramatic epic has been in large part a preparation for the encounter with the strangeness of Zola's Évangiles. The other motive for redefining a recognized, albeit little studied genre has been to facilitate the

demonstration of the Évangiles' impact on Proust's Recherche. Setting the Évangiles in the context of a literary tradition also helps by expanding the number of texts with which Zola's final novels can be shown working in conjunction as top intertext for the Recherche. The powerful similarities between the Évangiles and new, post-revolutionary epic will seem almost obvious in the following chapter, and yet this resemblance has until now not been recognized within published scholarship. A sheer lack of interest, until very recently, in Zola's final novels helps explain this oversight. A dislike in some quarters for the category of humanitarian epic also probably delayed the recognition of a fundamental similarity. Another likely reason for this oversight is that a slight reconceptualization or readjusting of generic categories is needed to bring the abundant similarities best to the fore. Such a readjustment is what has been attempted here. The epochal event that is the French Revolution, the importance and lasting influence of which can hardly be overstated, has grounded this expansion of the genre of humanitarian epic through its merger with melodrama.

Nevertheless, the redefinition of a genre cannot be the work of a single study. Other French epics from the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century will have to be examined in light of the theoretical discoveries that have been made here. The new insight as to the fundamental correspondence between melodrama and post-revolutionary epic is partly an invitation to more research, particularly on other, related literary texts. The decision to focus here on Chateaubriand, however, has been justified by his pivotal role at the dawn of the century, a role recognized by most scholars of French literature. A close study of his Génie du Christianisme and of his epic Les Martyrs has been the ideal way to begin substantiating this reworking of the genre. Sufficient evidence has been advanced to support provisionally the claim that melodramatic epic as defined here does, indeed, exist and that Chateaubriand initiated the form.

More work will be needed, though, on the question of Chateaubriand's relation to the epics written during the Romantic period proper. As stated previously, scholars have disagreed over the degree to which the Génie and Les Martyrs anticipate the humanitarian epics written by authors such as, among others, Hugo, Vigny, and Lamartine. The greatest expert on humanitarian epic, Herbert Hunt, accepts Chateaubriand's role in the shaping the new form. As shown earlier, Hunt quotes approvingly the statement of another leading scholar, Victor Giraud, who says that "l'épopée moderne...a reçu de Chateaubriand l'ébranlement décisif" (45). Hunt approves this statement, even though he realizes that Chateaubriand's promotion of Christianity separates him in a major way from the leading humanitarian epicists, all of whom are in rebellion to some degree against Christianity. Paul Bénichou is also perfectly willing to overlook this difference, writing that "...une branche du romantisme descend de lui [Chateaubriand]: celle de Lamartine, Hugo, Vigny, catholique au départ et qui cessa bientôt de l'être. Ce romantisme est, à l'arrivée, avec tout l'ensemble du mouvement, libéral ou républicain, et libre penseur" (70). This indication of Chateaubriand's impact on Hugo, Vigny, Lamartine is important for present study, because the latter three authors are widely recognized as the greatest practitioners of humanitarian or romantic epic. Bénichou perspicaciously looks past Chateaubriand's religious differences with these and other authors to grasp the larger point of their more fundamental similarities.

Yet some scholars, unwilling to look past the obvious religious differences, deny Chateaubriand's role in the creation of new, humanitarian epic. Léon Cellier is one of these. Cellier's definition of French humanitarian epic is one of the best available, and it is worth quoting his definition before looking at his refusal to admit Chateaubriand's participation in the birth of the new epic form. In his study, L'épopée humanitaire et les grands mythes

romantiques, Cellier uses the terms humanitarian epic and romantic epic interchangeably. His definition of the genre is the following:

L'épopée romantique est humanitaire et religieuse. Il n'y a qu'un héros épique : l'Homme ; il n'y a qu'un sujet épique : le progrès de l'Humanité. L'épopée romantique reste donc éminemment le récit d'une action héroïque ; mais elle prétend aussi délivrer sous une forme historico-allégorique un message théosophique. Le merveilleux cesse d'être un ornement ; il est intériorisé, et plus exactement l'œuvre humaine laisse entrevoir en filigrane l'action providentielle : *Gesta Dei per homines*. Enfin l'évolution de l'humanité est analogue à l'évolution de l'individu. L'épopée romantique est le poème de la rédemption. L'âge d'or qui brille dans l'avenir ne se réduit pas au bonheur terrestre ; il est une rédemption totale de l'univers...L'effet immédiat d'une telle conception est qu'elle rend oiseuse toute discussion sur la forme et la technique. Le problème est dépassé. (98-99)

According to Cellier, the chief characteristic of humanitarian/romantic epic is a concern with humanity in its entirety and the attribution of grand religious meaning to human evolution and progress of all kinds. In admirably concise fashion, Cellier thus explains how humanitarian epic got its name. The truly important question, at least for present purposes, thus becomes exactly how much Cellier's definition diverges from Chateaubriand's vision of epic. To begin with, Chateaubriand's vision for the genre is most decidedly not nationalistic; his vision is just as concerned, at least implicitly, with the welfare of all humanity. Chateaubriand also places just as strong an emphasis on the concepts of evolution and progress, at least in terms of the human understanding and practice of morality. The clear message of the Génie is that human morality has evolved and progressed over time, progress which is, of course, credited to Christianity, but Christianity in the very particular way that Chateaubriand understands it. Furthermore, Chateaubriand clearly believes that progress in morality continues and can still make new strides in the nineteenth century, especially if his view of morality is practiced and literature and the arts. As shown earlier, Chateaubriand in the Génie really does not believe that Christianity as he understands it has ever been adequately translated or depicted within epic. One difference between Chateaubriand's vision

and typical humanitarian epic is that the latter looks more persistently into the future, but this future-directedness is not fundamentally incompatible with Chateaubriand's vision. At the same time, both humanitarian epic and Chateaubriand's epic ideal make significant use of history. In his definition above, Cellier says that humanitarian epic delivers its message "sous une forme historico-allégorique." The historical/allegorical quality of Chateaubriand's epic Les Martyrs has already been demonstrated in these pages.

In two even more powerful ways than those just mentioned, Cellier's definition of humanitarian epic unwittingly builds a bridge back to Chateaubriand. First, Cellier resolutely disposes of any issue or problem arising from differences of form. He writes, "L'effet immédiat d'une telle conception est qu'elle rend oiseuse toute discussion sur la forme et la technique. Le problème est dépassé." The fact that Les Martyrs is written in prose, whereas most humanitarian epics are written in verse, makes no difference in determining Chateaubriand's role in the creation of new epic. According to Cellier's own logic, any other formal concerns or objections carry little to no weight. The new kind of epic that was born in the wake of the French Revolution is defined by its content, not by any particular technique or form. Yet the most important similarity by far between humanitarian epic and Chateaubriand's vision for epic is their similar marginalization of God, all the while keeping and insisting upon a distinctly religious tone overall. Cellier writes that, in humanitarian epic, "l'œuvre humaine laisse entrevoir en filigrane l'action providentielle." The phrase "en filigrane" means between the lines, not explicitly stated. In other words, humanitarian epic places the grand quest of human evolution squarely at center stage, both as that evolution has unfolded throughout history and as it will unfold into the future. Neither God nor God's intervention in earthly events is the chief concern of humanitarian epic. This strikingly resembles Chateaubriand's prescription in the Génie to keep the supernatural to a minimum, a prescription that Les

Martyrs puts into practice. It was stated earlier here that Chateaubriand's de-emphasis of theology and of the supernatural actually makes his theories more, not less useful to epic projects with (seemingly) different religious orientations. Cellier's definition, which takes for granted the non- and sometimes anti-Christian orientation of humanitarian epic, indirectly proves this very point. Humanitarian epic can almost be said to deify humanity and to deify the concept of progress, an approach which assures it from the start a very uneasy relationship towards many versions of Christianity, but not an uneasy relationship towards Chateaubriand and his own view of epic.

In spite of all this, Cellier denies Chateaubriand's relevance to the mainstream of nineteenth-century French epic. This is not because Cellier carefully considers all the issues that have just been raised here, only to reach conclusions on every point opposite to the conclusions reached here. In fact, Cellier does not consider Chateaubriand's relation to humanitarian epic in much detail or depth, nor does he closely examine what the Génie actually says about epic. Like some other scholars, Cellier mostly stops once he runs up against the obstacle of Chateaubriand's Christianity. Cellier writes, "...un examen objectif révèle que l'influence considérable exercée par Chateaubriand sur ses héritiers ne s'étend pas à l'épopée, et que, dans ses propres tentatives, la part de la nouveauté est moins importante que celle des formules usées. Sa place est bien au point terminus et non au commencement" (33). In this citation, Cellier is saying that Les Martyrs represents then end of a long line of Christian epics rather than the beginning of a line of epics with a radically new religious inspiration, which is what humanitarian epics represented. Yet the close reading of the Génie just performed here indicates how significantly different Chateaubriand's vision of epic is from prior Christian epics. His vision is much more similar to melodrama, a literary form that emerged and developed in the period Chateaubriand was writing.

Another problem for Cellier's position is the following contradiction, which he himself acknowledges: "l'influence considérable exercée par Chateaubriand sur ses héritiers ne s'étend pas à l'épopée." Every critic who denies Chateaubriand's role in the creation of humanitarian/romantic epic must confront the challenge posed by the widespread acknowledgement of Chateaubriand's influence on most other aspects of Romanticism and even beyond. The commentary of Maurice Regard contains this same contradiction, and Regard realizes it (xii). In truth, why should Chateaubriand's seminal role be any different in terms of epic? None of the scholars consulted for this project really provides an explanation for this seeming discrepancy, even though Cellier and Regard are honest enough to point it out. Of course, according to the new interpretation being developed here, there really is no discrepancy: Chateaubriand's influence almost certainly does extend to epic as the genre was practiced throughout the nineteenth century.

This is not to deny the differences that do exist between Chateaubriand's epic vision and the later humanitarian epics, but a clear and rather short line can be drawn connecting the former to the latter. For that matter, the later humanitarian epics differ among themselves in certain ways, and these differences seem to be just as great as those the later epics have collectively with the Génie and Les Martyrs.

The embryonic state in which the scholarship on these texts and subjects finds itself cannot be emphasized too much. Not enough work has been done in these areas to think through even the most basic difficulties, ramifications and contradictions. Of course, the reason that scholarship on these epics is in an embryonic state is that these texts have been deeply unpopular for a long time. Cellier concedes this unpopularity and holds out little hope of changing it. He says that one goal of his study is to get people to read these "neglected works" 'des œuvres négligées,' but he admits that such a goal is utopian and far-fetched,

Que ce projet soit utopique, nous n'avons pas la naïveté de l'ignorer. Dans l'immense déchet laissé par le Romantisme, l'épopée tient une place énorme. Amateurs de romans, de poèmes lyriques, indulgents pour des poèmes en prose ou des contes fantastiques, tout aussi conventionnels et désuets, mais offrant l'avantage de la brièveté..., nous ne pouvons plus supporter ces monstrueuses machines. (11)

The phrase “ces monstrueuses machines” really says it all, and this from a scholar who must have devoted a great deal of time to the preparation of what is, after all, a large study on these texts. As shown previously, Herbert Hunt, whose study is even longer and more elaborate than Cellier's, makes a similar, sad remark.

Given the disagreement among scholars as to the contours of this new kind of epic, and given also the diversity that exists in form and technique among the epics themselves, the most sensible thing to do might be to focus on the broadest, most common themes, the themes about which there seems to be universal agreement. That is actually what the present study has done, even as it has merged this genre with melodrama. Themes such as the long historical reach of the French Revolution, the vast religious ambitions that lasted throughout the nineteenth century, the near-constant engagement in politico-religious disputes, the ultimate failure of the vast ambitions, and the great concern with personal morality – all these themes seem to emerge time and again in scholarship on new, post-revolutionary epic, just as they do in the best theoretical work that has been done on melodrama so far. Of course, the proposal to merge this genre with melodrama is itself quite original, and not all previous scholars discuss new epic's treatment of morality in quite the same way, but most do discuss it. Put another way, this project has involved finding the lowest common denominator among the epics themselves and among the best scholarly commentaries on those epics, with the conclusion being a demonstration of how very powerful this lowest common denominator can be as an interpretive tool. This interpretive tool turns out to be particularly useful and powerful in explaining the sexual politics found in these works.

CHAPTER 5

BRUNETIÈRE, VOGÜÉ, TOLSTOY, AND THE DREYFUS AFFAIR'S MELODRAMATIC ENDGAME

That there is nothing new to be said about the Dreyfus Affair is an almost universal illusion in France. "Surely it has all been said already?": this opening gambit seems to have become commonplace...[T]here is still much awaiting discovery about one of the Third Republic's most profound crises, even after a century's study, which has produced a veritable mountain of books and articles...I have been and remain convinced that the mass of under-exploited press and archival material on the Affair and its role in French society and politics is...enormous...

Eric Cahm, The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics (vii-viii)

Aux environs de 1886 il s'est manifesté dans toutes les sphères de l'activité intellectuelle en France un mouvement religieux qui est intéressant, voire émouvant...[O]n s'est éloigné des méthodes rationnelles, systématiques, objectives alors en honneur, et on en est venu à serrer de plus près la vie de l'âme dans sa diversité infinie. Nous verrons...que le renouveau religieux ne s'est pas produit d'un seul bond dans l'esprit national ; il ne s'agit pas, surtout dans la première moitié de notre période, d'un retour intégral à une religion établie. C'était plutôt une attitude sympathique envers la religion, une préoccupation de questions d'ordre moral et social...Une douloureuse crise nationale [l'Affaire Dreyfus] a terminé cette phase du renouveau, et pendant la dernière partie de la période nous voyons se déclarer une nouvelle attitude religieuse qui aboutira à un retour plus général vers une religion dogmatique.

Elizabeth Fraser, Le Renouveau religieux d'après le roman français de 1886 à 1914 (v)

Avant 1886, avant *Le Roman russe* d'Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, Tolstoï... restait un inconnu : depuis 1886, il est, en France, illustre. Il est permis, en général, de penser que la Russie n'a jamais, en France, fait l'objet d'un aussi grand intérêt, et n'a jamais été aussi bien connue que dans la dernière décennie du siècle passé [le 19^e siècle] : Tolstoï et son combat contre la réalité russe de son temps sont d'actualité à Paris, parce que la Russie est à l'ordre du jour.

Wladimir Troubetzkoy, "Les intellectuels français lisant Résurrection" (47)

The finding that the melodramatic mode has often been pressed into service to advance various political campaigns and movements led Julia Przybos to investigate just how close the connection between major historical events and melodrama in art and literature can be. In the concluding chapters of her important study, L'Entreprise mélodramatique, Przybos reveals that certain key historical moments display a perfect mingling of dominant political events and melodramatic art and literature (173-194). In other words, not only can political crises push artistic creativity in a melodramatic direction, but the melodramatic art and literature that thereby results can in turn have an impact on the leading political developments. At such times, mainstream politics itself can take on all the characteristics of melodramatic theater, which Przybos demonstrates in a later study that uses the years of the Terror during the French Revolution as its prime example ("Tribun" 16-25).

Thus, Przybos finds that certain historical moments can be almost entirely melodramatic, with a perfect synchronicity between the melodrama of mainstream politics and the melodrama of the dominant art and literature then being created. A brief historical period that Przybos never considers provides further evidence for her theoretical discovery. This other historical period which represents a supremely melodramatic moment is, of course, the last several years of the Dreyfus Affair, when the fight over the guilt or innocence of Captain Alfred Dreyfus turned into a fight over the role of the Catholic Church in France, particularly in terms of Church-run schools run and the Church's status as France's state religion. This period deserves to be called one of history's supremely melodramatic moments, in part because of the perfect convergence between the strongly anticlerical message contained in Zola's Évangile novels and the anticlerical agenda of the influential and highly partisan newspaper that serialized those novels, the newspaper L'Aurore.

In full agreement with the earlier findings of Przybos, this chapter will demonstrate that the number of social, political, and cultural forces that converged to make the Dreyfus Affair's ending a supremely melodramatic moment is even larger than previously supposed. The forces that led to this flowering of melodrama were numerous, powerful, and longstanding. Of course, one claim of the present study is that the late Dreyfus Affair's melodrama has its most distant origins in the religious disputes of the French Revolution. Yet the birth of the Third Republic in 1870, in the wake of the military defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, created a partly new political and cultural dynamic that had a more direct impact on the turn that the Dreyfus Affair took at its conclusion.

Two long-term historical developments, both of which started after the Third Republic's inception, created the conditions that allowed the end of the Dreyfus Affair to become an intensely melodramatic moment in time. This chapter will provide an overview of both developments, but then focus on the second one, because it sheds more light on the relationship between Zola's Évangiles and Proust's Recherche. The first long-term development is that the fight over established Catholicism, a fight that never completely ended after the French Revolution and Napoleon's signing of the Concordat with the Vatican, flared again early in the Third Republic. More important still is that, early in the Third Republic, this dispute took on a new dimension, one that was rich in melodramatic potential because it involved children. Primary and secondary schools, along with the issue of how to raise children more generally, became a new battleground in the war over the proper relationship between Church and State in France. The second long-term development that fed into the outburst of melodrama at the end of the Dreyfus Affair was a religious reawakening that began in the 1880s. This religious reawakening took place chiefly among the elite in France, but it influenced the elites in many different realms of French life. A reaction against positivism and

Naturalism, which were perceived at the time as atheistic doctrines, this religious reawakening made an impact in the artistic, literary, social, economic, and political spheres.

The political fight over religion began very soon after the Third Republic was founded.

An extremely conservative and assertively Catholic government rose to power in France in 1873, led by Marshal Mac-Mahon as president and the Duke de Broglie as vice-president of the Council of Ministers. Their primary stated objective was to restore a “Moral Order” to France, and their tenure in power actually came to be known as the government of Moral Order. In practice, this term meant that Mac-Mahon and de Broglie wanted to turn the clock back at least fifty years on Church/State relations in France. By itself, the reactionary government of Mac-Mahon and de Broglie is not particularly important for the present study. It is useful, however, as an illustration of the fact that very few, if any of the fundamental Church/State issues raised during the French Revolution had been settled in the French political mainstream. Tremendous fights over the most basic questions in this area still occurred at the highest reaches of French political life. In his massive history of the Third Republic, Jean-Yves Mollier describes the Moral Order of Mac-Mahon and de Broglie.

Simplement, cet exécutif est un organe de combat et il va tenter de mettre au pas un pays dont il désapprouve l'évolution. Le 25 mai [1873], le nouveau chef de l'État l'avait clairement exprimé : l'«Ordre moral» devait être restauré avec fermeté ; il le serait sans faiblesse. La formule [de l'Ordre moral] n'a rien d'original quand elle est utilisée en ce mois de mai 1873 et, pourtant, elle va devenir le synonyme de cette courte période où Mac-Mahon et de Broglie ont essayé de faire reculer la France d'un demi-siècle. Incapables de comprendre les raisons profondes de l'anticléricalisme français, fruit des compromissions de l'Église catholique avec tous les pouvoirs depuis 1801, ils orientent leur action dans un sens inquiétant. Certes, ils ne vont pas jusqu'à consacrer la France au Sacré-Cœur comme le souhaitait le baron de Belcastel, mais ils font décréter d'utilité publique l'érection de la basilique de Montmartre. Conçu comme une réparation des crimes de la Commune, le Sacré-Cœur apparaîtra longtemps comme une insulte à la conscience républicaine. (74)

This reactionary government, which tried to “faire reculer la France d’un demi-siècle,” touched off anew, at the start of the Third Republic, the political dispute over established religion. This dispute remained a part of mainstream French political life for the next three-and-a-half decades, until the official separation of Church and State was finally enacted in France on July 3, 1905 (Derfler 58-60). The many twists and turns of this long-running political debate can be found in studies such as Jean-Marie Mayeur’s La vie politique sous la Troisième République 1870-1940 (32-208), Aristide Briand’s La Séparation des Églises et de l’État (125-143), and Theodore Zeldin’s History of French Passions (983-1039). Mollier’s mention of the controversy surrounding the construction of the Sacré-Cœur Church in Montmartre is quite relevant to the present study. Paris, the novel by Zola that serves as the preface to his Évangiles, will depict the construction of the Sacré-Cœur as part of a Catholic plot to retake control France (1240-1243).

The Dreyfus Affair inflamed passions on both sides of this religious debate to heights not seen in decades and was a proximate cause of the decision to disestablish Catholicism in 1905 (Derfler 58-60, Fraser 13-14). While neither the Vatican nor the French Catholic hierarchy ever took a position on the legal issues at the heart of the scandal, certain high-profile sections of the Catholic Church in France did ally themselves emphatically with the anti-Dreyfusards. This was especially the case with two powerful Catholic religious orders, the Jesuits and the Assumptionists (Capéran 47-51, 257-276). Of the two, the Assumptionists had by far the bigger impact during the Affair, because they published La Croix, one of the highest circulating newspapers in France at the time. La Croix adopted a stridently anti-Dreyfusard editorial line and thereby contributed to the general impression, especially common in pro-Dreyfus circles, that the Catholic Church was wholly committed to the anti-Dreyfusard cause. When the legal battle to prove Dreyfus’s innocence scored major successes

in late 1898 and 1899, Dreyfusard forces began to feel they had the latitude and political clout to take revenge on the Catholic Church. The disestablishment of Catholicism in French in 1905 thus flows out of the empowerment of the Dreyfusards in very late 1890s (Capéran 47-51, 257-276).

The Dreyfus Affair also led directly to the French government's 1904 decision to prohibit all religious orders from operating schools, a decision that was widely disobeyed and later overturned (Derfler 58-60). Yet the spread of the religious dispute into the area of educational policy actually began very early in the Third Republic, starting with an 1875 disagreement over the governance of French universities, a disagreement that soon expanded to encompass many aspects of primary and secondary education as well (Ozouf L'École 15-95). In her impressive study, L'École, l'Église et la République: 1871-1914, Mona Ozouf explains that no issue involving Church/State relations created more acrimony during the first several decades of the Third Republic's existence than the question of who would control the schools that educated French children.

Le ménage que font en France, de 1871-1914, l'Église et la République, n'est jamais aussi orageux que lorsque surgit la « question scolaire ». Et pour décrire les batailles qui se livrent autour de l'école, les journaux trouvent leurs accents les plus passionnés... A propos du problème scolaire, chacun révèle l'interprétation qu'il donne de la Révolution de 1789 et du passé politique de la France. Chacun décide aussi de ses options philosophiques : il s'agit en effet de savoir si l'instruction est également due à tous ; si on peut sans despotisme, la rendre obligatoire ; si les femmes peuvent, et doivent, y avoir accès ; si on croit au progrès de la civilisation et de la culture ; quelle place il faut faire à la science dans l'éducation ; s'il est possible de séparer morale et religion. Enfin, et surtout, il y va du problème de la forme de l'État : l'école laïque, pour les républicains, n'est pas séparable de leur cause ; en la fondant, en la défendant, la République a le sentiment de lutter pour son existence. Inversement, l'Église, en s'engageant dans la lutte pour la restauration monarchique, contre la République et son école, croit combattre pour sa survie... Tous ces problèmes, du reste, s'enchevêtrent ; quand il s'agit de l'école, la pédagogie se marie au droit, à la politique, à l'économie, à la métaphysique, à la morale. Cette diversité d'incidences explique l'ampleur de la question scolaire, mais aussi son irritante confusion. (5-9)

Ozouf explains elegantly why the debate over the education of children remained bitter and passionate for so long: both sides of the Third Republic's primary political dividing line believed they would win permanent victory only by training the youngest generation, the nation's true future, to see the world from their perspective. As Ozouf indicates, the main political division during the first half of the Third Republic was between secularist defenders of the Republic and Catholic partisans who either worked actively for the restoration of the French monarchy or at least endorsed centralized power such as the monarchy had represented. Strange as it may seem, the drive to restore the French monarchy remained an active and potent political force throughout the first two decades of the Third Republic (Zeldin History of French Passions 1: 393-427). This demonstrates once again that very few, if any, of the reforms brought about by the 1789 Revolution were considered settled and non-negotiable within mainstream French political discourse even as late as the 1880s. The most fundamental issues of Church/State relations were still subject to vociferous debate, and so was the republican form of government itself. Although the last realistic hope of restoring the French monarchy died in the late 1880s, the strong devotion to Catholicism that had almost always accompanied monarchism remained a rallying point for political conservatives (426-427).

Twice in the citation above Ozouf mentions how the religiously inflected debate over educational policy often turned into a debate over morality. Later in her study, Ozouf describes how issues related to sex and family life often became a central focus of this debate, with each side claiming that the schools it proposed would do a better job inculcating young people with the proper sexual morality (97-110, 117-121). Of course, neither side was content simply to vaunt the moral superiority of its own preferred system of education. Both sides soon set about painting garish images of the moral and sexual pervers that were bound to emerge from implementation of their opponents' educational agenda. In most cases, the

contrast created was between the moral character of students in schools run by the Catholic Church and the moral character of students in secular (public) schools run by the French government. Ozouf explains that some of the most vicious attacks on the grounds of sexual morality were carried out in the popular press of the day.

De tous les points de l'horizon politique, la presse fait à l'école, de 1871 à 1914, une place prépondérante. Il arrive que la question scolaire submerge toutes les autres : c'est le cas lors du vote des lois laïques, ou pendant les années qui précèdent la séparation de l'Église et l'État. Mais le problème est traité en des occasions moins attendues, et plus significatives peut-être de l'importance attachée à l'école : ne voudra-t-on pas voir un lien entre la flambée anarchiste et les nouveaux maîtres que la République a donnés à ses enfants ? Entre la dépopulation et l'école laïque ?... Les débats autour de l'école se prolongent jusque dans le feuilleton, instrument de propagande plus efficace que bien des éditoriaux. Dans les feuilletons des journaux républicains ou radicaux, les tortueuses intrigues des jésuites retiennent les parents d'élever leurs enfants à leur guise ; leurs machinations empêchent les fiancés de se marier, les enfants d'hériter, la femme pieuse d'épouser l'athée qu'elle aime. A l'opposé, dans les feuilletons des journaux conservateurs, où les francs-maçons remplacent les jésuites, les enfants grandis dans l'athéisme sombrent dans la débauche et le crime ; les jeunes filles à qui on a voulu donner une formation scientifique s'aigrissent, refusent le mariage et la maternité. (9-12)

Clearly, the two sides in this debate leveled outlandish accusations against each other. One reason for such venom was that the question of educational policy became freighted with many other larger, arguably more important issues. As Ozouf writes, “la question scolaire submerge toutes les autres.” All the following fear-inducing topics, mentioned by Ozouf in the passage above, can be found in Zola's Évangile novels relative to the question of primary and secondary education: demographic collapse, the dangers of religious intermarriage, debauchery, sinister plots of depraved priests and religious brothers, and the brainwashing of innocent and virginal young women.

What makes Ozouf's remarks above particularly appropriate for the present study is her observation that the worst attacks on moral grounds were carried out in the section of each newspaper that was then reserved for the serialization of fiction. Ozouf says that the serialized novel, the “feuilleton,” was an “instrument de propagande plus efficace que bien des

éditoriaux.” Zola’s combative Évangile novels were themselves first published in serial form in the extremely anticlerical newspaper L’Aurore, the same paper that had previously published Zola’s celebrated open letter, “J’accuse.” There was a perfect accord between the agenda of Zola’s politically engaged final novels and the strident editorial policy of the newspaper that serialized them. Of course, Zola’s final novels do not simply defend government-run, secular schools while disparaging the moral content of the education offered at Catholic schools. What turns his Évangiles into melodramatic epics is the way Zola frames these issues within the far larger context of the establishment of a new secular religion to replace a supposedly dying, but still dangerous Catholicism. Whether the numerous “feuilletons” to which Ozouf alludes include other novels that have the same epic scope will have to be the subject of a later study. Regardless, Ozouf’s comments on the other “feuilletons” support the claim that Zola’s Évangiles appeared at a historical moment that was unusually charged with melodrama. Ozouf herself notes that, during the forty-three year period covered by her study, there were two moments when the polemics over religion and education became especially intense, first in the late 1870s and early 1880s, when a nationwide system of tuition-free, government-run schools was approved and put into place, and then again as the final separation of Church and State began to be debated, in other words at the very end of the Dreyfus Affair.

The second long-term trend that started relatively early in the Third Republic’s history and that eventually played a major role in shaping the melodrama of the Dreyfus Affair’s conclusion was a religious reawakening among the French elite. Many studies on Zola and Naturalism or on the cultural history of this period discuss this religious reawakening in passing, but at least one book-length study focusing exclusively on this phenomenon has been written, Elizabeth Fraser’s Le Renouveau religieux d’après le roman français de 1886 à 1914.

The second epigraph of the present chapter comes from an early section of Fraser's carefully researched study. In this passage, Fraser summarizes how extensive the reawakening was, what earlier trend the reawakening reacted against, and how the reawakening evolved over approximately two decades. For the sake convenience, the passage from Fraser is repeated here below.

Aux environs de 1886 il s'est manifesté dans toutes les sphères de l'activité intellectuelle en France un mouvement religieux qui est intéressant, voire émouvant...[O]n s'est éloigné des méthodes rationnelles, systématiques, objectives alors en honneur, et on en est venu à serrer de plus près la vie de l'âme dans sa diversité infinie. Nous verrons...que le renouveau religieux ne s'est pas produit d'un seul bond dans l'esprit national ; il ne s'agit pas, surtout dans la première moitié de notre période, d'un retour intégral à une religion établie. C'était plutôt une attitude sympathique envers la religion, une préoccupation de questions d'ordre moral et social...Une douloureuse crise nationale [l'Affaire Dreyfus] a terminé cette phase du renouveau, et pendant la dernière partie de la période nous voyons se déclarer une nouvelle attitude religieuse qui aboutira à un retour plus général vers une religion dogmatique. (v)

The first thing to note about the Third Republic's religious reawakening is its vast scale and its strong intellectual underpinnings. As Fraser says, the movement toward religion took place in all spheres of intellectual activity, not just in literature. Furthermore, this religious trend was a reaction against the spirit of rationalism and objectivity that had held sway in French culture for years. In fact, as will be shown in a moment, the reawakening set itself most specifically in opposition to Zolian Naturalism, which had pretensions of scientific rigor and objectivity. Fraser also makes clear that the reawakening evolved over time, starting off as mere sympathy for religion but hardening in later years into religious dogma. The passage above says that "une douloureuse crise nationale" marks the turning point when this religious reawakening became more combative and dogmatic. Fraser does not leave her reader in doubt for long as to what the "painful national crisis" was that had such an unfortunate effect; it is, of course, the Dreyfus Affair. Fraser also says that from its very start, this religious renewal was "preoccupied by social and moral questions." Just how preoccupied this

trend was with moral questions, especially in the area of sexual morality, is obviously the main subject of the present chapter.

When Fraser calls this religious renewal “interesting, even moving” ‘*intéressant, voire émouvant*,’ she betrays certain sympathies of her own. In truth, Fraser openly champions the cultural trend that is the subject of her study. More accurate would be to say that she champions the first half of the reawakening, in the period before 1898, before Zola created a major new dynamic with the publication of “*J'accuse*.” Fraser prefers the gentler, less partisan phase of the reawakening, but even she admits that the first phase displayed significant hostility toward Naturalism, and Fraser clearly endorses the reaction against Zola and the literary movement that he led. Fraser’s partisanship on this matter needs to be acknowledged, as does the age of her study, which was published in 1934. These things need to be acknowledged in order to refute their importance. Le Renouveau religieux d’après le roman français de 1886 à 1914 is scholarship at a very high level, even though its author adopts several positions decidedly out of favor today – indeed, positions that the author of the present study also rejects. Fraser’s documentation and synthesizing skills are still superb. Furthermore, her work has special value in that it is a book-length study focusing strictly on the subject of this religious renewal. As stated a moment ago, many histories and literary studies discuss briefly this trend away from rationalism and science and toward religion, but Fraser’s work is more detailed than almost any other. Also, Le Renouveau religieux d’après le roman français de 1886 à 1914 offers the tremendous benefit of showing the deep, organic connections between the religious reawakening of the 1880s and the ferocious religious conflict triggered by the Dreyfus Affair at the turn of the century. Indeed, to Fraser, these are just different phases of the same long-term phenomenon, and this is an insight provided by few other scholarly works on this period.

Although substantiated with more evidence and more carefully constructed reasoning, Fraser's conclusions in many other respects do not differ much from those of other studies. For example, in his large history of the Third Republic, Jean-Yves Mollier speaks of this same long-term development, calling it "le réveil religieux et la crise du positivisme" (356-361). In her history of Third Republic fights over education and religion, Mona Ozouf calls this movement "l'esprit nouveau" saying, "Le goût pour la psychologie..., l'intérêt pour l'occultisme et le mystère favorisent ce renouveau, surtout sensible dans la littérature romanesque, alors en rupture de bans avec le naturalisme" (*L'École* 188-190). In a surprising way, Fraser's partisanship is actually helpful, because it exemplifies many of the same attitudes that Zola's enemies commonly held at the time.

Fraser's detailed analysis indicates that the literature that contributed to the religious reawakening had many affinities with melodrama. Indeed, the most basic impulses of the reawakening bear more than a few similarities to Chateaubriand's quest to renew religious sentiment in the wake of the revolutionary suppression of many forms of religiosity. In truth, Fraser never once employs the concept of melodrama in her analysis, but passages such as the one below call to mind many of the same processes and topics that have been discussed repeatedly in the course of the present study on melodrama in both its standard and epic forms.

Aux environs de 1886 nous assistons, dans le domaine de la littérature, à une évolution analogue à celle que nous avons vue se produire au sein de la philosophie. Depuis 1843 les réalistes, réagissant contre les épanchements sentimentaux et les descriptions trop imaginatives du romantisme, s'astreignaient à suivre des règles d'impassibilité, d'observation fidèle et de documentation exacte ; aux approches de notre période la forme la plus caractéristique de ce réalisme était devenue un naturalisme brutal. On s'efforçait d'introduire les procédés de la science expérimentale, voire même médicale, dans le roman ; seulement on se bornait à l'étude des côtés bas de la vie – on s'attachait à ce que l'homme a de plus animal, on le montrait en proie à ses instincts dans un monde hostile ou tout au moins indifférent et, sous prétexte de peindre la réalité, on se permettait de l'étalage de la pire pornographie. On fut bien obligé de tenir compte des manifestations du sentiment religieux dans l'humanité, mais on les classait parmi les phénomènes de la névrose. Le grand bienfait du renouveau que nous aurons à constater dans le roman sera justement

d'avoir apporté à ce réalisme déséquilibré le souffle de l'idéal, la pitié, enfin toute la richesse de la vie intérieure. (43-44)

The most interesting aspect of Fraser's overview here is the way she connects the major literary developments from the beginning of the nineteenth century to those at the end. The Romantics, inspired by Chateaubriand's devotion to sentimentality derived from religion, provoked a reaction from the earliest French realists, who sought an objective impassibility in their fiction. In turn, the Naturalists, the successors of the early realists, became the target of criticism that they had banished spirituality from their fiction. The world imagined within Naturalist fiction was often considered brutal, animalistic, heartless, and uncaring. Most important of all, it was considered pornographic: "l'étalage de la pire pornographie." Fraser does not always use the term "Naturalism," but the rest of her study makes clear that she is referring to the kind of fiction personified in the minds of many people by Émile Zola. Indeed, Fraser's complaint that some realists introduced the method of the experimental and medical sciences into fiction points directly to Zola and his famous treatise, Le roman expérimental. Fraser implies here that the authors who were newly inspired by religion at the century's end would adopt a much more conservative approach toward sex in their novels. She also says their fiction would be permeated by idealism and a strong sense of pity. Sexual conservatism, pity, and even idealism, if coupled with a sense of profound evil in the world, are all perfectly compatible with standard melodrama.

Fraser does much more than just suggest that the novels comprising the major part of the *fin-de-siècle* religious renewal were conservative in their approach to issues of sex and the family. She subsequently spends a chapter of her study demonstrating this very point (75-92). Although Fraser certainly mentions many authors and texts by name, her concluding paragraph should suffice to give an idea of the trend at this time toward conservatism in the literary depiction of sex and family relationships.

Nous croyons avoir démontré que l'idée de la famille a tenu une grande place dans le roman entre 1886 et 1914, et il est certain qu'on chercherait en vain de telles dispositions chez les romanciers les plus en vogue dans la période qui a précédé la nôtre...Ce qui reste significatif pour nous, parmi les tendances que nous avons relevées plus haut, c'est surtout le caractère moral et religieux du retour à la tradition et au devoir, c'est l'élément de contrainte personnelle en faveur du profit social. (92)

One could, of course, say that Zola's Rougon-Macquart series had the concept of family at its center from the start. Yet Fraser is speaking here of fiction that foregrounds contented, well-functioning, and religious families, not the kind of families with as many ancestral infirmities and black sheep as are found in the Rougon-Macquart. The emphasis placed by Fraser on moral literature and on literature that promotes social cohesion is something that recurs very often in both the scholarship and the primary source material having to do with the literature written in reaction to Naturalism at the end of the nineteenth century.

The most prominent figure who participated in all the different phases of the *fin-de-siècle* religious reawakening, from its first stirrings in the 1880s to the bitter debate over established religion at the turn of the century, is the critic and editor Ferdinand Brunetière. Brunetière would amply deserve to be included in this discussion simply because of the significant role that he played in French letters over a long period at the end of the nineteenth century. An even more important reason to discuss him here, however, is that Proust in the Recherche specifically criticizes the aesthetics that Brunetière develops directly as a result of his lengthy involvement in the religious reawakening. Proust's criticism of Brunetière comes at an absolutely pivotal moment in the Recherche, and a full analysis of Proust's rejection of Brunetière's aesthetics will appear in this study's last chapter. The present chapter will examine Brunetière's leadership role in the French literary world of this period and those of his ideas that contributed most to the Dreyfus Affair's hyper-melodramatic conclusion. Yet even before discussing who Brunetière was, the nearly complete oblivion into which he has fallen within French studies must be acknowledged. Antoine Compagnon, himself a major late

twentieth-century scholar of French literature, actually wrote a book not long ago to remind readers of how extremely important Brunetière was at the end of the nineteenth century.

Compagnon's wry, yet apt title for this study is Connaissez-vous Brunetière?. In the introduction, Compagnon observes how little anyone thinks of Brunetière anymore.

Le nom de Ferdinand Brunetière, le critique français le plus éminent de la fin du XIX^e siècle, successeur de Sainte-Beuve et de Taine, ne dit plus grand-chose à personne, ou, s'il dit encore quelque chose, ce n'est rien de bon. Brunetière semble irrécupérable : sa théorie de l'évolution des genres littéraires, calquée sur le darwinisme, a terni durablement sa réputation littéraire, et cet académicien, directeur de la *Revue des Deux Mondes*, fut conservateur, antidreyfusard, cléricale enfin. (7)

As Compagnon says, Brunetière was, without question, the most recognized and respected French literary critic during the period being studied here, and his career was exceptionally long. Elton Hocking makes a similar point in his study Ferdinand Brunetière: The Evolution of a Critic: "Eminent professor at the Sorbonne and Ecole Normale, Academician, editor of the most authoritative periodical, acknowledged successor of Sainte-Beuve and Taine in literary criticism, and the most brilliant orator in France, Brunetière was indeed a great influence upon public opinion" (6). According to Compagnon and Hocking, Brunetière's prestige derived from many sources. Above all, it derived from his being the editor-in-chief of the most important French literary and cultural review of the day, probably the most important such review of the entire nineteenth century, the Revue des Deux Mondes. The fact that Brunetière was a member both of the Académie française and of the teaching staff at the École Normale Supérieure added immeasurably to this prestige. Hocking's mention that Brunetière was also the most acclaimed public speaker in France is highly relevant here, because it was in several of his public speeches during 1898 and 1899 that Brunetière made his greatest impact on the melodramatic direction taken by the Dreyfus Affair at its conclusion.

Virtually an atheist at the start of his career in the 1870s, Brunetière drifted over many years toward religion, eventually converting to Catholicism. This aspect of Brunetière's personal trajectory, quite apart from his many other remarkable attributes, makes him a perfect representative of the *fin-de-siècle* religious reawakening. In La Pensée de Ferdinand Brunetière, John Clark makes exactly this point, namely that such a gradual religious conversion was typical of an entire generation of French writers, artists, and philosophers in the late nineteenth century.

...Brunetière comme tant d'autres écrivains français de sa génération s'approche de plus en plus du catholicisme pour finir par s'y convertir. Toute cette période de la vie intellectuelle française était en effet caractérisée par un vaste renouveau d'intérêt pour les problèmes moraux et religieux et par une renaissance de la philosophie idéaliste, renaissance susceptible à son tour de favoriser les progrès du catholicisme. (103)

In his biography of Brunetière, Victor Giraud meticulously traces the evolution of this dominant cultural figure toward dogmatic religion, an evolution that paralleled trends in the larger culture (64-220). Another study by Giraud, De Chateaubriand à Brunetière, traces the enduring impact of Chateaubriand's main ideas on religion and society as those ideas percolated down through the nineteenth century until the point where, at the end of the century, Brunetière was promoting very similar ideas. So influential was Brunetière, and so closely did he come to be identified with Catholicism, that from the mid-1890s onward he served as unofficial spokesperson for the Vatican on the subject of cultural issues in France (Clark 89-102).

Thus, Compagnon is quite correct in saying that Brunetière ended up "conservateur, antidreyfusard, clérical enfin." That being said, two vital points need to be re-emphasized at this time. First, the new interest in religion and morality that began in the 1880s intensified as time went on. Fraser makes a similar observation, although she does not mention how very extreme and even reactionary many of the movement's aesthetic and moral positions became

by the end of the Dreyfus Affair. Fraser's conspicuous sympathies for the religious renewal may well be what prevents her from realizing the radicalization that this movement underwent once it, like many other trends and issues of the time, was thrown into the cauldron of the Dreyfus Affair. As will be shown in a moment, Brunetière's own career, which perfectly tracks the religious renewal generally, displays the same radicalization that the movement overall underwent right around the time of the Affair. The second vital point to make here is that, certainly by the time Dreyfus Affair if not earlier, the religious reawakening was an enterprise to which both the Left and Right contributed. Although the religious reawakening of the 1880s was broadly identified with cultural conservatism, its great success led to an expansion and diversification during the 1890s. By the time of the Affair, its ideal of a moral literature promoting a conservative sexual ethic became one that key figures of both the Left and the Right would lay claim to, and – what is still more important – would push to surprising extremes. That is why the Dreyfus Affair's conclusion deserves to be known as one of history's prototypically melodramatic moments. Of course, the intense melodrama of this time, as well as its bipartisan nature, is exactly what the present study aims to demonstrate through an examination of such opposing figures and Brunetière and Zola.

Brunetière's hatred of Zola's fiction became manifest early in the critic's career. "Hatred," by the way, is definitely not too strong a word in this case. Elizabeth Fraser explains that Brunetière was, quite simply and for over twenty years, the chief adversary of literary Naturalism as exemplified by Zola's fiction (45). In *La Pensée de Ferdinand Brunetière*, John Clark indicates that the famous critic's strong aversion to Zolian Naturalism began early.

Dès ses debuts dans la critique littéraire, Brunetière prend nettement position contre le naturalisme du groupe de Medan, et ses articles, réunis pour la plupart dans le volume *Le Roman Naturaliste*, en constituent une condamnation sévère. Il s'acharne avec une vigueur particulière contre Zola. Par ses « grossièretés révoltantes et malsaines » l'auteur des *Rougon-Macquart* a dépassé, dit-il, « tout ce que le réalisme s'était encore permis d'excès » et l'on imaginerait difficilement « une telle préoccupation de

l'odieux dans le choix du sujet, de l'ignoble et du repoussant dans la peinture des caractères, du matérialisme et de la brutalité dans le style ». (29)

Brunetière's early opposition to Zola stands as a case study of how the religious reawakening at its origin was largely a reaction against Naturalism. The reasons that Clark gives for Brunetière's opposition to Zola also suggest that the reawakening had vague affinities with melodrama from its earliest stages. In other words, Brunetière operated at this early stage with a kind of proto-melodramatic aesthetic, although his aesthetic would become much more extremely and overtly melodramatic years later during the Dreyfus Affair. Brunetière's objection to the "grossièretés révoltantes et malsaines" in Zola's fiction stems from a moralism that is an integral part of melodramatic didacticism. Of course, grossness and brutality themselves play an important role in melodrama, but precisely by being associated strictly with the forces of villainy. The Manichaeism in melodrama isolates grossness and brutality, confining them, in a sense, to one side of a simple moral equation. Brunetière blames Zola for not providing this clear moral demarcation, for not contrasting the objectionable with the morally uplifting – for having, in short, a "préoccupation de l'odieux." In addition, a conservative sexual ethic common to nineteenth-century melodrama almost certainly informs Brunetière's complaint that Zola focuses too much on "l'ignoble et du repoussant dans la peinture des caractères."

The subtly melodramatic qualities of Brunetière's early aesthetic are made even clearer in a preface that he wrote in 1891 summarizing his initial objections to Zolian Naturalism. In the passage below, Brunetière claims that a superior and "true" form of Naturalism exists, but that French Naturalists betray this morally superior literary form in all they write. The term "nos naturalistes" refers to the hated French Naturalists.

...nos naturalistes, en se servant du nom sous lequel ils se sont désignés, n'avaient pas le droit de le détourner de son sens et de compromettre ainsi dans leurs aventures ce que j'appellerai le bon renom d'une grande doctrine d'art ; opposer les conditions

d'un art vraiment naturaliste, qui sont : la probité de l'observation, la sympathie pour la souffrance, l'indulgence aux humbles, et la simplicité de l'exécution, aux caractères les plus généraux du naturalisme contemporain, lesquels sont au contraire la superstition de « l'écriture artiste », le pessimisme littéraire, et la recherche de la grossièreté... (ii-iii)

Brunetière can be seen here reproaching French Naturalists for not including in their fiction several of the six characteristics commonly found in melodrama. Of course, Brunetière obviously uses his own vocabulary to describe these concepts, but his complaint that French Naturalism does not show enough sympathy toward human suffering is quite clearly a call for much more emotion and pathos, the first of the melodramatic characteristics. Brunetière's call for French Naturalism to show more indulgence for the marginalized and oppressed ("l'indulgence aux humbles") is a call for a much more democratic outlook, another of the characteristics of melodrama. Simplicity in design and execution, a quality that Brunetière believes Naturalist fiction should adopt, can have affinities both with melodrama's radically democratic outlook and with its repetitious didacticism. The most radically democratic gesture that an author can make may well be stripping complexity from his or her fiction in order to make it accessible to the widest possible audience. The repetitious didacticism of melodrama works best when the edifying message being repeated is very simple. One might also detect a desire on Brunetière's part that French Naturalists show more melodramatic pity for the plight of women and children, who certainly counted among nineteenth-century society's humblest and most oppressed.

The quasi-melodramatic nature of the aesthetic standard that Brunetière applied to French Naturalist texts in the 1880s is interesting, of course, but what really matters in the present study is how the Dreyfus Affair subsequently pushed Brunetière's aesthetic much more strongly in a melodramatic direction. Still more important is the extremely austere sexual morality that will be promoted by this later, significantly revised aesthetic. Simply put,

Brunetière's attacks against literature that he disliked became much more shrill and grew to encompass far more authors and texts. During the Dreyfus Affair, Brunetière's aesthetic standard changed in that it became far more sensitive to literary "defects," far more demanding as to the moral content of literature, and far more likely to condemn literary movements and traditions other than French Naturalism. The venom that Brunetière had directed for over a decade against French Naturalism would now be directed against many other literary movements, including ones that Brunetière himself had previously championed; and the entire enterprise would be carried out under the banner of promoting greater morality in art and literature. Finally, these major changes that Brunetière made to his critical aesthetic would be intimately connected with the vigorous anti-Dreyfusard campaign that he was waging at the same time. As will be seen shortly, the bulk of the literary criticism that Brunetière produced at the end of the 1890s, when the Affair was reaching its peak, was not published in the Revue des Deux Mondes, but instead appeared in fiery speeches delivered before large crowds. In these speeches, which were published soon afterwards in the collection Discours de combat, Brunetière seamlessly blended together anti-Dreyfusard politics and literary commentary that was informed by his new, extremely melodramatic and reactionary aesthetic.

Fortunately, the present study does not have to prove from scratch, as it were, all the contentions just made in the last paragraph regarding Brunetière's political and literary activities during the Dreyfus Affair. The basic outlines of the transformation just described appear in the final chapter of Elton Hocking's superb study, Ferdinand Brunetière: The Evolution of a Critic (221-263). As Hocking's title indicates, he is most interested in the changes that Brunetière's aesthetic standard and theoretical approach to literature underwent over the course of his exceptionally long career. The years in Brunetière's career that Hocking

discusses below are the same years as the Dreyfus Affair. Although he does not mention the Affair by name in this passage, Hocking is talking about the ideology of the Discours de combat, where Brunetière's anti-Dreyfusard politics and his reformed aesthetics merge inextricably.

Although the literary criticism of Brunetière's last decade [1896-1906] is integral with his preceding work as regards method, yet in spirit and direction it veered sharply with the course of his philosophical and ethical gropings...

Throughout these years just preceding 1895 there is evident an increasing seriousness, or shall we say rather a growing concern with social and moral problems, whether in literature or in life. After 1895 these considerations were paramount. "Art has its object or its purpose outside and beyond itself, and if this object is not precisely moral, it is social, which is the same thing." Impressionistic criticism and art for art's sake are merely two forms of dilettantism, "and dilettantism, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the death both of all art and all morality." "L'Art et la morale" (1898), from which these quotations are taken, displays an ascetic distrust of all art...The orator concludes that art is a social force, which with religion, science, and tradition shapes contemporary life. To exert a sane and healthy influence these forces must be equilibrated...

This theory is developed scores of times by the critic, and the bitterness with which he reproaches its transgressors, and the authorities whom he quotes, show clearly the humanitarian motives which animate him. He admits readily that the social function of art is relatively recent, -- a development of modern democracy which has brought the great public into contact with literature. This change has not merely increased the scope of the writer's influence; it makes his obligation sacred and mandatory. Literature is no longer a "diversion"; it is an arm, and a form of action. (238-240)

Hocking's main point here is that Brunetière's critical standards radicalized after 1895, exactly the years when the Dreyfus Affair controversy was gaining force. In truth, Hocking could have been even more precise in his chronology, given his prior explanation that most of Brunetière's ideas on literary criticism from these years appear in the Discours de combat. Brunetière delivered all but two of the speeches in the Discours de combat, and all of the most inflammatory ones, after the key date of January 13, 1898. This is, of course, the date that the newspaper L'Aurore published Zola's "J'accuse," the open letter that exponentially increased the Dreyfus Affair's rancor, even as it set in motion the release from Devil's Island of an falsely convicted man. The most aesthetically extreme of the "combat speeches" is the

one that Hocking quotes from above, “L’Art et la morale,” which Brunetière delivered just five days after “J’accuse.” “L’Art et la morale” actually works in conjunction with Brunetière’s most important anti-Dreyfusard writing, the essay “Après le procès : Réponse à quelques ‘intellectuels,’” which the Revue des Deux Mondes published not long afterwards. The trial to which “Après le procès” refers is Zola’s trial for slander as a result of the accusations that he hurled at the French military leadership in “J’accuse.” Justice was swift in those days, and so Zola’s trial for slander began on February 7, 1898, not even a full month after the release of “J’accuse.” Zola’s trial ended on February 18, and Brunetière’s “Après le procès” was published shortly thereafter. Thus, two of Brunetière’s most famous texts, the speech on aesthetics “L’Art et la morale” and the anti-Dreyfusard essay “Après le procès,” followed directly on the heels of Zola’s “J’accuse” and his celebrated trial for slander, respectively. The way these two texts by Brunetière create a unified critique on the basis of morality and conservative politics as a reaction to Zola’s engagement in the Dreyfus Affair will be explained here in a moment.

A key distinction made by Hocking explains the difference between Brunetière’s aesthetics in the early years of the religious renewal and his aesthetics at the time of the Affair. Whereas before 1895 Brunetière was interested in the ability of art and literature to promote morality, after 1895, virtually the only function of art and literature that still interested him was moral edification. This summary of the change in Brunetière’s aesthetics neatly encapsulates the intensification that the larger religious reawakening underwent under the powerful influence of the Affair. The Affair created a climate that risked annihilating the very notion of aesthetics, because art and literature reduced to the status of a moral sermon hardly deserve to be called art and literature.

Hocking's quotation from the speech "L'Art et la morale" reveals just how humorless Brunetière had become by this point. The statement, "dilettantism is the death of all art and all morality," employs a warped logic that sheds light on little more than Brunetière's own tremendous inflation of the stakes of the political and cultural battles raging in France at that moment. In the original speech, the phrase reads, "le dilettantisme, c'est la fin, à la fois, de tout art et de toute morale" (Brunetière "L'Art" 83). The double use of the word "tout" 'all' is what destabilizes the opinion that Brunetière is expressing. If the lighthearted, the unserious, and the dilettantish automatically become equated with the immoral, then there is no permissible release valve for the pressures that inevitably build up in art, politics and life. Brunetière authorizes only unidirectional art, art of increasing moral seriousness. This is an unrealistic and impractical aesthetic prescription. In its quest for unalloyed moral grandeur, Brunetière's concept is also a caricature of epic, although the term "epic" does not appear in "L'Art et la morale." Hocking explains that Brunetière was very specific and direct in his rejection of humor in literature and art (240-243). That is why Hocking writes, "Brunetière's systematic censure of all lighter forms of art suggests that he is losing his sense of balance, together with his sense of humor" (243).

As for Brunetière's denunciation of art for art's sake, the reductionist logic of "L'Art et la morale" has the effect of attributing all literature and art that Brunetière finds immoral to this late nineteenth-century movement, including Zola's Naturalism. Any art or literature that fails to make moral edification its paramount concern is by definition self-centered and corrupt, 'l'art pour l'art,' art for nothing except its own selfish ends. Such a surprising conclusion illustrates another peculiar aspect of the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic endgame, namely that the combatants in this political and aesthetic struggle were not willing to make the kinds of distinctions necessary to win allies to their cause. They cared more about trumpeting

their own virtue and the virtue of their ideologies than about gaining the allies that success in any political process requires. In this respect, the intense melodrama at the end of the Affair is a kind of negation of politics itself, a phenomenon that also came into being during the most turbulent years of the French Revolution.

Hocking's description of the grand social purpose that Brunetière prescribed for art reveals how unwittingly close the critic was to advocating the Romantic ideal found in the Humanitarian epics from earlier in the century. Hocking even uses the term "humanitarian" to describe Brunetière's ambitious social vision. The political engagement on a grand scale that Brunetière requires of authors is a "sacred and mandatory" obligation born out of the unprecedented needs of "modern democracy which has brought the great public into contact with literature" (Hocking 240). This is practically an alternative name for the characteristic of melodrama that usually goes by the title "radically democratic outlook."

Brunetière's new, extremely demanding and moralistic aesthetic standard was bound to lead him to reject a great many artistic and literary works, as well as reject their creators. This is exactly what happened, as Hocking explains below.

It must be admitted that the gentleman of letters was somewhat obscured by the Discours de combat. The gravity and social bearing which he demanded of literature were lacking not only in certain authors, but in whole literary movements or epochs, and the critic did not hesitate to condemn them without restrictions. The Italian Renaissance, French art of the late eighteenth century, and a large part of the French Renaissance he indicted for their antisocial and immoral nature, because of their dilettantism, individualism, and paganism. The most frequent and outright denunciations, however, are lavished upon the art and civilization of ancient Greece. (244)

Brunetière's wholesale denunciation of many of the West's artistic and literary classics bears an uncanny similarity to Chateaubriand's fearless denunciations in Les Martyrs. There is a resemblance, as well, to the aesthetic criticisms found in the Génie du Christianisme, but the Génie contains a bit more subtlety and nuance than do Les Martyrs and Brunetière's Discours

de combat. Hocking makes clear that the recklessly censorious Brunetière was a post-1895 creation. Although already quite judgmental, Brunetière's literary criticism from the 1880s and early 1890s did not condemn entire epochs or movements out of hand, except, of course, for the French Naturalists, who had been the main targets of Brunetière's vitriol prior to 1895. Oddly enough, in the Discours de combat, Zola almost disappears as a visible presence. Hard to believe as it may seem, the same is true for Brunetière's anti-Dreyfusard essay "Après le procès." Zola's name crops up a small number of times in these texts; and, of course, dislike of Zola lurks clearly in the background of many of Brunetière's remarks. Nevertheless, Brunetière seems so very angry and so very ambitious to reshape the cultural, political, and moral landscape that discrediting Zola almost seems like a paltry waste of time by this point.

Until now, there has been significant reliance here on Elton Hocking's interpretation of Brunetière's ideas from the time of the Dreyfus Affair. Yet Hocking does not investigate every aspect of Brunetière's thought that the present study requires to be investigated, and so a return to Brunetière's own words is called for. In particular, the way Brunetière harnessed a very conservative sexual morality to his anti-Dreyfusard politics and his late aesthetics needs to be examined. Over the course of slightly more than one year following the appearance of Zola's "J'accuse," in other words from early 1898 to the middle of 1899, Brunetière developed a unified theory that brought together the many strands of his new social, political, and aesthetic opinions. This is the coherent theory of which the "combat speeches" and the anti-Dreyfusard article "Après le procès" elaborate the various aspects. Above all, the theory is aggressive, designed to identify, isolate and destroy Brunetière's many enemies. Furthermore, Brunetière leaves no doubt that his enemies are equally the enemies of France, of religion, and of human civilization. A highly conservative sexual morality is an integral part of the theory, as are many other melodramatic elements.

The best place to start in explaining Brunetière's unified theory is the article "Après le procès," because it is one of the Dreyfus Affair's landmark texts. The foundation of Brunetière's theory is opposition to most forms of individualism, and "Après le procès" attacks the Dreyfusards for indulging in the worst form of individualism. The subtitle of "Après le procès" is very significant, because it indicates that Brunetière is not condemning ordinary Dreyfusards. The subtitle is "Réponse à quelques 'intellectuels,'" which actually had a very precise and new meaning in early 1898. The courage that Zola displayed by having "J'accuse" published on January 13 led to the circulation of a high-profile petition the very next day in support of the Dreyfusard cause. Members of the artistic, literary, academic and scientific communities were invited to sign the petition, and large numbers of them did. A young Marcel Proust was one of the least famous authors who signed, and this signature stands as the most visible form of Proust's engagement in Dreyfusard cause (Dosse 62). The signatories collectively identified themselves in the petition as "intellectuals" 'intellectuels,' which actually was a rather new word at the time. This "Manifesto of the Intellectuals" is, in fact, the first documented use of the word in the substantive form (Dosse 62). The story of the petition and of the rallying of the newly self-conscious French intellectual community can be found in Christophe Charle's Naissance des « intellectuels » and François Dosse's La marche des idées: Histoire des intellectuels, histoire intellectuel.

In short, Brunetière accuses the intellectuals of indulging in reckless individualism by presuming to know more about Dreyfus's guilt or innocence than the military judges who convicted him. Brunetière essentially condemns the intellectuals for having the audacity to form their own opinion as to whether Dreyfus committed treason. Blaming people for having their own opinions and for expressing those opinions may seem like an exceptionally lame polemical tactic, and it would be, if it were not for the way that Brunetière simultaneously

ridicules the intellectuals for their “aristocratic” pretensions and for their overly specialized forms of knowledge. Also, Brunetière presents French national security as being gravely at risk in the Dreyfus Affair, so that having a personal opinion different from that of the French military leadership does almost constitute treason. Below is one of the most pivotal, representative passages from “Après le procès.”

Méthode scientifique, aristocratie de l’intelligence, respect de la vérité, tous ces grands mots ne servent qu’à couvrir les prétentions de l’*Individualisme*, et l’*Individualisme*, nous ne saurions trop le redire, est la grande maladie du temps présent, non le parlementarisme, ni le socialisme, ni le collectivisme. Chacun de nous n’a confiance qu’en soi, s’érige en juge souverain de tout, n’admet pas même que l’on discute l’opinion qu’il s’est faite. Ne dites pas à ce biologiste que les affaires humaines ne se traitent pas par ses « méthodes » scientifiques ; il se rirait de vous ! N’opposez pas à ce paléographe le jugement de trois Conseils de guerre ; il sait ce que c’est que la justice des hommes ! et, en effet, n’est-il pas directeur de l’École nationale des Chartes ? Et celui-ci, qui est le premier homme du monde pour scander les vers de Plaute, comment voudriez-vous qu’il inclinât sa « logique » devant la parole d’un général d’armée ? On n’a pas usé sa vie dans des études de cette importance pour penser « comme tout le monde » ; et le véritable intellectuel ne saurait rien faire comme personne. C’est le « superhomme » de Nietzsche, ou encore « l’ennemi des lois », qui n’est point fait pour elles, mais pour se mettre au-dessus d’elles ; et nous n’avons, nous autres médiocres, qu’à l’admirer et l’en remercier ! Je dis seulement que ce qu’il faudrait voir, quand l’intellectualisme et l’individualisme en arrivent à ce degré d’infatuation d’eux-mêmes, c’est qu’ils sont ou qu’ils deviennent tout simplement l’anarchie ; -- et peut-être n’y sommes-nous pas encore, mais nous y courons à grands pas. (78-85) [Emphasis in original]

One of the silliest, most disingenuous aspects of “Après le procès” is the way Brunetière never acknowledges that he, too, is an intellectual. In many ways, Brunetière was the French *fin-de-siècle* intellectual par excellence. Because his literary and critical reputation fell so precipitously after his death, Brunetière does not seem anymore like France’s premier intellectual of the day, and yet a strong case can be made that he effectively was just that. With very few possible exceptions, such as Anatole France, Brunetière was more famous at the time as a writer and cultural commentator than anyone who signed the petition. Of course, the sheer novelty then of the word “intellectual” may furnish Brunetière with an excuse for not applying the term to himself; but, in truth, he had just as much specialized knowledge as did

the targets of his withering scorn in the passage above: the biologist, the paleographer, and the expert on the ancient Roman author Plautus.

Unlike these three “intellectuals,” however, Brunetière did not claim that his erudition gave him any special authority to comment upon a matter of military justice. There is a definite, albeit very cramped logic to Brunetière’s position here. “Après le procès” does not delve whatsoever into the details of the process that resulted in Dreyfus’s conviction, not even for the sake of justifying that conviction. Like many anti-Dreyfusards, Brunetière shows complete deference to the pronouncements of French military authorities. His own pose of deference goes to the heart of Brunetière’s grievance against the intellectuals, even though his deference is largely disingenuous. In “Après le procès,” as well as in the “combat speeches,” Brunetière claims that the intellectuals set themselves apart as a superior class of mortals, a class believing that its specialized training makes it uniquely qualified to pass judgment on all major issues of the day, even on an urgent matter of national security, which is how Brunetière presents the Dreyfus Affair. To a very limited degree, Brunetière may be correct in saying that some of the intellectuals exaggerated the relevance of their specialized knowledge to an issue that was outside the domain of their expertise.

Yet such a restrained and limited charge against the intellectuals was never the real purpose of “Après le procès” anyway. The best way to read Brunetière’s foremost anti-Dreyfusard text is as a piece of pure melodrama. “Après le procès” contains most of the characteristics of melodrama that have been presented in this study. Most of all, Brunetière’s article displays the radically democratic outlook that is common in nineteenth-century melodrama. Out of his supposedly humanitarian impulses, Brunetière sets himself up as the defender of the common man. He believes he is waging a battle against elitist intellectuals, whose reckless individualism threatens to undermine all that is good and decent in the world.

Brunetière speaks of himself as being one of the world's "little people" 'nous autres médiocres' who are put upon by an arrogant overclass that perceives itself comprised of Nietzschean supermen, for whom ordinary laws no longer apply. There is, of course, some satire here, but less than appears on first reading. Brunetière does not for an instant believe that the intellectuals are a group of supermen, but he does believe passionately that they perceive themselves in that way, and he is also deadly serious about the catastrophic consequences that he sees ensuing from their inflated sense of self-importance. To Brunetière, the kind of individualism exhibited by the intellectuals is the worst problem facing the world in his day: "l'*Individualisme*, nous ne saurions trop le redire, est la grande maladie du temps présent." A complete breakdown in social order looms on the horizon as a result of the Dreyfus Affair, or more precisely as a result of the fuel that that Affair provides for the twin evils of intellectualism and individualism: "quand l'intellectualisme et l'individualisme en arrivent à ce degré d'infatuation d'eux-mêmes, c'est qu'ils sont ou qu'ils deviennent tout simplement l'anarchie; -- et peut-être n'y sommes-nous pas encore, mais nous y courons à grands pas."

The anarchy that Brunetière fears is imminent has a sexual dimension. In the most frightening of the "combat speeches," entitled "Les Ennemis de l'âme française" and delivered on March 15, 1899, Brunetière goes through a list of ways that intellectuals and other advocates of individualism are working, quite literally, to destroy the French nation from the inside. The most fiendish of their plots is to undermine marriage and discourage childbirth, with the ultimate consequence being a collapse of the French population. Brunetière's demographic argument at the end of the passage below recalls Chateaubriand's strange use of demographics in the Génie du Christianisme. A closer and much funnier parallel, however, is to the first of Zola's Évangiles, Fécondité, which argues that resurgent Catholicism in France

is provoking the exact same crisis that Brunetière blames on intellectualism and individualism, namely the breakup of marriages, an increase in the number of single people, and the collapse of the French population.

Mais le mal est encore plus profond, et ce n'est pas seulement tout ce qu'il y a de moral, et presque de religieux, dans l'idée de la patrie, que les individualistes et l'individualisme sont en train de détruire, c'est, Messieurs, la société même. C'en est le support, si c'est la famille ; et c'en est le lien, si c'est l'idée de solidarité. Tous les observateurs sont unanimes sur ce point. Mal entendu tant qu'on le voudra, mais entendu comme nous voyons qu'on l'entend, l'individualisme est en train de déorganiser la famille, par la ruine insensible de l'indissolubilité du mariage, de l'autorité maritale et de du pouvoir paternel. On montrait récemment, dans un livre curieux, que la décroissance même de la population et l'abaissement de la natalité, -- non seulement en France, mais ailleurs, et dans le passé comme dans le présent, -- était en relation directe et constante avec le progrès de l'individualisme. « Le sentiment instinctif ou la volonté réfléchie de la solidarité de l'individu avec ses contemporains, disait M. Arsène Dumont, fait le patriotisme, le dévouement civique et militaire. Le sentiment instinctif, ou bien, à son défaut, la volonté réfléchie de la solidarité de l'individu avec les générations futures cause la fécondité. La solidarité dans le temps et dans l'espace conclue au même but, qui est la conservation de la race ; l'amour fécond et la vaillance guerrière y sont également indispensables. » (206-207)

Thus, the individualists are out to destroy society itself, and the way they will bring this about by destroying marriage and the family. The ideal that Brunetière holds up to negate this dangerous individualism is a very traditionalist, almost reactionary form of communitarianism. Brunetière wants the people of France to obey and respect authority, not challenge it. He also wants the French to suppress their individual needs and desires for society's welfare. Such a traditionalist view has obvious implications for the issues sex and romance. The extreme conservatism of Brunetière's sexual morality is presented more clearly in "L'Art et la morale," which will be discussed in a moment. Nevertheless, what is quite obvious in "Les Ennemis de l'âme française" is the catastrophic consequences that Brunetière predicts from even slight challenges to any kind traditional authority, be it religious, political, military or familial/patriarchal. More clearly than the other "combat speeches," "Les Ennemis

de l'âme française" displays the direct, unbroken and short line that Brunetière draws between supporting Alfred Dreyfus and sexual anarchy.

Brunetière relies on the authority of a demographic expert, Arsène Dumont, to draw these connections. The idea of solidarity is key. Patriotism, support of civic and military leadership, and faith in future generations are all essential forms of social solidarity. When one of these essential supports is weakened, the entire notion of solidarity may collapse. The collapse of social solidarity would make the reproductive drive, the desire to continue the race and the species, disappear. Military valor and married, reproductive sex are both indispensable to the preservation of the race, but both are also extremely vulnerable to the insidious, multifarious threat of individualism. Premised on a traditionalist concept of social solidarity that nothing can be allowed to disturb with risking catastrophe, Brunetière's view of sex thus contains strong elements of both the epic and the melodramatic.

"Les Ennemis de l'âme française" also displays Brunetière's keen disapproval of the growing anticlerical storm that was about result in the disestablishment of Catholicism and the prohibition of schools operated by Catholic religious orders. The beginning of the last citation speaks of individualism destroying religion in France, but earlier in the speech Brunetière warns that any attack whatsoever on the Catholic Church in France will weaken France itself and undermine the "French soul," the speech's central conceit. Brunetière says, "tout ce que nous ferons, tout ce que nous laisserons faire contre le catholicisme, nous le laisserons faire et nous le ferons au détriment de notre influence dans le monde, au rebours de toute notre histoire, et au dépens enfin des qualités qui sont celles de l' « âme française » " (193). Once again, the strange mixture of the epic and the melodramatic is evident here. Brunetière speaks of the grandest concepts and traditions that, for all their grandiosity, are threatened with collapse by insidious, evil forces.

The place where Brunetière makes his most extreme statements on sex is also where he makes his most extreme aesthetic statement, in the speech “L’Art et la morale.” In this speech, Brunetière claims that art and literature are fundamentally immoral human practices. His reasons for saying this are several, but they all relate to his hatred of individualism. Artistic creation is, by its nature, an isolating and selfish enterprise. Furthermore, art constantly wants to focus on nothing but itself, on issues such as its form and its style, as well as on the process of creativity. Thus, without constant vigilance, art will always veer toward a kind of individualism, a phenomenon that Brunetière deplores wherever he finds it. For Brunetière, individualism leads quickly to immorality. In the passage below, Brunetière warns ominously about “art that has only itself for an object.” This phrase is nearly synonymous with “art for art’s sake,” a concept that, as seen previously, Brunetière applies very broadly. Brunetière disapproves of this concept, because for him it represents individualism in the realm of aesthetics. Although far from obvious in the citation below, the kind of immorality that Brunetière chiefly fears is of the sexual kind, a fact that becomes increasingly clear as the speech progresses.

C’est du grand art que je vous parle, du plus grand art ; c’est dans la notion du grand art que je dis qu’un germe d’immoralité se trouve toujours enveloppé...l’art qui n’a que lui-même pour objet, l’art qui ne se soucie pas de la qualité des caractères qu’il exprime, l’art, en un mot, qui ne compte pas avec les impressions qu’il est capable de faire sur les sens ou de susciter dans les esprits, cet art-là, si grand que soit l’artiste, je ne dis pas qu’il soit inférieur, ce serait une autre question, mais je dis qu’il tend nécessairement à l’immoralité. (70-76)

The reason Brunetière insists that he’s speaking only of “grand art” is a strange one, and it actually intensifies the reactionary quality of his ideas. The reason also has a great deal to do with Brunetière’s hatred for Zola. As indicated earlier, Zola’s name almost disappears from Brunetière’s most famous writings and speeches at the end of the Dreyfus Affair. In “L’Art et la morale,” one begins to see why. In fact, Brunetière does not utter Zola’s name even a single

time in this speech on the need for morality in art. Given the vociferous campaign that Brunetière waged against French Naturalism for many years, his silence on the subject of Zola seems highly strange indeed. Zola's name actually does appear, but only in a footnote that was later added for the printed version of the speech (91). In this footnote, Brunetière says that several journalists asked after the speech how his new aesthetic ideas applied to the leader of the Naturalists. In the footnote, Brunetière goes on to explain that he does not even consider Zola's novels to be art. Furthermore, he considers Zola's works to be gross and vulgar, which is different from and worse than immoral (91). Not even qualifying as art and so bad as to fall entirely off the moral/immoral scale, Zola's fiction was therefore beyond (or below) the purview of Brunetière's speech. One can only wonder about entire categories of art and literature that Brunetière similarly excludes, *prima facie*, from the purview of his remarks in "L'Art et la morale."

Later in the speech, Brunetière develops the idea that only with the most concerted effort can artists and writers counter the essential immorality of their occupation. Brunetière's ultimate solution, to which Hocking referred in an earlier citation here, is for art to convey constantly and rather overtly a moral, socially conscious message. Brunetière presents this solution near the end of the speech (108-109). Similarities between Brunetière's new aesthetic ideal and socially and politically engaged melodrama are not difficult to demonstrate. For example, in an echo of language from "Après le procès," Brunetière says that writers and artists should not set themselves apart as an aristocratic class, behaving as if their creative work was the most important endeavor in the world. They should instead depict and cater to the needs of the humble and less fortunate (102-104). More interesting, however, are Brunetière's remarks about the struggle that must be waged to counter the inherent immorality of art and literature. Not everyone is up to this strenuous task, although many deserve censure

for never even making the effort. Citing the example of Racine's renunciation of his career as a playwright, Brunetière strongly implies that artists of good will who find the struggle to produce moral work too onerous should consider abandoning their creative endeavors altogether. Perhaps out of respect for Racine's lofty stature, Brunetière employs euphemisms for sex in speaking of the problematic depiction of the passions in Racinian drama. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that sexual passion is the principal subject of the comments below, as anyone familiar with Racine's plays would know. Once again, Brunetière's complaints about sex in art become clearer later in the speech.

...c'est à l'auteur d'*Andromaque* et de *Bajazet* que je demanderai de m'offrir [le souvenir] de son repentir. Lorsque, en effet, ce grand homme, -- dans la maturité de l'âge et du génie, n'ayant pas même encore atteint la quarantaine...abandonna la scène, quels sentiments pensez-vous qui lui dictèrent sa conduite ? Il eut peur, Messieurs, de lui-même, peur de la vérité des peintures qu'il avait tracées ; de la fidélité redoutable avec laquelle il avait rendu ce que les passions ont de plus naturel ; de la justification qu'il avait trouvée de leurs excès dans leur conformité à l'instinct ; et c'est pourquoi, depuis ce moment, sa vie ne fut plus qu'une longue expiation des erreurs de son génie. Regrettons-le, si nous le voulons ! mais n'ayons pas l'esprit assez étroit pour nous en étonner, ni surtout pour en blâmer le poète... (95-96)

Brunetière states emphatically that Racine's dramatic art is scrupulous in depicting the passions in a realistic and natural manner. Although the realism of the passions in Racinian theater is probably debatable, the point Brunetière is making is that even the most scrupulous artistic imitation of nature is not enough to inoculate a work against immorality. More imaginative depictions of the interplay of the passions would almost certainly entail exponentially greater risk of immorality.

To the extent that Brunetière calls for artists and writers to renounce their craft, this adds a new dimension to the claim that the Dreyfus Affair's extremely melodramatic conclusion came close to bringing about the annihilation of aesthetics, at least in terms of its larger social and political ideology. In fairness to Brunetière, he never actually says that artists should imitate Racine and abandon their craft for good. Nevertheless, Brunetière makes the

social consequences of immoral art sound so awful, and the creation of art sufficiently moral to avoid those consequences sound so difficult, that any artistically inclined person with slightly charitable feelings who took Brunetière's warnings seriously would hesitate very long before ever picking up the brush or pen again. Of course, there was without question at least one author whom Brunetière would have been delighted to see quit his craft for good, but his name is too obvious to mention. The question of whether there are any limits at all to Brunetière's zealotry actually arises later in "L'Art et la morale." Brunetière briefly argues that there is still a place for aesthetics in his highly moralistic view of what art should be. He says that artists cannot and should not try to replace preachers, who are better trained at moral instruction anyway (105-110). Hocking, for one, will have none of it, however. He says that Brunetière by this point has gone so far in reducing art to moral edification that any attempt to moderate this position fails for lack of all credibility and consistency (Hocking 60-61).

Brunetière's primary obsession with sex becomes clear when he speaks about the artistic trends that have dominated French culture for much of the nineteenth century. This is also the section of the speech where Brunetière condemns large swaths of celebrated artistic creations. Continuing the theme that art that has not been rigorously monitored for its moral content at the time of its creation, Brunetière speaks of the dominant art in France over the last fifty years, when few artists were conscientious enough to place such careful controls on their creativity. The vision of constant debauchery that Brunetière summons up in describing the French cultural landscape of the last fifty years is reminiscent of Sodom. Brunetière actually begins the passage below by saying that art throughout history has always become perverted whenever the moral dimension has not been considered paramount.

Mais il résulte de là, Messieurs, plusieurs conséquences ; c'est ainsi qu'on a vu, -- je dis dans l'histoire, -- l'art, livré à lui-même, et ne cherchant sa règle qu'en lui, poésie, musique, ou peinture, dégénérer rapidement en un ensemble d'artifices pour émouvoir la sensualité. On ne lui demande plus alors, il ne se souci plus lui-même que de plaire,

et de plaire à tout prix, par tous les moyens, et, littéralement, d'un conducteur ou d'un guide, il se change en une espèce d'*entremetteur*... Osons enfin le reconnaître : tout cet art qu'on nous vante, qu'on célèbre encore, tout cet art, sous toutes ses formes, n'a guère été, pendant près d'un demi-siècle, qu'une excitation perpétuelle à la débauche ; et croyez-vous que, pour être ce qu'on appelle élégante, la débauche en soit moins dangereuse ? Moi, je crois qu'elle l'est bien davantage ! (80-81) [Emphasis in original]

Two sections here are so intemperate in their prudishness that they become unwittingly funny.

The first is where Brunetière complains that art has gone from serving as a teacher and guide to performing the function of a pimp or procurer. Less funny, but still worth a chuckle for the contrived panic that inspires them, are the lines at the end where Brunetière worries that the perpetual debauchery to which recent art invites its audience is all the more dangerous for appearing so elegant.

Zola truly does hover in the background in much of the Discours de combat, even if his name is rarely mentioned. One of the most vivid examples of Zola's spectral presence appears in the "combat speech" that addresses the religious question in the most sustained manner. The speech is called "Le besoin de croire," and Brunetière delivered it on November 19, 1898 before a convention of Catholic youth. As the title of their speech indicates, Brunetière was trying to explain to these young people why (Catholic) religious faith is an absolute necessity. More than a bit surprising is the reason for belief that Brunetière presents as being most compelling and most central of all. He tells the assembled Catholic youth that proof of the necessity of religious belief is best found in the example of nineteenth-century atheists. Brunetière follows up that astonishing declaration with the explanation that, after abandoning God, nineteenth-century atheists have always felt a void, which they have then tried to fill by deifying some concept, thing or person. He mentions progress, science, democracy, suffering, solidarity and art as having been objects of human worship at different times throughout the century. The search by atheists for a God substitute has not been merely

metaphorical, Brunetière insists (304). It certainly was not metaphorical for Zola, whose search for an entire substitute religion was strong and persistent at the end of his career. Just as the journalists thought of Zola while hearing Brunetière deliver “L’Art et la morale,” the Catholic youth may very well have thought of Zola and his religious experimentation while listening to the editor of the Revue des Deux Mondes utter the following lines:

Mais où je trouve la preuve du besoin de croire, c’est dans un autre phénomène, d’une bien autre importance, et dont on ne peut dire sans exagération que, dans le siècle où nous sommes, il est devenu le caractère essentiel de l’incrédulité, et ce phénomène, le voici. Quiconque, en notre temps, a secoué l’autorité de la croyance légitime, ce n’est pas un incroyant que nous l’avons vu devenir, -- et bien moins un libre penseur, je veux dire un penseur libre et indépendant, -- mais c’est un anticroyant, pour ne pas dire un fanatique ; et pas une doctrine en nos jours n’a momentanément triomphé de la religion qu’en se donnant à elle-même l’apparence d’une religion. Les exemples en seraient innombrables ; car de quoi, et de qui, ce siècle finissant ne s’est-il pas fait une idole ? Il s’en est fait une de la Science, et il s’en est fait une du Progrès ; on l’a vu se faire une religion de l’Art, et on l’a vu s’en faire une de la Démocratie...Maintenant depuis quelques années, nous avons inventé la « religion de la souffrance humaine », et celle de la « solidarité ». (302-303)

In November of 1898, when Brunetière delivered this speech, the start of the serialization of Zola’s Évangiles in the newspaper L’Aurore was still six months away. Nevertheless, Les Trois Villes, the series that Zola had recently completed and published, was certainly still on many people’s minds; and Paris, the last novel in that series, had already indicated the drift of Zola’s thought toward the search for a new religion. Of course, whether Brunetière actually thought of Zola and his most recent series as he penned these lines will never be known.

Likewise, no answer will be forthcoming as to whether Brunetière realized the abundant self-directed irony that pervades much of what he says above. For example, he complains about new-fangled religions of “solidarity” and of “human suffering,” but his own melodramatic vision of Christianity relies significantly upon these same themes. Of course, the concept of melodramatic epic developed earlier in this study anticipates just such an

unwanted and probably unrecognized convergence of religious and political enemies on the ideological grounds of melodrama. A deeper irony is that Brunetière comes very close to perceiving this convergence accurately. Yet his perception falls short at the last minute, focusing only on the inconsistencies and compromises of one side, that of his adversaries. Brunetière only sees the anti-Christian secularists losing nerve and cobbling together an ersatz religion in pathetic desperation. He fails to perceive how much his own Christian humanitarianism, which aims to meet the spiritual needs of newly enfranchised common folk in post-revolutionary times, has in common with the new, secular religions. Like Chateaubriand, Brunetière does not acknowledge that the relentlessly practical, earthly, and non-supernatural quality of his faith, at least as he brandished that faith in his anti-Dreyfusard polemics, just might be doctrinally suspect from the standpoint of the most orthodox Catholicism. Finally, Brunetière the great religious moralist does not acknowledge any inconsistency or compromise in his tactic of reducing morality to an extremely cautious conformism in the name of social solidarity. Presumably, the Catholic youth in attendance were not sufficiently familiar with the range of Brunetière's thinking on these matters to notice such ironies.

Racine is not the only celebrated author whose abandonment of his craft for moral reasons elicits praise from Brunetière. Brunetière is able to point proudly to a contemporary case of such renunciation, a case that underwent major new developments just as the conflict in the Dreyfus Affair was reaching its climax. The world-famous, contemporary author whose renunciation of his art Brunetière cites approvingly is Leo Tolstoy, whose teachings and writings had just as large an impact on the French cultural scene in the final decade of the nineteenth century as did the works of any domestic writer. The story of Tolstoy's influence on the greater Dreyfus Affair and of the Affair's reciprocal influence on Tolstoy has gone

mostly unwritten within scholarship. The present study will not fill that void completely by any means. Nevertheless, the rest of this chapter will show that Tolstoy played a major role on the cultural side of the religious disputes that took on greater importance at the Affair's end. In other words, Tolstoy's ideas and writings helped amplify the melodrama that permeated the conclusion of the Affair. To demonstrate how Tolstoy contributed to the Affair's melodrama, as melodrama has been theoretically defined so far in this study, the present chapter will examine the reception in France of one of Tolstoy's books, his radical treatise on aesthetics, What is Art?. The French translation of What is Art? appeared in Paris in 1898, the very year that began with Zola's "J'accuse." In his speech "L'Art et la morale," which followed "J'accuse" by only a few days, Brunetière mentions excitedly that the first few chapters of What is Art? had just been published in other countries. Even though he has not yet been able to read Tolstoy's treatise in its entirety, or in French for that matter, Brunetière expresses full sympathy with the ideas contained in the first few chapters. The French did not have long to wait for What is Art?, because the entire treatise translated into their language would be available before the year was over (Lindstrom 76). In his speech, Brunetière discusses Tolstoy immediately after mentioning Racine. The passage below begins with Brunetière's final remarks on Racine and finishes with the bulk of his comments on Tolstoy.

...c'est pourquoi, depuis ce moment, sa vie [celle de Racine] ne fut plus qu'une longue expiation des erreurs de son génie. Regrettons-le, si nous le voulons ! mais n'ayons pas l'esprit assez étroit pour nous en étonner, ni surtout pour en blâmer le poète ; et songeons qu'on ce moment même, depuis déjà plusieurs années, c'est l'exemple aussi que nous donne celui qui fut à son heure l'illustre romancier de *la Guerre et la Paix* et d'*Anna Karénine*. Vous en trouverez la preuve dans l'ouvrage dont les premiers chapitres viennent de paraître à la fois en russe et en anglais ; et qu'à la vérité je ne puis pas juger encore, puisqu'il est inachevé, mais où je sais qu'il soutient le même combat que je livre aujourd'hui ; -- et, si cet effort n'a rien que d'ordinaire dans un critique ou dans un historien des idées, tant pis pour ceux qui ne comprendraient pas ce qu'il a d'héroïque dans un romancier ! (96-97)

The key section here is where Brunetière says about Tolstoy, “je sais qu’il soutient le même combat que je livre aujourd’hui” ‘I know he is fighting the same battle as I do here today.’ The combat that Brunetière was waging on the day that he delivered this speech was, of course, the fight to make morality the paramount concern within contemporary art and literature. Brunetière is thus saying that in What is Art?, Tolstoy also argues that morality should be the chief concern of artists and authors. This interpretation of Tolstoy’s treatise on aesthetics as given by the famous editor of the Revue des Deux Mondes is quite accurate. The correspondences between Brunetière’s speech “L’Art et la morale” and Tolstoy’s treatise What is Art? are very plentiful, although Tolstoy’s work appears even more radical, if only because it is book-length, which means that Tolstoy has much more space to denounce and prescribe from a moralizing, melodramatic point of view. There can be no doubt that What is Art? is indeed the work by Tolstoy to which Brunetière refers when he says, “l’ouvrage dont les premiers chapitres viennent de paraître à la fois en russe et en anglais.” What is Art? is Tolstoy’s only extended writing on aesthetics, and it did appear throughout Western Europe in 1898 (Lindstrom 76). What is Art? also contains the most formal renunciation that Tolstoy ever made of virtually his entire literary *œuvre*, including the great classics Anna Karenina and War and Peace (What is Art? 197-198). In this respect, What is Art? provides a strong parallel with Racine’s abandonment of his craft, which is one of the key points Brunetière was making.

Although What is Art? appeared throughout Europe in 1898, its impact in France was especially powerful. To understand why Tolstoy’s treatise made such an impact in France, one needs to review the beginning of the French religious reawakening in the 1880s. Tolstoy can almost be said to have triggered this revival, which started a decade before the Dreyfus Affair. More precisely, the work often viewed as triggering the revival is not one by Tolstoy himself,

but rather a literary study about Tolstoy and other leading nineteenth-century Russian novelists. This remarkable literary study, one of the most consequential works of humanities scholarship ever published, was Le Roman russe by Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé. The 1886 publication of Le Roman russe is often cited as the moment when the religious reawakening, stirrings of which existed earlier, took clear and distinct shape. The publication of Vogüé's study in 1886 is a key reason why Elizabeth Fraser chooses that year as the starting point for her study of the revival's impact on the French novel (45-46). The connections, both practical and ideological, between Brunetière, Vogüé and Tolstoy are plentiful. For example, Brunetière was Vogüé's boss at the Revue des Deux Mondes. Vogüé was a longtime contributor to this most prestigious of all late nineteenth-century French journals of literary and cultural commentary (Röhl 9). In fact, the separate chapters of the Roman russe appeared first as articles in the Revue des Deux Mondes before they were collected and published in book form (Röhl 35-36). The greatest bond between Brunetière and Vogüé, however, was their shared dislike of French Naturalism and their belief that literature needed to adopt a religious orientation, an orientation they found sorely lacking in the works of Zola and other French Naturalists. Vogüé's great contribution to their common agenda was to promote nineteenth-century Russian novelists, then largely unknown in France, as religiously inspired alternatives to Zola and the Naturalists. Elizabeth Fraser explains,

Un autre a beaucoup fait pour détruire le naturalisme : Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, confrère de Brunetière à la *Revue des Deux Mondes*, et, ne se contentant pas de signaler le mal, il alla jusqu'à en indiquer le remède. Son *Roman russe*, paru en 1886, fit date dans l'histoire littéraire du XIX^e siècle et détermina en partie la nouvelle orientation qui s'accusa peu de temps après ; de Vogüé y montra que le réalisme français se mourait à force de n'avoir plus d'âme ; il voulut le renouveler en le mettant en contact avec un autre réalisme, le vrai, celui des grands romanciers russes. « Plus qu'à toute autre forme d'art », dit-il dans la préface de son livre, « le sentiment religieux lui (il s'agit du réalisme) est indispensable ; ce sentiment lui communique la charité dont il a besoin ; comme il ne recule pas devant les laideurs et les misères, il doit les rendre supportables par un perpétuel épanchement de pitié ». Dans son ouvrage il cherche donc surtout à faire ressortir le côté idéal de l'œuvre des

romanciers russes, l'esprit évangélique dont elle est pénétrée, le respect de la vie comme chose belle en soi qui s'en dégage. L'accueil fait à l'ouvrage révéla combien de Vogüé avait su discerner l'intime besoin de ses contemporains. A partir de cette année on vit se multiplier les traductions des romans russes. Entre 1886 et 1890 il n'y eut en France pas moins de quarante-trois traductions des œuvres de Tolstoï, et douze de Dostoïevsky. Il se forma un véritable culte tolstoïste, dont il n'est pas difficile de reconnaître l'influence sur la littérature française de l'époque. (45-46)

This passage is typical of both the strengths and weaknesses of Fraser's study. Well-written and accurate, Fraser's discussion of Vogüé suffers from a lack of critical distance. To her credit, Fraser is one of very few scholars to trace the repercussions of the French religious renewal into the late 1890s and beyond, but she is so very sympathetic toward the renewal's aims and aspirations that she tends to accept the statements of its leading figures at face value. For example, Fraser is correct in saying that Vogüé's Roman russe champions Russian novels as a spiritually superior alternative to allegedly soulless French Naturalist fiction. Yet Fraser never casts a dubious eye on Vogüé's invidious comparisons. She agrees with him that "French realism was dying on account of having lost its soul."

The contrast that Vogüé establishes between Russian spirituality and French soullessness is so extreme that the most interesting aspect of Le Roman russe is its partisanship, not Vogüé's actual analysis of Russian and French fiction. Magnus Röhl has written a monograph that interprets Le Roman russe as the deeply partisan text that it is, rather than as a conscientious grappling with novels from a culture that French citizens hardly knew anything about at that time. Röhl even views Le Roman russe in terms of the long-term historical disputes that divided nineteenth-century France (37-51). Nonetheless, the historical context that Röhl provides is all backward-, rather than forward-looking. In other words, Röhl shows how Le Roman russe was squarely on one side of a religious, cultural and political divide that was decades old in France, stretching back to the 1789 Revolution. Röhl does not show, however, the way that Vogüé's popular and influential study helped preserve that

partisan divide down to the end of the century. Röhl does not apply his fine critical mind to the examination of the Roman russe's repercussions, and he says nothing at all about the Dreyfus Affair. The different strengths and weaknesses of the studies by Fraser and Röhl reveal that, while excellent scholarship has been done on the various issues being explored in the present study, no one has yet adopted the exact perspective required to perceive the unusual cultural phenomenon that manifested itself late in the Dreyfus Affair. That phenomenon was a flowering of intense melodrama.

Read carefully, the citation above from Fraser does give a clue as to the melodramatic quality of Vogüé's study. She quotes Vogüé saying that French realism needs more of the pity and charity that are found so often in Russian fiction. "Realism" is, in fact, Vogüé's preferred term for the literary movement to which Zola and the other Naturalists belonged. Vogüé is able to say that realism has been the dominant literary movement for several decades in both Russia and France, but that the Russian version is superior because it has never lost touch with the evangelical spirit, unlike its French equivalent.

Just as Brunetière can be seen applying a quasi- or proto-melodramatic standard in his early critical writings on Zola, Vogüé can be seen operating with a similar standard in Le Roman russe. The fact that Vogüé and Brunetière shared a similar aesthetic ideal by the early or mid-1880s is understandable, given that they were both already colleagues at the Revue des Deux Mondes by this point. The passage below, taken from the vitally important introduction to Le Roman russe, reveals the melodramatic aesthetic that informs the entire study. Pity inspired by tender religious sentiment is the main characteristic that Vogüé hopes to find in modern literature. Vogüé finds and praises this characteristic in Russian fiction; he finds it missing in French fiction, and he therefore belittles the dominant literary trend of his native culture. The great importance of the Roman russe's introduction derives from the fact that it

reveals more clearly than any other part of the study Vogüé's polemical and partisan aims. The Latin phrase to which Vogüé refers at the start of the passage, "Misereor super turbam," comes from the Christian Gospels, Mark 8:2. It is a phrase uttered by Jesus just before he performs the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Jesus has been preaching for three to a crowd that that listened to him attentively without taking time out to eat. Noticing their hunger, Jesus says "Misereor super turbam," which means, "I suffer with the people" or "I feel compassion for the people," whereupon Jesus produces enough food to feed them all by miraculously multiplying a small number of fish and bread loaves into enough food for the crowd. The "realism" that Vogüé suggests has turned "odious" by ceasing to be charitable refers includes Zolian Naturalism.

Tout le grand effort de notre temps a été prédit et commandé par ce mot : *Misereor super turbam*. Cette goutte de pitié, tombée dans la dureté du vieux monde, a insensiblement adouci notre sang, elle a fait l'homme moderne avec ses conceptions morales et sociales, son esthétique, sa politique, son inclination d'esprit et de cœur vers les petites choses et les petites gens. Mais cette action constante de l'Évangile, qu'on accorde à la rigueur dans le passé, on la nie dans le présent... Ces considérations étaient cependant nécessaires pour déterminer l'inspiration morale qui peut seule faire pardonner au réalisme la dureté de ses procédés. Il répond à l'une de nos exigences, quand il étudie la vie avec une précision rigoureuse, quand il démêle jusqu'aux plus petites racines de nos actions dans les fatalités qui les commandent ; mais il trompe notre plus sûr instinct, quand il ignore volontairement le mystère qui subsiste par delà les explications rationnelles, la quantité possible de divin. Je veux bien qu'il n'affirme rien du monde inconnu : du moins il doit toujours trembler sur le seuil de ce monde. Puisqu'il se pique d'observer les phénomènes sans suggérer des interprétations arbitraires, il doit accepter ce fait d'évidence la fermentation latente de l'esprit évangélique dans le monde moderne. Plus qu'à tout autre forme d'art, le sentiment religieux lui est indispensable ; ce sentiment lui communique la charité dont il a besoin ; comme il ne recule pas devant les laideurs et les misères, il doit les rendre supportables par un perpétuel épanchement de pitié. Le réalisme devient odieux dès qu'il cesse d'être charitable. Et l'esprit de pitié, nous le verrons tout à l'heure, avorte et fait fausse route dans la littérature, aussitôt qu'il s'éloigne de sa source unique. Oh ! je sais bien qu'en assignant à l'art d'écrire un but moral, je vais faire sourire les adeptes de la doctrine en honneur : l'art pour l'art. J'avoue ne la comprendre pas, du moins dans le sens où on l'entend aujourd'hui. Certes, moralité et beauté sont synonymes en art... (xxiii-xxiv)

The major reform in literary realism that Vogüé calls for in this passage bears many similarities to the aesthetic transformation called for by Chateaubriand earlier in the century. Although not as explicit on this point as the Génie du Christianisme, Le Roman russe conveys the sense that the infusion of charity, pity and tenderhearted Christianity within literature would be the prelude to a much wider religious transformation of all humanity. As will be seen presently, Vogüé quite appropriately invokes the memory of Chateaubriand later in the introduction to Le Roman russe. Magnus Röhl also notes Vogüé's bond with Chateaubriand, although he makes this observation briefly and in the context of many other influences on the author of Le Roman russe (54-56, 98-100, 103-104). Vogüé's reformist zeal in the citation above also resembles the sentiment that Guilbert de Pixérécourt and Charles Nodier say motivated the invention of standard theatrical melodrama.

Vogüé begins by explaining the marvelous civilizing effect that the Gospels have had on Europe for many centuries. More recently, however, new cultural forces have arisen in the West that deny or ignore the Gospels' humanizing power. Vogüé then shifts to a discussion of literary realism, one of those new cultural forces that have not adequately reckoned with humanity's enduring need for the message of the Gospels. Vogüé by no means believes that realism is fundamentally incompatible with his sentimental vision of Christianity. He cannot hold such a belief, because he will soon present Russian novelists as exemplars of the realist school as it should be, securely founded on Christian charity. Vogüé believes, however, that realism left to its own devices naturally turns into a heartless obsession with rationalism, objectivity, and empiricism. This is what Vogüé believes has happened to Western, especially French literary realism. Vogüé speaks of the great need for "l'inspiration morale qui peut seule faire pardonner au réalisme la dureté de ses procédés." He also writes that "Le réalisme devient odieux dès qu'il cesse d'être charitable." Religious feeling, specifically Christianity, is

the only reliable source for the charity and pity that realism requires to avoid becoming hateful. Vogüé writes that “l’esprit de pitié... avorte et fait fausse route dans la littérature, aussitôt qu’il s’éloigne de sa source unique.” Vogüé leaves no doubt that the “unique source” of the pity that modern literature needs is Christianity. He adds, “Puisqu’il se pique d’observer les phénomènes sans suggérer des interprétations arbitraires, il [le réalisme] doit accepter ce fait d’évidence, la fermentation latente de l’esprit évangélique dans le monde moderne. Plus qu’à tout autre forme d’art, le sentiment religieux lui est indispensable...” The classically melodramatic characteristics of pathos, didacticism, conservative sexual politics, a radically democratic outlook and even Manichaeism in an attenuated form are all implied in the aesthetic vision that Vogüé lays out in the introduction to Le Roman russe. When Vogüé says the following of realism – “comme il ne recule pas devant les laideurs et les misères, il doit les rendre supportables par un perpétuel épanchement de pitié” – he is saying that realist authors should should constantly and overtly display sympathy for the suffering of common folk. This is not very different from a call for more melodrama.

Vogüé forthrightly admits that the literary reform that he is calling for is moral in nature. He admits no less forthrightly that many will scoff at his proposal: “en assignant à l’art d’écrire un but moral, je vais faire sourire les adeptes de la doctrine en honneur : l’art pour l’art...” Vogüé also states his belief that “moralité et beauté sont synonymes en art.” Of course, this sounds very similar to Brunetière’s statements over a decade later in “L’Art et la morale,” but Vogüé is actually much less blunt and much less radical in Le Roman russe than Brunetière will be years later in his “combat speeches.” Le Roman russe is not an extended theoretical disquisition on aesthetics, which means that Vogüé has far less opportunity to make inflammatory pronouncements about what all art must be like. The vast majority of Vogüé’s study is composed of rather close, albeit partisan commentary of fiction by the

Russian authors Gogol, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Tolstoy. For similar reasons, Le Roman russe is also a far less radical and less prescriptive study than Tolstoy's 1898 treatise on aesthetics What is Art?.

Vogüé's strong preference for Tolstoy among all the nineteenth-century Russian novelists becomes clear as Le Roman russe progresses (281). Tolstoy will also be the Russian novelist whose reputation in France gains the most from the publication of Le Roman russe (Fraser 45-46). The novel by Tolstoy that seems to be Vogüé's favorite is Anna Karenina; at least it is the novel by Tolstoy that Vogüé praises most highly. The moralizing sexual conservatism that permeates Vogüé's study overall is most in evidence within Vogüé's discussion of this particular novel, and for obvious reasons. Commenting on Tolstoy's great story of adulterous love gives Vogüé ample opportunity to express himself fully on the issue of sex in literature. The passage below contains Vogüé's core opinion on Anna Karenina. The accuracy of Vogüé's interpretation of this great literary classic is not in question here. In fact, Magnus Röhl's conclusion as to the deeply flawed and hopelessly skewed commentary provided by the Roman russe will be discussed in a moment. Thus, the claim being made here is not that Anna Karenina really contains significant melodramatic qualities that Vogüé's criticism successfully foregrounds. Instead, what matters is the way that Vogüé uses Anna Karenina in his campaign against contemporary French fiction, as well as the quasi-melodramatic aesthetic standard that Vogüé applies in his discussion of both Russian and French texts.

Anna Karénine est le testament littéraire du comte Tolstoï ; il a poursuivi pendant de longues années la composition de ce roman...L'écrivain tentait de fixer dans ce livre l'image de la société contemporaine, comme il avait fait dans *Guerre et paix* pour la société d'autrefois...Ce second livre sur la vie russe n'a pas l'allure d'épopée, la puissance d'étreinte et la complexité de son aîné ; en revanche, il se rapproche davantage de nos préférences littéraires par l'unité du sujet, la continuité de l'action, le développement du caractère principal. Notre public y sera moins dépaycé, il y trouvera même deux suicides et un adultère. Que le Malin ne se réjouisse pas trop tôt !

Tolstoï s'est proposé d'écrire le livre le plus moral qui ait jamais été fait, et il a atteint son but. Le héros abstrait de ce livre, c'est le Devoir, opposé aux entraînements de la passion. L'auteur développe parallèlement le récit d'une existence jetée hors des cadres réguliers et la contre-épreuve, l'histoire d'un amour légitime, d'un foyer de famille et de travail. Jamais prédicateur n'a opposé avec plus de force la peinture de l'enfer à celle du...purgatoire. L'écrivain réaliste n'est pas de ceux qui veulent ou savent voir le paradis dans aucune des conditions humaines. (316-317)

Breathtakingly audacious may be the best way to describe Vogüé's claim that the author of Anna Karenina set out to write the most moral book ever created, and that he reached this goal: "Tolstoï s'est proposé d'écrire le livre le plus moral qui ait jamais été fait, et il a atteint son but." One wonders how Vogüé could possibly know Tolstoy's intention when he started to write this great novel. In fact, the available evidence suggests that Tolstoy did not intend for Anna Karenina to be a simple morality tale, but rather "something pure and elegant, like the works of ancient Greek literature and art" (Bortnes 121). Tolstoy began work on this novel at a time when his religious interests had receded into the background (Bortnes 121). Vogüé's personal opinion on this issue is not in doubt, however. Vogüé clearly believes that Anna Karenina is the most moral book ever written, an opinion which gives a good idea of the tremendous weight that the author of the Roman russe accords sexual issues in his overall conception of morality.

Anna Karenina actually provides a splendid example of how dangerous and difficult it is to proclaim one novel the most moral of all books, if such an example were ever needed. As will be shown here shortly, Tolstoy underwent a profound religious conversion just as he was finishing work on Anna Karenina. The fundamentalist religious beliefs that Tolstoy formulated as a result of this religious conversion eventually led him to adopt the radical system of aesthetics enunciated in What is Art?. Tolstoy's aesthetic treatise is significantly preoccupied with the question of sexual morality in literature, and this very concern leads Tolstoy to condemn virtually all his own prior literary production, including Anna Karenina

(197-198). Thus, the novel that the literary critic Vogüé puts forward in 1886 as the most moral book ever written is condemned by the novel's author himself in 1898; and Vogüé and Tolstoy employ the same basic aesthetic standard, the degree to which a given text promotes sexual morality, to reach this almost diametrically opposed conclusion. Although the aesthetic standard they use is basically the same, Tolstoy in What is Art? employs a greatly intensified version of that standard, beyond even Brunetière's approach in "L'Art et la morale." The irony in all this is quite rich, of course.

As for the content of Anna Karenina, Vogüé emphasizes the novel's extended contrast between two loves, one illicit by the rules of the day and the other licit by those same rules. The illicit love is, of course, the adulterous affair between the novel's eponymous heroine and her dashing lover, Count Vronsky. The second, licit love is between the rural landowner Konstantin Levin and his young wife Kitty. There is certainly a great deal of truth to Vogüé's interpretation of this aspect of Anna Karenina (Belknap 245-246). Tolstoy does set up a contrast between these two couples, but Vogüé focuses almost exclusively on the lesson in sexual morality that is supposedly conveyed by the contrast, thereby slighting other implications, such as the significantly different social and geographical contexts in which Tolstoy places the two couples. For example, much of the novel's dynamic derives from the different locales in which the two loves develop, between the city and the countryside (McLean 51-52).

Even though the accuracy of Vogüé's interpretations is not a crucial question here, it is nevertheless worth citing one of today's leading specialist in Russian literature to show how dubious is the reading of Anna Karenina as a simple lesson in sexual morality. Dubious though it is, such a reading has been tried more than once before, as Robert Belknap explains, "The critics who make Anna Karenina a simple morality tale for or against behavior like

Anna's risk becoming what Tolstoy dislike most: comfortable. The intricacy of the parallels and parallels of parallels infects us with a disputatiousness that emerges in the critical debate and makes this book not moral indoctrination but moral exercise" (246). In addition, Vogüé mistakenly implies that the novel contains no possible justification for Anna's behavior, thereby reducing her to an adulteress whose awful final fate is completely deserved. The narrative of Anna Karenina is much more complex than that, however. Specifically addressing the issue of whether Anna deserves her terrible fate, Robert Belknap speaks of a productive and positive "malaise" produced in the reader by the plot's moral ambiguities: "Tolstoy offers his readers ample proof that Anna is primarily a sinner and ample evidence that she is a victim of a complacent, hypocritical, jealous, and sometimes spiteful society" (245-246).

Still more problematic is the way Vogüé uses Anna Karenina as a club with which to thrash contemporary French fiction. The passage above with Vogüé's unstinting praise for Anna Karenina includes this not-very-subtle jab at French Naturalism: "Notre public y sera moins dépaycé [dans Anna Karénine], il y trouvera même deux suicides et un adultère. Que le Malin ne se réjouisse pas trop tôt...Le héros abstrait de ce livre, c'est le Devoir, opposé aux entraînements de la passion!" The idea that French readers will feel right at home in the pages Anna Karenina because it has two suicides and an adulterous relationship stands as a rebuke of the typical content of French Naturalist novels. More precisely, the rebuke is that, even with two suicides and an adulterous relationship, Anna Karenina still manages to make duty its real hero and to resolutely oppose giving free reign to the sexual passions. The implication, of course, is that French Naturalist fiction does not ultimately make moral sense out of the same degree of immorality in its plots.

Vogüé's attack on the French Naturalists becomes much more direct later in his chapter on Tolstoy. He ultimately reaches a point in his argument where he decides to explain

in detail why Tolstoy as a writer is morally superior to the French novelists of the day. Vogüé's answer is that Tolstoy is morally superior because his fiction is more genuinely realistic, that the realism of French fiction is severely compromised by a gratuitous focus on the vulgar, the obscene and the sick. Vogüé actually takes the title "Naturalist" away from the French novelists and gives it to Tolstoy, whose novels are supposed to represent Naturalism at its best and as properly understood. Brunetière performs a similar critical move in a passage cited earlier here, claiming that the French novelists had corrupted and debased what was originally a perfectly fine literary style, Naturalism. Vogüé, of course, has the advantage of being able to point to Tolstoy as a splendid counter-example of Naturalism properly understood.

Quelle est l'analogie réelle entre l'art de Tolstoï et l'art français de nos jours ? Sous la similitude des physionomies, quelles différences radicales séparent ces deux arts ?... Tolstoï est naturaliste, si le mot a un sens, par son extrême naturel, par la rigueur de son investigation ; il l'est même à l'excès, car il ne recule pas devant le détail bas, grossier... Tolstoï emploie tous ces procédés, il les pousse aussi loin qu'aucun de nos romanciers ; comment se fait-il qu'il produise sur le lecteur une impression différente ? Pour ce qui est du naturalisme et impressionnisme, tout le secret est dans une question de mesure. Ce que d'autres recherchent, lui le rencontre et ne l'évite pas...[E]n traversant une rue, en visitant une maison, on se heurte parfois à des objets dégoûtants ; l'accident est rare si l'on ne cherche pas ces objets. Tolstoï nous en montre juste ce qu'il faut pour qu'on ne le soupçonne pas d'avoir balayé d'avance la rue et la maison. De même pour l'impressionnisme ; il sait que l'écrivain peut essayer de rendre certaines sensations rapides et subtiles, mais que ces essais ne doivent pas dégénérer en habitude de nervosité malade. Surtout, -- et c'est à son honneur, -- Tolstoï n'est jamais obscène ni malsain. *Guerre et paix* est dans les mains de toutes les filles russes ; *Anna Karénine* déroule sa donnée périlleuse comme un manuel de morale, sans une peinture libre. (321-323)

Every bit of praise that Vogüé heaps on Tolstoy constitutes a slap against French Naturalism. When Vogüé says that Tolstoy's realism is balanced and measured, he is saying that French Naturalist fiction is unbalanced and exaggerated. When he says that Tolstoy depicts only so much filth as an average person might encounter in a busy city on a typical day – in other words, just a bit, but not very much – he means that French Naturalist fiction

intentionally lingers in the gutters, the flophouses and the bordellos. When Vogüé writes that Tolstoy's greatest virtue consists in never being "obscene or perniciously immoral," he means that such derogatory terms do indeed apply to French Naturalism. Vogüé's last two comments above are nice melodramatic flourishes, stating that War and Peace can found in the hands of all young Russian girls and that Anna Karenina serves in Russia as a manual on morality. F. W. J. Hemmings interprets these last two claims as a slap specifically against Zola's Nana, a salacious best-seller that few adults at the time would have gladly put into the hands of young girls (Russian Novel 44).

Le Roman russe gives abundant internal indications that Vogüé was hoping to bring about a kind of literary revolution in France with the publication of his study. Vogüé specifically says that he wants to have an impact on French culture similar to Chateaubriand's impact in the first half of the century. According to Vogüé, Chateaubriand's influence was not revolutionary in its suddenness, but rather by its massive scale. Vogüé develops this idea through a contrast between how adults and young people experience significantly new cultural ideas. Adults barely change their thinking and behavior at all, because they are so set in their ways. Young people, especially intelligent, educated youth, pay attention to revolutionary ideas and process them gradually. Yet it can take these young people as long as two decades to reach a point in their careers where they are able to shape the larger culture in accord with the ideas that fascinated them in their youth. Such is the trajectory of influence that Vogüé says Chateaubriand's ideas followed at the start of the century, and such is the trajectory of influence that Vogüé hopes the new ideas contained in the Roman russe will follow at the century's end. Vogüé's focus on French youth in discussing the long-term impact of his ideas is important, because Proust in the Recherche will complain about a similar movement among educated and intellectual young people, a movement that reached its peak during the Dreyfus

Affair. Below is the passage where Vogüé declares his wish to influence French youth as Chateaubriand did.

Chateaubriand n'entre en scène que six ans après la Terreur, et il demeure une exception unique ; le puissant mouvement littéraire qui permet de mesurer les bouleversements de l'intelligence française ne se déclare que vingt ans plus tard. C'est que les catastrophes n'instruisent et ne modifient guère leurs témoins déjà mûrs ; ils se retrouvent le lendemain avec leurs habitudes d'esprit, leurs préjugés et leur routine. Elles opèrent d'une façon inexplicable sur les imaginations encore tendres, sur les enfants, qui les grossissent en ouvrant devant elles ces beaux yeux étonnés où tout spectacle s'agrandit. Ces petits deviennent hommes, et l'on reconnaît en eux les enfants de la tempête.

Il en aura été ainsi pour notre époque...Un esprit d'inquiétude travaille [la] jeunesse lettrée, elle cherche dans le monde des idées un point d'appui nouveau...Sa générosité native est rebutée par le détachement égoïste et l'intolérable sécheresse du seul réalisme qu'on lui propose. Les négations brutales du positivisme ne la satisfont plus. Lui parle-t-on de la nécessité d'une rénovation religieuse dans les lettres, elle écoute avec curiosité, sans prévention et dans haine, car à défaut de foi, elle a au plus haut degré le sens du mystère, c'est là son trait distinctif. (xlix)

Vogüé's comparison of himself to Chateaubriand is explicit and direct. It is also very appropriate, because the Roman russe would indeed have an impact comparable in size and duration to that of the Génie du Christianisme. Finally, the comparison is very useful for the purpose of the present study, which attempts to demonstrate that a century of politico-religious conflict in France produced relatively consistent consequences for a particular strain of French literature. The manner in which Vogüé compares himself to Chateaubriand is at least as important as the comparison itself. The idea of a delayed impact for revolutionary ideas to make themselves fully felt turns out to be quite accurate in the case of Le Roman russe. The Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic endgame, which unfolded a little more than a decade after the release of Vogüé's study, constitutes in many ways the delayed maximum impact of the idea that French culture required a religious renewal. By that time, even Zola was in agreement on the essential point; and he, too, was focusing on French youth, who since the mid 1880s had been "rebutée par le détachement égoïste et l'intolérable sécheresse du seul réalisme qu'on lui propose" and who had been searching for "dans le monde des idées un point d'appui nouveau.

F. W. J. Hemmings's study, The Russian Novel in France 1884-1914, is the best known of a small group of scholarly works that chronicle the enormous impact that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, but especially Tolstoy, had in France as soon as Vogüé's study was released. Hemmings covers virtually the same years as Elizabeth Fraser does in her study of the religious renewal in *fin-de-siècle* France. Unlike Fraser, Hemmings says nothing about the Dreyfus Affair, a silence best explained by Hemmings's more strictly literary concerns. Nevertheless, The Russian Novel in France 1884-1914 contains valuable information about the changes that French literature underwent as a consequence of the favorable and partisan light that Vogüé shed on Russian authors. The impact and lasting repercussions of Le Roman russe need to be appreciated to understand the consequences that the 1898 publication of Tolstoy's What is Art? would have in France. Without hesitation, Hemmings compares the phenomenon caused by Vogüé's book to an invasion, specifically Napoleon's 1814 invasion of Russia. Unlike the earlier, military invasion, the later invasion, the one of books and ideas, was successful; and it had been prepared by years of debate over Naturalism.

Russian troops marched into France in 1814, with the armies of their allies, to restore a dynasty and impose a peace. But the invasion to be chronicled here took place seventy years later, caused no blood to be shed and no maps to be re-drawn. It was an invasion by the printed page, which restored certain aesthetic ideals that had been languishing in exile...The term ["invasion"] is not a far-fetched formula...The phrase: 'the invasion of French literature by the Russians' was used to describe current happenings by more than one clear-sighted eyewitness. In 1886, when the process was beginning to make itself felt, a contemporary jokingly declared that Paris was suffering the Russian *revanche* for the burning of Moscow in 1812...Most successful invasions (by force of arms) have two characteristic qualities. They are sudden and sweep all before them...The (pacific) Russian invasion of France had both these qualities.

It was sudden. For suddenness there can be few analogies in French literature or any other to the blaze of glory that played around the names of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky almost as soon as they became familiar to the intellectual and artistic strata of French society...The invasion was unexpected, unforeseen, because it was by nature unplanned, an irruption of barbarians. There is no single or obvious reason why it should have occurred when it did instead of ten years earlier or twenty years later...Tolstoy had written his greatest works many years before the French began to devour them with such voracity...It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, to have

created so electrical a sensation, the Russians must have made some special appeal to Frenchmen in the late eighties, an appeal which would have been ineffective earlier...[T]he reason for the spectacular success of the Russians [is] intimately bound up with the spiritual mood of France during the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century. (1-3)

There is no reason to believe that Hemmings is exaggerating when he compares the phenomenon touched off by Vogüé's study to an invasion. He certainly is not joking in developing the analogy. Hemmings's stature in French studies is worth noting in evaluating his statement about the scale of the Russian invasion of France. Hemmings was practically the founder of Zola studies in the Anglophone world, and his scholarship is still greatly esteemed (Lethbridge vii, Keefe viii-xii). His study on how the Russian authors were used to undermine French Naturalism was one of his first published works related to Zola. Thus, the Zola/Tolstoy nexus lies near the origin of Zola studies, even though it has not been a significant subject of research in decades.

Hemmings's greatest insight concerning this cultural invasion is not found in the vivid image he creates of the shock that the Russian example gave the French system. Instead, the greatest insight comes when he explains that "the spiritual mood of France during the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century" was as much the cause of the resulting phenomenon as any quality inherent in the Russian imports. The tendentious use made of the Russian novels within domestic French disputes is never lost on Hemmings, and that is one reason he criticizes rather severely Vogüé's Roman russe (Russian Novel 28-48). Thaïs Lindstrom agrees with Hemmings, saying that Vogüé's interpretations are nothing more than "literary propaganda" 'propagande littéraire' (9-10). Yet the best study on the bias of the Roman russe is the monograph on the subject by Magnus Röhl. From the start, Röhl boldly discards the idea that Vogüé had anything much that was important or new to say about Russian literature. Instead, he reads the Roman russe as an epic in which two great cultures do battle and where

their opposing views of religion constitute the primary weapons. Novels qua works of fiction matter little except inasmuch as they could be made to function as vehicles of the great religious clash between two powerful cultures. By reading the Roman russe not as literary criticism but instead as epic, Röhl simultaneously captures the study's many flaws and also its strange allure. Röhl explains,

Fortement enraciné dans la tradition de la *Revue des deux Mondes* et présentant une nouvelle civilisation, Vogüé crée très habilement une sorte de rythme équilibré entre le connu et l'inconnu. Le lecteur...est introduit dans un univers fascinant, effrayant et consolant à la fois. Ceci a dû contribuer largement au succès du livre. Vivant dans un monde qui se désintègre, les lecteurs sont séduits par un monde qui se crée...En effet, Vogüé est simple : il n'est guère subtil, il va directement au but, il travaille avec de gros concepts et de gros contrastes ; pour lui, tout est religion : pris dans une situation dont la complexité le dépasse, il est fasciné par ce qui simplifie. Son art poétique – sa théorie du roman – réclame tout simplement l'union de l'esprit et de la matière ; la beauté dans l'art est synonyme de vérité ; la vérité, c'est la vie ; le beau, le bien et le vrai sont en harmonie. Vogüé oppose l'est et l'ouest, l'infiniment grand et l'infiniment petit, etc...Si à ses yeux, la littérature russe contemporaine est prodigieusement riche, la littérature française contemporaine est prodigieusement pauvre. En plus, Vogüé gonfle son sujet qui prend une dimension que l'on pourrait dire épique : les romanciers russes sont chez lui des héros littéraires d'une envergure énorme...On peut dire, avec une certaine exagération, que le vicomte [de Vogüé] devient le rapsode de la littérature russe et son livre une véritable – rapsodie. On peut dire aussi que la critique littéraire en général se situe par rapport au *Roman russe* comme la biographie par rapport à l'hagiographie : le texte est plus proche de Vogüé et de son groupe qu'il n'est proche de l'objet étudié. Aussi, la critique de Vogüé paraît souvent naïvement absolue et définitive. Assez fidèle dans les détails, elle ne l'est pas dans ses grandes idées...Vogüé s'est fait l'interprète de ce qu'il prétend être la vie spirituelle de tout un peuple, et ceci dans une perspective grandiose et synthétique. Voilà qui donne au livre sa force persuasive...Si le *Roman russe* a encore un avenir, c'est grâce au mythe, au souffle épique qui l'anime. (65)

Röhl is correct in saying that the Roman russe aims to be much more than a work of literary criticism. Vogüé's book spins the myth of a culture clash between two great civilizations, one known and the other unknown, one old, corrupt and disintegrating from a lack of faith, the other, young, faith-filled, and vigorous. Thus Röhl devises his brilliant interpretation of Le Roman russe as epic, and as epic primarily concerned with fundamental religious differences. As Röhl says, "pour lui [Vogüé], tout est religion." In striving to be

much more than literary criticism, however, Le Roman russe ends up being something less. Röhl is not exactly paying Vogüé's study a compliment by calling it an epic, and he never conceals his low opinion of the literary commentary that it provides. In the passage above, Röhl calls the literary criticism in the Roman russe "naively absolutist and definitive," lacking all nuance and simplistic. Röhl summarizes the quality of Vogüé's commentary in this way: "Assez fidèle dans les détails, elle ne l'est pas dans ses grandes idées."

Reading Le Roman russe as an epic is not Röhl's only great innovation. By denying the accuracy of Vogüé's image of a fundamental Russo-French dichotomy, Röhl frees himself to look elsewhere for the source of the great division that structures Vogüé's study. He finds the source of that division in the politico-religious conflict that had riven France since the French Revolution. Another, earlier section of Röhl's monograph reveals how perfectly Vogüé's overall argument reflects longstanding French domestic conflict (37-58). The passage above contains several remarks that draw upon this earlier conclusion by Röhl. He says that Le Roman russe is "fortement enraciné dans la tradition de la Revue des deux Mondes" and that "le texte est plus proche de Vogüé et de son groupe qu'il n'est proche de l'objet étudié." Thus, Röhl is saying that Le Roman russe is less about Russia than it is about Vogüé's preoccupations and those of the journal for which he worked. Yet the journal for which Vogüé worked was the most prestigious and influential journal of cultural commentary published in France in the nineteenth-century, and the Revue des Deux Mondes was indeed published throughout most of the century. Röhl's statement means that the Roman russe reflects the preoccupations of the journal that probably more than any other had its finger on the pulse of a century's worth of French cultural and social conflict, a journal moreover whose editor at century's end was a key figure in an inflamed Church/State dispute. Combined with its powerful epic qualities and its quasi-melodramatic aesthetic, the Roman russe's preoccupation

with domestic politico-religious conflict makes Vogüé's study seem surprisingly similar to the French melodramatic epics being considered in these pages. Its ostensible interest in Russian literature and civilization may in fact serve as a thinly veiled disguise just as the ancient Rome of Diocletian and Constantine functions as a disguise for Chateaubriand's contemporary polemics in Les Martyrs. Le Roman russe may quite simply be melodramatic epic masquerading as literary criticism; and as such, Vogüé's famous study would contribute much more to the present study's central argument than simply set up the discussion of Tolstoy and his notorious treatise on aesthetics, What is Art?.

The third epigraph to this chapter adds to the evidence of Vogüé's great success in promoting Tolstoy, and it also indicates the unusually prominent role that Tolstoy was to play in *fin-de-siècle* French culture, in spite of being a foreign author. According to Wladimir Troubetzkoy, Le Roman russe made Tolstoy famous overnight in Paris; and for the rest of the century, Tolstoy's every move would be followed with intense fascination in the French capital. In effect, Tolstoy was as important and influential in France as any domestic writer or cultural figure. Tolstoy's special status in French culture would continue throughout the Dreyfus Affair and include 1898, the critical year that saw the publication of the French translation of What is Art?.

What is Art? promotes a radical aesthetic with many melodramatic elements, and the French reception of this treatise by Tolstoy contributed to the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic conclusion. This is the very limited argument that the remainder of this chapter will attempt to make. Strictly speaking, none of Tolstoy's other writings nor his evolution as either an author or thinker will be an integral or even requisite part of this discussion. The indispensable elements of the argument that will be made here are only twofold: first, the melodramatic character of a single work by Tolstoy, What is Art?; and second, the major impact that this

work made in a nation that was undergoing its own supremely melodramatic moment at the end Dreyfus Affair. How Tolstoy came to develop the melodramatic aesthetic in What is Art? – whether the road that took him there was long, tortuous and eventful, or short, temporary and adopted on little more than a whim – is not directly germane to the issue at hand here. The question as to why Tolstoy ever wrote such an unusual book as What is Art? will be explored here, but only in the most cursory way; and the tentative conclusions drawn from that exploration – be they strong and credible, or weak and unpersuasive – ultimately have no direct bearing on the role that What is Art? played in the Dreyfus Affair’s cultural and religious disputes. Introducing Tolstoy on such a narrow basis is, of course, designed to keep to a minimum the number of claims that need to be substantiated concerning an extremely complex author from a significantly different literary tradition. Until now in this study, no claims of any great import have been made either about Tolstoy the man or about his writings. Tolstoy’s name has so far appeared only in the context of Vogüé’s peculiar and melodramatic reading of Russian literature. This chapter previously called Vogüé’s approach to Russian literature melodramatic, not the actual Russian texts that he commented upon. Anna Karenina was not labeled melodramatic; Vogüé’s reading of Anna Karenina was.

Another interesting, but not essential topic that will be explored here only briefly is the apparent irony of Tolstoy’s aesthetic move in the very direction that Vogüé wrongly claimed to detect in his earlier masterpieces. In other words, if the aesthetic ideal of Le Roman russe, an ideal that Vogüé wrongly claimed was enacted in Russian novels such as Tolstoy’s, is a melodramatic one, and if the aesthetic promoted in Tolstoy’s later treatise What is Art? is also melodramatic, then Tolstoy could perhaps be perceived as having subsequently adopted the very aesthetic that Vogüé mistakenly attributed to him in Le Roman russe. The answer as to how this seemingly ironic development came to pass is not that Vogüé was prescient to

such an extraordinary degree that he could foretell the aesthetic evolution of so great an author as Tolstoy. The signs that Tolstoy's aesthetic was moving in a melodramatic direction were already abundant in 1886; but, once again, demonstrating this long-term evolution in Tolstoy's thinking either conclusively or even in the slightest bit persuasively is not a requisite part of this discussion of What is Art?'s impact on the cultural side of the Dreyfus Affair.

Tolstoy underwent a profound religious conversion around the time he finished Anna Karenina, in the period just before 1870. The rest of his life – he lived for another forty years – was heavily shaped by the idiosyncratic and fundamentalist version of Christianity to which he came to subscribe. Gary Saul Morson explains,

Upon completing *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy fell into a profound state of existential despair, which he describes in his *Ispoved* (1884; *My Confession*). All activity seemed utterly pointless in the face of death, and Tolstoy, impressed by the fate of the common people, turned to religion. Drawn at first to the Russian Orthodox church into which he had been born, he rapidly decided that it, and all Christian churches, were corrupt institutions that had thoroughly falsified true Christianity. Having discovered what he believed to be Christ's message and having overcome his paralyzing fear of death, Tolstoy devoted the rest of his life to developing and propagating his new faith. He was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox church in 1901. (689)

Tolstoy's impulse, not simply to become a fervent adherent of an already-established Christian denomination, but instead to create his own new version of Christianity seems at first glance to have something in common with the fundamental impulse of melodrama as described by theorists of this literary form. That fundamental impulse, of course, is to create a new hegemonic religion or to re-establish Christianity on a new basis in the enduring wake of the religious turmoil produced by the French Revolution. A small library has been written on Tolstoy's conversion, his highly original religious ideas, and the impact that those religious ideas had on himself and on thousands of his contemporaries all around the world. The present study would not presume to claim that the concept of melodrama can encompass or convey a significant portion of Tolstoy's new religious ideas. Nevertheless, the similarities are striking

enough to warrant further research on this subject. Such a research topic would certainly break new ground. Tolstoy's name does not appear in the theoretical writings on melodrama that were consulted for this study. The absence of Tolstoy's name is understandable, if only because current scholarship on melodrama focuses mostly on French, English and American literature and film. The parallels are quite tantalizing, however. Not unlike Chateaubriand, Tolstoy devised a new and idiosyncratic form of Christian apologetics which comes close to being a new and idiosyncratic version of Christianity itself.

Actually, in Tolstoy's case, the version of Christianity that he devised and promoted was significantly new. As Gary Morson explains above, "Tolstoy devoted rest of his life to developing and propagating his new faith." Tolstoy literally became a new Christian evangelist. He rewrote the Gospels and considered his own version superior to the original (Flowers 11, Matual, 29-66, Tolstoy Four Gospels Harmonized, Gospel in Brief). The changes that Tolstoy made to the standard Gospels in creating his own version of these most canonical of texts conform in several key respects to the melodramatic view of religion. In fact, the changes that Tolstoy made to the Gospels also conform rather closely to Chateaubriand's vision of Christianity, even though Chateaubriand never went so far as to rewrite basic religious texts. The key resemblance between Chateaubriand's and Tolstoy's views on religion is that both minimize the miraculous, the supernatural, and the theological. Tolstoy meticulously stripped these elements from his version of the Gospels (Flowers 11). Tolstoy retained only Jesus's moral teachings, the down-to-earth and extremely practical lessons about how humans should behave and treat each other. Even those seemingly essential sections of the standard Gospels that attest to Jesus's divinity are removed from the Tolstoyan version (Flowers 11). In his study on Tolstoy's version of the Gospels, David Matual includes an entry

from the great author's diary in which he explains his desire to strip down and simplify Christianity in exactly this way.

A conversation yesterday about God and faith has brought me to a great, enormous idea toward the realization of which I feel capable of devoting my life. This idea is the founding of a new religion corresponding to the development of mankind, the religion of Christ but cleansed of faith and mystery – a practical religion which does not promise future happiness but gives happiness on earth. (16)

On a very basic level, Tolstoy's approach to religion seems to resemble Peter Brooks's theoretical description of the origins of melodrama. According to Brooks, the ambitious drive to create a new post-revolutionary religious hegemony collapses into an obsession with personal morality. Tolstoy's aim to recreate "the religion of Christ but cleansed of faith and mystery – a practical religion which does not promise future happiness but gives happiness on earth" seems to indicate just such a collapse downward from the supernatural and the theological onto the level of morality. Once again, this discussion of Tolstoy's religious beliefs is meant only to be suggestive and to point out possible directions for future research. Demonstrating Tolstoy's relevance to the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic conclusion does not depend upon a reevaluation, either complete or partial, of his basic religious beliefs. Familiarity with those beliefs nevertheless provides helpful context for an analysis of the treatise What is Art?.

From the very beginning, Tolstoy's religious conversion had major ramifications for his literary career and for his views on aesthetics. Tolstoy actually quit his literary career for several years after his conversion. Nicolas Weisbein relates the details of Tolstoy's profound religious experience in his study L'évolution religieuse de Tolstoï (67-147). In terms of the consequences of the conversion for Tolstoy's literary profession, Weisbein writes that the great author came to conclude that "Cette foi dans la littérature, l'art, la poésie n'était qu'un leurre et il n'éprouva que de la répulsion" (132). Derrick Leon makes the same point in his

biography, Tolstoy: His Life and Work (182-201). Leon notes how thoroughly disenchanted Tolstoy became with writing.

By the time the book [*Anna Karenina*] was finished, Tolstoy found himself in a moral dilemma that, with his passionate integrity of mind and heart, it was impossible for him to escape. The high ambitions of youth that he should win fame, that men should know and love him...: all these had now come to pass in as great a measure as any man could expect. Yet still the eternal, abiding questions remained unanswered...As for his much-coveted fame, what did it profit him? He was one of Russia's greatest novelists. Very well. But suppose he became more famous than Gogol or Pushkin, than Shakespeare or Molière, what then? The ground between his feet had collapsed. He had walked until he had reached a precipice beyond which was nothing. He must face the fact that life was meaningless, and ahead of him lay only destruction. (182)

Tolstoy's new, post-conversion views on aesthetics were not made fully public until the 1898 publication of the treatise What is Art? (Matual 20-21). Nevertheless, early signs of the direction in which Tolstoy was heading certainly existed. The simple fact that the celebrated novelist stopped publishing fiction for a few years was one sign. More revealing, however, was the first of a long line of non-fictional religious writings that Tolstoy produced over the last three decades of his life. This early religious work, the autobiographical Confession, published in 1879, contains glimpses of the ideas that would be expressed much more clearly in What is Art?. David Matual writes that, "Turgenev immediately noticed the antiaesthetic implications of the Confession and commented on them in [a] famous letter..." (20) Matual goes further, writing of the "cultural impoverishment" that was "implied, if not explicitly declared in [Tolstoy's] gospel and in his other religious works" (20). At least in terms of Tolstoy's much later and very explicit treatise What is Art?, the present study will reinterpret what Matual refers to as "antiaesthetic implications" and "cultural impoverishment" as a hyper-melodramatic aesthetic that resembles in many respects the message of Brunetière's 1898 speech "L'Art et la morale."

The fact that the radical views on aesthetics expressed in 1898's What is Art? appeared in embryonic form as early as 1879 helps account for what seems to be Vogüé's

strange prescience in his 1886 study Le Roman russe. Vogüé already knew the direction in which Tolstoy's opinions were evolving, and this knowledge may well have colored his interpretation of Anna Karenina, War and Peace, and, indeed, of all the great Russian novels that he analyzes in Le Roman russe. Vogüé actually spends the last eleven pages of his chapter on Tolstoy in Le Roman russe discussing the great novelist's religious conversion and its the consequences for his writing career (330-340). In this context, Vogüé specifically discusses Tolstoy's 1879 religious work Confession. So great was Vogüé's admiration for Tolstoy that he may have adopted the great novelist's newly emerging aesthetic ideal as his own and then retrospectively used that ideal as a tool for interpreting several decades' worth of Russian fiction by various authors. If Tolstoy's newly emerging aesthetic was at least partly melodramatic from the start, then the melodrama in Le Roman russe could derive from Vogüé's close study of Tolstoy's recent religious non-fiction. Le Roman russe would then not really represent an uncanny prediction of the radically melodramatic turn that Tolstoy's aesthetics would later take in What is Art?. Instead, Le Roman russe would simply reflect Vogüé's accurate detection of the melodramatic turn that Tolstoy's thinking began to take as early as 1879. This is, of course, speculation that will require future research for verification. As stated earlier, the role of What is Art? in the cultural and sexual politics of the Dreyfus Affair does not depend on the accuracy of this sort of speculation. Furthermore, the intensely melodramatic, antiaesthetic storm that broke out in France in 1898, a storm to which What is Art? contributed, is many orders of magnitude greater than the melodrama that might be found in either Le Roman russe or in Tolstoy's early religious work, Confession.

So strange and harsh is the aesthetic promoted in What is Art? that the amount of scholarship devoted to this treatise is quite limited. David Matual writes about the way Tolstoy's late aesthetic "greatly annoyed his contemporaries and continues to vex readers and

scholars in our own day” (20). The only book-length scholarly treatment of What is Art? seems to be the study Tolstoy’s Aesthetics and His Art written by Rimvydas Silbajoris. Silbajoris himself comments upon the dearth of scholarship available on Tolstoy’s one and only aesthetic treatise (8-9). As stated earlier, none of the scholarly works on melodrama cited here mention What is Art?, and Silbajoris does not analyze Tolstoy’s treatise from the standpoint of melodrama. Neither, for that matter, does Caryl Emerson, whose recently published essay, “Tolstoy’s aesthetics,” splendidly summarizes and comments upon What is Art? in a very limited number of pages. Emerson’s overview of What is Art? serves as an excellent introduction to the treatise.

Emerson begins by quoting Tolstoy’s basic definition of art: “Art is that human activity which consists in one person’s consciously transmitting to others, by certain external signs, the feelings he has experienced, and in others being infected by those feelings and experiences” (Tolstoy What is Art? 40). This transmission of feelings and experiences is what Tolstoy believes the best art should accomplish, so his conspicuous use of the term “infection” does not mean that Tolstoy considers all art, especially not the art that he prefers, to be like an illness. The main reason for Tolstoy’s peculiar and repeated use of the term “infection” is to emphasize his belief that the consumption of art and literature should be effortless, requiring as little work as possible on the part of the audience or reader. In the process of explaining Tolstoy’s belief that the reception of art should be completely effortless, Emerson also describes the standards that Tolstoy uses for evaluating art and literature.

Tolstoy then introduces further distinctions. Works of art are judged according to two axes, true versus counterfeit and good versus bad. Along the true/counterfeit axis, the standard of success is simply communicative: art is true if it infects. This replication of emotion in the recipient must be immediate and unmediated; its happy result is to make us experience an event of life more deeply, without having to analyze it or struggle with it...Tolstoy could cavalierly reject whole genres as divisive and inauthentic if he personally was not moved by a feeling of effortless co-creation...Thus, Tolstoy concludes, the workings of art must be distinguished from

mental activity, for the latter requires “preparation and a certain sequence of learning” – always discriminatory and always tending to favor those groups already profoundly favored in all societies: the rich, the tutored, the clever, and the quick. “The business of art,” Tolstoy insists, “consists precisely in making understandable and accessible that which might be incomprehensible and inaccessible in the form of reasoning.” (239-241)

The first indication that Tolstoy’s treatise promotes intense melodrama in art and literature can be found in this summary from Emerson. One of the six standard characteristics of melodrama is a radically democratic outlook, and Tolstoy’s late aesthetic vision is nothing if not radically democratic. As Emerson states, Tolstoy encouraged the creation of art and literature that could be digested effortlessly, because any complexity at all would be comprehensible only to “those groups already profoundly favored in all societies: the rich, the tutored, the clever, and the quick.” Tolstoy’s aesthetic is one for the unwashed, uneducated, even unintelligent masses. Emerson describes how Tolstoy uses the concept of “instantaneous infection” to develop the first of two axes for evaluating all art and literature. The first axis is between true art versus counterfeit art, with the former providing the effortless and instantaneous infection that Tolstoy prefers and the latter quite simply not. This true/counterfeit axis reveals a second way in which the aesthetic in What is Art? is profoundly melodramatic: Tolstoy’s treatise is permeated by a thoroughgoing Manichaeism. Everything in What is Art? is black and white; there are no shades of gray. The treatise contains vociferous denunciations of many works of art and literature that are typically counted among the world’s greatest masterpieces. Tolstoy denounces many works of art and literature for being counterfeit, bad, or both. As Emerson indicates, the two axes that Tolstoy uses to evaluate art are true/counterfeit and good/bad, so being counterfeit and being bad in art are two different things for Tolstoy, although many works fail by being both. Tolstoy’s imperious denunciations of numerous works of art and literature resemble the condemnatory aesthetics found in melodramatic epics such as in Chateaubriand’s Les Martyrs and Zola’s Évangiles.

The other aesthetic axis that What is Art? develops is the good/bad axis, and it has everything to do with Tolstoy's views on morality, especially sexual morality. For Tolstoy, good art and literature reflect his views on personal morality, whereas bad art and literature do not. Emerson nicely summarizes Tolstoy's insistence that art be moral, although she does not go into much detail about what makes a given work moral or immoral in Tolstoy's opinion.

This exile of specialized training and intellectual prowess from the realm of authentic art provides a transition to Tolstoy's second set of subcategories. It follows from the above definition that a true artist can experience, fix in signs, and infect others with a whole range of feelings, sophisticated as well as trivial, noble as well as ignoble. "The stronger the infection, the better the art is as art, regardless of its content – that is, independently of the worth of the feelings it conveys." Hence, an additional, morally informed axis of judgment is necessary with regard to content: good versus bad. Tolstoy calls the authentic, good art of our time – non-denominationally, of course, and stripping the term of any institutional associations – "Christian art." It can be of two sorts: religious, reflecting an ethical ideal endorsed by a certain people in a given historical time or place, or universal, accessible at all times to everyone in all cultures, without exception... True/counterfeit and good/bad: these two axes of judgment must be applied to every human product that claims to be art. (241-243)

Tolstoy understands that immoral feelings, too, can be effectively transmitted by "infectious" art and literature. Yet Tolstoy has no intention of encouraging the creation of works that infect people with any feelings whatsoever, works that are indiscriminately effective in causing infection. The feelings transmitted effortlessly through infection must be rigorously moral ones, hence the good/bad aesthetic axis. "Good" art is moral, whereas "bad" art is not; and this distinction is independent of the issue of infectiousness. In the citation above, Emerson also reveals a principal way in which Tolstoy's religious views enter into his late aesthetics. Art that is both true and good as Tolstoy understands these terms is also inherently Christian, even if that art was not originally inspired by Christian religious sentiment. Tolstoy's primitive, idiosyncratic and non-denominational view of Christianity is evident in this peculiar notion of what makes art Christian, a notion that is developed only near the end of the treatise (What is Art? 147-150).

Emerson says very little about what precisely constitutes moral art in Tolstoy's eyes; and Silbajoris in his book-length study on Tolstoy's treatise is equally reticent on this subject. Such reticence may seem surprising, but the extreme sexual conservatism of What is Art? is actually the reason for it. As will be shown in a moment, Tolstoy's chief criterion for morality in art and literature is an extreme puritanism in the depiction of love, romance and sex. For reasons that soon become understandable, neither Emerson nor Silbajoris wishes to discuss at length such an embarrassing aspect of What is Art?. Given that Tolstoy's treatise has been despised by scholars for a very long time, Emerson and Silbajoris take as their principal task the discovery of interesting and insightful aspects to Tolstoy's late aesthetics (Emerson 237, 245, 249-250; Silbajoris 256). In other words, both Emerson and Silbajoris justify the serious attention that they lavish on What is Art? with the claim that Tolstoy's treatise is not as appalling as is commonly believed. To a large degree, Emerson and Silbajoris actually succeed in their goal of finding value in a treatise long considered worthless or, even worse, noxious. The value that Emerson and Silbajoris find in What is Art? is different for each of these two scholars, since they wrote independently of each other and took different approaches to the treatise. Nevertheless – and this is the crucial point – both Emerson and Silbajoris admit forthrightly that their rehabilitation of What is Art? is necessarily only partial. In other words, they both admit that large sections of the treatise and several key aspects of its aesthetic are beyond any hope of rehabilitation (Emerson 237, 245, 249-250; Silbajoris 256). For example, no scholar could possibly justify Tolstoy's condemnation of his own great classics War and Peace and Anna Karenina; and Emerson and Silbajoris do not even try.

The extreme sexual conservatism of What is Art? is another key aspect of the treatise that Emerson and Silbajoris do not try to defend or justify. In fact, they barely discuss this aspect of the treatise at all. Emerson says that Tolstoy's "extreme sensitivity to erotic themes

in art” weakens his argument (240). She writes further, “A recurrent motif in What is Art? is the ‘erotic mania’ of all Western – especially French – literature, and the fact that ‘sensuality...constitutes the chief subject of all works of art in modern times’” (240). Thus, Emerson herself admits that the issue of sex, love and romance in art is of paramount importance within Tolstoy’s treatise, and yet she hardly says anything more about this subject than the two phrases just cited. Emerson is also quite correct in observing that Tolstoy saves his strongest denunciations for the lasciviousness he believes to find in modern French art and literature. Tolstoy’s special contempt for modern French literature is, of course, highly relevant to the present study, and for several different reasons. First, Tolstoy’s extended discussions of specifically French art and literature reveal how keenly interested he was in the latest cultural developments in France. The discussion of recent French cultural trends also shows how very well informed Tolstoy stayed about the latest developments in France. Finally, the fact that French art and literature receive more sustained attention in Tolstoy’s treatise than do the art and literature of any other nation, including Russia, helps explain why What is Art? made such a large impact in France as soon as it was released in 1898. Both F.W.J. Hemmings and Thaïs Lindstrom observe that the focus on French culture in What is Art? ensured great interest in the treatise in France (Hemmings Russian Novel 183-184; Lindstrom 76-79). The analysis of What is Art? by Hemmings and Lindstrom, the two greatest experts on contemporary French reception of Tolstoy’s writings, will be a subject for further discussion here in a moment.

In his much longer book on What is Art?, Silbajoris devotes even less space proportionately to Tolstoy’s opinions on sex, love, and romance (124-125). Silbajoris observes that Tolstoy equates virtually all artistic depictions of love and romance, including the most restrained of modern love stories, with pornography, which he then condemns out of hand

(125-126). Silbajoris correctly concludes that this sexual extremism found in What is Art? owes a great deal to the stridently anti-sex works of fiction that Tolstoy was writing around the same time, The Kreutzer Sonata, Resurrection, and The Devil (126). In these three fictional works, as well as in the non-fictional work The Relations of the Sexes, Tolstoy promotes complete sexual abstinence for all adults, even within marriage. This anti-sex ethic bears surprising similarities to Chateaubriand's advocacy of virginity and celibacy in the Génie du Christianisme and Les Martyrs. An analysis of Tolstoy's anti-sex writings could easily fit into the framework of the present study, because these writings bear many of the hallmarks of melodrama and because they certainly made a large impact in France throughout the 1890s. Tolstoy's anti-sex writings also offer a perfect contrast with the emphasis on unlimited procreation found in Zola's Évangiles. Above all, however, Tolstoy's last novel, Resurrection, which was published in France to great acclaim during the terminal phase of the Dreyfus Affair, could easily be read as a melodramatic epic, given that it concerns the establishment of a new version of the Christian religion. Nevertheless, and for reasons already mentioned previously, What is Art? is the only work by Tolstoy to be discussed in detail here. The great importance that Proust's Recherche attaches to aesthetics lends special relevance to Tolstoy's treatise on the subject. Finally, as will be seen here shortly, Tolstoy's anti-sex attitude is abundantly on display in What is Art?, even though this treatise never directly counsels readers to abstain from all sexual activity.

In Tolstoy's What is Art?, the depiction of love, sex, and romance truly is the key distinction between moral and immoral art. Indeed, the most radical or reactionary aspect of Tolstoy's treatise is precisely its discussion of love and sex. What is Art? certainly displays the sexual conservatism that specialists have identified with melodrama, thus indicating a third way that Tolstoy's treatise is profoundly melodramatic, in addition to its Manichaeism and

radically democratic outlook. Yet Tolstoy goes much further than encouraging sexual conservatism in art and literature. The pronouncements in What is Art? regarding depictions of love and sex have more in common with the bizarrely extreme sexual morality of melodramatic epic than with the mere sexual conservatism of standard melodrama.

What is Art? is not itself a melodramatic epic, not even in the sense that Le Roman russe, another work of literary criticism, probably is. Nor does Tolstoy's treatise necessarily encourage the creation of epics, whether melodramatic or otherwise, as does Chateaubriand's Génie du Christianisme. In fact, What is Art? is much clearer and more specific about what it condemns aesthetically than about what it approves. Given Tolstoy's belief that art should be immediately and effortlessly comprehensible even to the least educated, he seems at times to be encouraging the creation of very simple and short literary works. In other words, What is Art? seems occasionally to be promoting something resembling standard melodrama. Nevertheless, the sexual ethic that permeates the treatise is clearly of a radicalness that is more suited to melodramatic epic. Indeed, a strong case can be made that the primary goal of What is Art? is to remove virtually all depictions of romance and sex from Western art and literature. What is Art? could itself perhaps be viewed as a melodramatic epic, but only if considered in the much larger context of Tolstoy's attempt to found an entirely new form of Christianity. That is something this study has foresworn doing. The analysis of What is Art? offered here has to stand on its own, and the chief claim here is simply that Tolstoy's treatise contributed to a supremely melodramatic moment at the end of the Dreyfus Affair, a moment that was conducive to the creation of melodramatic epics, such as Zola's Évangiles.

Extremism on the subjects of sex and love is integral to What is Art?. Such extremism appears initially in Tolstoy's condemnation of art and literature created for the bourgeoisie. Given Tolstoy's belief that virtually all acclaimed works of art and literature since the

Renaissance were created for the bourgeoisie, his condemnation of bourgeois art is tantamount to a condemnation of most recognized classics. According to Tolstoy, religion is the only proper subject of art and literature, but once the wealthy and educated in Europe began losing their religious faith centuries ago, there no longer was a demand for art that was religious in inspiration. The easy life of the bourgeoisie leaves it perpetually bored, and so the only thing it seeks from art is artificial stimulation, something to add excitement to a satiated lifestyle. Catering to this market, artists and authors discovered the advantages of saturating their creative productions with sex, because sexual content is the easiest way to spice up art and literature. The following passage, taken from relatively early in What is Art?, presents Tolstoy's ideas on these matters.

The unbelief of the upper classes of the European world created a situation in which the activity of art, the aim of which was to convey the loftiest feelings mankind has attained to in its religious consciousness, was replaced by an activity the aim of which was to afford the greatest pleasure to a certain group of people. And from the whole vast area of art, that alone which affords pleasure to people of a certain circle has been singled out and has come to be called art.

Not to mention the moral consequences for European society of this singling out from the whole area of art and bestowing importance upon an art not deserving of such evaluation, this perversion of art weakened art itself and drove it almost to ruin. The first consequence was that art lost the infinitely diverse and profound religious content proper to it. The second consequence was that, having only a small circle of people in mind, it lost beauty of form, becoming fanciful and unclear; and the third and chief consequence was that it ceased to be sincere and became artificial and cerebral...[A] work of art is only a work of art when it introduces a new feeling...into the general usage of human life...The is nothing older or more hackneyed than pleasure; and there is nothing newer than the feelings that emerge from the religious consciousness of a particular time. (58-59)

Tolstoy laments that European art is all about artificiality, ambiguity and pleasure, when it should instead deal exclusively with the subjects of religion and morality. Tolstoy thus establishes a purely Manichaeian contrast here between what art and literature should be and what they unfortunately are. Tolstoy's language could hardly be more scathing. He complains that "this perversion of art weakened art itself and drove it almost to ruin." Although Tolstoy

is not as explicit here on the subject of sex as he will be later in the treatise, sexual pleasure is chiefly what he is talking about when he complains that art now aims merely to provide pleasure to a sybaritic upper class. Tolstoy's severe problem with sex in art becomes much clearer later in the treatise. Yet the very expansiveness of the term that he does use here to describe what he detests in art, the hated "pleasure," indicates the vast swath of human experience that Tolstoy would like to purge from art and literature. Tolstoy does not simply condemn the artistic depiction of the sex act itself. He is also denouncing most depictions of romantic love, an important human experience that is as intensely pleasurable as it is diverse in its forms. Furthermore, given the ample evidence of Tolstoy's extreme puritanism, it almost goes without saying that he also disapproves of the artistic depiction of alternative or minority forms of sexual expression, such as homosexuality. This becomes clearer later in the treatise when Tolstoy denounces Oscar Wilde and the decadents, who "choose as the theme of their works the denial of morality and the praise of depravity" (144).

Tolstoy has the audacity to present himself as a champion of diversity in art, however. Religion, which he believes should be art's sole subject, is "infinitely diverse," much richer than that "which affords pleasure to people of a certain circle," a subject that has wrongly "been singled out and has come to be called art." Yet Tolstoy's pose as a defender of artistic diversity does not withstand scrutiny. Once he reveals the rather simplistic kind of art that alone meets with his approval, any claim that he has to enriching and diversifying the fields of art and literature through the reintroduction of religious content seems flimsy indeed.

Tolstoy's preoccupation with French culture becomes obvious once he makes clearer his disapproval of sex in art. Indeed, when Tolstoy surveys modern art and literature he sees little else but sex, and nowhere is this "disgusting" trend more pronounced than in France. Emerson is quite correct in speaking of Tolstoy's "extreme sensitivity to erotic themes,"

which is a polite way of saying that Tolstoy finds the coarsest kinds of eroticism everywhere he looks in modern culture. To Tolstoy's way of thinking, this eroticism in modern art is not natural; all of it is contrived and artificial; and all of it contributes to a widespread mental illness in modern society, something he memorably calls "erotic mania." Tolstoy explains,

...of these three feelings, sensuality, being the lowest...constitutes the chief subject of all works of art in modern times.

From Boccaccio to Marcel Prévost, all novels, narrative poems and lyrics invariably convey feelings of sexual love in its various forms. Adultery is not just the favorite but the only theme of all novels. A performance is not a performance unless women bared above or below appear in it in some pretext. Ballads, songs – all these express lust with various degrees of poeticizing.

The majority of paintings by French artists portray female nakedness in various forms. There is hardly a page or poem in the new French literature without a description of nakedness or the use here and there, appropriately or inappropriately, of the favorite word and notion *nu* ['nude']. There is a certain writer named Remy de Gourmont, who is published and considered talented. In order to form an idea of the new writers, I read his novel *Les chevaux de Diomède*. This is an unbroken, detailed description of the sexual relations some gentlemen had with various women. Not a page is without lust-arousing descriptions...[I]t is the same, with the rarest exceptions, in all French novels. These are all works by people suffering from erotic mania. These people are apparently convinced that, since their entire life, as a result of their morbid condition, is concentrated on the smearing about of sexual abominations, it must mean that the entire life of the world is concentrated on the same thing. And the entire artistic world of Europe and America imitates these people suffering from erotic mania.

And so, as a result of the unbelief and the exclusive life of the upper classes, the art of these classes became impoverished in content, and was all reduced to the conveying of the feelings of vanity, the tedium of living, and, above all, sexual lust. (62-63)

Although this is not the passage where Tolstoy repudiates his own earlier fiction, his condemnation here of the literary theme of adultery stands as an unambiguous rebuke of Anna Karenina, perhaps the most famous novel ever written specifically and primarily on the subject of adultery. As is typical for What is Art?, Tolstoy's complaint about adultery in literature goes to extremes that strain credulity. He says, "Adultery is not just the favorite but the only theme of all novels." This is not hyperbole used merely for rhetorical advantage. By this stage in his life, Tolstoy was nothing if not sincere, and he therefore should be taken at his

word when he states his belief that adultery is the one and only theme of all novels in modern times. The best way then to explain this bizarre statement must therefore be that Tolstoy finds sexual lawlessness everywhere he looks in modern fiction, even in works that, to most readers, seem to have nothing to do with such a topic. Tolstoy is actually rather clear about the way he reduces practically every artistic depiction of love and romance to raw sex and primitive lust. When he complains bitterly that “all novels, narrative poems and lyrics invariably convey feelings of sexual love in its various forms” and that “all these [works] express lust with various degrees of poeticizing,” he is admitting that he cannot abide even the gentlest, most restrained literary depictions of love. No matter how discreet and poetic such works may be, they instantly call to Tolstoy’s mind the basest sexual passions; and he condemns all of it.

Tolstoy’s use of French culture as a whipping boy is quite remarkable. He indiscriminately condemns virtually all the major literary movements in nineteenth-century France, including most prominently Naturalism and Symbolism. In this particular passage, Tolstoy denounces by name the novel Les chevaux de Diomède by the French author Remy de Gourmont. Although today not considered a major literary figure, Gourmont represents the sexual corruption of French culture for Tolstoy, whose knowledge of nineteenth-century French literature is revealed to be quite extensive in the remainder of What is Art?. To Tolstoy, Gourmont’s novel contains far too many “lust-arousing descriptions.” He then asserts that “it is the same, with the rarest exceptions, in all French novels. These are all works by people suffering from erotic mania.” Tolstoy then seems to say that France is leading the world in a descent into erotic mania: “These people are apparently convinced that, since their entire life, as a result of their morbid condition, is concentrated on the smearing about of sexual abominations, it must mean that the entire life of the world is concentrated on the same thing. And the entire artistic world of Europe and America imitates these people suffering

from erotic mania.” The scornful, derogatory phrase “these people” seems to refer principally if not exclusively to French writers, whose work Tolstoy complains is imitated on both sides of the Atlantic. Throughout the latter two-thirds of What is Art?, Tolstoy repeats his attack on what he considers to be lascivious art and literature, which for him includes most modern cultural works; and French artists and authors are singled out for a special lashing.

Zola is by no means spared in this blistering attack. In fact, Tolstoy reserves one of his most humiliating criticisms for Zola’s fiction. He contrasts the novels of Zola and of several other prominent contemporary authors to an obscure children’s story, and he concludes that this very simple children’s story is a greater work of art than the novels of these leading authors. The four prominent authors that Tolstoy humiliates in this way include three Frenchmen: Zola, Bourget, and Huysmans. The children’s story that Tolstoy prefers to their novels could not be any more obscure or simpler, as the passage below explains.

For my work on art I have spent this winter reading, diligently and with great effort, the famous novels and stories of Zola, Bourget, Huysmans and Kipling, which are praised all over Europe. And at the same time, in a children’s magazine, I chanced upon a story by a completely unknown writer about the preparations for Easter in a poor widow’s family. The plot of the story is that the mother, having with difficulty obtained some white flour, poured it out on the table to be kneaded and went to get some yeast, asking the children not to leave the cottage and to watch over the flour. The mother left and the neighbors’ children came running to the window, shouting for the ones in the cottage to come out and play. The children, forgetting their mother’s order, run outside and start playing. The mother comes back with the yeast and finds a mother hen on the table throwing what is left of the flour to the dirt floor for her chicks to peck up from the dust. The mother, in despair, scolds the children. The children cry. (117-118)

As Tolstoy’s summary of the children’s story goes on to explain, the mother changes course and changes her attitude, deciding to making the special Easter desert out of rye flour, which is readily available, rather than out of the precious white flour, most of which the chickens have now eaten. The story makes clear that rye flour was considered far inferior to white flour, but the mother adopts such a cheerful disposition and sets so diligently to work

making the desert out of rye, that the overjoyed children actually believe they are getting a special treat. Tolstoy then drives home the message of the contrast between this simple children's story and the novels by the respected contemporary novelists that he was reading at the same time.

The reading of the novels and stories of Zola, Bourget, Huysmans and Kipling and others, with the most provoking subjects, did not touch me even for a moment, but I was vexed with the authors all the time, as one is vexed with a man who considers you so naïve that he does not even conceal the method by which he wants to catch you. From the first lines you see the intention behind the writing, and all the details became superfluous – you feel bored. Above all, you know that the author never had any other feeling than the desire to write a story or a novel. And therefore no artistic impression results from it. Yet I could not tear myself away from the unknown author's story about the children and the chicks, because I immediately became infected by the feeling which the author had obviously lived, experienced and conveyed. (117-118)
This children's story that Tolstoy prefers to Zola's novels indicates the kind of

melodramatic aesthetic that What is Art? promotes most specifically. Tolstoy's summary of the story indicates that it probably had several different melodramatic qualities, qualities such as pathos, didacticism, and an implicitly conservative sexual politics. Although it can be debated whether so simple a tale has a clear sexual politics, there is little doubt that Tolstoy reads a conservative sexual politics into the story, because later in his treatise he explains that the most suitable role for female characters in art and literature is also the most traditional, motherhood (149-150). Of course, the standard characteristic of melodrama that is most conspicuously on display in this story that Tolstoy praises so highly is precisely its focus on the plight of women and children.

Yet Tolstoy pushes this particular aspect of melodrama to extremes, not merely preferring works in which women and/or children are placed in precarious situations and are in need of rescue, which is a typical melodramatic plot device. Tolstoy goes further by seeming to promote literary works that are actually written for children, which further radicalizes the standard melodramatic aesthetic. Later in What is Art?, Tolstoy comes very

close to making the point that all art and literature must be chaste, moral and simple enough to be consumed by young children (141-144). Children therefore become Tolstoy's ideal consumers of art, the target audience to whom writers and authors must always cater. Any work of art or literature that is too sophisticated, too risqué or too complex for "simple people and children" runs the risk of confusing and perverting these two groups about whose welfare Tolstoy claims to care so much (141-142). About "simple people and children," Tolstoy worries, "They see that singers, writers, painters, dancers make millions, that they are given greater honours than saints, and these simple people and children become perplexed" (142). In other words, society should never esteem artists more than saints, because moral heroes make a far greater contribution to the world. For their part, artists and authors should never employ their creativity in such a way that their works might confuse simple people and children as to the vastly superior worth of saints and moral heroes. From this idea alone, one sees clearly why What is Art? has often been considered little more than the ravings of a lunatic. Nevertheless, experts agree that Tolstoy exerted enormous influence in France in the final decade of the nineteenth-century, and his moral message carried far more weight than his fiction. Given Tolstoy's tremendous influence and prestige, one also sees how What is Art? could have made a mighty contribution to an antiaesthetic trend that peaked in the final years of the Dreyfus Affair, beginning in 1898, the year that Tolstoy's treatise was published in France. Of course, the present study is the first to identify such a trend specifically in relation to the Dreyfus Affair and specifically involving the three major cultural figures of Brunetière, Tolstoy, and Zola.

Another reason What is Art? can be viewed as representing the annihilation of aesthetics has to do with the fact that the treatise condemns such a large number of revered artists and artworks. The number of prominent artists and writers that Tolstoy attacks by name

is very high indeed. Silbajoris has put together a useful, but still incomplete list of artists and writers that Tolstoy denounces out of hand. Silbajoris's list includes Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Dante, Tasso, Milton, Shakespeare, Raphael, Michelangelo, Bach, Beethoven, Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Klinger, Wagner, Liszt, Berlioz, Brahms, and Richard Strauss (Silbajoris 114). One of the few famous literary works that Tolstoy endorses wholeheartedly is Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, widely regarded in the field of melodrama studies as a classic of the genre (What is Art? 132).

Thaïs Lindstrom provides the best evidence of the French reception of What is Art? in her study Tolstoï en France: 1886-1910. F. W. J. Hemmings, however, provides the best analysis of the guru-like status that Tolstoy attained in France at the end of the nineteenth century. A general appreciation of Tolstoy's standing as a great moral leader in France will help in understanding French reception of What is Art?. Hemmings explains that, from 1890 until his death, Tolstoy was revered in France far more on account of his moral teachings than on account of his literary masterpieces. Given the inherent conflict between the two main aspects of Tolstoy's reputation, the religious and the literary, one of these aspects almost inevitably had to suffer at the expense of the other. Tolstoy himself conceived his idiosyncratic religious beliefs largely in opposition to literature and art as these fields of endeavor are typically understood. Of course, the radical opposition between Tolstoyan morality and traditional aesthetics did not become completely clear in France until the 1898 appearance of What is Art?. Nevertheless, the greater interest shown in Tolstoyan morality after 1890 in France may indicate a widespread, if mostly tacit acknowledgment that the two sides of Tolstoy's reputation could not be fully reconciled and that a choice had to be made. In the passage below, Hemmings discusses the choice that educated, culturally aware French citizens made after 1890. The phenomenon referred to by Hemmings as "le tolstoïsme" is the

moral and social movement that Tolstoy's influence set in motion in France around this time.

Yasnaya Polyana was the Tolstoy family estate in the Russian provinces. Wyzewa was a

French literary critic who wrote, not coincidentally, for the Revue des Deux Mondes.

Novel-writing was not the only, nor even perhaps the most important, field of activity in which the influence of Tolstoy made itself felt. The worldwide interest he aroused from the mid-eighties until his death in 1910 can only be partly explained by his prestige as a novelist. It was 'le tolstoïsme' on which attention centered; Tolstoy's artistic achievement was subsidiary...From 1890 or before, until his death, the 'prophet of Yasnaya Polyana' was a major force to be reckoned with in the world of ideas. As early as 1893 Wyzewa wrote: "The moral papers of Count Tolstoy have not so far fully converted anyone; but there is no one now who does not take them seriously, and their influence on every truth-loving spirit becomes stronger each day. I cannot think of any philosopher since Rousseau whose words have commanded more attention"...Literature, being a human and social activity like any other, was in its turn weighed on the scales of Tolstoyism and found wanting. (177-178)

The article by Teodor de Wyzewa that Hemmings quotes appeared in the October 15, 1893 issue of the Revue des Deux Mondes (Hemmings Russian Novel 177). All throughout the 1890s, the prestigious journal edited by Brunetière played a major role in disseminating and promoting Tolstoy's ideas in France. Even a casual perusal of the collected issues of the Revue des Deux Mondes from the last decade of the nineteenth century reveals many articles on Russian culture and especially on Tolstoy. The keen interest in Tolstoy's religious notions certainly does not mean that his every pronouncement was accepted unquestioningly. Wyzewa admits as much in the brief citation that Hemmings makes from his Revue des Deux Mondes article. More important, however, is the following part of the Wyzewa citation, describing the growing impact of Tolstoy's ideas in France: "their influence on every truth-loving spirit becomes stronger each day." Wyzewa wrote these words in 1893, and this observation from a prominent French critic indicating that the influence of Tolstoy's moral ideas grew throughout the 1890s provides valuable indirect support for the claim that What is Art? made a particularly large impact five years later, in 1898.

An important document to consider before turning to Lindstrom's study is the book review that the Revue des Deux Mondes published for What is Art?. A critic named René Doumic wrote a glowing review of Tolstoy's What is Art? for the May 15, 1898 issue of Brunetière's journal. Almost oblivious to the sheer outrageousness of much of Tolstoy's treatise, Doumic makes sure to note the many similarities between Tolstoy's ideas on aesthetics and those expressed by Brunetière in his speech from early in 1889, "L'Art et la morale." Doumic goes much further, however, setting What is Art? in the context of a grand cultural movement that had only recently manifested itself in France. The specific words that Doumic uses when he first mentions this movement are "un courant qui commence à se dessiner et qui tend à faire sortir l'art des voies étroites où on l'a récemment confiné" (457). Neither pithy nor terribly precise at first, Doumic's description of this movement soon becomes much clearer and also much more grandiose. As described by Doumic, this major cultural movement was motivated by the very same concerns that theorists have shown gave rise to standard melodrama and humanitarian epic at the start of the century. Of course, Doumic never mentions either melodrama or humanitarian epic, nor does he even display any obvious familiarity with either of these literary forms. Nevertheless, the new French cultural movement to which Doumic says What is Art? will contribute seems very much to echo dominant trends from early in the century, trends that were described in several previous chapters here. Doumic writes,

...les théories de Tolstoï vont dans le sens d'un courant qui commence à se dessiner et qui tend à faire sortir l'art des voies étroites où on l'a récemment confiné. Nous ne pouvons oublier, en effet, qu'avant que le livre de Tolstoï ne fût connu en France, M. Brunetière, dans sa conférence *L'art et la morale*, réclamait déjà contre les excès du formalisme...C'est qu'il se fait sous nos yeux une transformation sociale trop rapide et trop profonde pour qu'on puisse se refuser à l'apercevoir et qui rend de plus en plus paradoxale la conception d'un art réservé à l'élite...Qu'il le veuille ou non, l'écrivain d'aujourd'hui se trouve en présence, non plus d'une aristocratie locale, mais d'un immense public venu de tous les points de la société, comme de tous les coins du globe, et pour tout dire, en présence d'une foule. Qu'il s'adresse donc à la

foule !... Seulement, au lieu que ce soit pour la suivre et pour la flatter dans ses instincts les plus bas, il faut que ce soit pour dégager d'elle ce qu'il y a de meilleur en elle, pour y éveiller les sources latentes de l'enthousiasme, pour la convier au culte d'un idéal dont l'art devient en quelque manière l'unique dépositaire. A mesure que les influences religieuse, traditionnelle, familiale diminuent, et tandis que la transformation sociale s'opère surtout sous la poussée des intérêts matériels, le rôle de l'art grandit et redevient analogue à ce qu'il était dans les époques primitives, c'est d'être l'interprète des aspirations les plus relevées de notre nature. C'est ainsi que se pose aujourd'hui la question et ce n'est pour la littérature rien de moins qu'une question de vie ou de mort. Ou elle continuera d'être le frivole passe-temps destiné à amuser une décadence, et elle aura tôt fait de périr d'épuisement. Ou elle comprendra la mission qu'il lui appartient de remplir, -- c'est d'être pour la foule des âmes sans guide un moyen de s'unir et de s'élever. (457-458)

Although Brunetière does not use the term "formalisme" in his speech "L'Art et la morale," Doumic is basically correct in saying that formalism is the chief artistic and literary phenomenon that Brunetière opposes. More precisely, Brunetière used this major speech to denounce art for art's sake, which he interpreted very broadly to mean any art or literature that displays concern for aesthetics, for its own "form" as a cultural product. Thus, calling "formalism" the main target of Brunetière's wrath is not really incorrect. As shown earlier, Brunetière wants art and literature to be constantly preoccupied with the morality of the message that it sends.

Another way Brunetière describes the kind of art that meets with his approval is that it is highly socially conscious, always trying to send a morally edifying and uplifting message to the newly enfranchised masses. This extremely moralizing social consciousness in art and literature is precisely how Doumic above describes the new cultural movement to which Tolstoy's What is Art? will contribute. Yet the parallels with melodrama and humanitarian epic are striking. Most striking is Doumic's claim that art and literature must now function as substitutes for weakening religious faith: "A mesure que les influences religieuse, traditionnelle, familiale diminuent... le rôle de l'art grandit et redevient analogue à ce qu'il était dans les époques primitives, c'est d'être l'interprète des aspirations les plus relevées de

notre nature.” This is exactly the same purpose that Charles Nodier and Guilbert de Pixérécourt prescribed for melodrama in the early aftermath of the French Revolution. The grand aspiration that Doumic attributes to the new cultural movement emerging at the very end of the nineteenth century is also no different from the aims of new/post-revolutionary/humanitarian epic from early in the century. All these peculiarly nineteenth-century literary forms and trends emerged to provide moral lessons in a time of diminished religious belief, and sexual and family issues were central to that moral message.

The new and grandiose cultural movement that Doumic describes also resembles greatly the religious reawakening that began in France barely more than a decade before the Revue des Deux Mondes published this glowing review of Tolstoy’s What is Art?. In fact, the new movement seems like a more epic, more intensely melodramatic version of the earlier religious reawakening. That idea, of course, is precisely one of the major, overarching contentions of the present study. A major contention here is that the religious battles at the end of the Dreyfus Affair incorporated and then amplified the melodrama that was always present to some degree in the decade-old religious reawakening. Although Doumic does not mention either the Dreyfus Affair or the previous religious reawakening, his detailed commentary in May 1898, five months after “J'accuse,” concerning a major new cultural trend in France does point in the direction of a more intense, more epic kind of melodrama. According to Doumic, the role of art has recently enlarged and expanded immeasurably. At the end of the passage above, Doumic uses high-flown language to convey literature’s awesome new responsibilities: “...ce n’est pour la littérature rien de moins qu’une question de vie ou de mort. Ou elle continuera d’être le frivole passe-temps destiné à amuser une décadence, et elle aura tôt fait de périr d’épuisement. Ou elle comprendra la mission qu’il lui appartient de remplir, -- c’est d’être pour la foule des âmes sans guide un moyen de s’unir et de s’élever.” Virtually every

aspect of melodramatic epic can be detected in Doumic's description of the new cultural movement that was emerging at the peak of the Dreyfus Affair. The need to create a substitute for traditional religion, the radically democratic focus on the masses or "la foule," the moral didacticism, the Manichaeian denunciation of frivolity and decadence, the conservative sexual politics, the urgent need for political and social engagement – all these and more characteristics of melodramatic epic are clearly evident in Doumic's review of What is Art?, a review that relates Tolstoy's (anti)aesthetic treatise to a major new development in French culture.

Another name for the radically democratic outlook that Doumic describes and promotes in this book review is simply "humanitarian," which makes the connection to the French epics of earlier in the century even more obvious. Doumic clearly states the grand moral responsibility that authors now have before all humanity, "Qu'il le veuille ou non, l'écrivain d'aujourd'hui se trouve en présence, non plus d'une aristocratie locale, mais d'un immense public venu de tous les points de la société, comme de tous les coins du globe, et pour tout dire, en présence d'une foule. Qu'il s'adresse donc à la foule !" Doumic wants authors to address themselves not to some real or imagined aristocracy, but instead to "the crowd," which means all of humanity. More precisely, Doumic wants authors to address themselves to the lower classes worldwide, who supposedly need moral edification. About art and literature's duty toward the worldwide crowd 'la foule', Doumic writes, "...il faut que ce soit pour dégager d'elle ce qu'il y a de meilleur en elle, pour y éveiller les sources latentes de l'enthousiasme, pour la convier au culte d'un idéal dont l'art devient en quelque manière l'unique dépositaire." In other words, the best and most moral qualities of the global masses are latent, pent up, in need of being released. Only art and literature can release these moral qualities worldwide.

In her study Tolstoï en France, Thaïs Lindstrom seems to describe the same new cultural movement that Doumic discusses in such excited terms in his review of What is Art?. Lindstrom also relates this movement to Tolstoy's 1898 treatise, but she does something else as well. She emphasizes the key role played in this movement by the youngest segment of the French literary elite.

Hemmings, too, discusses the special impact that What is Art? made on the younger French, but he provides much less detailed evidence on this topic than Lindstrom does. Hemmings focuses on the writers André Suarès and Romain Rolland, who were near the beginning of their literary careers when What is Art? appeared in France. Hemmings says that, in the immediate aftermath of the publication of Tolstoy's treatise, both Suarès and Rolland were positively impressed by Tolstoy's new aesthetic ideas (Russian Novel 197-198, 208-217). According to Hemmings, Romain Rolland's admiration for Tolstoy's aesthetics continued to grow in the following years and eventually influenced his own theories on socially useful art (Russian Novel 208-217).

Thaïs Lindstrom provides much more evidence of the eager receptiveness that greeted Tolstoy's call for moral art among young French writers from 1898 until the early years of the new century. About the appeal of Tolstoy's moral message overall to the younger generation in France, Lindstrom writes, "Ce qui est remarquable, c'est que l'évolution intérieure de Tolstoï rejoint en France un moment historique comportant des étapes similaires, comme si l'écrivain russe avait passé par les mêmes épreuves que la jeunesse française au sortir de ses collèges" (61).

Turning specifically to What is Art?, Lindstrom first notes how perfectly Tolstoy's new ideas on aesthetics corresponded to cultural trends emerging in France at the moment of its publication there, in 1898. Lindstrom cites an interrelated nexus of cultural trends, which

includes the rejection of Symbolism on account of its supposed amorality, a new emphasis on the social utility of art, a return to the “human” in art and literature, and a turn away from pure “artistry” in literature, which seems to mean a turn away from aesthetics for its own sake. In the context of these newly emerging trends, Lindstrom mentions by name both Brunetière and Doumic, as well as André Breton, who she says were all three moving in the same direction aesthetically as Tolstoy. Only in a very limited way does Lindstrom address the reactionary sexual politics of What is Art? and the sexual politics of the emerging French cultural movement: she observes that Tolstoy and his French admirers all opposed decadence in art. Above all, Lindstrom emphasizes how Tolstoy’s treatise on aesthetics arrived at the perfect moment to have maximum impact on French culture. That moment also happens to be the climax of the Dreyfus Affair. Lindstrom writes,

Tolstoï, lui, a un art essentiellement social...[I]l n’avait tout simplement pas compris l’effort des symbolistes français dans leur exploration poétique des régions de l’âme humaine qui échappent à l’observation de la raison...[I]l avait conscience des dangers que les investigations des symbolistes français pouvaient faire courir à la littérature. Et c’est bien là ce qu’il expose dans la première partie de son essai sur l’art. Ce même avertissement avait été donné en France par des écrivains et critiques comme Brunetière, Doumic, et André Breton ; Tolstoï, loin de les étonner et de les contrecarrer..., ne faisait que rejoindre le fond de leur accusation. Les signes de décadence que le théoricien russe relève dans la poésie française : la préciosité, la tendance à l’exceptionnel et au bizarre, la recherche de l’hermétisme qui isole l’artiste du public, étaient précisément, déjà en 1898, quelques-uns des facteurs en train d’accélérer le déclin du symbolisme.

Le « retour à l’humain », qui se dessina dès les dernières années du siècle dans les diverses expressions de la pensée française, détourna les écrivains, plus même que les excès des symbolistes, de la littérature dite « artiste ». Ce nouvel idéal gagnait de plus en plus les écrivains ; il avait, sur le plan de l’art, des ambitions dont Tolstoï revendiquait fortement la réalisation dans la deuxième partie de *Qu’est-ce que l’art ?* Ainsi, Tolstoï n’innovait pas en annonçant la direction de l’art vers le social : il formulait à son insu, et admirablement, une exigence de la conscience française. (78-79)

Lindstrom’s striking conclusion captures the remarkable synchronicity that developed between Tolstoy’s thinking and the thinking of the French literary elite around the year 1898. According to Lindstrom, Tolstoy fulfilled an urgent need of the French consciousness at that

moment in time when he presented his radical theory of socially beneficial art. This synchronicity between Tolstoy and a large segment of the French literary elite was far more pronounced in 1898 than had been the general affinity for Tolstoy that developed in France in the early years of the religious reawakening in the 1880s. The analysis of Le Roman russe here has shown that the affinity for Tolstoy in the 1880s contained a great deal of misunderstanding, as his novels and those of other Russian authors had to be significantly distorted to play a role in the French cultural politics of that time. By 1898, however, there was much less room for misunderstanding, largely because the intervening decade had provided sufficient time for Tolstoy's radical message on religion and morality to be comprehended in France. More precisely, there was far less room for misunderstanding Tolstoy's radical message on aesthetics in 1898, because What is Art? offered Tolstoy's only formal disquisition on the subject, and because this treatise presented his radical ideas so clearly and thoroughly.

One may be forgiven, however, for doubting Lindstrom's claim that this synchronicity developed "à son insu," meaning without Tolstoy's even being aware of it. What is Art? reveals that Tolstoy was exquisitely attuned to the latest trends in French culture. Although Tolstoy more often than not denounced those latest French trends – and denounced them in the most vociferous terms – he still seems to have been well aware of the latest cultural developments in France. Tolstoy's strident denunciations actually make him seem more relevant and more attuned to contemporary French culture, since France had its own cultural figures making similar denunciations, figures such as Brunetière. Tolstoy was also exquisitely aware of the latest French political developments, including most especially the Dreyfus Affair, although a major study remains to be done organizing and presenting the available evidence that shows this to be the case. Therefore, one may doubt Lindstrom's claim that

Tolstoy's What is Art? appealed to a large segment of the French literary elite almost by accident. What is Art? may instead represent Tolstoy's completely conscious effort to intervene in the French cultural politics of the very late nineteenth century. The prolific polemicist that Tolstoy became at the end of his life certainly would not have shied away from such intervention, and the immense prestige of *fin-de-siècle* French culture would have made it a tempting target for such intervention. Of course, for the time being all of this must remain mere speculation, and any notion as to Tolstoy's motives in writing What is Art? has no direct bearing on the present study's main thesis.

Lindstrom next explains how Tolstoy's What is Art? exerted a particularly strong influence on a cohort of young French authors that was coming into its own right at the turn of the century (79-86). Although the influence was not lasting in many cases, most of these young authors expressed open admiration for Tolstoy's ideas on aesthetics at some point during the several years following the French publication of What is Art?. This cohort of young authors was united by a full spectrum of ideals that can be drawn either directly or indirectly from Tolstoy's treatise. Generally speaking, they were drawn to similar notions of socially conscious literature as Brunetière was developing at this time, but the young authors were located mostly on the political Left, whereas Brunetière was ensconced on the Right. As described by Lindstrom, the art and criticism produced by these young authors was often socialist in inspiration. This young generation shared the following goals, all of which will sound familiar in the present context: creating an "art of the people" that might be easily understood by the least educated, presenting a morally uplifting message that would improve the character of their audience, avoiding "decadent" themes, serving as an alternative to moribund religion, and celebrating the simple life while castigating the bourgeoisie (Lindstrom 79-86). The art that these young authors produced was occasionally even labeled

“humanitarian,” although probably not in a conscious throwback to the epics written at the height of Romanticism (Lindstrom 84). An obvious conclusion to draw from all this is that the new French cultural movement described excitedly by René Doumic in his review of What is Art? probably has just as much to do with this trend among young authors as it has to do with the pronouncements of the elder statesman Brunetière.

The young author from this cohort on whom Lindstrom focuses most is Jean-Richard Bloch, who “représentait très bien l’élite de la jeunesse intellectuelle de la fin du siècle dernier [le dix-neuvième siècle]” (Lindstrom 83). Lindstrom cites the passage below from Bloch, in which he envisions what the new art and literature must be like. The parallels to melodramatic epic as defined and described for the first time in the present study are striking.

Si nous examinons les conditions de milieu où sont écloses les grandes œuvres d’art d’un peuple, nous constatons qu’elles sont toujours nées en des périodes d’*unité morale*. Unité de croyances religieuses, unité de mythes sociaux ou nationaux, comme dans la Grèce homérique, l’Athènes du Ve siècle, le XIII^e siècle français, la France de Louis XIV... (Lindstrom 84-85) [Emphasis in original]

According to Bloch, the aim of this young generation was, at least for a while, to re-create the same kind of religious hegemony as existed in previous eras when “les grandes œuvres d’art d’un peuple” were created. Bloch does not use the word “epic,” but epic is usually considered the literary genre that encompasses an entire people, an entire civilization, or, indeed, all of humanity. Bloch’s dream of somehow recapturing “[l’]unité de croyances religieuses, [l’]unité de mythes sociaux ou nationaux” means quite literally restoring something resembling the religious hegemony that existed prior to the French Revolution. Quite simply, Bloch is unwittingly describing the initial stages of the process of melodramatic epic. Whether Bloch or other members of this cohort of young authors actually wrote works that qualify as melodramatic epics is a subject beyond the limits of the present study. Nevertheless, the very last sentence of Lindstrom’s chapter on this younger generation of

authors is highly suggestive: “Tout compromis est écarté: un art nouveau est né d’une religion nouvelle qui prend ses racines dans le cœur d’un peuple de travailleurs. C’est aussi l’idéal esthétique de Tolstoï” (86). The most remarkable thing of all, however, is that Lindstrom’s description of a new art born out of a new religion based on a radically democratic outlook also became the aesthetic ideal of Emile Zola in the exact same time period, the historical period marked most notably by the release of “J’accuse.” The next chapter will show how the ideas advanced in Zola’s polemical Évangile novels closely parallel the ideas being promoted at the same time by Tolstoy and Brunetière.

The other young French authors whom Lindstrom mentions as coming of age in the late 1890s and as being influenced by Tolstoy’s views on aesthetics include André Suarès and Romain Rolland, the same two authors profiled by Hemmings. Yet Lindstrom’s research in this area is deeper, and she identifies these other young French authors who responded positively to the message of What is Art?: Georges Chenevière, Vildrac, René Arcos, Luc Durtain, Duhamel, Daniel Halévy, Emile Guillaumin, Georges Bourdon, Maurice Pottecher, Camille Mauclair, Alfred Fouillée, and Marc Sangnier (79-86).

The reason for discussing young French writers influenced by What is Art? within a rather short time frame, from about 1898 to 1904, has to do with the single most important reference to the Dreyfus Affair in Proust’s Recherche. At a crucial juncture within the Recherche, Proust discusses at length a troubling cultural movement that flourished briefly around the time of the Dreyfus Affair. The final chapter of this study will show that this cultural movement criticized directly by Proust in the pages of the Recherche is none other than the Dreyfus Affair’s intensely melodramatic conclusion. Of course, Proust does not have at his disposal the term “melodramatic epic,” and also absent from his discussion of this troubling cultural trend are a few of the theoretical ramifications that the present study has

derived from the concept of melodramatic epic. Nevertheless, what Proust complains about and ridicules is definitely the same cultural phenomenon that has been analyzed over many pages here. The vocabulary that Proust employs differs from the vocabulary used here, but the fundamental concepts and developments that he describes are recognizably the same as those analyzed in this study. Varied evidence will be marshaled to demonstrate that the Recherche speaks of the same cultural phenomenon, but a major piece of that evidence will be Proust's discussion of the regrettable enthusiasm with which young French authors allowed themselves to be swept up in this trend that unfolded at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. The influence that the radical (anti)aesthetic ideas of Tolstoy, Zola, and Brunetière exerted on younger authors precisely during this time will therefore have great relevance to this part of Recherche. Given the crucial location where Proust's complaint about this movement appears in the Recherche, the relevance will ultimately extend to the entire Recherche.

As useful as the younger French authors will be in building a bridge to Proust's Recherche, Zola, Tolstoy, and Brunetière were clearly the dominant cultural figures in France between 1898 and 1904. Zola, Tolstoy, and Brunetière led the campaign that resulted, at least in some quarters of the French cultural elite, in the virtual abandonment of aesthetics and in the promotion of a conservative view of morality based on significantly new religious perspectives. The irony of the convergence of these three dominant figures is made all the greater by the fact that they fought each other bitterly for many years prior to this period. Zola's unexpected death in late 1902 did little to diminish his influence in the cultural, political, and religious debates that stretched into 1904. Close reading of the powerful newspaper L'Aurore, where Zola's Évangiles were serialized well into 1903, testify to the lasting influence of Zola's late cultural and political message.

The younger French authors who espoused similarly radical ideas on religion and aesthetics could not have changed the cultural landscape as quickly and dramatically as did Zola, Tolstoy, and Brunetière. The younger authors particularly could not have effected such change single-handedly in 1898-1904, when their careers were just getting started. Their infatuation with Tolstoy in particular seems to bear the marks of young talent that has not yet found its own distinct voice. In fairness to these younger authors, there will be no opportunity here to examine their writings directly or in depth; and, in truth, the main reason for mentioning them at all here is that the Recherche often discusses the new cultural movement at the time of the Dreyfus Affair in terms of its unfortunate impact on young talent. There is another important reason, however, for mentioning the young French authors of this period: Zola himself focuses on them and makes special appeals to them in some of the most inflammatory passages of his Évangiles. That, however, will be a subject for the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

ZOLA'S ÉVANGILES AS MELODRAMATIC EPICS

Il est évident que Zola s'est appliqué assez sérieusement à la tâche de refaire l'Evangile chrétien. Chacun des romans de la nouvelle série présente en effet des caractères bibliques – thèmes, épisodes, phraséologie même – auxquels l'auteur veut prêter un sens nouveau... Mais Zola n'a pas seulement écrit un 'Evangile' sociale, dans lequel il offre des conseils d'une utilité temporelle. Il a écrit une œuvre qui révèle des attitudes vraiment religieuses.

David Baguley, Fécondité d'Emile Zola : roman à thèse, évangile, mythe (190)

C'est l'instituteur laïque, l'instrument de vérité et de justice, qui seul peut sauver la nation, lui rendre son rang et son action dans le monde... Et vous verrez, vous verrez, lorsque, peu à peu, des maîtres sortiront d'ici, instruits pour être les apôtres de la raison et de l'équité, vous les verrez se répandre dans les campagnes, dans les villes, portant la bonne parole de délivrance, détruisant partout l'erreur et le mensonge, tels que des missionnaires de l'humanité nouvelle ! Alors, l'Eglise sera vaincue, ...et toute la nation se mettra en marche, sans entraves désormais, vers la Cité future de solidarité et de paix.

Zola, Vérité (1172)

Le vieux catholicisme tombe en poudre de toutes parts,... les peuples se détournent, veulent une religion qui ne soit pas une religion de la mort... Et quel réveil joyeux, lorsque la virginité sera méprisée, lorsque la fécondité redeviendra une vertu, dans l'hosanna des forces naturelles libérées, les désirs honorés, les passions utilisées, le travail exalté, la vie aimée, enfantant l'éternelle création de l'amour. Une religion nouvelle! Une religion nouvelle!... Une religion de la science, c'est le dénouement marqué, certain, inévitable, de la longue marche de l'humanité vers la connaissance.

Zola, Paris (1561)

...[W]ith due allowance for differences of temperament and milieu, the two careers [of Emile Zola and Leo Tolstoy] run curiously parallel. Both men, by their middle years, had accomplished their monumental contributions as novelists. Both became evangelists, as they proceeded toward the intellectual

and social problems of the twentieth century...It is on the extra-literary, the ideological side, we must admit, that Tolstoy and Zola come closest to meeting.

Harry Levin, The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists (370)

When, in February 1901, just three years after “J'accuse” made him the world-famous hero of the Dreyfus Affair, Emile Zola sat down to write a fictionalized account of the scandal, he changed the crime at the heart of the Affair from military espionage to the rape and murder of a child. This fact bears repeating. Zola, the figure who came to embody the Dreyfus Affair even more than the falsely convicted Alfred Dreyfus himself did, re-imagined the scandal as a controversy over one of the most shocking of all sex crimes. Literary scholarship on Zola's fiction and historical scholarship on the Dreyfus Affair have barely even begun to grapple with Zola's reduction of the Dreyfus Affair to a sex crime; a sex crime, moreover, that is perpetrated on a defenseless child; a sex crime, finally, that is homosexual in nature. For the victim at the core of Vérité, the last novel Zola would ever complete before his untimely death in September 1902, is an eleven-year-old boy; and there is never any doubt within the novel that an adult male sexually violated the boy before strangling him to death. The only question is which adult male character committed this crime, referred to in the novel as “l'immonde attentat,” “quel affreux malheur,” and “le crime exécrable” (1013-1015). Utterly different as the rape and murder of child is from the sale of military secrets, the man convicted of the crime in Vérité is, as in the real Dreyfus Affair, a very respectable member of the Jewish community. Of course, as in the historical Affair, the man initially convicted of the crime could not be any more innocent of it.

Vérité has always been perceived as a fictionalized retelling of the Dreyfus Affair. In truth, it could hardly be otherwise, so transparent and numerous are the parallels to the historical event within the novel. Nevertheless, this point is too important simply to be taken for granted. The article that the newspaper L'Aurore ran in August of 1902 to announce the

upcoming serialization of Zola's Vérité stated clearly, "Comme affabulation, l'auteur, en une action très dramatique, a transposé l'affaire Dreyfus, l'a portée du monde militaire dans le monde universitaire..." ("Vérité par Émile Zola" 1). Although quite correct in saying that the novel's plot is patterned after the Dreyfus Affair, this article gets one fact wrong. Zola transposes the basic narrative of the Affair, not primarily to a university setting, but instead to an elementary school setting.

Critics and scholars who write about Vérité nearly always comment upon its obvious fictionalization of the Dreyfus Affair, made all the more obvious by the fact that the author performing the fictionalization is Zola himself. In his major new biography of Zola, Henri Mitterand discusses the close relation between the plot of Vérité and the central aspects of the Affair (726-728). Jean-Louis Bory goes further, drawing up a list of the most conspicuous parallels between the novel's plot and the historical Dreyfus Affair (1002). The most important parallel, in Bory's own words, is simply this: "L'instituteur juif Simon est l'officier juif Dreyfus" (1002). In Vérité, the man falsely convicted of the rape and murder of a child is a Jewish schoolteacher named Simon, a character who personally bears numerous similarities to the historical Captain Alfred Dreyfus. Yet neither Bory nor Mitterand nor, for that matter, anyone else who has written on Vérité in the scholarship that this study cites has expressed any shock or even mild surprise that Zola would transform the central accusation of the Dreyfus Affair into a sex crime, and a particularly gruesome sex crime at that.

This original crime in Vérité, the transgression that precipitates a massive, long-running scandal in the novel similar to the decade-long Dreyfus Affair, occurs in the dormitory of a Catholic elementary school. More precisely, the crime takes place in the dorm room of one Zéphirin Lehmann, a half-Jewish schoolboy who is being raised Catholic at the request of his deceased Catholic mother. Zéphirin's father was Jewish, but he pre-deceased his

wife by several years, leaving the decision as to the child's religion up to her. Technically an orphan, Zéphirin is the ward of the Jewish schoolteacher Simon, who married the sister of Zéphirin's Jewish father. Thus, Simon is Zéphirin's uncle by marriage, which obviously means that Simon is convicted of raping and murdering his own nephew (1011-1013).

Three rather important details should be clarified at once. First, Simon is a family name, like Dreyfus; but the first name of the falsely convicted schoolteacher is never indicated in the novel. In fact, his first initial is indicated as "E" once early in the narrative and then as "L" much later, an inconsistency that Zola may have overlooked precisely because he wanted to minimize the importance of the character's first name (1099, 1227). By not giving Simon a first name, Zola strengthens the parallel to Dreyfus, whose last name only became world famous in the exhilarating term "l'affaire Dreyfus." Zola does not fail to use repeatedly throughout Vérité the perfectly parallel term "l'affaire Simon." The second detail needing clarification is that Zéphirin is being raised Catholic, not only because his deceased mother wanted it that way, but also because Simon, who now has custody of the child, is willing to abide by the mother's wishes, even though he and his wife are both Jewish. Because the child is supposed to be raised Catholic, but because the Simon household that has legal custody of him is Jewish, Zéphirin is a boarder at a nearby school run by a Catholic religious order. As a boarding student in the Catholic school, Zéphirin is immersed in a totally Catholic environment. The third detail needing clarification is that, although Simon is himself a schoolteacher, he does not teach in the Catholic school that Zéphirin attends. Simon teaches in the local public school, or in French terminology, the local "école laïque."

The crime at the center of the historical Dreyfus Affair has sometimes been called a comedy of errors, so labyrinthine was the world of espionage and counter-espionage in which it was supposed to have taken place and so incompetent were the French and German

agents who inhabited that world. The Rube-Goldberg-level absurdity of the case of military espionnnage forming the kernel of the Dreyfus Affair is the principal subject of Marcel Thomas's highly respected study, L'Affaire sans Dreyfus. For his fictional "Simon Affair," Zola selected a central crime that is neither funny nor complicated. In fact, Vérité presents its central crime in garish, hideous simplicity. Below is the description of the scene where little Zéphirin's dead, sexually violated body is found.

L'étroite chambre, au papier clair, gardait son calme, son air d'enfance heureuse. Sur la table, il y avait une statuette coloriée de la Vierge, quelques livres, des images de sainteté, rangées, classées avec soin. Le petit lit blanc n'était pas même défait, l'enfant ne s'était pas couché. Et, par terre, ne traînait qu'une chaise abattue. Et là, sur la descente de lit, le pauvre petit corps de Zéphirin gisait, en chemise, étranglé, la face livide, le cou nu, portant les marques des abominables doigts de l'assassin. La chemise souillée, arrachée, à demi fendue, laissait voir les maigres jambes écartées violemment, dans une posture qui ne permettait aucun doute sur l'immonde attentat... Mais cette tête, malgré sa pâleur bleuie, gardait son charme délicieux, une tête d'ange blond et frisé, un visage délicat de fille, aux yeux bleus, au nez fin, à la bouche petite et charmante, avec d'adorables fossettes dans les joues, lorsque l'enfant riait tendrement. (1014)

Simply and straightforwardly gruesome as this passage is, Zola's description of the murder scene acquires additional emotional impact from the rest of the novel. In fact, the beginning of the passage soon acquires an emotional value diametrically opposed to what it seems at first to have. The presence of the Virgin Mary statuette and of the other religious images seem to heighten the crime's horror by emphasizing the piety of the innocent victim. Yet soon after this passage, Vérité turns ferociously and incessantly anti-Catholic; and so the boy's Catholic piety no longer appears admirable in the least. In fact, Simon's decision to raise Zéphirin Catholic in accord with his deceased sister-in-law's wishes quickly appears to be the only serious mistake that the nearly perfect Jewish schoolteacher ever committed.

Likewise, the terminology describing the signs of rape on the boy's body takes on a distinctly homophobic cast as Vérité's sexual politics become clearer. The middle of the passage leaves little doubt that Zéphirin was raped anally in the most brutal manner: "La

chemise souillée, arrachée, à demi fendue, laissait voir les maigres jambes écartées violemment, dans une posture qui ne permettait aucun doute sur l'immonde attentat." The stained nightshirt and the violently separated legs are clear signs of anal rape, which in the homophobic imagination must certainly represent the ultimate homosexual crime. The thematics of the remainder of Vérité are all about attributing various sexual perversities to the novel's many villains and about attributing sexual health and purity to its heroes. Thus, the homosexual nature of the novel's central crime needs to be understood in the context of a larger stigmatization of all sex that is non-heterosexual and/or non-procreative, even when that sex is between adults and consensual. In other words, the rape and murder of Zéphirin is an indisputably awful crime, but in the larger context of Vérité – indeed, in the larger context of all Zola's Évangiles – this awful crime serves a larger symbolic purpose of stigmatizing many different kinds of sexual behavior, most of which have no element of violence whatsoever. For example, the person who actually committed the central crime in Vérité, a Christian brother named frère Gorgias, is later strongly insinuated to be homosexual, on account of the strong emotional attachments of a "sinister" quality that he has with other males (1422-1427). Through the characterization of the despicable frère Gorgias, Vérité strongly suggests that homosexuality is linked in some way to pedophilia – and to violent, murderous pedophilia at that. Of course, such a suggestion could hardly be more homophobic. The larger context provided by the full sexual politics of Zola's Évangiles is the subject of this chapter, most specifically as that sexual politics undergirds these novels' status as melodramatic epics.

Vérité is indeed one Zola's Évangile novels, which are the final novels that he ever wrote. To parallel the four Christian Gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John, Zola originally planned to write four Évangiles of his own, with the titles Fécondité, Travail, Vérité, and Justice. He completed the first three of these novels as planned, and he started

work on them in the second half of 1898, while he was in exile in England following his libel conviction for “J'Accuse.” Zola’s tragic and unexpected death in September 1902 prevented him from even starting the composition of the last Évangile, Justice. Thus, there are really only three Évangiles by Zola to speak of – Fécondité, Travail, and Vérité – even though a fourth was certainly planned. For reasons that will be indicated in a moment, the scholarship on Zola’s Évangiles is still rather thin, and no one has yet described these novels as epics, much less as melodramatic epics. Nevertheless, the evidence is quite strong that they are indeed melodramatic epics, at least as this sub-genre has been defined here. Forces similar to those shown in the last chapter operating on Brunetière can be seen pushing Zola in the direction of writing three melodramatic epics at the end of the Dreyfus Affair.

A major force that came to bear on the composition of the Évangiles was the religious reawakening that started in France in the 1880s and continued straight through the 1890s. The Évangiles contain abundant and very specific internal indications of having been written in reaction to the religious reawakening, and this chapter will rely almost exclusively on such evidence from within the novels themselves to show their close relation to this well-know *fin-de-siècle* cultural movement. Nevertheless, in 1890, Zola sat for a remarkable interview that merits discussion in this context. This major interview, entitled “Zola Defines Count Tolstoi,” was with the New York Herald newspaper, and it was published on September 24, 1890. The interview was published in English, because it was for an American newspaper, but it must have been carried out in French, since Zola knew hardly any English at all (Mitterand Zola 3:523). As the title indicates, the interview’s primary subject was Zola’s opinion about Leo Tolstoy. Anyone familiar with the way Zola’s enemies in France used Tolstoy as a cudgel to attack French Naturalism, however, might suspect that the interview would soon turn into a

discussion broader than one having to do simply with Zola's opinion about Tolstoy's fiction. Any suspicion of a broader ideological purpose to the interview would be entirely correct.

In a rather brief space, the New York Herald interview substantiates many of the key contentions of this study's previous chapter. What makes the interview particularly useful is that Zola himself, in his own words, substantiates these key contentions, even as he makes concessions that point ahead to the possibility of novels such as the Évangiles in his future. The interview begins with Zola's bitter complaint about the tendentious use made of Tolstoy in French cultural debates of the 1880s. He says that, of all the attacks mounted against his own fiction and Naturalism more generally in the 1880s, the attack led by Vogüé and the Revue des Deux Mondes using the novels of Tolstoy as an ideal represented the greatest challenge of all. Quickly, however, Zola turns from criticizing Vogüé's exploitation of Tolstoy to criticizing Tolstoy himself, and in terms that are every bit as humiliating as the terms that Tolstoy himself would apply to Zola in 1898's What is Art?. Below are statements that Zola himself made in the course of the interview.

The Tolstoi campaign was the severest of all we have had to go through. The Marquis de Vogüé and all the influence of the Academy and the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the Spiritualist school were arrayed against us. I have no need to tell you how Tolstoi was boomed. M. de Vogüé wrote about him in the charming style of his reviews and newspapers like the *Temps* sang his praises and placed him aloft on a pinnacle to which a writer of the French realistic school could not aspire. The Russian was the prophet of a new literary religion, a genius who had marked in his writing the first impulses of a great intellectual movement, a towering mountain whose sublime heights had caught the first beams of a rising sun which was a little later to flood the universe with its splendor.

Now, the facts of the case were altogether different. Instead of being a creative genius Count Tolstoi was merely a receptive mind, which had been impressed by the truth, the realism if you like, of our writings. He had followed our lead. He was a Russian disciple of the French school...

The promise held forth by the beginning of the century has been belied. I do not say this in respect to science, for science has achieved great and glorious things, but even the great stages of its onward march are insufficient to content us. Humanity wants that which science cannot give. It cries in anguish for something human, something which appeals to its human instincts, its loves and fears, its joys and sorrows, its hopes and its despair, its impulses and its passions... (13)

Bitter and contemptuous seem entirely appropriate terms for describing Zola's tone in this interview. Zola even seems sarcastic when he talks about how Vogüé and his colleagues trumpeted Tolstoy as "the prophet of a new literary religion," a genius "placed...aloft on a pinnacle to which a writer of the French realistic school could not aspire." The complaint about "all the influence of the Academy" is a reference to the French Academy, to which both Brunetière and Vogüé – but, notoriously, not Zola – belonged. Zola is not content lambasting only Vogüé and his partisan colleagues, however. The middle of the passage above contains only a sample of the many insults that Zola lobs in Tolstoy's direction in the course of this interview. Zola makes Tolstoy out to be a rather slavish imitator of French literary trends, an imitator who is unable to initiate or lead his own literary movement. In Le Roman russe, Vogüé had presented Tolstoy as the leading representative of the correct and healthy kind of literary realism, whereas French Naturalism was realism run amok, without any moral compass guiding it. In the New York Herald interview, Zola rebuts Vogüé's claim by saying that Tolstoy could not have invented and perfected the "correct" kind of realism, because the famed Russian novelist lacked all originality from the start.

The most useful part of this interview for the present chapter, however, appears at the end of the passage above. Zola makes a key concession to the religious reawakening, which was led in many respects by Brunetière and Vogüé. Zola admits that French Naturalism has not done enough to feed the soul of humanity. He states that science, originally conceived as the foundation of literary Naturalism, cannot satisfy humanity's religious longings. Zola says, "Humanity wants that which science cannot give. It cries in anguish for something human, something which appeals to its human instincts, its loves and fears, its joys and sorrows, its hopes and its despair, its impulses and its passions..." Zola is basically saying that Naturalism cannot afford to remain hostile or even merely indifferent to religion. The spiritual hunger of

humankind must eventually be fed, although Zola's belittlement of Tolstoy makes it clear that he does not believe the great Russian novelist and moralist offers the proper method of feeding that hunger. For good or ill, Zola does eventually develop his own solution to the problem of satisfying humanity's spiritual needs, and he presents it in the pages of the Évangiles. In the 1890 interview, Zola almost despairs over the seeming intractability of this problem of spirituality. Years later, however, under the intense pressure of the Dreyfus Affair, in particular under the pressure generated by the debate over the future of the French Catholic Church, Zola would indeed propose his own solution. Contrary to his claim in the 1890 interview that "Humanity wants that which science cannot give," Zola at the end of the decade actually conceives of a religion of science that will replace Christianity entirely. Of course, as the theory of melodrama predicts, the drive to create a new, post-revolutionary hegemonic religion inevitably collapses into a focus on personal morality; and probably nowhere does that dynamic operate quite so clearly as it does in Zola's Évangiles.

The first clear sign from within Zola's fiction that he would propose a new religion of science to replace Christianity actually appears in Paris, the last novel that Zola wrote before starting the Évangiles. Paris is a novel that functions as a very long prologue to the Évangiles. Although not a melodramatic epic itself, Paris puts forward the preliminary justification for establishing a new hegemonic religion, the new religion that would be embodied in the three completed Évangiles. The publication date of Paris also marvelously fits the chronological scheme being developed in this study, a scheme according to which the pressures of the Dreyfus Affair led to a supremely melodramatic cultural and political moment from 1898 to approximately 1904. That is because the publication of Paris in book form took place on March 1, 1898, although the full story is a bit more complex (Mitterand Zola 3:393). "J'Accuse" was not Zola's first attempt to intervene on behalf of Dreyfus in the French press.

Throughout 1897, the year before “J'Accuse,” Zola wrote a regular opinion column for the newspaper Figaro, and he occasionally took up the topic of Alfred Dreyfus’s conviction and its political ramifications in this column. Gradually but perceptibly, Zola adopted an increasingly Dreyfusard position in these Figaro columns, particularly by the end of 1897 (Mitterand Zola 3:340-346). Of course, none of these 1897 columns could prepare readers for the explosive originality found in “J'Accuse,” but the simple fact is that Zola was moving gradually in a Dreyfusard direction throughout 1897, and Paris reflects that, although only indirectly. Paris was written from late 1896 until late 1897, and it was first serialized in the newspaper Le Journal starting in November 1897 (Mitterand Zola 3:339-342).

The stridently anti-Catholic message of Paris is what most reflects Zola’s movement toward the Dreyfusard position. As was explained early in the last chapter, the Catholic Church was widely perceived as being in the anti-Dreyfusard camp, although this perception was true only to a limited degree. By challenging the Catholic Church so aggressively and openly as he does in Paris, Zola was attacking one of the supposed pillars of the anti-Dreyfusard cause. The Évangiles would later make much more explicit Zola’s belief that the Catholic Church was the leading anti-Dreyfusard force in the entire Dreyfus Affair. Nevertheless, Paris, the effective prologue to the Évangiles, is already significantly anti-Catholic. In fact, Paris, just like the Évangiles, is really anti-Christian, even though the main Christian Church that it attacks is the Catholic Church.

The protagonist of Paris is a character named Pierre Froment, a Catholic priest in the process of losing his faith and, because of that, on the verge of leaving the priesthood. One of the main reasons Pierre Froment wants to leave the priesthood is so he can marry and have children. Pierre will be the founder of Zola’s new religion, just as the apostle Peter/Pierre was

the rock on which Jesus established the Christian Church. Yet Pierre Froment will found Zola's new religion through procreation: his four children will be the new religion's equivalent of the four Christian evangelists. Just as the authors of the four Christian Gospels are Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, Pierre and his wife will give birth to four sons named Mathieu, Luc, Marc, and Jean. Pierre's four sons will not author the new Gospels, but each will be the protagonist of one of Zola's Évangile novels. Mathieu will be the protagonist of Fécondité, Luc of Travail, and Marc of Vérité. Jean Froment was to be the protagonist of the unwritten novel Justice. Through his words and deeds, each of the Froment sons will personify a different cardinal virtue of the new religion, which are indicated by the titles of the novels: fecundity, work, truth, and justice. Of course, these last two, truth and justice, were bywords of the Dreyfusard movement, which provides further evidence of how completely Zola integrated his Dreyfusard activism into his conception of a new religion.

In reality, the most important virtue by far in Zola's new religion is fecundity, which chiefly means procreation. For Zola's Évangiles to qualify as melodramatic epics, their vast religious ambitions must ultimately reduce to a focus on personal morality, especially sexual morality. Fecundity, or more specifically maximal procreation as contrasted with the Christian virtues of virginity and celibacy, becomes the primary standard by which human lives are judged in the Évangiles. In fact, the contours of Zola's new religion of science remain extremely vague and sketchy both in Paris and in the later Évangiles, whereas what quickly becomes clear is that giving birth to children, especially a large number of children, is the new religion's hallmark. This reduction to procreation is already obvious in Paris. In the passage below, taken from near the end of the novel, Pierre Froment meditates on the new religion that he envisions replacing the old one he has recently quit, both as a priest and even as an ordinary communicant. Dominating his grand religious vision is a perception of Christianity

as being utterly hostile to natural human passions, especially the sexual passions, along with the aspiration that the new religion would release the human drive for fecundity. The passage below is an expanded version of this chapter's third epigraph.

Le vieux catholicisme tombe en poudre de toutes parts, la Rome catholique n'est plus qu'un champ de décombres, les peuples se détournent, veulent une religion qui ne soit pas une religion de la mort. Autrefois, l'esclave accablé, brûlant d'une espérance nouvelle, s'échappait de sa geôle, rêvait d'un Ciel où sa misère serait payée d'une éternelle jouissance. Maintenant que la science a détruit ce Ciel menteur, cette duperie du lendemain de la mort, l'esclave, l'ouvrier, las de mourir pour être heureux, exige la justice, le bonheur sur la terre. C'est là, enfin, la nouvelle espérance, la justice, après dix-huit siècles de charité impuissante. Ah ! dans mille ans, lorsque le catholicisme ne sera plus qu'une très vieille superstition morte, quelle stupeur que les ancêtres aient pu supporter cette religion de torture et de néant ! Un Dieu bourreau, l'homme châtré, menacé, supplicié, la nature ennemie, la vie maudite, la mort seule douce et libératrice ! Pendant deux mille ans, la marche en avant de l'humanité aura eu pour entraves cette odieuse idée d'arracher de l'homme tout ce qu'il a d'humain, les désirs, les passions, la libre intelligence, la volonté et l'acte, toute sa puissance. Et quel réveil joyeux, lorsque la virginité sera méprisée, lorsque la fécondité redeviendra une vertu, dans l'hosanna des forces naturelles libérées, les désirs honorés, les passions utilisées, le travail exalté, la vie aimée, enfantant l'éternelle création de l'amour. (1561)

When Pierre calls Christianity “a religion of death” ‘une religion de la mort,’ he means several things, but above all he means that the Christian promotion of virginity and celibacy spells the death of the human sex drive and, ultimately, the death of the human race through the suppression of human population growth. A key phrase appears in the middle of the passage, when Pierre gives this brief summary of his view of Christianity: “Un Dieu bourreau, l'homme châtré, menacé, supplicié, la nature ennemie, la vie maudite, la mort seule douce et libératrice !” Three of the seven components of this description bear directly on Pierre's complaint that Christianity suppresses procreation, and the other four components bear on this complaint indirectly. The term “l'homme châtré” means that Pierre sees Christianity as sexually castrating mankind with its emphasis on virginity and celibacy. The terms “la nature ennemie” and “la vie maudite” mean that Christianity makes an enemy of natural human sexuality and thereby condemns life itself, the supreme manifestation of which

is the life-affirming act of giving birth to new generations of humans. As stated in an earlier chapter here, applying the framework of today's religious debates does not help in interpreting these religious conflicts from *fin-de-siècle* France. Quite often, reference to today's terminology only produces confusion. For example, Pope John Paul II's formulation of the concept of the "culture of life," a concept picked up recently by President George H. W. Bush, is quite alien to Zola's understanding of the Christian sexual ethic, which he perceives as uniformly suppressing procreation. As will be seen in a moment, Zola's novel Fécondité even goes so far as to associate Christianity with the practice of abortion, which is quite antithetical to current Catholic doctrine. The other terms in Pierre Froment's concise description of Christianity – God as executioner, mankind threatened and tortured, death the only sweet liberation – all represent indirectly the antithesis of procreation as the ultimate life-affirming act.

The end of the passage above makes even clearer the huge emphasis that Zola's new religion will place on fecundity and procreation. The idea of human desires and passions being liberated has mostly to do with the sexual passions and desires. In the new religion, virginity will be despised and fecundity itself will become a virtue: "la virginité sera méprisée, [et] la fécondité redeviendra une vertu." Life will be cherished, "enfantant l'éternelle création de l'amour" 'giving birth to the eternal creation of love.' The double entendre of the participle "enfantant" 'giving birth' is surely intentional. Work, one of the new religion's other cardinal virtues, already gets badly eclipsed in this reverie about procreation. Tucked into the final sentence is the phrase "le travail exalté" 'work exalted,' but there can be little doubt, even as early as the novel Paris, that the virtue of hard work will play a decidedly secondary role to fecundity.

The passage in Paris that immediately follows the one just cited makes abundantly clear that Pierre dreams of a new religion, a religion of science. Yet even his grand dreams about science pale in comparison to the reverie over procreation.

Une religion nouvelle! Une religion nouvelle! Pierre se souvenait de ce cri...qu'il avait répété à Rome, devant l'effondrement du vieux catholicisme...Certes, le divin semblait nécessaire à l'homme comme le pain et l'eau, toujours l'homme s'y était rejeté, affamé du mystère, semblant n'avoir d'autre consolation que de s'anéantir dans l'inconnu. Mais qui pourrait dire que la science, un jour, n'étanchera pas cette soif de l'Au-delà?...Une religion de la science, c'est le dénouement marqué, certain, inévitable, de la longue marche de l'humanité vers la connaissance... (1561)

In fairness to Zola, Paris makes some effort to give substance to the idea of a religion of science. For example, the crucial final pages of the novel make passing reference to the ideas of Charles Darwin, Charles Fourier and Saint-Simon (1560-1562). Yet these same final pages of the novel, the pages where Pierre Froment envisions a new religion to replace Christianity, contain even more sentences in celebration of procreation than the exhilarating ones already quoted here. In short, the emphasis is decidedly on fecundity and procreation.

Zola's idea that a new religion of science is needed to replace Christianity shows how far his thinking evolved since the beginning of his career, when he proposed merely that novelists should employ the scientific method in their writing. Zola's landmark essay on Naturalism, Le roman expérimental, published in 1880, presents science and the scientific method as valuable instruments to be used by the fiction writer (Le roman expérimental 1173-1401). In Zola's 1898 novel Paris, however, science is presented as an entirely new religion, locked in a struggle to the death against Christianity. In short, science goes from being a valuable instrument to being overtly a new religion. Zola's thinking was clearly radicalized in the late 1890s, just as Brunetière's was. As shown in the last chapter, Brunetière was an early

opponent of Naturalism, criticizing it on non-systematic grounds having to do with aesthetic and moral concerns. By 1898, however, Brunetière's worries about morality in art and literature had expanded dramatically, to the point where he feared and denounced vast swathes of the Western cultural heritage. By 1898, morality became virtually the only important factor in art and literature for Brunetière. Of course, much of the present study is designed to show that the ferocious conflict of the Dreyfus Affair was itself responsible for this radicalization of both Brunetière and Zola.

Aesthetic concerns are never far from the central action either in Zola's Paris or in his Évangiles. An earlier part of this study commented upon melodramatic epic's pronounced tendency to ruminate on its own aesthetic, along with its equally pronounced tendency to denounce competing aesthetics. At the height of the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic conclusion, the focus on morality in art and literature became so obsessive that a virtual annihilation of aesthetics took place, an annihilation that was to have profound repercussions within Proust's Recherche. The roles of Brunetière and Tolstoy in bringing about this virtual annihilation of aesthetics were examined in the last chapter. For his part, Zola played just as important and active role in this endeavor, and he did so directly in the pages of his last four completed novels. Paris promotes a radical/reactionary aesthetic within its discussion of the turn toward religion among the educated French youth, precisely the cohort that was so important to Brunetière and Vogüé. This was also the cohort that was earlier shown being most influenced by Tolstoy's What is Art?.

One of Pierre Froment's best friends is a young science student at the Sorbonne named François. While walking through the university district of the Left Bank, Pierre and François engage in a long discussion about cultural trends that are making a significant impact in the French capital. In the middle of their conversation, they chance upon one of François's

childhood friends, a young and well-educated scion of an extremely wealthy family, a character named Hyacinthe Duvillard. Unlike François, Hyacinthe is totally won over to the latest cultural manifestation of the ongoing French religious reawakening. In the course of this chance encounter between two childhood friends, Paris shows how Hyacinthe's commitment to the religious revival has destroyed his intellect, perverted him, and driven him away from a "normal" sexuality. François and Hyacinthe clearly have not seen each other for quite a while, and François is actually none too pleased to meet his old friend again, apparently because he disapproves of the recent evolution in Hyacinthe's opinions under the influence of the religious reawakening. The narrator says that, upon seeing Hyacinthe again, "François le regardait en souriant, pincé dans sa longue redingote, avec sa figure faite, sa barbe et ses cheveux taillés, qui lui donnaient son air laborieux d'androgyné" (1304). Thus, from the very start of the encounter, the novel makes clear that Hyacinthe is androgynous and that, as women are stereotypically supposed to do, he pays excessive attention to his physical appearance. The term "sa figure faite" even seems to suggest that Hyacinthe is wearing makeup at the moment he encounters François and Pierre.

One of the first things Hyacinthe tells Pierre and François is that he is writing a poem called "La Fin de la Femme." This poem promotes virginity and celibacy by suggesting that women are such filthy creatures that men should stop having sex with them in order to keep themselves pure. The passage in which Hyacinthe describes his poem is below, but an important issue should now be addressed before the passage is presented. This important issue could have been dealt with in any number of earlier locations within this study, but the present moment seems particularly opportune, given that the rest of this chapter will cite a number of passages that will probably seem outrageous and/or downright bizarre to many readers.

Just as with the late writings of Brunetière and Tolstoy, Zola's Paris and his three completed Évangiles do truly contain many bizarre and outrageous elements. Readers unfamiliar with these novels and shocked by the passages cited may believe that the present study is taking Zola's words badly out of context. That is certainly not the case. One of the main contentions of this study is that the basic dynamic of melodramatic epic inevitably produces such extremeness and oddities. The examples of melodramatic epic already presented here, Chateaubriand's Les Martyrs and Vogüé's unusual study Le Roman russe, displayed such strangeness as an integral part of their argument. Although he did not write a melodramatic epic, Brunetière was clearly motivated by the spirit of melodramatic epic in his drive to achieve a wholesale moral renewal of France through his speeches and literary polemics at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. In Brunetière's case, too, sheer outrageousness emerged almost inevitably from the project of moral and religious renewal that he assumed late in his career. Something similar could be said about Tolstoy, even though the claims made here about the Russian novelist have been carefully circumscribed to limit the amount of scholarly effort needed to include him productively in this study. As in the works of these other leading cultural figures, there is a great deal in Zola's final novels that could easily outrage readers today. Constantly commenting upon their outrageousness would not be a good use of time, however, and so the analysis here will be straightforward and dispassionate.

Below is Hyacinthe Duvillard's description of his poem "La Fin de la Femme." Hyacinthe's pathetic complaint about how slowly work on the poem is progressing is Zola's way of suggesting that people won over to the religious reawakening lose the capacity for hard, productive labor, one of the key virtues of his new religion of science. The fact that Hyacinthe is indeed a follower of the religious reawakening is stated in the next passage to be cited.

-- Oh ! mon cher, créer me répugne tant ! un vers me coûte des semaines...Oui, j'ai un petit poème, *La Fin de la Femme*...[En] poésie, ah ! grand Dieu ! en a-t-on abusé, de la Femme ! N'est-il pas temps vraiment de l'en chasser, pour nettoyer un peu le temple des immondices dont ses tares de femelle l'ont souillé ? C'est tellement sale, la fécondité, la maternité, et le reste ! Si nous étions tous assez purs, assez distingués, pour ne plus en toucher une seule, par dégoût, et si toutes mouraient infécondes, n'est-ce pas ? ce serait au moins finir proprement. (1304)

Hyacinthe's devotion to Christianity, at least to Christianity as a death cult, which is the way Zola's final novels depict the Christian religion, is implied in the evocative phrase about cleansing the temple of the filth created by women's vices. If women are to be chased out of the beds of all men regardless of occupation, just as they are to be chased out of the imaginations of male writers and artists, then the death of the human race might well be imminent, given that no more children presumably would be born. When Hyacinthe says, "si toutes mouraient infécondes...ce serait au moins finir proprement," he is quite literally talking about a "clean finish" to the human race, absurd as that may sound. In the novel Paris, Hyacinthe personifies the literature being produced by corrupt and decadent young writers, writers directly influenced by the religious reawakening. Reading Hyacinthe as homosexual seems appropriate, even though Zola never directly says that he is gay. In a homophobic context, the kind of context that Zola's final novels provide, androgyny and raging misogyny such as Hyacinthe displays would probably be signals for homosexuality that might not want to be named. Yet guessing about Hyacinthe's homosexuality and about his significant symbolic value within the novel is really not required, since Zola helpfully goes a long way toward clarifying both these issues in a later passage.

After Hyacinthe takes leave of François and Pierre, François condemns his old friend in the harshest possible terms. François explains to Pierre how Hyacinthe became so freakish, and the religious reawakening is entirely to blame. François launches into a tirade against many of the ideas and authors that were most associated with the religious reawakening in

France. He specifically denounces Tolstoy's influence on Hyacinthe, and, by extension, on many other educated French youth. François also complains bitterly about Brunetière's influence, but he does so without mentioning Brunetière by name. The indirect but unmistakable reference to Brunetière in the passage below will be explained later. François accuses Tolstoy, Brunetière, and other peddlers of fashionable religious notions of creating a new Sodom and Gomorrah in France through their noxious influence on young people involved in the arts and in literature. François ends this lament on a strong note of optimism, however. Unlike the literary and artistic youth who have been perverted by the religious reawakening, the industrious French youth working in the sciences offer real hope for the future. The mention of "Condorcet" at the very start of the passage is, of course, a reference to the "lycée Condorcet," one of the most prestigious of all French high schools and the one that both François and Hyacinthe are supposed to have attended.

Il a été mon condisciple à Condorcet, j'ai fait toutes mes classes avec lui. Oh ! un type si drôle, un cancre qui étalait les millions du père Duvillard... tout en affectant de les mépriser, posant pour le révolutionnaire, parlant d'allumer au feu de sa cigarette la cartouche qui ferait sauter le monde. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Tolstoï et Ibsen réunis ! Et vous voyez ce qu'il est devenu, un malade et un farceur !...

Celui-ci n'est qu'un grotesque. Et comment voulez-vous que leur mysticisme, que le réveil du spiritualisme, allégué par les doctrinaires qui ont lancé la fameuse banqueroute de la science, soit vraiment pris au sérieux, lorsqu'il aboutit, en une si brève évolution, à de telles insanités dans les arts et dans les lettres ? Quelques années d'influence ont suffi, voici le satanisme, l'occultisme, toutes les aberrations qui fleurissent : sans parler de Gomorrhe et de Sodome réconciliées, dit-on, avec la Rome nouvelle. Aux fruits, l'arbre n'est-il pas jugé ? Et, au lieu d'une renaissance, d'un profond mouvement social ramenant le passé, n'est-il pas évident que nous assistons simplement à une réaction transitoire... Le vieux monde ne veut pas mourir, il se débat dans une convulsion dernière... Et là c'est l'avenir, le monde nouveau que la vraie jeunesse apportera, celle qui travaille, celle qu'on ne connaît pas, qu'on n'entend pas... Mais, tenez ! prêtez l'oreille, et peut-être l'entendrez-vous, car nous sommes ici chez elle, dans son quartier, et le grand silence qui nous entoure n'est fait que du labeur de tant de jeunes cerveaux penchés sur la table de travail... la vérité conquise chaque jour davantage. (1304-1305)

There is a great deal of meaning to unpack here, but Zola chiefly uses the encounter between Hyacinthe, François, and Pierre to throw back into the faces of his worst critics all the

charges of sexual corruption that were so frequently leveled against his own fiction and French Naturalism in general. The greatest perverter of young minds, the cultural movement most responsible for producing “insanités dans les arts et dans les lettres” is not Naturalism at all, but instead “le réveil du spiritualisme,” the spiritual reawakening that François describes as having so much influence in France.

There can be no doubt that François is speaking of the same religious reawakening that has been discussed here at length. His conversation with Pierre on this subject extends over many more pages than just the dozen or so paragraphs telling of the encounter with Hyacinthe. In other parts of their conversation, François and Pierre speak bitterly of the return to idealism, of the fashion for “néo-catholicisme,” and of “l’esprit nouveau” (1301-1303). These are all commonly used alternative names for the religious reawakening. The mention of Tolstoy and Schopenhauer is also a clear indication of what François is talking about, since the Russian novelist and the German philosopher were the two foreign authors whose ideas played the largest role in the French *fin-de-siècle* religious renewal.

The most remarkable denunciation that François makes against the return to religion is that it perverts young people sexually. Hyacinthe’s perversion in his appearance and in his thinking was plainly evident while he was present in the scene. Once he is gone, François clearly blames the moral and sexual corruption that has taken hold of his friend on the religious reawakening itself. Hyacinthe symbolizes the many perversions that have ravaged elite French youth as a result of the return to religion. François complains of “toutes les aberrations qui fleurissent : sans parler de Gomorrhe et de Sodome réconciliées, dit-on, avec la Rome nouvelle.” The language that François uses to associate Rome, the seat of the Vatican, with Sodom and Gomorrah is just vague enough to summon up in the mind of the reader all manner of perversions and wickedness. Yet one thing François is surely suggesting is that the

neo-Catholicism spreading among elite French youth has aroused an interest in homosexuality. Hyacinthe's effeminacy and misogyny only reinforce that impression.

The reference to Brunetière within François's tirade can be found in the phrase "la fameuse banqueroute de la science." Brunetière was, quite simply, the French cultural figure most closely identified with the idea of the bankruptcy of science. This phrase anchors one of the most famous essays that Brunetière ever wrote, "Après une visite au Vatican," published in the Revue des Deux Mondes in January 1895 ("Après une visite" 97-100). "Après une visite au Vatican" was also the essay that earned Brunetière the status of unofficial Vatican spokesman in France, because, as the title suggests, it was written after a private audience with Pope Leo XIII (Van Der Lugt 49-70). Brunetière's private audience with the Pope took place in November of 1894, and the pontiff himself is supposed to have asked Brunetière to use his high-profile position at the Revue des Deux Mondes to combat anti-Catholic trends that were gaining strength in France. Almost immediately upon his return from Rome, Brunetière wrote a long essay on the failure of science to formulate a system of morality superior to the one provided by Christianity, hence the "bankruptcy of science." The concept of science's bankruptcy was thus integral to Brunetière's increasing emphasis on the need for moral regeneration in France. The concept also represented a further attack on the French Naturalists, who were still widely known for incorporating scientific theories within literature. "Après une visite au Vatican" made a tremendous impact on the French cultural scene and touched off the dominant cultural and literary debate that raged throughout all of 1895. In his study L'action religieuse de Ferdinand Brunetière, J. Van Der Lugt devotes an entire chapter to an analysis of the history, content, and impact of this influential essay (49-70). More recently, Henri Mitterand also discusses the impact of "Après une visite au Vatican" on French Naturalism in his new biography of Zola (Zola 3:143-146).

In spite of the noxious influence of prominent figures such as Brunetière and Tolstoy, François nevertheless manages to voice a strong note of optimism at the end of his tirade. His optimism marks the single biggest difference between the novel Paris and the Évangiles that followed it. This optimism is a major reason why the Évangiles are true melodramatic epics, whereas Paris functions merely as their prelude. The mood of the Évangiles is much darker than the mood of Paris. François calls the religious reawakening and its attendant perversions “une réaction transitoire.” He says somewhat casually that “Le vieux monde ne veut pas mourir.” He also points with a great deal of hope in the direction of the dormitories and labs of the university students in the sciences. He says that they are the future, “là c’est l’avenir,” and that they, not the types like the effeminate Hyacinthe Duvillard, represent true French youth, “la vraie jeunesse.”

Although the long passage cited above does not clearly specify that François places his hope in French youth studying science, the larger context of his conversation with Pierre makes that very clear. Earlier in their conversation, François assures Pierre that students in the sciences have not been blighted by the harmful influence of the religious reawakening, as have the students in the arts and literature. He says, “Quant à mes camarades dans la section scientifique, je vous jure que le néo-catholicisme, le mysticisme, l’occultisme, et toutes les fantasmagories de la mode, ne les troublent guère...[Ils] demeurent des positivistes convaincus, des évolutionnistes, des déterministes...” (1303). After Pierre’s conversation with François, the narrator describes Pierre’s thoughts this way, “Et voilà que la jeunesse intellectuelle dont il avait désespéré...venait de se révéler à lui, pleines de viriles promesses, résolue à continuer l’œuvre des aînés, en conquérant par l’unique science toute vérité et toute justice” (1312). The youths studying science, not the ones with literary aspirations like Hyacinthe, are virile and full of promise. Thus, the ridicule that François heaps on young

people like Hyacinthe and the unshakable confidence that he has in the eventual triumph of science over religion denotes a strong optimism that pervades the rest of Paris.

The Évangiles paint a much bleaker picture, however. As in most melodramas, the forces of good do win a decisive victory at the end of each of Zola's last three novels. Yet, in true melodramatic form, good does not triumph over evil without a ferocious battle first taking place. Unlike in Paris, a great deal of each Évangile is taken up with depicting an epic battle between the clearly demarcated forces of good and evil. The battles are so ferocious that, were it not for the conventions of melodrama themselves being so clearly followed in these novels, the ultimate victory of the forces of good would often seem in doubt. The fact that Paris was written just before "J'Accuse," whereas composition on the Évangiles began several months after the firestorm touched off by Zola's celebrated open letter, explains in large part the significantly greater conflict and melodrama found in the three later novels. As shown earlier, the signs of the Dreyfus Affair's impact on the Évangiles, specifically the impact of the period following "J'Accuse," are quite abundant.

Another major reason the Évangiles are so much more melodramatic than Paris is that Zola's last three novels display their greatest concern for an even younger segment of the French population than Paris does. As just indicated, Paris shows great anxiety for the education of French university students and for the cultural and intellectual trends that shape their lives. The main focus of the Évangiles, however, is the welfare of infants, small children and elementary school students. With its vehemently anti-abortion message, Fécondité even lavishes great attention on the welfare of the unborn. Small children hardly figure at all in Paris. Although Pierre Froment quits the priesthood to marry and have children, he and his new wife Marie do not have their first child, Jean, until the very end of the novel (1551-1552). The vast majority of Paris concerns Pierre's intellectual and spiritual struggle as he decides to

leave the priesthood, and his friendship with several highly intelligent university students plays a large role in his evolution away from Catholicism. Pierre's last three "evangelist" sons – Mathieu, Marc, and Luc – are not even born yet by the end of Paris.

The Évangile novels are quite different, being oriented toward the traditional family from the very start. Fécondité, the first Évangile, resumes the story of the Froment family more than twenty years after the narrative in Paris leaves off. Unlike Paris, Fécondité is all about procreation. Mathieu Froment and his wife Marianne, the central characters of Fécondité, give birth to twelve children. The first Évangile also depicts the birth of Mathieu and Marianne's grandchildren and great-children, who together swell their progeny to the epic number of one hundred and fifty-eight by the novel's close (483). For its part, the Évangile Vérité principally concerns the education of elementary school students, with the central dynamic comprised of a melodramatic contrast between the education offered in Catholic schools and that offered in secular schools run by the state. Travail represents, in many respects, a blend of the other two Évangiles, Fécondité and Vérité. Luc Froment, the hero of Travail, founds a new city based on vaguely socialist principles. As in Fécondité, a high birthrate is a major aim of Luc's new city (688-697, 956-969). As in Vérité, the elementary school education provided to the large cohort of young children born into Luc's new city is one of Travail's major themes (688-697, 742-746).

The focus on a much younger section of the French population creates a very different atmosphere in the Évangile novels as compared to Paris. Simply put, the melodramatic potential of children under threat is significantly greater than that of young adults under threat. The infants and children depicted in the Évangiles are most definitely in danger, and the primary force threatening them is the same institution that was shown perverting and corrupting French university students in Paris, namely the Catholic Church. The Catholic

Church specifically and Christianity more generally are the major enemies of the Froment brothers in all three Évangile novels, although how this is so will be explained in a moment. The important point to make here is simply that the Évangiles derive a great deal of their melodramatic power from their almost relentless focus on the welfare of children. Women, especially in their role as mothers, also constitute the site of a great deal of anxiety in the Évangiles.

One obvious explanation for Zola's shift in focus from young adults to young children in going from Paris to the Évangiles has to do with the dominant political climate in France as the Dreyfus Affair drew to a close. As shown at the start of the last chapter here, the anticlerical campaign that emerged out of the Dreyfus Affair took as one of its primary objectives the shutting down of Catholic primary and secondary schools in France. In 1904, anticlerical forces succeeded in pushing through the French national legislature a law that mandated precisely that, although the law was soon afterward repealed, and the Catholic schools that had been closed were allowed to reopen. The perfect historicity of Zola's Évangiles, the extraordinary degree to which they were engaged in the dominant political debate of their day, does not detract from their melodrama. In fact, the significant engagement of the Évangiles in the politics of their time heightens their melodrama, given that political engagement is itself one of melodrama's six principal characteristics. Of course, political engagement alone does not make a literary work melodramatic; no one quality does. As explained previously in these pages, melodrama is a blend of characteristics, with political engagement being one of the primary components of that blend.

Another consequence of the greater focus on children in the Évangiles is the further draining away of the specifically "scientific" content of the new religion that the patriarch Pierre Froment envisions in Paris. With its main characters including ambitious university

students and a prominent chemist named Bertheroy, a character clearly modeled after the famous real-life French chemist Marcelin Berthelot, Paris manages to give a certain intellectual substance to the idea that there could really be a religion of science (Zola Paris 1255-1257, Mitterand Zola 265-266). Yet the draining away of these scientific pretensions already begins by the end of the novel, when Pierre's final religious reverie gives far greater prominence to the idea of fecundity and procreation. The draining away progresses much further in the Évangiles, where university students and scientists play hardly any role at all, making it much harder to sustain credibly the idea that these novels are the founding texts of a specifically "scientific" religion. This collapse of the grand scientific pretensions only serves to make the Évangiles more perfect melodramatic epics, given that melodramatic epic requires the failure and collapse of the original religious ambition.

Travail is actually quite explicit about the reduction of the original scientific ambitions to a particular ideology of sex, love, and family life. Science plays slightly more of a role in Travail than in the other two completed Évangiles, because Luc Froment depends on a new way of generating electricity to make the city that he founds economically competitive. Nevertheless, the quasi-scientific descriptions of this new way of generating electricity and of its industrial applications are not well integrated into the novel's overall religious vision. The failure to integrate science into the novel's religious vision is most obvious in the curriculum of the elementary school that Luc builds for his city's growing population of children. Science is taught in the school, but the guiding principle of the scientific instruction is actually the conservative notions of love and family life that pervade all three Évangile novels. In the ideological framework of Travail, science is genuine and valuable only when it serves the novel's dominant sexual politics. The passage below, which describes the elementary school's curriculum, also reveals the humanitarian impulse behind the Évangiles. Like Fécondité and

Vérité, Travail presents an epic vision of loving, procreating couples transforming the entire world. One key to understanding this passage is the special meaning that Zola's final novels attach to the word "life" 'vie.' As in Pierre Froment's religious reverie in Paris, "life" means, principally but not exclusively, the begetting of plenty of children.

Aussi les cinq classes se déroulaient-elles, des notions premières à toutes les vérités scientifiques acquises, comme une émancipation logique et graduée des intelligences...C'était à la réalité des êtres et des choses, à la vie elle-même qu'on demandait le meilleur de leur enseignement, dans cette conviction que toute science ne doit avoir d'autre but que de bien vivre la vie. Et, en dehors des notions générales, on s'efforçait encore de leur donner la notion d'humanité, de solidarité. Ils grandissaient ensemble, ils vivaient toujours ensemble, L'amour seul était le lien d'union, de justice, de bonheur. En lui se trouvait le pacte indispensable et suffisant, car il suffisait de s'aimer, pour que la paix régnât. Cet universel amour qui s'élargira de la famille à la nation, de la nation à l'humanité, sera l'unique loi de l'heureuse Cité future. (692-693)

The first sentence seems to suggest that a great deal of science will be taught to the children in Luc Froment's school, but the rest of the description reveals the peculiar conception of science on which the Évangiles are all based. Apart from the first sentence, this description of the curriculum is full of code words that appear repeatedly in the Évangiles and that are all connected integrally to the conservative sexual politics of the series. "Life" itself will be at the core of the students' instruction: "C'était...à la vie elle-même qu'on demandait le meilleur de leur enseignement." All science must have no goal other than "life": "toute science ne doit avoir d'autre but que de bien vivre la vie." Along with "life," "love" will be the other foundation of the children's education: "L'amour seul était le lien d'union, de justice, de bonheur." While all this high-flown rhetoric may seem like nothing more than a dream of universal brotherhood and sisterhood, the final sentence reveals that everything in Travail, and not merely the children's education, depends on the novel's ideal of family life: "Cet universel amour qui s'élargira de la famille à la nation, de la nation à l'humanité, sera l'unique loi de l'heureuse Cité future." This final sentence, too, may seem either so vague as

to be meaningless or so non-controversial as to be outside the realm of politics. Nevertheless, what is reasonably clear is that everything derives from the concept of family presented in Travail and, indeed, in all the Évangiles. The last sentence says that the universal love that will encompass all humanity in its embrace starts in the family. A primary goal of this chapter is to show how extreme the ideal of family promoted in the Évangiles actually is. If the extreme conservatism of that ideal has not already been made evident here, the remainder of this chapter should accomplish that task.

The first requirement of any melodramatic epic, at least as the sub-genre has been defined here, is that it must attempt to re-establish religious hegemony, ideally with a visible awareness of the lasting religious instability created by the French Revolution. David Baguley, the author of the best book-length study so far written on Zola's Évangiles, makes the point quite clearly that Zola was formulating a new, secular religion with his Évangile novels. Strictly speaking, Baguley's study concerns only the first of the Évangiles, as its title indicates: Fécondité d'Emile Zola : roman à thèse, évangile, mythe. Nevertheless, in the process of interpreting Fécondité, Baguley occasionally makes valuable comments that apply to the entire Évangile series. Below is the passage in which Baguley explains the grand, biblical aspirations of the Évangiles.

Il est évident que Zola s'est appliqué assez sérieusement à la tâche de refaire l'Evangile chrétien. Chacun des romans de la nouvelle série présente en effet des caractères bibliques – thèmes, épisodes, phraséologie même – auxquels l'auteur veut prêter un sens nouveau. Bien des inconséquences et des invraisemblances que toute critique rationnelle peut reprocher au romancier, s'expliquent par le fait que, dans ces œuvres, Zola fait appel à la foi autant qu'à la raison. Pierre Froment, rendu à la vie laïque, pierre sur laquelle Zola bâtit sa nouvelle foi, a laissé à ses fils la mission de formuler et de promulguer la religion laïque et naturelle qui doit délivrer l'humanité de 'l'exécrable cauchemar du catholicisme.' Mais Zola n'a pas seulement écrit un 'Evangile' sociale, dans lequel il offre des conseils d'une utilité temporelle. Il a écrit une œuvre qui révèle des attitudes vraiment religieuses. (190)

A question that arises perhaps inevitably while reading such a passage is whether Zola was really trying to create a new religion with his Évangiles. The present study will not attempt to answer that question, and neither does David Baguley. The Évangiles present themselves as the founding documents of a new religion. At the end of Paris, Pierre Froment clearly has a vision of a new religion of science to replace harmful Christianity, and the Évangiles read as the gospels of that new religion. Pierre's sons, Mathieu, Marc, and Luc are the protagonists of these novels, but more than that, they are the non-supernatural saviors of a corrupt and dying world. Doubting the clear internal evidence found within these novels and wondering whether Zola wrote them simply as an unusual kind of literary experiment is tantamount to speculating on authorial intent, something this study chooses not to do. The Évangiles present themselves as the gospels of a new religion, and the present study accepts and interprets them as such, as David Baguley does also. This is not to suggest that the question of Zola's sincerity in writing the Évangiles is foolish or beyond any hope of an answer. Some of the most revolutionary religious ideas found in the Évangiles can also be found in Zola's numerous non-fictional pamphlets, essays, and opinion columns from the time of Dreyfus Affair. Certain key similarities between the Évangiles and Zola's non-fictional polemics during the Affair might be viewed as substantiating Zola's earnestness in creating something resembling a new religion. Nevertheless, no scholarship has yet been published tracing these similarities and pondering their larger significance. That will have to be the work of an entirely different study than this one.

Previous scholarship on the Évangiles, including David Baguley's excellent study, has been remarkably divergent on many of the most important issues related to their interpretation. Making this extreme lack of scholarly consensus on the Évangiles all the more obvious is the surprisingly small number of studies, in book or in article form, that have been published on

Zola's final novels. A survey of the available scholarship on the Évangiles quickly reveals the vast disagreements that surround these texts.

Critical interpretations of these novels are unusually at odds with each other. Indeed, recent scholarship has shown that these novels have sparked divergent opinions from their earliest reception (Morel 34-39). Some scholars, for example, see substantially feminist imagery in the major role the novels assign to women in the construction of a new France (Mayer-Robin 69-80). Others, however, see almost reactionary anti-feminism in the Évangiles' emphasis on unfettered procreation (Jennings 9-22, Perry 90-99). Fécondité's enthusiastic defense of colonialism seems completely opposed to Zola's courageous stand for human rights in the Dreyfus Affair, fictionalized in Vérité (Mayer-Robin 77, Pagès 70-74). The assertive secularism of the Évangiles contrasts sharply with their celebration of a new modern religion (Baguley Fécondité 190-206, Ouvrard 177-183). Fantastic elements that defy credulity co-exist, in these novels, with a realism frank and gritty for its time (Cogny 19, Morel 35-36). Often called utopias, the Évangiles nevertheless contain many pages with frightful images of social corruption, cruelty and human suffering. The series's advocacy of socialism appears undercut by its promotion of bourgeois family values (Perry 94). Remarkably ahistorical in their reach for a timeless message but also deeply enmeshed in the history of their time, the Évangiles contain all these dichotomies and more. The greatest critical ambivalence can be found, however, in relation to the most fundamental issues, such as the novels' literary quality and their relation to the Rougon-Macquart. Some think the Évangiles represent a radical departure from the larger, much more famous series, while others say they are an almost seamless continuation of the same literary enterprise (Bory 1002-1003, Cosset 7-11, Hemmings Culture 254, Hemmings Émile Zola 239, Mitterand Preface vii, Ouvrard 177-183, Pagès 74).

Classifying Zola's Évangiles as melodrama actually resolves most of the critical disputes that have long circulated around these unusual texts. Melodrama, a composite art form harboring unreconciled opposites, may be the only generic classification to accommodate Zola's Évangiles, with all their fascinating contradictions... Without taking sides in these [scholarly] debates, the classification of the Évangiles as melodrama makes allowance for the many varied interpretations that have so far been put forward. In terms of resolving the significant critical debates that surround the Évangiles, it is useful to note that melodrama usually does accord great importance to women, even as it continues to value them mostly for their role as mothers. Thus, classifying Zola's Évangiles as melodrama can account simultaneously for the large number of major female characters in the novels, as well as for the rather quite conservative role that they fulfill in the novels' grand vision of a new human society (301-302). In addition, the abundant melodrama in the Évangiles takes on vast, even universal dimensions. Travail and the other Évangiles envision a universal transformation that is in many ways radical, but in others extremely conservative. It is, in short, melodrama, and more precisely, hyper-melodrama. Calling the Évangiles "hyper-melodrama" due to their universal aspirations is the virtually the same as calling these novels melodramatic epics.

The Évangile that speaks most directly to the issue of aesthetics is Fécondité. Fécondité actually contains a loathsome character similar to Hyacinthe Duvillard in Paris. Hyacinthe Duvillard was a young, unsuccessful poet who wrote verse praising the idea of universal celibacy. In Fécondité, Charles Santerre is a slightly older, highly successful novelist who writes books praising the idea of universal celibacy. Although it may seem ludicrous that Zola would create two such similar fictional characters, a great deal of Zola's last several novels could, if approached from the proper perspective, furnish material for comedy. The similarity between the Hyacinthe and Santerre characters provides a perfect example of the

repetitiveness of Zola's final novels, and repetitious didacticism is itself one of the six major characteristics of melodrama. Nevertheless, there is one hugely important difference between Hyacinthe Duvillard and Charles Santerre, and this difference has everything to do with the fact that Hyacinthe appears in Paris, which is not a true melodramatic epic, whereas Santerre appears in Fécondité, which is. As indicated a moment ago, Charles Santerre is a commercially successful writer, which means that the anti-sex ideology promoted in his fiction circulates widely in France and does a tremendous amount of harm. Charles Santerre is almost certainly the most evil character in a novel that overflows with evil characters, and the noxious influence of his best-selling fiction goes a long way toward explaining why he is the worst of the worst. Hyacinthe Duvillard in Paris is a pathetic, almost risible figure whose life is ruined by real-life authors such as Tolstoy and Brunetière; but Hyacinthe the poet has virtually no influence of his own. Charles Santerre, on the other hand, functions in part as a domestic version of Tolstoy, whose writings such as The Kreutzer Sonata really did promote an anti-sex ethic. Given that the conflict in Fécondité is much greater –in short, more epic – than the conflict in Paris, a successful anti-sex novelist is a much more sinister and frightening figure to do battle with than a young, unsuccessful poet like Hyacinthe Duvillard. Furthermore, the aesthetic annihilation dynamic noted elsewhere in this study centers on the Charles Santerre character within the Évangiles.

Of course, the heroes of Fécondité are the couple Mathieu and Marianne Froment, who epitomize procreation to the maximum, and so Santerre represents the antithesis of everything that they stand for. Yet Santerre also functions strangely as the antithesis of Zola himself, because the former is a successful author of novels celebrating celibacy and non-procreation, whereas the latter at the end of his career transformed himself into a successful author of novels celebrating procreation. One novel in particular by Santerre that is described

in detail in Fécondité appears as a perfect *mise-en-abîme* antithesis of Fécondité itself. Zola gives vividly concrete form to the devastation wrought by Santerre's ideas by making the anti-sex novelist the best friend of the leading upper-class couple in Fécondité, the extremely wealthy Séguins (52-53). Over the course of hundreds of pages, Santerre's personal influence and the influence of his anti-sex, anti-procreation literature drive the Séguins into utter ruin. Santerre exerts the most influence over Mme Séguin, whose first name is Valentine. It is not coincidental that Santerre's novels have a special appeal to women (54).

Below is the first extended description of Santerre, his books, and his personal behavior. An important element to note is a certain confusion as to whether Santerre's fiction promotes abstinence from sex or merely non-procreation. At the start of the description, Santerre's novels are said to depict non-procreative adultery, but then at the end, he is said to promote sexual abstinence. Of course, there is a significant difference between choosing not to have children and choosing not to engage in sex altogether. Santerre is always and quite clearly opposed to both marriage and procreation, but he also sometimes seems to support complete sexual abstinence. This confusion is never fully resolved in Fécondité, but Santerre's evilness is never in doubt. Neither is his role as the symbolic antithesis to the faithful, married and procreating couple Mathieu and Marianne Froment. Of course, the abstinence and anti-sex side of Santerre's message is what resembles the anti-sex message in Tolstoy's The Kreutzer Sonata. The observation that Santerre likes to settle into the nest of others "s'installant dans le nid des autres" will provide a key explanation as to why he eventually becomes so close to the upper-class Séguin family that he practically becomes a member of their household.

Décidé au célibat, par principe et par calcul, s'installant dans le nid des autres, simple exploiteur du vice mondain, il avait adopté en littérature la spécialité de l'adultère, ne peignant que l'amour coupable, élégant et raffiné, l'amour infécond, qui jamais n'enfantait. Il n'avait eu d'abord aucune illusion sur ses livres, ce n'était qu'un métier aimable et lucratif qu'il choisissait de propos délibéré. Puis, dupe de ses succès, il avait laissé son orgueil lui persuader qu'il était un écrivain. Et il se donnait maintenant

comme le peintre en cravate blanche d'un monde à l'agonie, il professait le pessimisme le plus désenchanté, la fin du désir, par l'abstention réciproque, dont il faisait la religion du bonheur final, dans l'anéantissement. (54)

Through this sinister portrait of the novelist Santerre, Zola clearly denounces fiction depicting adultery, which perfectly parallels Tolstoy's bitter complaint in What is Art? that adultery has become the sole subject of Western novels. Thus, in his final, polemical *romans à clef*, using a character that is, at least in part, a stand-in for Leo Tolstoy, Zola is quite literally making the same argument against adultery in fiction that Tolstoy made shortly before in his one and only treatise on aesthetics. The fact that Zola and Tolstoy had both grown rich and famous earlier in their careers by writing novels about adultery only multiplies the bizarreness of all this beyond measure. Yet ironies such as this never cease when studying the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic endgame. The further description of the kind of love that Santerre specialized in depicting – "l'amour coupable, élégant et raffiné, l'amour infécond, qui jamais n'enfantait" – only adds in a somewhat silly and excessive fashion to his sinister image.

The last sentence in the description of Santerre above really means that he looks forward to the end of the world, to be achieved ideally by universal abstinence from sex. Santerre's fervent wish for the world to end is made even clearer later in the novel, but it is already rather clear here. The passage above says that Santerre likes to present himself as "le peintre en cravate blanche d'un monde à l'agonie" 'the painter in white tie of a dying world.' By promoting an extreme form of pessimism and total sexual abstinence "l'abstention réciproque," Santerre makes a religion of "final happiness" 'du bonheur final' and of "annihilation" 'l'anéantissement.' Given that a traditional definition of epic is a literary form depicting the birth of a new civilization, Santerre's penchant for depicting the end of the world turns his novels, in effect, into anti-epics, which is yet another way in which they are the antithesis of Zola's Évangiles, which depict simultaneously the creation of a new religion and

the founding of a new civilization. In spite of the language above about Santerre creating a “religion of final happiness,” Fécondité very shortly reveals that the anti-sex novelist is thoroughly devoted to Christianity, at least as Zola depicts Christianity in his late fiction, namely as a death cult.

Santerre’s newest novel is entitled L’Impérissable Beauté. This is the novel that bizarrely functions as the diametrical opposite of Fécondité itself. The plot of L’Impérissable Beauté is a pure expression of Santerre’s anti-procreation beliefs, and it also begins to reveal how closely Fécondité associates Santerre with Christianity. Finally, as a novel about art and aesthetics, L’Impérissable Beauté will provide the opportunity for Zola to put forward a counter-aesthetics, one that will seem so improbable as to represent almost the end of aesthetics itself. The title of Santerre’s new novel does not appear in the following passage, but an earlier chapter indicated that it is L’Impérissable Beauté.

Cette fois, Santerre...avait voulu s’élever à l’art pur, au symbole abscons et lyrique. Il contait l’histoire d’une comtesse, Anne-Marie, qui, pour fuir un mari grossier, un mâle faiseur d’enfants, se réfugiait en Bretagne, près d’un jeune artiste d’inspiration divine, Norbert, lequel s’était chargé de décorer de ses visions la chapelle d’un couvent de filles cloîtrées. Pendant trente ans, son travail de peintre évocateur durait, tel un colloque avec les anges, et le roman n’était que l’histoire des trente années, de ses amours pendant trente ans, aux bras d’Anne-Marie, dans une communion de caresses stériles, sans que sa beauté de femme fût altérée d’une ride, aussi jeune, aussi fraîche, après ces trente ans d’infécondité, que le premier jour où ils s’étaient aimés. Pour accentuer la leçon, quelques personnages secondaires, des bourgeoises, des épouses et des mères de la petite ville voisine, finissaient dans une déchéance physique et morale, une décrépitude de monstres. (56)

The eeriest thing about Santerre’s new novel is that its plot is the reverse of the plot of Fécondité. L’Impérissable Beauté is about an aristocrat, a countess named Anne-Marie, who flees her “gross” husband because he wants to have children. She takes refuge in the company of a young painter who spends many years decorating the walls of a convent chapel with his angelic and divine religious visions. Anne-Marie and the painter clearly become lovers, but they make sure never to have children, presumably either through contraception or abortion.

The countess Anne-Marie is depicted as staying forever youthful because she never gives birth. To drive home the anti-procreation message of *L'Impérissable Beauté* – “Pour accentuer la leçon,” as the passage reads – Santerre includes in his novel non-aristocratic female characters who remain in their marriages and who choose to have children. These “wives and mothers from the little neighboring town” fall into physical decay and turn into human monsters, all because of their decision to have children. The description in French is even more striking: these women “finissaient dans une déchéance physique et morale, une décrépitude de monstres.”

Two aspects of this plot description for *L'Impérissable Beauté* stand out immediately. First, the plot is didactic in a very crude way, with the anti-procreation message hammered home through a stark contrast between the positive fate of the adulterous, non-procreative countess Anne-Marie and the disastrous fate of the married, bourgeois mothers from the nearby village. Second, the author Santerre believes that such a plot is the height of aesthetics, that with this novel he rose to the level of pure art and to the level of the most obscure and most lyrical symbolism: “Cette fois, Santerre...avait voulu s'élever à l'art pur, au symbole abscons et lyrique.”

The plot of *Fécondité* turns out to be the complete opposite of that of *L'Impérissable Beauté*, but the more important question is whether these two novels are really the aesthetic opposites that they are clearly made out to be. The first thing to discuss is the perfectly antithetical quality of their plots. *Fécondité* is about a working-class couple, Mathieu and Marianne Froment, who remain utterly faithful to each other and who are resolutely neither Catholic nor Christian. The Froments decide to have as many children as possible, and directly as a result of this decision, their family prospers in every sense of the word. Marianne is even depicted as remaining youthful and perpetually beautiful from giving birth so many times. Yet

to accentuate Fécondité's basic lesson about the need to have large families, the novel contains many other characters that serve as a stark contrast to the Froments. Fécondité contains many couples that are either wealthy such as the Séguins or extremely eager to climb the social ladder, who all decide for various reasons either not to have children or to have only a few. Some of these couples use contraception, some resort to abortion, but directly as a result of such family planning decisions, all these couples fall into ruin and the women experience horrible physical and mental suffering. Thus, the contrast with the plot of L'Impérissable Beauté could hardly be more complete. This *mise-en-abîme* placement of an imaginary novel that contrasts perfectly with Fécondité reveals the starkly Manichaeian view of aesthetics that undergirds the Évangiles, a view that practically amounts to aesthetic annihilation, but there will be more discussion of this subject in a moment.

The fact that the marvelous painter in Santerre's novel spends years decorating a convent chapel automatically suggests that L'Impérissable Beauté is supposed to be perceived as a "Catholic" novel. Yet the dialogue in Fécondité makes this point much more explicit. M. Séguin, who has read L'Impérissable Beauté and enjoyed it greatly, praises Santerre for having written the novel "en bon catholique" (56). Santerre then claims to have had direct Christian inspiration for the novel. He explains his belief that Christianity always has and still does fundamentally oppose procreation. Going further still, Santerre makes the claim the most Christian status, sexually speaking, is virginity or celibacy.

Cherchez donc dans le Nouveau Testament le « Croissez et multipliez, et remplissez la terre » de la Genèse ? Jésus n'a ni patrie, ni propriété, ni profession, ni famille, ni femme, ni enfant. Il est l'infécondité même. Aussi les premières sectes chrétiennes avaient-elles horreur du mariage. Pour les saints, la femme n'était qu'ordure, tourment et perdition. La chasteté absolue devenait l'état parfait, le héros était le contemplatif, l'infécond, le solitaire égoïste, tout entier à son salut personnel. Et c'est une Vierge qui est l'idéal de la femme, l'idéal de la maternité elle-même. Plus tard seulement, le mariage fut institué par le catholicisme comme une sauvegarde morale, pour réglementer la concupiscence, puisque ni l'homme ni la femme ne peuvent être des anges. Il est toléré, il est la nécessité inévitable, l'état permis, dans de certaines

conditions, aux chrétiens assez peu héroïques pour ne pas être des saints complets. Mais aujourd'hui comme il y a dix-huit siècles, le saint, l'homme de foi et de grâce ne touche pas à la femme... (56-57)

The most important sentence here may be the last, where Santerre insists that complete sexual abstinence is just as necessary for the religious person today as it was at the founding of Christianity. Somewhat paradoxically, Santerre utters these lines directly in defense of his new novel, L'Impérissable Beauté, which depicts non-procreative adultery, and yet his statement here supports something different, complete sexual abstinence. As indicated a moment ago, there exists a certain confusion in Santerre's sexual ethic. It is not clear whether he supports complete abstinence or merely childlessness. A development directly relevant to this issue occurs much later in Fécondité. Santerre and Mme Séguin eventually become even more devout Catholics than they already are, and Santerre begins writing novels only about religious conversions. He says that depicting adultery in fiction is boring and passé, and he talks more openly than ever before about ending the world through universal sexual abstinence (289-291). Perhaps Zola wants readers to understand that Santerre evolves artistically and ideologically from promoting non-procreative, non-marital sex to promoting complete celibacy. Nevertheless, Santerre's ideas on this subject still remain somewhat confused, even at the end of the novel.

This contradiction in Santerre's sexual politics actually reflects a basic contradiction in the sexual politics of Zola's final novels. The chief adversary both in Paris and in the three completed Évangiles is Catholicism specifically and Christianity more generally. The main accusation that Zola's final novels make against Catholicism and Christianity is that they inhibit procreation and stunt the "natural" human sex drive. Yet procreation and sex are two different, if related, things; and this fact greatly complicates Zola's ideological attack against the Church. In Paris, the problems arising from the distinction between sex and procreation

are covered up by Zola's decision to make that novel's protagonist a Catholic priest. Catholic priests are required to abstain entirely from sex, which obviously eliminates their chances of procreating. When Pierre Froment, who has just left the priesthood, draws up in his mind a list of all the crimes that the Church throughout history has committed against "fecundity" and the "natural" sexual passions, the difference between sex and procreation is not conspicuous, because the figure denouncing the Church is a former priest, who until recently could not even have sex. In Fécondité, however, the main characters, both good and evil, are heterosexual couples, and the argument that the Church stymies both sex and procreation is more difficult to make and also much more complicated. Zola winds up arguing that Church doctrine and practice have the effect of discouraging sexual relations within marriage by turning wife against husband in numerous ways. Yet he also suggests that the Church encourages contraception and abortion, by showing that the Catholic revival in France was mostly a phenomenon of the upper classes, the very classes that would stop at nothing to limit their family size so as to preserve their social and economic interests. Periodically, the Évangiles simply resurrect the charge that the Christian ideal demands complete sexual abstinence at all times and from everyone, whether married or single. Lurking behind many of Zola's accusations against the Christian sexual ethic is it gives rise to perversions of various sorts, including gender confusion and homosexuality. Sometimes the belief that Christianity produces sexual perversity breaks the surface in Zola's final novels.

As one can plainly see, this bundle of accusations is quite complex and perhaps fundamentally untenable. Zola never untangles all the complications of the charges that he levels bitterly against the Church's stand on sex and procreation, and the resulting contradictions are easy to see throughout the Évangiles. The case that Zola is trying to make against the Christian sexual ethic may well be inherently contradictory, because his own

argument is so broad, sweeping and extreme. The pro-fecundity counter-ethic that Zola advances in his final novels may itself be hopelessly contradictory, but pondering that issue will have to be the work of another study.

Mathieu Froment takes part in the conversation between Santerre and Séguin concerning the former's new novel, but he vehemently disapproves of all the talk about adultery, celibacy, virginity, and childlessness. Mathieu's riposte to the description of L'Impérissable Beauté represents the most important aesthetic statement in all the Évangiles, but what his response truly indicates is how close these novels come to promoting, ideologically if not in their own form, the annihilation of all aesthetics. Mathieu tells Santerre that, while L'Impérissable Beauté does represent the aesthetic that is dominant in France, artists and writers should unanimously decide to make a contrary aesthetic the dominant one, an aesthetic that takes as its first priority proclaiming the need to have large families. Mathieu claims to find authority for this new hegemonic aesthetic of procreation in the Renaissance. He complains to Santerre,

Mais l'idée de beauté varie. Vous [Santerre] la mettez dans la stérilité de la femme, aux formes longues et grêles, aux flancs rétrécis. Pendant toute la Renaissance, elle a été dans la femme saine et forte, aux larges hanches, aux seins puissants. Chez Rubens, chez Titien, même chez Raphaël, la femme est robuste, Marie est vraiment mère... Et remarquez, qu'il s'agirait justement de changer cette idée de la beauté, pour que la famille restreinte, en honneur aujourd'hui, fît place à la famille nombreuse, qui deviendrait la seule belle... Selon moi, l'unique remède décisif est là, au mal grandissant de la dépopulation, dont on se préoccupe tant aujourd'hui. (58)

Mathieu's idea of returning to Renaissance aesthetics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shows how absurd is the fundamental aesthetic proposition of the Évangiles. Even the suggestion that the greatest artworks of the Renaissance were designed to encourage procreation seems silly. Equally silly is the reduction of Renaissance aesthetics to the image of a woman "saine et forte, aux larges hanches, aux seins puissants." One wonders what Mathieu would make of the images of masculinized women that Michelangelo painted on the ceiling of

the Sistine Chapel. Most striking of all, however, is the fact that neither Mathieu nor the narrator ever perceives the glaring contradiction in having one of the vehemently anti-Christian Froment brothers speak approvingly of Renaissance art, much, if not most of which was thoroughly Christian in inspiration. Thus, the first antiaesthetic feature of Mathieu's statement is his belief that artists and writers can return to an artistic ideal from the distant past, an ideal that never really even existed in the first place.

Far more antiaesthetic is Mathieu's belief that the pro-fecundity ideal in art and literature must become hegemonic. He dreams of effecting a fundamental and lasting change in the dominant aesthetics of France: "il s'agirait justement de changer cette idée de la beauté, pour que la famille restreinte, en honneur aujourd'hui, fit place à la famille nombreuse, qui deviendrait la seule belle." This aesthetic revolution would leave little, if any, room for other aesthetic notions, especially any competing notions of sex and the family. The image of the large family, the anchor of Mathieu's new ideal of beauty, would henceforth be perceived as the only beautiful family structure: "la famille nombreuse, qui deviendrait la seule belle." This attempt at aesthetic hegemony, this refusal of diversity in art and literature is the second antiaesthetic feature of Mathieu's statement. The refusal of aesthetic diversity is actually also implied in the stark contrast between L'Impérissable Beauté and Fécondité. The special *mise-en-abîme* role played by L'Impérissable Beauté, along with the fact that it is a tendentious novel about the art form of painting, seems to suggest that only two aesthetics are even possible: either an aesthetic that promotes unprocreative adultery and celibacy, or its complete opposite, an aesthetic that promotes maximal procreation within heterosexual, monogamous relationships. This kind of aesthetic Manichaeism, which is distinct from the more ordinary Manichaeism of Fécondité's good and evil characters, blocks out practically every alternative

vision of art and literature. It also reveals yet another way in which Zola's Évangiles promotes antiaestheticism.

The single most antiaesthetic feature of Fécondité, however, must surely be the claim, developed in various ways throughout the novel, that art and literature have a huge and direct impact on people's decision whether to become parents. Combined with Fécondité's attempt to depict France as a country on the verge of demographic collapse, the idea that every single novel, poem, sculpture and painting could spell France's doom by discouraging couples from having children must surely suppress artistic creation by setting the stakes so sky-high. Motivated by the fear of an impending demographic catastrophe, Mathieu's concept of art and literature leaves hardly any room for the latitude that aesthetic development certainly requires. Many different passages in Fécondité speak of the collapsing size of France's population, but one appears in this very conversation between Mathieu, Santerre and Séguin (59-62). Another such passage from much later in the novel will be cited here momentarily.

Through his close friendship with Valentine Séguin, Santerre slowly but surely destroys the upper class Séguin family. He imparts both to Valentine and to her husband his extremely pessimistic, anti-procreation views, views shaped by his brand of Christianity. Santerre's pernicious impact on the Séguin family symbolizes the pernicious impact that literature such as the novels that he writes has on many families throughout France. At the start of the next passage cited here, Valentine has just given birth to her third and final child, a pregnancy that she desperately wanted to avoid. Santerre had tried to persuade Valentine to have an abortion, and he gave her information about the leading doctor in Paris who performed abortions for wealthy women (118-120). Valentine's ultimate decision against having the abortion caused a rupture in her friendship with Santerre, but the rupture was only temporary. By the start of the passage below, Valentine and Santerre are as close as ever, and

they are destined to become much closer. Although she backed out of the abortion, Valentine does decide to cut her youngest child completely out of her life by handing her care over to wet nurses and nannies. As much as anything else, Fécondité turns out to be a ferocious polemic against the use of wet nurses and in support maternal breast-feeding. From this point forward, Valentine, liberated from all responsibility of caring for her children and destined not to have any more, slowly becomes little more than the tool of the evil novelist Santerre. The Séguin family is on the road to perdition.

Au lendemain des relevailles de Valentine, le romancier était redevenu l'intime, le commensal de la maison. Plus rien n'en gênait la gaieté, il ne s'y heurtait plus au malaise d'une femme gâtée par la grossesse, il y pouvait reprendre avec elle l'aimable roman interrompu, certain maintenant de vaincre. Et Valentine elle-même, sauvée de son affreuse peur de la mort, délivrée de cette maternité qu'elle regardait comme la pire des catastrophes, s'en était échappée avec un soulagement immense, un besoin de rattraper le temps perdu, en se rejetant follement dans les fêtes, dans le tourbillon extravagant de la vie mondaine. De nouveau fine et jolie, ayant retrouvé la jeunesse un peu maigre de son air garçonnier, elle n'avait jamais eu un tel besoin d'étourdissement, de plus en plus poussée par l'impérieuse logique des faits à laisser les enfants aux soins des domestiques, à désertir chaque jour davantage sa maison, pour courir les champs de sa fantaisie...C'était le ménage définitivement détraqué, la famille détruite, menacée du suprême désastre, et Santerre y vivait à l'aise, en achevait la destruction, accepté naturellement par le mari, avec lequel il continuait à faire assaut de philosophie et de littérature pessimistes, en attendant que la femme lui tombât dans les bras. (220)

The widespread devastation that Santerre's kind of literature is supposed to cause is suggested in Fécondité mostly through a focus on his harmful relationship with this one family, the Séguins. The ruin that Santerre inflicts on the Séguins symbolizes the tremendous harm that much of modern literature is supposed to cause in France and beyond. The sentence that most cleverly captures the hugely symbolic nature of Santerre's evil relationship with the Séguins is this: "il y pouvait reprendre avec elle l'aimable roman interrompu, certain maintenant de vaincre." Thus, Santerre's destructive personal relationship with Valentine Séguin is itself called a novel. Referred to sarcastically as "l'aimable roman interrompu," this relationship is as much a novel as any real novel that Santerre has ever written. By resuming

his ties with Valentine, Santerre wants to get back to “writing” this novel, certain that its conclusion will be his complete triumph over the woman whose mind he has perverted. The implication, of course, is that Santerre maintains a similarly pernicious relationship with the many female readers of his real novels, and that he is leading them, too, to perdition. The end of the passage makes Séguin’s personal responsibility for the destruction of the Séguin family completely clear. The fact that Santerre, along with his “philosophie et de littérature pessimistes,” is specifically blamed for destroying this one family means that the many different kinds of modern literature that Santerre represents quite literally ruins families, and then, as will be seen in a moment, entire societies. The statement that Valentine behaves and dresses in a boyish manner, “son air garçonnier,” is just another sign that modern literature creates sexual deviance, perversity, and gender confusion.

Later in the novel, as the financial, moral and physical collapse of the Séguin family becomes increasingly apparent, Zola makes even more explicit the symbolic value of Santerre’s destructive influence on the family. The character who concisely explains this aspect of Fécondité and who also gives voice to the novel’s alarmist views concerning the size of the French population is Dr. Boutan. Dr. Boutan is the Froments’ family doctor, which means that he shares all of Mathieu Froment’s natalist beliefs. As a medical doctor, however, Boutan is able to lend an air of scientific authority to these beliefs. Dr. Boutan once pays a visit to the Séguin mansion and observes the insanity, ill health and sexual corruption that permeate the household. In a conversation with Mathieu, the doctor blames the wealthy family’s slow demise on the parents’ decision to stop having children. He then explains how the Séguins are representative of many interrelated social ills, all caused in large part by degenerate art and literature. In his explanation to Mathieu, Dr. Boutan’s repeated use of the

term “fraude” refers to the widespread use of contraception and abortion. To the doctor’s way of thinking, this kind of family planning constitutes a defrauding of nature.

Ainsi, pour les Séguin, n’est-il pas évident que tout le mal est venu des fraudes premières, lorsque le mari et la femme se sont pervertis, exaspérés, dans leur obstination à ne plus vouloir faire d’enfant ? Dès lors, on peut dire que le ménage a été en perdition... On fait grand bruit de notre névrose moderne, de notre dégénérescence, de nos enfants de plus en plus chétifs, mis au monde par des femmes malades, détraquées, affolées. Mais, avant bien d’autres causes, moins graves, la fraude est la première, la grande cause, celle qui empoisonne la vie à sa source ! Mais c’est la fraude, la fraude universelle, préméditée, obstinée, vantée, qui nous jette à cette décrépitude précoce et qui nous achèvera !... Songez donc !... Vous énervez la femme, vous ne contentez chez elle que le spasme, vous en restez à la satisfaction du désir, qui est simplement l’appât générateur, sans consentir à la fécondation, qui est le but, l’acte nécessaire et indispensable. Et vous ne voulez pas que, dans cet organisme dupé, bousculé, détourné de son usage, se déclarent de terribles désordres, les déchéances, les perversions !... Que de femmes malades, irritées, brisées par des pratiques frauduleuses, j’ai vues se remettre, grâce à une grossesse ! Et que d’autres sont retombées aux mêmes souffrances, dès qu’elles se sont refusées de nouveau à vivre la vie comme elle doit être vécue !... La nature trompée se révolte. Plus on fraude, plus on pervertit, plus la population s’affaiblit et se dégrade. On en arrive à notre fameux nervosisme moderne, à notre prochaine banqueroute physique et morale... Nos femmes dés sexuées, frémissantes, éperdues, c’est nous qui les faisons par nos pratiques, par notre art et notre littérature, par notre idéal de la famille restreinte... Et, dites-moi, avez-vous jamais mieux senti la fin d’une société que dans cette maison, dans cette pièce aux bibelots rares, d’un luxe défaillant ? N’y assistez-vous pas au grand drame actuel, la démoralisation du dégoût de la vie, de l’infécondité voulue et préconisée ? (285-287)

This is one of the most alarmist passages in a novel that does all it can to create a sense of social crisis and impending national doom. The beginning and the end clearly indicate that the Séguins are just the tip of a very large iceberg that is threatening to destroy all of France with various health, moral and demographic catastrophes. Dr. Boutan lays most of the blame on a depraved aesthetics, “notre art et notre littérature... notre idéal de la famille restreinte.”

By begetting twelve children jubilantly, Mathieu and Marianne Froment represent the opposite of the pessimistic, anti-natalist Séguins. Mathieu and Marianne are the heroes of the melodramatic epic that is Fécondité. Prominent Zolian specialist David Baguley was cited a

moment ago making the observation that Zola genuinely rewrites the Christian Bible in his Évangiles. The excerpts so far presented here from the Évangiles – which are, in fact, extremely long novels – do not reveal the full extent to which Baguley’s observation is correct. Certain sections of Zola’s Évangiles are much more “biblical” in their imagery, language and tone than others. One of the more biblical-sounding passages from Fécondité appears below, and yet also interesting about this passage is how stereotypically epic it sounds. Mathieu and Marianne are here called true heroes, the founders of a royal lineage. The august sentiments expressed below either represent the thoughts of an elderly Mathieu and Marianne or form part of the narrator’s retrospective look back over the novel’s many tumultuous events. Either way, the passage comes from late in the novel, and it surveys Mathieu and Marianne’s many remarkable accomplishments, all of which are attributed, of course, to the couple’s decision to have plenty of children. As the passage progresses, however, it becomes increasingly clear that, more than Mathieu and Marianne, the primary hero of the novel is the “virtue” of fecundity itself. Zola’s first Évangile is not primarily the epic tale of a single family, however heroic that family may have been in resisting the national mania for having fewer and fewer children. No, the true hero of this story is the splendid concept, the shining principle, the noble ideal that is fecundity. Chantebled is the name of the Froments’ farming homestead, and it is comprised of parcels of land bought gradually over the years from a country estate owned by the disintegrating Séguin family. Thus, the fecund Froments grow ever richer from lands purchased on the cheap from the increasingly impoverished, increasingly desperate, anti-natalist Séguins.

Et lui, Mathieu, restait seul debout, vainqueur avec Marianne, en face de ce domaine de Chantebled, conquis par eux sur les Séguin, où leurs enfants Gervais et Claire régnaient maintenant, prolongeaient la dynastie de leur race. C’était leur royaume, les champs s’élargissaient à perte de vue, roulant une prodigieuse fertilité sous l’adieu du soir, disant la lutte, l’enfantement héroïque de toute leur existence. C’était leur œuvre, ce qu’ils avaient enfanté de vie, d’êtres et de choses, dans leur puissance d’aimer, dans

la volonté de leur énergie, aimant, voulant, agissant, créant un monde... La victoire ! la victoire naturelle, nécessaire de la famille nombreuse ! Grâce à la famille nombreuse, à la poussée fatale du nombre, ils avaient fini par tout envahir, par tout posséder. La fécondité était la souveraine, l'invincible conquérante. Et cette conquête, elle s'était faite d'elle-même, ils ne l'avaient ni voulue ni organisée, ils ne la devaient, dans leur loyauté sereine, qu'au devoir rempli de leur longue tâche. Et ils étaient, la main dans la main, devant leur œuvre, tels que d'admirables héros, glorieux d'avoir été bons et forts, d'avoir beaucoup enfanté, beaucoup créé, donné au monde beaucoup de joie, de santé, d'espoir, parmi les éternelles luttes et les éternelles larmes. (483)

If ever there were a passage that inflated sex, pure and simple, to ridiculously epic proportions, this is surely it. Yet all three Évangiles contain numerous passages like this one, where the language and imagery are grandiose, and the grandiosity stems either directly or very nearly so from the novels' conservative sexual politics. In Vérité, where an epic struggle takes place between Catholic and secular, government-run elementary schools, the heroes are the underpaid, overworked and underappreciated teachers in the secular government schools. Marc, the Froment brother who figures in Vérité, and the falsely convicted Jewish character Simon, are both teachers in secular "laïque" elementary schools. In the passage below, Salvan, the director of the Normal School in the region where Marc and Simon both teach, speaks of laic schoolteachers as the apostles of a new religion, indoctrinating the young with correct and healthy ideas. Salvan specifically says that victory for the secular teachers will spell utter doom for the Catholic Church, because the doctrines taught in the Catholic schools are utterly incompatible with those taught in the government schools. Thus, a truly epic struggle to the death takes place in Vérité. The excerpt below is also this chapter's second epigraph.

C'est l'instituteur laïque, l'instrument de vérité et de justice, qui seul peut sauver la nation, lui rendre son rang et son action dans le monde... Et vous verrez, vous verrez, lorsque, peu à peu, des maîtres sortiront d'ici, instruits pour être les apôtres de la raison et de l'équité, vous les verrez se répandre dans les campagnes, dans les villes, portant la bonne parole de délivrance, détruisant partout l'erreur et le mensonge, tels que des missionnaires de l'humanité nouvelle ! Alors, l'Église sera vaincue, ...et toute la nation se mettra en marche, sans entraves désormais, vers la Cité future de solidarité et de paix. (1172)

As the Évangile that rewrites the Dreyfus Affair, Vérité is replete with the catchwords and battle cries of the historical scandal. Salvan here uses the two most common Dreyfusard catchwords, the ideals “vérité et...justice” ‘truth and justice,’ which he says secular schoolteachers will promote more effectively than anyone else. Another famous line from the Affair – in fact, from “J'Accuse” itself – is roughly paraphrased here by Salvan. Zola’s stirring line, “la vérité est en marche et rien ne l’arrêtera” becomes in Salvan’s version “toute la nation se mettra en marche, sans entraves désormais...” The phrase “sans entraves” ‘without impediments’ is loaded with special meaning in the context of the Évangiles. As stated in Pierre Froment’s religious reverie at the end of Paris, the greatest “entrave” or “impediment” that humanity faces is the anti-life, anti-sex, anti-fecundity message of Christianity. Enthrallment to that message is supposed to have stymied all kinds of human progress for centuries. The greatest error or lie in the world is also supposed to be Christianity’s anti-life message. Here, in Vérité, Salvan says that laic schoolteachers will destroy errors and lies: “détruisant partout l’erreur et le mensonge, tels que des missionnaires de l’humanité nouvelle.” The universal, humanitarian dimension of Vérité’s dream is also made clear in Salvan’s statement.

Of course, Salvan does not say anything directly about sex or procreation. He is, after all, the director of a normal school, and he is speaking about the future accomplishments of a new generation of freshly trained elementary school teachers. Nevertheless, the many parallels between Salvan’s high-flown rhetoric on education and the grandiose natalist rhetoric of the novels Paris and Fécondité reveal how all of Zola’s ideas and all of his terminology from his last four novels are closely interrelated. This dense web of connections always and inevitably seems to lead to the primacy of procreative sex. The simultaneous injection of so many catchwords and concepts taken directly from the Dreyfus Affair raises the worrisome question

as to whether Zola's final novels effectively reduce the entire Affair, one of France's best-known historical episodes, to a fight over sexual ethics. The present study will not make quite so bold an argument in interpreting the Évangiles, nor does it need to in order to substantiate the claim that the end of the Affair witnessed a convergence of extremely melodramatic forces that eventually produced repercussions in Proust's Recherche. Nevertheless, the degree to which the Évangiles depict the entire Dreyfus Affair as a struggle over sexual ethics is an important question for future research. Below is the end of the passage cited earlier here from Pierre's natalist religious vision in Paris. Its many rhetorical similarities to Salvan's grand hope for secular schoolteachers will be readily apparent.

Pendant deux mille ans, la marche en avant de l'humanité aura eu pour entraves cette odieuse idée d'arracher de l'homme tout ce qu'il a d'humain, les désirs, les passions... toute sa puissance. Et quel réveil joyeux, lorsque la virginité sera méprisée, lorsque la fécondité redeviendra une vertu, dans l'hosanna des forces naturelles libérées... (1561)

Apart from the pedophilic rape and murder of a schoolboy by a member of a Catholic religious order, along with the strong insinuation that child molestation is endemic in Catholic schools, the main sexual politics in Vérité takes the form of a struggle over the religious allegiance of wives and mothers. Vérité repeatedly makes the claim that women are more likely to be religiously pious than are men, and that the reason for women's greater piety is that they are more susceptible to Church propaganda. The novel also shows how the Catholic Church makes a special effort to win the allegiance of wives and mothers, whose particular devotion to the Church can serve as leverage for Catholicism to gain control over entire families. As the narrator says near the novel's mid-point,

Se glisser au sein d'un ménage, se mettre entre les deux époux, et reprendre la femme par son éducation, ses traditions pieuses, et désespérer, détruire ainsi l'homme dont on veut se débarrasser : il n'est pas de tactique plus indiquée, plus commode, d'usage plus courant, dans le monde noir et chuchotant des confessionnaux... Depuis le premier jour, l'Église a pris et gardé la femme, comme l'aide la plus puissante de son œuvre de propagande et d'asservissement. (1194)

As this passage suggests, the confessional is the locus of extreme anxiety in Vérité, because the confidentiality of all that is said there gives priests the chance to gain control over women's minds and turn them against their husbands. Vérité even makes the case that Catholic confessors frequently seduce women sexually, turning long faithful wives into adulteresses in the very Churches where they go to confess their sins.

The primary example that Vérité gives of a wife who turns against her husband due to the sinister influence of the Catholic Church is none other than Geneviève Froment, the wife of Marc, the Froment brother who is the hero of this final completed Évangile. As Marc Froment plays the Zola role in the Simon Affair, trying desperately to prove that the Jewish schoolteacher is innocent and the victim of a grand conspiracy, the Catholic Church goes to work trying to convince his wife Geneviève that her husband's political activism is the worst kind of sin. Geneviève actually draws closer to the Catholicism during the same period that Marc devotes virtually all his spare energy to proving that the Church is the culprit behind Simon's phony conviction. Geneviève leaves the family home, taking their only child with her, and she moves in with her extremely pious aunt and grandmother, who do all they can to prejudice her against her husband and the work he is doing to liberate Simon. Geneviève also takes as her confessor a priest widely known for sexually seducing pious Catholic women. Worst of all, Geneviève is pregnant at the time she abandons the Froment household – there is no doubt that Marc truly is the father – but all the same forces of Catholicism that convince her to hate her husband also convince her that the newborn child is permanently tainted or defiled by the simple fact that its father is working against Catholic interests. Geneviève will not allow Marc to see the newborn, but she also wants to limit her own contact with the child, so she sends it to the countryside to be taken care of by wet-nurses.

A key confrontation between Marc and Geneviève takes place below, where the couple vigorously debate the meaning of the Dreyfus Affair catchwords “vérité et justice” ‘truth and justice.’ As in many other sections of the Évangiles, this excerpt makes clear that the struggle between Catholicism and the forces of secularism is death-match to the bitter end. There can be no peaceful coexistence between such diametrically opposed powers. The passage below is an actual conversation between Marc and Geneviève, with Marc speaking first.

Peu à peu, Marc était pris d’impatience.

« Je ne comprends pas qu’une question de vérité et de justice si claire puisse nous séparer. Le Ciel n’a rien à voir en tout ceci.

--- Pardon, il n’y a ni vérité ni justice en dehors du Ciel.

--- Ah ! tu viens de dire le grand mot, voilà qui explique notre désaccord et notre torture. Tu penserais encore comme moi, si tu n’avais pas mis le Ciel entre nous deux, et tu me reviendras, le jour où tu consentiras à redevenir, sur cette terre, une intelligence saine, un cœur fraternel. Il n’est qu’une vérité, il n’est qu’une justice, celles que la science établit, sous le contrôle de la certitude et de la solidarité humaines. »

Geneviève elle-même s’exaspéra.

« Expliquons-nous donc une bonne fois, c’est ma religion, c’est mon Dieu que tu veux détruire.

--- Oui ! cria-t-il. C’est le catholicisme que je combats, l’imbécillité de son enseignement, l’hypocrisie de sa pratique, la perversion de son culte, et son action meurtrière sur l’enfant, sur la femme, et sa nuisance sociale. L’Église catholique, voilà l’ennemie, dont nous devons d’abord débarrasser la route. Avant la question sociale, avant la question politique, il y a la question religieuse, qui barre tout. Jamais nous ne ferons un pas en avant, si nous ne commençons point par abattre l’Église, la corruptrice, l’empoisonneuse, l’assassine... » (1250)

Marc’s final outburst, the last paragraph in this dialogue, reveals one of the most powerfully melodramatic elements of all three of Zola’s Évangiles. Mathieu, Luc, and Marc Froment are quite literally presented as the rescuers – or, perhaps more appropriately, as the saviors – of extremely vulnerable women and children. The motif of imperiled women and children being rescued by more competent men is one of the most traditional of all melodramatic dynamics, and Zola exploits that dynamic in every one of his Évangiles. Equally grandiose statements can be found throughout Travail, such as “Tant que la femme souffrirait,

le monde ne sera pas sauvé” and “L’amour seul, et la femme, et l’enfant finiraient par vaincre.” Of course, women and children “triumph” in the Évangiles primarily through being rescued by much more powerful men, such as the “apostles” Mathieu, Luc, and Marc Froment.

If peaceful coexistence between Christianity and the new secular religion of science is completely impossible, then one or the other must disappear, quite literally, from the face of the earth. The disappearance of Christianity is something that Travail depicts in a visually striking, albeit rather ludicrous, scene. Near the end of Travail, the principal Catholic church in the novel suddenly collapses into ruin, killing its stubbornly traditionalist pastor in the rubble. No credible reason is given as to why this building suddenly falls to the ground, but the symbolic reason, of course, is that, by the novel’s end, Catholicism has been abandoned by nearly everyone in the region, in favor of the new secular religion. The collapse of the church provides a vivid and concrete symbol of the loss of Catholic faith in the region. The collapse of this Catholic church brings full circle the collapse of the pagan statues in the polytheistic temples at the end of Chateaubriand’s epic Les Martyrs. At the dawn of the nineteenth-century, Chateaubriand’s epic depicts the polytheistic temples falling partially into ruin just as Christianity rose to become the new state religion of the Roman Empire – and, by extension, of new post-revolutionary France. As the fading nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, Zola’s description of a Christian church falling down just as the new religion of science rises to power provides the ultimate counterpoint to Chateaubriand’s similar description many decades earlier. Quite appropriately, Zola’s image of a collapsing church is even more (melo)dramatic than Chateaubriand’s. The pastor of the collapsing church is the abbé Marle, and it is he who will die in the rubble. The abbé Marle is the only character in this highly melodramatic scene.

Alors, l'abbé Marle sentit un monde finir et s'anéantir autour de lui. Ses complaisances n'avaient pu sauver la bourgeoisie menteuse, empoisonneuse, rongée du mal d'iniquité...Et, de même, il avait eu beau se réfugier dans la lettre stricte du dogme, pour ne rien accorder aux vérités de la science, dont il sentait le suprême assaut vainqueur, en train de détruire le séculaire édifice du catholicisme. La science achevait de faire brèche, le dogme était finalement emporté, le royaume de Dieu allait être remis sur la terre, au nom de la justice triomphante. Une religion nouvelle, la religion de l'homme, enfin conscient, libre et maître de son destin, balayait les anciennes mythologies, les symbolismes où s'étaient égarées les angoisses de sa longue lutte contre la nature. Après les temples des anciennes idolâtries, l'Église catholique disparaissait à son tour...Et le prêtre, depuis que le confessionnal et la sainte table étaient désertés, depuis que la nef se vidait de fidèles, entendait bien chaque jour, à sa messe, les lézardes des murs s'agrandir, les charpentes des toits craquer davantage. C'était un continuel émiettement, un travail sourd de destruction, de ruine prochaine...[II] continuait à dire sa messe, en héros de la foi, seul avec son Dieu délaissé, tandis que les voûtes se fendaient au-dessus de l'autel.

Ce matin-là, l'abbé Marle remarqua qu'une immense crevasse nouvelle s'était produite, pendant la nuit, à la voûte de la nef. Et, certain de l'effondrement attendu depuis des mois, il vint pourtant célébrer sa dernière messe, vêtu de ses habits sacerdotaux les plus riches. (906-907)

In its entirety, the scene of the church collapse is very long, more than three dense pages in Travail. The passage above actually constitutes only a small fraction of the overall scene, which Zola milks for all every drop of melodrama possible. The suicidal nature of the abbé Marle's death is indicated quite clearly. The imminent death of this stubbornly misguided, perversely heroic cleric in the ruins of his own church is obvious from the very start. Marle practically commits suicide by continuing to say mass in the church that is conspicuously on the verge of collapse. Of course, the whole scene reeks of the kind of fantastic element often found in melodrama. The villain at the end must be crushed, and crushed completely by the forces of good. This is what happens to the abbé Marle, and the paragraph depicting the actual moment of the church's collapse is just below. Immediately before the collapse, Marle practically dares the god of Christianity to save his Church/church from ruin, and of the double entendre is fully resonant. The god of Christianity is called upon to save the entire Christian Church, as well as the actual church building in which Marle is saying mass.

Si Dieu le voulait, l'église allait retrouver sa jeunesse vigoureuse, ses forts piliers soutenant la nef indestructible. Les maçons n'étaient point nécessaires, la toute-puissance divine suffisait, un sanctuaire magnifique renaîtrait... O Dieu de souveraineté et d'éternité, rebâissez d'un geste votre maison auguste, vous seul pouvez la remettre debout, l'emplir de vos adorateurs reconquis, si vous ne voulez pas être anéanti vous-même sous ses décombres. Et, au moment où le prêtre élevait le calice, ce ne fut pas le miracle demandé qui se produisit, ce fut l'anéantissement. Il [l'abbé Marle] se tenait là debout, les deux bras levés, dans un geste superbe d'héroïque croyance, provoquant son souverain Maître à mourir avec lui, si la fin du culte était venue. La voûte se fendit comme sous un coup de foudre, la toiture s'écroula dans un tourbillon de débris, avec un effroyable grondement de tonnerre. Ébranlé, le clocher oscilla, s'abattit à son tour, achevant d'éventrer la nef, entraînant le reste des murailles disjointes. Et il ne demeura rien sous le clair soleil, qu'un tas énormes de gravats, dans lequel on ne retrouva même pas le corps de l'abbé Marle, dont les poussières de l'autel écrasé semblaient avoir mangé la chair et bu le sang. Et l'on ne retrouva rien non plus du grand christ de bois peint et doré, foudroyé lui aussi, tombé en poudre. Une religion encore était morte, le dernier prêtre disant sa dernière messe, dans la dernière église. (908)

Although essentially opposed to the concept of the supernatural, the new religion of science, like all good religions, must have at least a few miracles of its own. This utterly unbelievable collapse of a major Christian church surely ranks as one of the new religion's most impressive miracles. Not only does the building fall down without any reasonable explanation, the abbé Marle's body, crushed beneath the rubble, seems to disappear completely: "un tas énormes de gravats, dans lequel on ne retrouva même pas le corps de l'abbé Marle, dont les poussières de l'autel écrasé semblaient avoir mangé la chair et bu le sang." Conspicuous in this description of the disappearance of Marle's corpse is Zola's sacrilegious play on the greatest of all the Christian sacramental mysteries, the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, which is consumed by the Christian faithful. In Zola's version, the collapsed church seems to have eaten Marle's flesh and drunk his blood. Even more symbolically significant is the disappearance of the large wooden crucifix that hung above the altar where, until just a moment ago, the abbé Marle was saying Catholic Mass: "Et l'on ne retrouva rien non plus du grand christ de bois peint et doré, foudroyé lui aussi, tombé en poudre." The miraculous vaporization of the crucifix is the

ultimate symbol of Christianity's extinction from the region of France depicted in Travail. The passage's last sentence of this is probably the single best-known anticlerical line that Zola ever wrote or uttered: "Une religion encore était morte, le dernier prêtre disant sa dernière messe, dans la dernière église."

CHAPTER 7

PROUST'S RECHERCHE: A MOCK-EPIC RESPONSE TO THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY TRADITION OF MELODRAMATIC EPIC

In his first, failed attempt to write a novel, Jean Santeuil, Proust situated the Dreyfus Affair at the very center of his narrative. While the Recherche often alludes to this historical episode, it is no longer decisive to the text's action, nor is it given any focused treatment...It is worthwhile reflecting upon why the most celebrated political and ideological event of the early Third Republic has been all but displaced from Proust's narrative...

Michael Sprinker, History and Ideology in Proust (107)

L'œuvre et le style de Proust témoignent d'une véritable passion pour les signes religieux. Emprunts à la Bible, à la théologie catholique, clichés littéraires, fragments de discours historiques... cités par le texte ludiquement encyclopédique de la Recherche, tous ces matériaux ayant le religieux pour objet forment un ensemble discursif dont la cohérence déroutante demande à être appréhendée par une métaphore oxymorique : la cathédrale profane.

Stéphane Chaudier, Proust et le langage religieux :

La cathédrale profane (10-11)

Et dans ces grands livres-là, il y a des parties qui n'ont eu le temps que d'être esquissées, et qui ne seront sans doute jamais finies, à cause de l'ampleur même du plan de l'architecte. Combien de grandes cathédrales restent inachevées ! On le nourrit, on fortifie ses parties faibles, on le préserve, mais ensuite c'est lui qui grandit, qui désigne notre tombe, la protège contre les rumeurs et quelque temps contre l'oubli.

Marcel Proust, Le Temps retrouvé (610)

Le plan de la carrière idéal de tout candidat à la panthéonisation consiste à être à la fois un grand intellectuel et un grand militant. L'excellence littéraire seule ne suffit pas. Imagine-t-on Stendhal, Proust, ou Colette au Panthéon ? ...[Une] adhésion sincère et affective à l'idéal révolutionnaire de 1789..., c'est là le critère premier des panthéonisés...[C'est] aussi un rituel propre à la

Révolution française, quand le peintre David organisait les panthéonisations comme de vraies mises en scène...

Mona Ozouf, "Les hommes de lettres sont les rois de la nation" (5)

The 1952 release of Marcel Proust's unfinished novel Jean Santeuil caused an uproar in the world of Proust studies (Clarac ix-x, Marc-Lipiansky 11-15). On the one hand, scholars were shocked to find that this early novel, which Proust did not publish in his lifetime and which even the executors of his estate waited decades before releasing, clearly served as a kind of rough draft for the Recherche. Many of the same themes and characters for which the Recherche had already long been celebrated by 1952 were clearly present in the almost unknown Jean Santeuil. The characters in Jean Santeuil have different names than those in the Recherche, but the similarities between the two sets of imaginary figures are unmistakable (Marc-Lipiansky 88-143).

Given the abundant parallels between Proust's early, unfinished novel and his later masterpiece, the differences between the two novels are all the more conspicuous and surprising. The worldview of the earlier novel is marked by a naïve earnestness that contrasts starkly with the worldly sophistication and humorous cynicism of the Recherche (Tadié Marcel Proust 371-373). In 1952, the year of Jean Santeuil's release, these differences upset accepted notions about Proust's artistic and personal development (Marc-Lipiansky 212-225). So troubled were some scholars by what they found in Jean Santeuil that a few argued that it was a forgery, while others declared that the earlier novel should simply be ignored and not be allowed to "taint" the image of Recherche's brilliance (Marc-Lipiansky 11). As Mireille Marc-Lipiansky explains, the attitude of many scholars was, "A quoi bon...chercher à découvrir dans les papiers que [Proust] nous a laissés des révélations inédites, une nouveauté que son génie même contredit ?" (15). Of course, ignoring Jean Santeuil and pretending as if it did not exist have not been the approach of the majority of Proustian specialists since the 1950s. Marc-

Lipiansky's own 1974 study, La naissance du monde proustien dans Jean Santeuil, is indicative of the consensus today among scholars, the consensus being that Proust's unfinished novel holds important clues concerning the eventual development of his masterpiece (Marc-Lipiansky 224-226).

The many connections between Jean Santeuil and the Recherche, including their similarities and their differences, have by no means all been accounted for and explained in Proustian scholarship, however. The most significant ongoing mystery, the one that caused the greatest shock when Jean Santeuil was released to the world in 1952, has to do with the very different ways in which Proust's two novels discuss the Dreyfus Affair. Georges Bataille was one of the first critics to draw attention to this major difference, and he wasted no time in doing so. Very soon after Jean Santeuil was published, Bataille wrote an essay on the novel's treatment of the Dreyfus Affair for the journal Critique, and his essay that was later reprinted in the collection La littérature et le mal. Speaking about Jean Santeuil and the Affair, Bataille wrote,

Marcel Proust écrivait à propos de l'affaire Dreyfus, aux environs de 1900. Ses sentiments dreyfusards sont connus, mais dès la *Recherche*, écrite dix ans plus tard, ils avaient perdu cette naïveté agressive. Nous avons nous-mêmes aujourd'hui perdu cette simplicité... A lire *Jean Santeuil*, nous nous étonnons de l'importance que la politique eut alors dans l'esprit de Proust : il avait trente ans. Bien des lecteurs seront saisis d'apercevoir le jeune Marcel bouillant de colère, parce qu'assistant à la séance de la Chambre, il ne pouvait applaudir les paroles de Jaurès. (142)

Shock is not too strong a word for Bataille's reaction to Jean Santeuil. He says that the naïve, simplistic passion for Dreyfus Affair politics on display in the early, unfinished novel could leave devotees of the Recherche "saisis." Bataille refers to how Jaurès, the great French socialist leader who eventually took a decisive stand for Dreyfus, fills the character Jean Santeuil with angry enthusiasm. Actually, Bataille says that Jaurès filled "le jeune Marcel" with angry enthusiasm, thus conflating the eponymous hero of Jean Santeuil with Marcel

Proust himself, a conflation that is also often made when speaking of the narrator in the Recherche. For reasons too numerous to mention here, the present study will, for the most part, not make this conflation. For the purposes of this study's argument, it is sufficient that the Dreyfus Affair fills Jean Santeuil the character with passion and enthusiasm, whereas the narrator of the Recherche, a character who resembles Jean Santeuil in many respects, discusses the same historical event with a cool detachment. The occasions where this chapter will delve into Proust's own opinions about the Dreyfus Affair will be few in number and, while serving to illuminate the overall argument, will not be essential to it.

Bataille makes sure to provide several long and compelling citations from Jean Santeuil to back up his claim about the novel's "naïveté agressive." A key passage cited by Bataille will be analyzed here in a moment. After presenting relevant citations from Jean Santeuil, Bataille concludes, "Cet accent naïf surprend d'un auteur [Proust] qui le fut si peu" (145). Once again, Bataille expresses great surprise at the contrast with the Recherche, which is hardly naïve in any sense whatsoever. In the rest of his essay, Bataille attempts to explain why the attitude toward the Dreyfus Affair and toward mainstream French politics in general changed so fundamentally within Proust's literature. The explanation that Bataille develops is both brilliant and almost certainly correct to a significant degree. Bataille says that Proust's deepening reflections on sexual diversity led him to reject all simplistic distinctions between Good and Evil, first in the domain of personal morality, but then in other areas, including in the area of mainstream politics (145-155).

The specific years during which Proust worked on Jean Santeuil constitute a vital question, of course. Bataille says "aux environs de 1900," which only gives a rough estimate. It is important to remember that Bataille wrote his essay on Jean Santeuil immediately after the novel's release. Some of the more technical and specific questions concerning the

unfinished novel, such as the precise years of its composition, would require years of scholarly work. Nevertheless, Bataille's basic reaction to Jean Santeuil and his general interpretation of the novel have not been contradicted in the intervening years. The shock that Bataille experienced from the unfinished novel's politics and his explanation that Proust's changing opinions on sexuality led to the very different perspective found in the Recherche have been voiced much more recently within Proustian scholarship (Bouillaguet 34-37, Sprinker 118-153). In terms of the years during which Proust wrote Jean Santeuil, Mireille Marc-Lipiansky has precisely determined 1895 to 1900 as the period of the novel's composition. Marc-Lipiansky explains that Proust stopped work on Jean Santeuil suddenly about a decade before he began writing the Recherche (12). More recent scholarship, which will be presented here in a moment, suggests that the most "naïve" and passionate sections dealing with the Dreyfus Affair in Jean Santeuil were written in 1898, or at the latest, in early 1899. A change of attitude concerning the Dreyfus Affair within Proust's writing is actually discernible in the period shortly after Zola's Évangiles began to be serialized in the newspaper L'Aurore in May of 1899.

Another consensus opinion concerning the different handling of the Dreyfus Affair within Proust's two novels appears in the first epigraph to this chapter. Michael Sprinker, author of History and Ideology in Proust, explains that the Dreyfus Affair is "at the very center" of Jean Santeuil but that the scandal figures much less prominently within the Recherche. Sprinker actually says that the scandal is "displaced" within the Recherche, and he expresses genuine surprise that "the most celebrated political and ideological event of the early Third Republic has been all but displaced from Proust's narrative..." (107). Like Bataille, Sprinker searches for an answer to this conundrum; and he reaches a similar conclusion, namely that the increasing role of sexual politics in Proust's writing had a

profound impact on the depiction of all forms of politics (118-153). Also like Bataille, Sprinker employs rather sophisticated theory to explain the intersection between the Recherche's sexual politics and its detached treatment of the Dreyfus Affair. Yet neither Bataille nor Sprinker goes back to the political and cultural history of the Affair to look for a reason why the fundamental attitude expressed towards it changes so significantly between Proust's two novels. A change or rupture in the Dreyfus Affair itself may have produced the change in attitude that is so visible from one of Proust's novels to the other. Lending plausibility to this theory is the fact that Jean Santeuil was written while the Dreyfus Affair still raged and as the scandal continued to evolve. A fundamental change in the scandal could have had an immediate and direct impact on the writing of Jean Santeuil, since, as Zola did in Vérité, Proust was writing about this major political event while it still unfolded.

A return to the history of the Dreyfus Affair – both its political history and, even more so, its cultural history – represents the approach taken by the present study as it tries to solve essentially the same conundrum that Bataille, Sprinker, and many other scholars have written about. There will be little conflict between Bataille's and Sprinker's insights and the discoveries made here, however, particularly since their works and this one all agree on the central role played by sexual politics in changing Proust's literary representation of the Dreyfus Affair. While agreeing with Bataille and Sprinker on the ripple effect produced by changes in Proust's thinking on sexuality, the present study accounts for such changes, at least as they are manifested in Proust's literature, by pointing to a heretofore overlooked phase of the Dreyfus Affair itself. That overlooked phase of the scandal is, of course, its melodramatic conclusion. The importance that this study will show the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic conclusion assuming within the Recherche does suggest one major disagreement with Sprinker's conclusions, however. Sprinker states that the Dreyfus Affair does not play as

central a role in the Recherche as it does in Jean Santeuil. This statement is probably true, if one thinks of the Affair primarily as a legal and military scandal involving espionage and anti-Semitism. If, however, one includes as an indispensable part of the Affair the multi-year anticlerical campaign at its end and the strangely melodramatic cultural forces that this anticlerical campaign set in motion, then one can actually make the case that the Dreyfus Affair matters more to the Recherche than it does to Jean Santeuil. Such is the case being made here, of course.

An examination of the text of Jean Santeuil is obviously needed to appreciate how much its treatment of the Dreyfus Affair differs from that of the Recherche. The phase of the scandal that receives the most coverage within the unfinished novel is actually Zola's trial for slander following the publication of "J'Accuse." Zola's famous open letter was published in the newspaper L'Aurore on January 13, 1898. Not even a full month later, Zola was put on trial for having slandered France's military leaders by accusing them of hiding evidence of Captain Alfred Dreyfus's innocence. Zola's slander trial ran from February 7 to February 23, 1898, with the trial ending in the famed novelist's conviction. The character Jean Santeuil actually attends "le procès Zola," just as Proust himself did (Tadié 371-375).

A key moment in Jean Santeuil occurs when a handwriting analyst named Paul Meyer appears at the trial to confirm one of Zola's principal claims in "J'Accuse," namely that Alfred Dreyfus did not write the infamous "bordereau," a list of all the classified French military documents that he was accused of passing to Germany. Unlike in the Recherche, the narrator and the protagonist of Jean Santeuil are not one and the same. The eponymous hero attends Zola's slander trial, while the narrator provides commentary. The passion and rhetoric of the narrator soar into the stratosphere as he explains Paul Meyer's courage in testifying to the scientific certainty that Dreyfus could not have written the bordereau. Adding to Meyer's

courage is supposed to be the fact that he is a close friend of leading anti-Dreyfusards and is, in fact, anti-Dreyfusard in his own personal sympathies. Georges Bataille quotes most of the passage below as an illustration of Jean Santeuil's shocking political "naïveté aggressive" (141). Difficult as it may be to believe for anyone familiar only with the Recherche, the passionate political sentiments expressed below by Jean Santeuil's narrator are quite sincere; and nothing in the rest of the novel suggests that any irony is implied.

...c'est toujours avec une émotion joyeuse et virile qu'on entend sortir des paroles singulières et audacieuses de la bouche d'hommes de science qui par une pure question d'honneur professionnel viennent dire la vérité, une vérité dont ils se soucient seulement parce qu'elle est la vérité qu'ils ont appris à chérir dans leur art, sans aucune espèce d'hésitation à mécontenter ceux pour qui elle se présente de tout autre façon comme faisant partie d'un ensemble de considérations dont ils se soucient fort peu...Ainsi M. Paul Meyer qui sans doute jusque-là se souciait fort peu de Zola et ne se serait pas dérangé une minute pour lui et qui peut-être était ami intime du ministre de la Guerre, défendra avec une joyeuse sympathie Zola qu'il a reconnu être dans la vérité et à toutes les pressions, tous les arguments de l'autorité militaire opposera un certain nombre d'assertions sur certains déliés, certaines courbes, et conclura : « Je jure que ce ne peut être de l'écriture de Dreyfus. » Ces paroles sont émouvantes à entendre, car on sent qu'elles sont simplement la conclusion d'un raisonnement fait d'après des règles scientifiques et en dehors de toute opinion sur cette affaire, en sorte qu'on y sent une sorte de sincérité, la seule vraie sincérité, car dans une opinion la sincérité n'est jamais que de la naïveté. Tandis qu'ici on sent joyeusement au violent écart qu'il y a entre l'opinion attendue de M. Paul Meyer par le gouvernement et la majorité de ses confrères et cette opinion...que la vérité est quelque chose qui existe réellement en soi, en dehors de toute opinion, que la vérité à laquelle le savant s'attache est déterminée par une série de conditions qui ne se trouvent nullement dans les convenances humaines mêmes les plus hautes, mais dans la nature des choses. (649-650)

Just like Zola's Évangiles, this passage is full of unintentional irony. The narrator goes into transports of metaphysical ecstasy merely on account of the testimony of a handwriting analyst. The discrepancy between the mundaneness of the handwriting analysis and the rhapsodic fervor of the narrator's reaction would surely form the stuff of brilliant comedy in the Recherche. One thinks of the way the Proustian narrator repeatedly deflates the phony ecstasy over bad art and music that the snobbish Mme Verdurin pretends to experience in the presence of the members of her "petit clan."

Yet the rhapsody that Jean Santeuil's narrator launches here is, in its own way, extremely philosophical; and what is perhaps most striking about the passage above is how contrary its philosophical speculations are to those found in the Recherche. Truth is presented here as absolute and certain, sincerity as something easy to judge, and the products of the pure, conscious and scientific intellect are implied to be the highest forms of knowledge. Truth in the Dreyfus Affair can be found merely on the basis of a few upstrokes and curves, "certains déliés, certaines courbes," in the handwriting found on a single document. The testimony of the handwriting analyst is supposedly based only on the rules of science, not influenced by personal political beliefs or by the pressure of colleagues and friends. Such impartial testimony, scientific and pure, constitutes the only true form of sincerity, "la seule vraie sincérité." The narrator practically makes a fetish out of sincerity, and never gives any reason to believe in the objectivity of the handwriting analyst other than that he frequented anti-Dreyfusard circles in his personal life. The narrator goes out of his way to explain the analyst did not even really like Emile Zola and his literature, but that with his scientific testimony he "défendra avec une joyeuse sympathie Zola qu'il a reconnu être dans la vérité." The narrator's paean to science continues on the next page of the novel, where he elevates scientific knowledge above all other forms of knowledge, "...on sent avec plaisir que la Science est quelque chose de tout autre que toutes les choses humaines et politiques" (651). For anyone familiar with the Recherche, the credulous, trusting attitude behind these statements from Jean Santeuil could hardly appear more different from the humorous skepticism that pervades Proust's masterpiece. Even more important for the present study is the fact that this naïve philosophical rhapsody in Jean Santeuil emerges directly out of a discussion of one of the Dreyfus Affair's central events, Zola's slander trial following "J'Accuse." The central relevance of the Dreyfus Affair to the philosophical content of Jean Santeuil suggests that a

basic alteration in the Dreyfus Affair itself, particularly a change in Zola's involvement in the Affair, could well have led to a change in the philosophical outlook of Proust's literature.

The vehement faith in science of Jean Santeuil's narrator certainly calls to mind Zola's novel Paris, where the priest Pierre Froment abandons Catholicism out of an emerging faith in a new religion of science. Even the suggestion that there is something joyous and manly about being confronted with the truth – “c'est toujours avec une émotion joyeuse et virile qu'on entend sortir des paroles singulières et audacieuses de la bouche d'hommes de science” – calls to mind Pierre Froment's joyous reclaiming of his manhood by leaving the emasculating death cult of Christianity to marry and have children. Key differences between Jean Santeuil and Paris are that science never becomes a dominant theme in the former novel and that Proust obviously never goes so far as to make a religion out of science. Nevertheless, anyone familiar with Paris and with the passionate tone and vocabulary of Zola's early Dreyfusard writings could not help but notice similarities to Jean Santeuil's passionate description of Zola's slander trial.

The influence of so powerful a personality as Zola in a scene where he is a central figure is, to a large extent, understandable. Nevertheless, the Proustian narrator here thinks and speaks remarkably like Zola, and this strong intellectual resemblance to the Dreyfus Affair's leading figure can also help explain the suddenness and force of a subsequent estrangement. It is important to note that Jean Santeuil does not resemble Zola's Évangiles, partly because the Évangiles actually contain fewer paeans to pure science than does Paris. Furthermore, the Dreyfus Affair scenes in Jean Santeuil were probably not influenced by the Évangiles, because those scenes were almost certainly written before Zola's final three novels began to be serialized in L'Aurore. There will be more explanation of this point in a moment, but the fundamental change in Proust's thinking about the Dreyfus Affair and, even more important,

the fundamental change in the way the scandal is depicted in his literature seems to coincide rather precisely with the beginning of the Évangiles' serialization in L'Aurore, the exact same newspaper that had previously published "J'Accuse."

The overarching goal here, of course, is to demonstrate that Zola's Évangiles constitute the primary epic intertext for the Recherche's basic mock-epic dynamic. In conjunction with the entire nineteenth-century tradition of melodramatic epic to which they belong, Zola's Évangile novels furnish the supremely melodramatic counterpoint against which the ubiquitous humor in the Recherche operates to its best advantage. Put another way, the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic endgame and the melodramatic epics to which it gave rise fill a sort of "missing link" that many scholars have noted in the Recherche. Indeed, writing in a very different context, Michael Riffaterre has explained that intertextuality, properly understood, consists precisely in filling a text's missing link through reference to some antecedent text, which may or may not be easily identifiable.

Riffaterre develops this pathbreaking theory in his essay "L'intertexte inconnu," a brief but highly influential contribution to the theoretical literature on intertextuality. Riffaterre bluntly says that most critical investigations on intertextuality make the mistake of emphasizing the search for an intertext and then the discovery of as many parallels as possible between that text and the main text (4-5). To Riffaterre, however, intertextuality involves much more than identifying earlier texts that bear some similarity and, hence, some possible relation to the main text. That sort of process of simply looking for parallels could go on forever without proving anything, he complains (4-5). Intertextuality is also more than literary allusion, the explication of which constitutes a very old-fashioned form of criticism (5). Properly understood, intertextuality is a highly productive absence or void in the main text that solves some problem or inconsistency by pointing outside the text. One of Riffaterre's greatest

innovations in this essay is the claim that understanding the problem, inconsistency, or void in the main text is more important than searching for the antecedent intertext. Indeed, the void can often resolve itself and enhance the meaning of the main text even if the intertext can never be identified. Cases where the actual intertext will never be known often arise with very old literature, such as medieval courtly romances, which might refer intertextually to earlier books of etiquette or earlier tales depicting conduct befitting a knight, books and tales that have probably been permanently lost (6). Even without the intertext, and even without any hope of precise knowledge about the intertext, patient examination of a main text can yield a highly productive awareness of an intertextual void.

None of this is to suggest that Riffaterre dismisses the importance of identifying actual intertexts wherever possible. He simply insists that, before anyone rushes off in search of all manner of possible intertexts for any given main text, a determination must first be made that there exists in the main text the kind of problem, inconsistency or void that only an intertext can solve. Riffaterre calls this crucial initial process looking for the “trace of the intertext” within the main text. In a key section of his essay, he compares the trace of the intertext to a kind of grammatical error in the main text.

L'accident historique qu'est la perte de l'intertexte ne saurait entraîner l'arrêt du mécanisme intertextuel, par la simple raison que ce qui déclenche ce mécanisme, c'est la perception dans le texte de la *trace* de l'intertexte. Or cette trace consiste en des anomalies *intratextuelles* : une obscurité, par exemple, un tour de phrase inexplicable par le seul contexte, une faute par rapport à la norme que constitue l'idiolecte du texte. Ces anomalies, je les appellerai des agrammaticalités. Le terme ne doit pas s'entendre au sens étroit de faute de grammaire : il couvre aussi bien toute altération de n'importe lequel des systèmes du langage – morphologique, syntaxique, sémantique, sémiotique. Ces agrammaticalités indiquent la présence latente, implicite, d'un corps étranger, qui est l'intertexte. Elles suffisent à provoquer chez le lecteur des réactions que l'identification de l'intertexte continuera et prolongera, mais qui au minimum se suffisent à elles-mêmes. (5) [Emphasis in original]

The beginning of this passage, talking about the “historical accident that is the loss of the intertext” refers primarily to medieval literature, which is the main focus of Riffaterre's essay.

According to Riffaterre, even more important than reconstituting the corpus of the intertext is determining the main text's presuppositions that lead the reader to sense an absence, an absence that can only be filled by some previously written intertext (6-7). Thus, an intertext's operational presence and even many of its qualities can be deduced, Sherlock Holmes-style, without any knowledge whatsoever of its identity. It is important to note that Riffaterre defines very broadly the "grammatical errors," the "agrammaticalités" that he sees intertextual references producing. Inconsistencies or gaps in meaning are sufficient to constitute such "agrammaticalités."

Riffaterre's pathbreaking essay does not explore the specific example of epic intertexts in a mock-epic dynamic. For that matter, Riffaterre never directly addresses the question of intertextuality in a comic framework. Nevertheless, his precise and rigorous understanding of intertextuality overall has great utility for the present attempt to reveal nineteenth-century melodramatic epic as the Recherche's main intertext. Proust's massive novel does indeed possess the *intratextual* anomalies and the gaps in meaning that Riffaterre says should always be the sign of intertextual references. In fact, generations of Proustian scholars have reached agreement about three major *intratextual* anomalies that exist in the Recherche, anomalies that this chapter will show all point to melodramatic epic for their resolution. The longstanding scholarly awareness of these three anomalies within Proust's long novel suggests an understanding, not always verbalized, that something outside Proust's text, something like a main intertext more cohesive and focused than any yet proposed, needs to be found to provide some explanation or resolution.

The first of these widely recognized anomalies has already been discussed at some length in this chapter. It is the Recherche's peculiar approach the Dreyfus Affair, an approach that seems all the more peculiar if viewed in light of Jean Santeuil's treatment of the same

historical event. Two scholars, Jean-Yves Tadié, perhaps the greatest living expert on Proust and general editor of the Pléiade edition of the Recherche, and Mireille Marc-Lipiansky, perhaps the greatest expert on Jean Santeuil, have argued that Proust's early writings should be viewed as forming an integral part of the later Recherche, which means that Jean Santeuil, differences and all, represents the unmistakable prologue to the later and much longer masterpiece (Marc-Lipiansky 16, Tadié Introduction x-xi). If Proust's two novels are viewed as forming but a single work, the need to explain their significantly different approaches to the Dreyfus Affair becomes all the more urgent. Other scholars who have recently expressed varying degrees of bewilderment at the discrepancy between the depiction of the Affair in Proust's two novels are Antoine Compagnon, Annick Bouillaguet, Jeanne Canavaggia, and Jacques de Ricaumont (Bouillaguet 36, Canavaggia 7-18, Compagnon Recherche 3851, Ricaumont 5-6).

The second major anomaly has to do with the absence within the Recherche of a clear approach toward mainstream politics in general. What makes this particular anomaly so troublesome is the fact that the Recherche presents itself as a kind of encyclopedia of culture and of life, and yet its "entry" on the kind of politics that dominates newspaper headlines seems so negligible. Scholars over the past two decades have increasingly come to view Proust's masterpiece truly as a kind of encyclopedia, to the point where the Recherche is now often referred to as a summa of all French and, indeed, of all Western culture (Compagnon Recherche 3836-3842, 3862-3868; Tadié Introduction x-xi, xxxv). In the general introduction to the most recent Pléiade edition of the Recherche, Jean-Yves Tadié writes that Proust's massive novel "récapitule...la tradition antérieure, de la Bible à Flaubert et à Tolstoï, et tous les genres littéraires. Enfin, il propose le rêve...d'une synthèse de tous les arts, peinture, musique, architecture" (x-xi). Tadié's reference to Tolstoy almost certainly does not

incorporate the antiaesthetic What is Art?; at least there is no indication at all that Tadié means to include this highly peculiar, typically overlooked treatise. Nevertheless, the idea that the Recherche draws upon positive lessons learned from Anna Karenina and War and Peace, while deriving comic inspiration from the disturbing cultural movement to which What is Art? belonged, is both plausible and fascinating. On the subject of the Recherche's encyclopedic qualities, Tadié continues, saying that Proust's huge novel recapitulates "non seulement la vie, mais la littérature et les autres arts. L'énorme système de citations, tantôt ironiques, tantôt sérieuses, du texte définitif, mais aussi des brouillons, complète cette synthèse, pour faire de l'œuvre la somme de celles qui l'ont précédée, une encyclopédie" (xxxv).

The problem with viewing the Recherche as an encyclopedia of life and of art is that it seems to have so little to say on the subject of mainstream politics. Compounding this problem immeasurably is the fact that the Recherche can hardly be viewed as the summa of all French literature, when so many French literary landmarks, at least since the eighteenth century, have been overtly engaged in politics. Between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, the issue of political engagement has been one of the dominant themes in French literary culture, and yet the Recherche's stance toward this major issue is either highly ambiguous or, more likely, outright dismissive. Antoine Compagnon has eloquently captured this anomaly in his discussion of how Proust, now recognized by many as the dominant French author of all time, in no way fits the image of the "great author," a concept that was elaborated in France during the nineteenth-century and that continues to hold great appeal this day. First, Compagnon states clearly the special status that has Proust has attained within the French literary tradition: "...Proust, depuis quelque temps et sans qu'on sache bien comment cela s'est passé, paraît avoir pris rang auprès de Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantès, et Goethe comme le géant de la littérature française que, d'une certaine manière, il absorberait en entier..."

(Recherche 3836). Compagnon then observes in real bewilderment that Proust does not conform whatsoever to the standard French notion of a great author.

Proust a survécu. Son œuvre nous paraît aujourd’hui la somme intégrale de toute la littérature française. Pourtant il ne ressemble nullement au modèle du grand écrivain français inventé par la III^e République...[Les] grands écrivains au pluriel, au sens d’une collectivité, d’un aréopage, d’un panthéon, de l’assemblée des saints laïques, sur le modèle des « grands hommes », n’existent pas avant le romantisme et la célébration d’une littérature nationale...Les grands écrivains sont patriotiques...[Ce] sont les pères de la III^e République, la ligne de crête de notre littérature, sur laquelle on progresse de génie en génie...Il semble que l’accélération...de l’histoire propre au XX^e siècle ait couronné et consommé de plus en plus vite de grands écrivains. Après Hugo, ils furent nombreux de leur vivant même, comme Anatole France, Gide, Valéry, Malraux, Sartre ou Camus...Or, paradoxalement, Proust, le plus grand, ne correspond nullement à ce modèle...Il ne pose pas de grands problèmes de société, à part ceux de Sodome et Gomorrhe. Rien chez lui d’un père fondateur de la III^e République ; non qu’on puisse dire qu’il ne fût pas républicain...S’il est vrai que [Proust] incorpore une bonne part de notre littérature, la grande absente, l’absente de marque, c’est l’intégralité du XVIII^e siècle, auquel Proust paraît avoir miraculeusement échappé : ni Voltaire, ni Rousseau, ni Diderot, qui prêchent les vertus civiques que la République voudrait inculquer, ne sont de ses livres de prédilection, et son roman ne saurait former des citoyens. (3838-3842)

Compagnon’s mention of “un panthéon” is clearly a reference to the Pantheon in Paris, the place where the French nation solemnly installs the remains of its greatest authors. Thus, France not only has a rather precise concept of a “great author,” it also has a specific place, an elaborate monument where these august figures are quite visibly laid to rest. Nor are these French literary traditions, both the “great author” concept and the Pantheon, as sexist and racist as they clearly once were. The recent entombment of George Sand and of the biracial Alexandre Dumas within the hallowed walls of the Pantheon attest to a conscious effort to diversify the French national concept of literary greatness (Ozouf “Les hommes de lettres” 5, Ivry “Will George Sand”). Yet in the midst of all this diversification of the French concept of literary greatness, one characteristic remains unalterably necessary for any author to attain such exalted status. Mona Ozouf, a leading French historian who has already been cited here on several occasions, explains in this chapter’s fourth epigraph that a certain amount

of conspicuous political commitment is required for any author to earn a place in the Pantheon. Ozouf explains that, rather than any specific political ideology, conspicuous devotion to the general political ideals of the 1789 Revolution constitute the *sine qua non* for entry into the Pantheon. This article by Ozouf appeared in the newspaper Libération in 2002, at the time of the entombment of Alexandre Dumas. Speaking as a representative of French scholarship and culture, Ozouf insists that the Pantheon remains symbolically important on the French cultural landscape. She also says that the ceremony of entombment, which harks back to the “pantheonization” of Voltaire at the height of the French Revolution, an event that was organized by the famous revolutionary painter David, also still holds great relevance today.

Yet Ozouf insists that three indisputably major French authors will never be judged worthy of inclusion in the Pantheon, and this precisely on account of their insufficiently clear political commitment. Proust is one of those three authors destined to perpetual exclusion from the Pantheon. Antoine Compagnon basically makes the same observation in the long passage cited above. He says that Proust does not at all fit the notion of the “grands écrivains au pluriel, au sens d’une collectivité, d’un aréopage, d’un panthéon, de l’assemblée des saints laïques...” The key term “secular saints” ‘saints laïques’ alludes to the very important fact that the French Pantheon was specifically and overtly conceived as part of the Revolutionary effort to devise a secular religion that could replace Christianity and assume the hegemonic position that Christianity long held. In other words, the French Pantheon is a huge and concrete symbol of the very same forces that this study has shown resulted in melodramatic epic, the forces that attempted to reinstate religious hegemony in post-revolutionary France, regardless of whether the attempt was made in the name of Christianity or in the name of hostility to Christianity. By taking melodramatic epic as the primary intertext for its mock-epic dynamic, the Recherche encompasses within its humor the very forces that produced the Pantheon. Far from ignoring

the 1789 Revolution, or the Pantheon, or the French literary tradition of political engagement, the Recherche has a great deal to say on these subjects, although it makes its comments mostly in a comic vein.

Nevertheless, there is at least an apparent void at the heart of the Recherche's ambition to be a summa of French literary history. This problem extends far beyond the question of whether Proust will ever be given the honor of burial in the Pantheon. In a direct and central way, it bears upon the interpretation of the Recherche itself, which matters a great deal more due to the special status that Proust's major novel has now attained. Riffaterre says that intertextuality operates on the basis of a perceptible void or absence, and Antoine Compagnon obliges by indicating a huge and glaring (apparent) absence within the Recherche: "la grande absente, l'absente de marque, c'est l'intégralité du XVIIIe siècle, auquel Proust paraît avoir miraculeusement échappé : ni Voltaire, ni Rousseau, ni Diderot, qui prêchent les vertus civiques que la République voudrait inculquer, ne sont de ses livres de prédilection, et son roman ne saurait former des citoyens."

The apparent absence in the Recherche of any interest in political engagement, reflected specifically in the negligible role that Proust accords the great politically engaged authors of the French eighteenth-century, has produced a concomitant hole in Proustian scholarship. Jacques de Ricaumont has observed the extreme dearth of studies on Proust and politics: "Il y près de 10,000 volumes parus sur Proust depuis sa mort, et, à l'exception de quelques thèses demeurées inédites comme beaucoup de travaux universitaires, pas un seul ouvrage n'a été écrit sur ses rapports avec la politique. Les auteurs d'études proustiennes consacrent au sujet un ou deux chapitres de leur livre, en insistant d'ordinaire sur le dreyfusisme de l'écrivain" (5). Ricaumont seems to exaggerate a bit on the total absence of published studies dealing specifically with Proust's relation to politics, but, his point is

nevertheless crystal clear. Jeanne Canavaggia makes the same point, but in a much funnier way: “Proust et la politique? En général, un interlocuteur auquel on poserait cette question répondrait avec un sourire: «les duchesses »” (7). The maneuverings within upper-class salons organized by fading duchesses and princesses certainly do not constitute the totality of politics within the Recherche, yet the role of mainstream politics in the novel does operate mostly through an intertextual, mock-epic absence that is highly productive and meaningful. In keeping with Riffaterre’s understanding of intertextuality, the nearly complete (apparent) absence of mainstream politics from the Recherche actually indicates its immense importance within the novel’s mock-epic dynamic.

The third basic anomaly revealed by decades of scholarship on the Recherche has to do precisely with the identity of the novel’s main intertext. The profusion of literary references, both explicit and implicit, within Proust’s novel makes it difficult to discern which intertexts are the most important. One may question altogether the need to identify a primary intertext for the Recherche; one may even doubt that such an identification is possible. Nevertheless, in key locations the Recherche claims for itself a distinct, if organic, kind of structure amidst its sprawling complexity. A coherent and sustained reference to some unified intertext seems one of the likeliest ways in which the Recherche structures itself amidst its own massive sprawl.

The difficulty of identifying the novel’s primary intertext and also the powerful incentive to do so are both illustrated by a crucial passage from Le Temps retrouvé, the last volume of the Recherche. One of the Recherche’s key features, a feature that is easily forgotten amidst the comings and goings of its many sharply defined characters, is that its narrative is fundamentally one of literary apprenticeship. The narrator of the Recherche, who is clearly the novel’s main character, is also a figure in search of his literary vocation. He does

not become convinced that he has the wherewithal – the talent, the time, the inclination, or the proper understanding of aesthetics – to actually be a writer until Le Temps retrouvé, the very end of the overall novel. In this final volume, the narrator ruminates over various works of literature that have shaped his understanding of the literary craft over many years. Two works that figure most prominently in his ruminations are the Thousand and One Nights and the memoirs of Saint-Simon. So conspicuous is the narrator's admiration for these two literary works that both have been cited within scholarship as primary intertexts for the overall Recherche.

There is some plausibility to this speculation. That is because the narrator not only concludes that he does indeed have a literary vocation, he also spends many pages planning his future novel, and the outline that he presents is usually read as a retrospective description of the Recherche itself. Due to the Recherche's brilliant and innovative circularity, the narrator is seen at the end describing the very novel that the reader has just spent many weeks poring over. What prevents this circularity from being tedious – it is, on the contrary, one of the novel's greatest successes – is that the retrospective description is not mere plot summary, but rather a kind of treatise on aesthetics, a treatise providing clues to the interpretation of the entire Recherche. Thus, when the narrator expresses profound admiration for both the Thousand and One Nights and Saint-Simon's memoirs, and when he ruminates as to whether his future novel should resemble these two celebrated works of literature, the justification appears strong for reading this section of Le Temps retrouvé as a declaration of the Recherche's own main intertexts. Yet, after a great deal of intelligent and fascinating contemplation, the narrator somewhat surprisingly decides that he cannot model his future novel after these two literary works that he likes so much, and it is precisely because he enjoys and respects them that he must renounce any plan to follow their example. In the pivotal

passage below, the narrator explains how his future novel must differ from two of his favorite literary works.

Ce serait in livre aussi long que *Les Mille et une Nuits* peut-être, mais tout autre. Sans doute, quand on est amoureux d'une œuvre, on voudrait faire quelque chose de tout pareil, mais il faut sacrifier son amour du moment, ne pas penser à son goût, mais à une vérité qui ne vous demande pas vos préférences et vous défend d'y songer. Et c'est seulement si on la suit qu'on se trouve parfois rencontrer ce qu'on a abandonné, et avoir écrit, en les oubliant, les « Contes arabes » ou les *Mémoires* de Saint-Simon » d'une autre époque. (621)

The most important part of this very revealing passage is the middle, where the narrator basically says that his future novel, which is usually understood as the Recherche itself, must not take as its main intertext literary works that are admired, esteemed and enjoyed. The narrator insists that he must sacrifice his love of the moment and not think about what appeals to him in literature when planning his novel. The narrator does not exactly say that he must, on the contrary, take as his main intertext literary works that he despises, but the aesthetic theory that he develops here distinctly leaves open that possibility. If Proust is not going to take the Thousand and One Nights and the memoirs of Saint-Simon, two works that he loved in real life, as his main intertexts, then he just may use melodramatic epics, works with many features that he certainly would have disliked, for that very purpose. There actually is evidence from within the Recherche that this is what happened, and that evidence will be presented here in a moment.

Isolated and taken out of the context of the rest of the Recherche, the passage above may seem to reject the entire notion of a primary intertext, in imitation of which or against which the author creates his own novel. In other words, the narrator may appear to be rejecting the conscious process that the use of a primary intertext almost by necessity involves. Such an interpretation would seem to gain plausibility from Proust's famous discovery of involuntary memory, which makes its contribution to the literary craft in a way beyond the writer's

conscious control. Nothing in the Recherche suggests that intertextuality operates by the same process as involuntary memory, however, and the abundance throughout the Recherche of elaborate literary references that are clearly planned and executed quite consciously militates against such an interpretation.

Proust's discovery of involuntary memory's usefulness in the process of artistic creation actually bolsters the claim that melodramatic epics serve collectively as the primary intertext for the Recherche. That is because Proust presents the (anti)aesthetic ideology behind melodramatic epics as the antithesis of the kind of involuntary memory that he deems crucial to the process of literary creation. Where and how Proust presents such an explanation will be explained in a moment, and the vocabulary that he will use certainly differs from the vocabulary that has been used here, but the very awareness in the Recherche of the artistic importance of involuntary memory can be seen emerging out of a rejection of the antiaesthetic promoted and exemplified by melodramatic epic. The Proustian narrator not only rejects the kind of antiaesthetic promoted by melodramatic epic, he rejects melodramatic epic itself, and he does so quite specifically, although, once again, his vocabulary differs from that used here. The "truth" 'vérité' that the narrator says in the passage above that he will find and follow while writing his novel is truly the process of involuntary memory, but he becomes aware of this process only after struggling with the demands of the heavy-handed didacticism of melodramatic epic. The struggle against those demands is imperative and crucial to literary creation, and it produces "une vérité qui ne vous demande pas vos préférences et vous défend d'y songer." This is not the kind of simplistic truth promoted in Zola's Évangiles, but a complex, unpredictable truth that rejects – or, more precisely, transcends – the rigid dichotomies of melodramatic epic.

A key factor that militates in favor of melodramatic epic as the primary intertext of the Recherche is its contemporaneity with the period described in the novel. As is well known, the Recherche focuses sharply on French society during a specific part of the Third Republic, and the fact that melodramatic epic was a literary phenomenon of the French nineteenth-century, including the period covered in the Recherche, increases the likelihood that this new epic sub-genre serves as the novel's main intertext. This factor is not dispositive, but it seems to work against the likelihood that much older texts and/or texts from entirely different cultures, such as the Thousand and One Nights, might have weighed this heavily in the formation of a novel that is so focused on the period contemporary with its creation. At the very least, there seems to be a higher burden of proof for any proposal that the Recherche might have either a very old or a non-French primary intertext. In a somewhat similar case, Joyce's Ulysses is a novel even more sharply focused on contemporaneous times, and the Odyssey's structural role in that text amply meets this higher burden of proof. Nevertheless, Ulysses goes to exceptional lengths to have an ancient Greek epic as its chief intertext, and the same probably cannot be said about the Recherche. In the passage cited above, the narrator may be seen hinting at his preference for a contemporary intertext by stating he will not model his novel after Saint-Simon's memoirs and that maybe, but only by chance, he will wind up writing "les *Mémoires* de Saint-Simon » d'une autre époque." This is simply another way of stating the preeminence of contemporary times in the Recherche.

The question of contemporaneity has not stopped scholars from suggesting numerous older and non-French primary intertexts for the Recherche. Indeed, as awareness of the Recherche's encyclopedic quality has grown, the number of its intertexts recognized within Proustian scholarship has skyrocketed. More problematic is the large number of disparate texts that are all claimed to be the Recherche's primary intertext. The drive to

identify a primary intertext for Proust's novel is unmistakable within scholarship, because it accords with an even more basic drive, the drive to find order within the novel's sprawling complexity. As Roger Shattuck and Malcolm Bowie, two leading contemporary Proustian specialists, both attest, the Recherche authorizes the quest for order amidst its dizzying intricacy. Shattuck and Bowie both eventually propose intertexts that fundamentally structure the novel's complexity. In terms of the basic quest for order, Shattuck writes, "Through the prolonged vegetable growth of the novel to some three thousand pages, working mostly in bed, Proust displayed astonishing organizational powers over his proliferating notebooks and drafts and typescripts. To his friend Louis de Robert he insisted on the novel's "very strict composition, though not easy to grasp because of the complexity" (161). Bowie agrees, writing,

A majestic respiratory rhythm is at work in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. On the one hand, the narrator of the novel has a mania for multiplicity, wants the world to contain more things rather than fewer, and stands guard over an unstoppable transformational machine. He speaks of the hundreds, thousands and millions of opportunities for new perception that the world affords, and of the novelist as an insatiable traveler in outer and inner space, always on the move and always driven by the demon of imagination to actualise the potential forms of things...

On the other hand, everything is connected to everything else in the remembering or fantasizing mind, and the oceanic swell which seems to bear the voyager onwards to ever-new destinations can easily bring him home to his habitual tastes and his over-familiar emotional landmarks. Structure, limitation and fewness have a way of reasserting themselves even as the narrator seeks to be convinced that an indefinite plurality or worlds lies at his feet. In *Le Temps retrouvé* a new parsimony is discovered on the other side of plenitude. (xiv-xv)

Bowie's reference to Le Temps retrouvé, the last volume of the Recherche, as the site of a new structural awareness within the novel is significant, because Le Temps retrouvé contains the clearest evidence that melodramatic epic serves as the main intertext for the overall novel. In terms of the fundamental or primary intertexts that Shattuck and Bowie each propose for the Recherche, there is only partial agreement between them. Both scholars point to the immense importance of the Thousand and One Nights; but Bowie adds Homer, Dante,

Vergil, and Hugo as key intertexts for the novel's mock-heroic quality (Bowie 104-105, 314-315; Shattuck 229-231). Bowie does not specify which work by Hugo he has in mind; but his inclusion of Homer, Dante, and Vergil clearly indicates that he is not thinking about the entire category of new, post-revolutionary French epic as the main intertext for the Recherche.

Other scholars, all of whom find abundant comedy in the Recherche and some of whom speak of the novel as a mock epic, propose different primary intertexts. Hollie Markland Harder discusses the importance Dante's Divine Comedy and Balzac's La Comédie humaine (136-137). The whole point of Albert Mingelgrün's study, Thèmes et structures bibliques dans l'œuvre de Marcel Proust is the intertextual significance of the Bible within the Recherche. Throughout her study Proust's Gods, Margaret Topping agrees with Mingelgrün about the importance of the Bible but places on a nearly equal footing the entire corpus of ancient Greek and Roman Myths.

In a brilliant new study released in 2004, Stéphane Chaudier identifies "religious language" at its most general as the intertextual, unifying element that runs throughout the Recherche. Chaudier goes on to demonstrate that the organizing metaphor for Proust's entire novel is the "secular cathedral" 'cathédrale profane' that the Recherche constructs out of its playful intertextual use of all sorts of religious language (499-502). Chaudier's view of the entire Recherche as a "secular cathedral," one constructed chiefly out of playfulness and humor, will obviously be helpful in demonstrating how Proust's novel responds intertextually to melodramatic epics, with their vindictive drive to portray the collapse of places of worship allied with religions that they condemn. Nevertheless, Chaudier does not provide a more focused main intertext for the Recherche than do Topping or Mingelgrün, who are also interested in Proust's literary use of religion.

Demonstrating a certain intertextual order within the Recherche in no way represents an attempt order to suppress or deny the novel's overwhelming diversity. Respect for this diversity characterizes all the studies referenced here, just as much as it characterizes the present study itself. As Malclom Bowie eloquently explains, there is order within the Recherche's amazing multiplicity, and proposing a new source for that order conforms to novel's most fundamental dynamic. For scholars who recognize and appreciate the mock-epic quality of the Recherche, the prestigious examples of intense mock-epic unity provided by Don Quixote and Ulysses, works that also harbor tremendous diversity with themselves, loom large.

Yet the case that the Recherche derives much, if not most of its order from intertextuality is somewhat less than compelling when such an abundance of primary intertexts is proposed. Not only is their number rather large, but the literary works put forward as filling this role come from vastly different time periods and differ greatly in most other respects among themselves. Riffaterre might be said to have anticipated this problem, because the studies proposing dominant intertexts do not primarily approach the question as one of resolving a basic anomaly within the Recherche. Furthermore, and with only the partial exception of Stéphane Chaudier's new work, none of these studies consider the likelihood that the mock-epic dynamic in the Recherche resembles that of Don Quixote, where the epic intertext itself is the butt of much of the humor. As explained in an earlier chapter, Cervantes ridicules the very Spanish and Portuguese chivalric romances that he takes as his main intertext. Other mock-epics, perhaps the majority, show great respect for the epics to which they allude, reserving their humor for deflating contemporary problems and foibles that they skewer through an extended comparison to an august past. Joyce's Ulysses and Pope's Rape of the Lock chiefly practice this kind of mock-epic dynamic. The passage from Le Temps

retrouvé where the narrator states that he will not pattern his novel after literary works that he likes suggests that Proust's approach is different. The proposals that the Bible, ancient myths, the Thousand and One Nights, and works by Homer, Vergil, Dante, Balzac, and Hugo are the main intertext for the Recherche all presuppose that Proust respects these works immensely and uses comparison to them to laugh at certain Belle Époque trends and attitudes.

The situation is somewhat more complex, however, especially where religion is concerned. The three scholars who delve into Proust's use of the Bible – Topping, Mingelgrün, and Chaudier – do state that the attitude expressed in the Recherche toward the Bible and religious tradition is not one of unalloyed respect. In fact, Proust can at times be humorously and playfully disrespectful toward religious tradition. Margaret Topping explains,

Proust approaches the texts he draws upon, whether the Bible, classical myths, or the plays of Racine, with a curious mix of irony and homage. The result is a remarkably diverse range of contexts onto which individual allusions are transposed, and a sliding scale of tones. These range from the idealizing to the burlesque, the comic to the mock-heroic, the compassionate to the ironic, and indeed a blend thereof. "Il nous a appris que les Dieux avaient des chaînes de montre." This comment, made by Degas about Gustave Moreau, was cited by Proust in a letter to Mme Strauss dated 1906, but with its suggestions of humanizing the sacred and deifying the human, it provides as fitting a description of Proust's own transformations as of Moreau's artistic vision, and exemplifies the blend of irony and homage identified above. (21-22)

Topping's most important observation has to do with Proust's unusual "blend of irony and homage" on issues related to the Bible and religion in general. Finding a connection between these two paradoxical approaches to religion that Proust blends together, the comical and the respectful, seems crucial, as does identifying Proust's reason for blending them. The Recherche's tendency to humanize the sacred and deify the human does not answer either of these questions, however. The incongruity that results from "humanizing the sacred and deifying the human" certainly provides the occasion for humor, but it does not by itself ensure a humorous outcome. A certain kind of humorous detachment from the spectacle of incongruity is also needed, but the key questions then become how, when, and why Proust

adopted exactly the detached perspective needed to make such incongruities involving religion so very humorous in the Recherche.

The intervention of the Dreyfus Affair's highly melodramatic conclusion provides an answer to these questions; and Proust's own evolving attitude toward Gustave Moreau, the artist that Topping references, begins to prove this point. Moreau was a leading figure of the French art establishment in the second half of the nineteenth century, and he specialized in large canvases depicting images from the Bible, mythology and other religious sources. Moreau's artistic legacy is complex, but two statements can safely be made about his work: first, that his use of religious imagery was clearly and even intentionally epic in scope, and second, that there is almost nothing comical to be found in his paintings. In a major study of Moreau released in conjunction with a 1999 exhibition of his work at the Art Institute of Chicago, Geneviève Lacambre describes the specifically epic inspiration behind his treatment of religious themes (1-3). The very name of Lacambre's study is Gustave Moreau: Between Epic and Dream. In an earlier scholarly work, Jean Selz makes a similar point about Moreau's epic scope (6-22). In the passage cited above, Topping quotes Proust quoting Degas making the observation that Moreau teaches viewers of his paintings that gods have watch chains. Topping says that Degas is referring to Moreau's tendency to humanize the sacred and deify the human, and this is clearly correct; but Degas's statement also mocks Moreau's epic pretensions. Thus, when Topping compares Proust's literature to Moreau's art, as she does at the end of the passage, she describes only half the dynamic that operates in the Recherche vis-à-vis religion. Comparing Proust to Moreau captures the religious incongruities that abound in the Recherche, but it does not account for the rich humor that permeates the frequent use of such incongruity in Proust's novel. In his paintings, Moreau humanizes the sacred and deifies

the human, but he does so without humor, and thus something about Proust's approach is very different.

The comparison to Moreau actually has much more significance than the passage cited above acknowledges. Proust's own writing, where he discusses Moreau at length, shows this. Proust was very familiar with Moreau's art, and he wrote about this well-known contemporary painter both at the beginning of his literary career and at the end, directly in the pages of the Recherche. There is a tremendous change over the years in how Proust writes about Moreau, and the biggest difference is the injection of highly sophisticated humor within Proust's later discussion of Moreau's paintings. The pattern of this evolution toward a comical perspective on Moreau corresponds well to the chronology being developed here showing the pivotal impact of the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic conclusion.

Over a decade before he started the Recherche, Proust wrote a long essay on Gustave Moreau which he left unpublished and untitled at the time of his death. The Pléiade series gives this essay the title "Notes sur le monde mystérieux de Gustave Moreau." Proust's essay on Moreau is utterly serious in tone and extravagantly in praise of this artist's work. Proust even says in the essay that he had recently traveled to Holland to view a special exhibition of Rembrandt's paintings, but that his subsequent visit to a collection of Moreau's paintings in Paris impressed him more (674, Carter 258-259). The precise date of composition of the essay on Moreau is not known, but William Carter explains that its relation to the trip to Holland means that Proust must have been written in late 1898, probably in October or November of that year (Carter 258-259). This means that Proust wrote his essay in praise of Moreau within the same period that he was writing the sections of Jean Santeuil dealing most directly with the Dreyfus Affair. There are many similarities between the description of Zola's trial in Jean Santeuil and the description of Moreau's art in the 1898 essay. In both works, Proust adopts

without any mental reservation at all the passionate perspective of these dominant French cultural figures, Zola in Jean Santeuil and Moreau in the essay. There is very little detachment, comic or otherwise, to be found in these texts. In the passage below from the essay, Proust acclaims Moreau's blending of the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine, and even of the animal and the divine. Proust's tone throughout is quite serious, even reverential, just like the mood conveyed by Moreau's canvases.

...les paysages de Moreau [sont] généralement resserrés dans une gorge, fermés par un lac, partout où le divin s'est parfois manifesté, à une heure incertaine que la toile éternise comme le souvenir du héros. Et comme ce paysage naturel et qui semble pourtant conscient, comme ces montagnes dont les nobles sommets où l'on va prier et où s'élèvent des temples sont presque des temples, comme ces oiseaux peut-être cachant l'âme d'un dieu, ayant un regard qui semble humain à travers leur déguisement et dont le vol semble dirigé par un dieu pour avertir, le visage du héros lui-même semble participer aussi vaguement au mystère que toute la toile exprime. (668)

Several aspects of the Recherche's approach to aesthetics can be found in this passage and in the much longer essay from which it was selected. In exquisitely crafted sentences, Proust here praises nature's divine beauty through his contemplation of Moreau's magnificent landscapes. Proust marvels at how, within Moreau's canvases, mountaintops become temples and birds become infused with a divine spirit, exhibiting a kind of religious awe before nature's grand spectacle. This is not unlike the attitude of the young narrator in the Recherche, who celebrates in quasi-religious terms the rich flora that surrounds his family's country home in Combray and the elegant landscaping of the Bois de Boulogne in Paris (Du côté de chez Swann 179-184, 414-420). Proust also approves wholeheartedly of Moreau's epic vision, which allows the human figures in his canvases, his "héros," to participate fully in the divine energy.

Later in the essay, Proust goes even further in praising Moreau. While studying Moreau's famous depiction of a woman carrying the severed head of the murdered Orpheus

on his lyre, Proust comes to the realization that painters and poets are fundamentally the same and that both are mythic figures in the tradition of the ancient musician Orpheus. Such ideas are almost clichés and would be unworthy of the highly original Recherche, but the young Proust conveys these notions with an elegant passion. He even imagines Moreau, who had just recently died, peering out at spectators through the eyes of the dead Orpheus; but then Proust reconsiders, concluding that the audience for his paintings mattered little to Moreau, very little compared to his own artistic achievement.

C'est ainsi que les poètes ne meurent pas tout entiers et que leur âme véritable, cette âme, la plus intérieure qui était la seule où ils se sentissent eux-mêmes, nous est dans une certaine mesure gardée. Nous croyions le poète mort, nous allions faire un pèlerinage au Luxembourg comme on va simplement, comme une femme portant la tête morte d'Orphée, devant la *Femme portant la tête d'Orphée* et nous voyons dans cette tête d'Orphée quelque chose qui nous regarde, la pensée de Gustave Moreau peinte sur cette toile qui nous regarde de ces beaux yeux d'aveugle que sont les couleurs pensées.

Le peintre nous regarde, nous n'osons pas dire qu'il nous voit. Et sans doute en effet, il ne nous voit pas, mais nous, si chers que nous le fussions, nous étions si peu de chose pour lui. Sa vision continue d'être vue, elle est devant nous, cela est tout ce qu'il faut. (671)

There is no comic detachment in this passage. Using the well-worn trope according to which all writers, whatever their genre, are poets, the young Proust, who aspires to be a great writer, clearly puts himself in the position of the murdered Orpheus and, later, into the position of the recently deceased Moreau. Too close an identification between writer and subject, too much sympathy felt by the former toward the latter, blocks the crucial process of comic detachment. The other religious imagery here is also filled with unalloyed solemnity. When Proust talks about making a "pilgrimage" to the Luxembourg gardens, there is not a trace of irony. In the Recherche, similar religious metaphors are either entirely ironic or else infused with a very subtle blend of both the ironic and the serious. Even the young narrator's quasi-religious celebration of nature's beauty early in the Recherche needs to be understood in the context of the lengthy process of disillusionment that occurs over the course of the novel's

many pages. Most of the young narrator's passions and illusions are burst over time, and the process of comical disenchantment in the Recherche often proceeds by means of some unexpected sexual revelation.

This is exactly what happens when Proust writes about Gustave Moreau over ten years later, in A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs. Moreau is used as the punch line to a very elaborate joke, and the core meaning of the joke is sexual. Recounting the joke here will take some explanation, and Moreau's name appears only at the end, but the humor is wonderfully complex and illustrative of Proust's skill at gradually building the comic force of his writing. At the beginning of A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, the young narrator, whose first name is Marcel, is on vacation by the sea in Balbec with his grandmother. They are staying at the Grand Hôtel in Balbec, where they meet a large number of people, both old and new acquaintances, who span the gamut of social class. While Marcel and his grandmother vacation in Balbec, his father and M. de Norpois, an old friend of Marcel's father, happen to be traveling together in Spain. Marcel's mother has remained in Paris and is sending occasional letters to Balbec, informing the youth about goings-on at home and about his father's travels in Spain. One day while taking a stroll outdoors, Marcel and his grandmother encounter a woman the young man has never met before, Mme de Villeparisis. What surprises Marcel is that Mme de Villeparisis seems already to know a great deal about him and even more about his father, including about his father's current trip throughout Spain. For example, Mme de Villeparisis already knows that the luggage belonging to Marcel's father and M. de Norpois, luggage that had previously been lost, has been recovered. She also knows about changes that Marcel's father and M. de Norpois have made to their travels plans. The narrator explains,

Quelques jours auparavant nous avions appris par une lettre de maman que mon père et son compagnon M. de Norpois avaient perdu leurs bagages.

- Ils sont retrouvés, ou plutôt ils n'ont jamais été perdus, voici ce qui était arrivé, nous dit Mme de Villeparisis, qui sans que nous sussions comment, avait l'air beaucoup plus renseignée que nous sur les détails du voyage. Je crois que votre père avancera son retour à la semaine prochaine car il renoncera probablement à aller à Algésiras. Mais il a envie de consacrer un jour de plus à Tolède car il est admirateur d'un élève de Titien dont je ne me rappelle pas le nom et qu'on ne voit bien que là. (II 61)

The “student of Titian” whose name escapes Mme de Villeparisis is El Greco, a revelation made in the next paragraph. There is a hint of humor in the fact that the very snobbish Mme de Villeparisis is not more familiar with the great painter El Greco, but the humor becomes much more intense a bit later. It turns out that the reason Mme de Villeparisis is so well-informed about Marcel’s father’s trip to Spain is that she is secretly carrying on an affair with M. de Norpois, the close friend of Marcel’s father and his traveling companion. The implication is that Norpois is communicating with Mme de Villeparisis by letter even more frequently than Marcel’s mother in Paris is with him. Proust does not spoil the humor by allowing his narrator to state bluntly at this relatively early stage of the novel that these two major characters are having an affair. The relationship between Norpois and Mme de Villeparisis becomes much clearer later in the narrative. Nevertheless, Swann has already alluded to their sexual affair much earlier in the story, but the young Marcel did not understand the allusion and is now left wondering in bewilderment.

Et je me demandais par quel hasard dans la lunette indifférente à travers laquelle Mme de Villeparisis considérait d'assez loin l'agitation sommaire, minuscule et vague de la foule des gens qu'elle connaissait, se trouvait intercalé à l'endroit où elle considérait mon père, un morceau de verre prodigieusement grossissant qui lui faisait voir avec tant de relief et dans le plus grand détail tout ce qu'il avait d'agréable, les contingences qui le forçaient à revenir, ses ennuis de douane, son goût pour le Greco, et changeant pour elle l'échelle de sa vision, lui montrait ce seul homme si grand au milieu des autres, tout petits, comme ce Jupiter à qui Gustave Moreau a donné, quand il l'a peint à côté d'une faible mortelle, une stature plus qu'humaine. (II 61)

As promised, the reference to Gustave Moreau appears at end, as the ultimate punch line to an elaborate joke, but other aspects of this scene require commentary before there can

be discussion of Proust's comical reference to the epic painter. Proust develops an intricate comic metaphor that runs throughout this passage involving a telescope "la lunette" that the snobbish Mme de Villeparisis is imagined using as she regards the people that surround her. This woman who is Norpois's mistress has already behaved in a somewhat arrogant way earlier in her encounter with Marcel and his grandmother, so her snobbery is well established. The metaphor of a snob keeping her distance from the people around her by viewing them through a telescope is therefore perfectly suited to Mme de Villeparisis. Proust makes overt the metaphor's implication that anyone viewing the world through such a telescope considers those around her as being, quite literally, "little people" who are so far beneath her that they require a special optical instrument to be perceived. The one exception to this rule seems to be Marcel's father, who benefits from a special lens inserted automatically in Mme de Villeparisis's telescope every time she views him. This special lens through which she views Marcel's father turns him into a giant, so hugely visible that she can see and learn everything about him. About Marcel's father, Mme de Villeparisis has already learned using this special lens "ce qu'il avait d'agréable, les contingences qui le forçaient à revenir, ses ennuis de douane, son goût pour le Greco." Then comes the punch line, which is that, to Mme de Villeparisis, Marcel's father is like the god Jupiter surrounded by Lilliputian mortals in one of Gustave Moreau's many mythological and religious paintings.

The targets of the elaborate humor in this scene are many. The most important target, however, is the narrator himself, or at least his youthful, naïve, and ignorant self who experienced this encounter with Mme de Villeparisis at the seaside resort of Balbec. The young Marcel is gently ridiculed for not understanding the effects of snobbery and, above all, for not understanding how sexual relations work. Mme de Villeparisis is not genuinely in awe of Marcel's father, as the young Marcel thinks. She feigns great interest in his father, simply

because his father is a very close friend of her lover. The bifurcation of Marcel into his older and wiser narrating self and his younger, naïve self, the younger self that undergoes the experiences being narrated, is probably the greatest comic device in the entire Recherche. In truth, Proust manages to obtain even more comical perspectives on Marcel through additional, simultaneously activated divisions of the character from even more stages of his life, but discussion of the two most basic divisions will do for now. Through this division, Proust obtains the necessary emotional detachment for brilliant self-deprecating comedy. In other words, Proust makes himself, or at least his narrator, the target of his greatest humor. The fundamentally self-deprecating quality of the humor in the Recherche carefully buffers the impact of all its other forms of comedy, which can seem quite tough and cutting. The other humor in the novel, directed at other targets, has any possible meanness eliminated by the fact that the narrator primarily takes himself as target. The sharpness and the toughness of the comedy usually remain, but any possible angriness or viciousness dissolves away.

The ridicule directed at Marcel the child and young adult also constitutes one of the many ways that the Recherche responds comedically to the conventions of melodramatic epic. As seen in many of this study's previous chapters, melodramatic epic tends to obsess over the moral training of young people. Keeping young people innocent and ignorant of sexual matters is a top priority of melodramatic epic, and nowhere was this clearer than in Leo Tolstoy's What is Art?, where anxiety over art's corrupting influence is so great that the standard for all future artistic and literary production is made out to be suitability for consumption by young children. By making fun of the extreme sexual naïveté of the young Marcel, a naïveté that lasts well into his young adulthood, the entire first half of the Recherche simultaneously makes fun of one of the chief obsessions of melodramatic epic, preserving the sexual innocence/ignorance of the young. There are additional reasons for interpreting the rich

comedy deriving from the young Marcel's sexual naïveté as a direct response to the (over)emphasis on children in melodramatic epic, but the evidence for that will be presented here later.

The sexual content of the humor in this scene in Balbec is actually much greater than what has so far been described. The character Mme de Villeparisis stands at a crucial node in a vast network of sexual comedy in the Recherche, because she is related to the aristocratic Guermantes family. Mme de Villeparisis is the aunt of Charlus and the great-aunt of Saint-Loup, the novel's two leading gay male characters. In fact, Marcel makes his first acquaintance with both Charlus and Saint-Loup through Mme de Villeparisis. Her secret affair with Norpois points to and is ultimately dwarfed by the mountain of secrets surrounding the homosexuality of Charlus and Saint-Loup. In spite of its enormous size, the Recherche really is tightly constructed, which means that a single event such as the encounter with Mme de Villeparisis in Balbec has powerful ramifications in many different directions. The humor of sexual secrecy lodged within just this one scene branches out far beyond Mme de Villeparisis herself. The clear implication is that the Guermantes family has many more sexual secrets, and much funnier ones, than hers.

The epic painter Gustave Moreau certainly receives his share of comic barbs in this scene. The reverential tone with which Proust spoke of Moreau in the 1898 essay has vanished without a trace. Although the telescope metaphor is not scathingly funny at his expense, the famous painter of Biblical and mythological scenes has nevertheless been reduced to an inventor of images that unwittingly depict the operation of snobbery. The mysterious and mystical content for which his paintings were renowned has been comically stripped away and explained through comparison to the workings of a scientific instrument. Moreau may have humanized the sacred and deified the human, but a telescope, along with any number of other

new technical inventions, produces similar “miracles” of its own. Proust is certainly not being antiaesthetic in his comedy, however. The reference to El Greco seems basically respectful, with Mme de Villeparisis’s forgetting of his name reflecting more on herself than on this great Spanish painter. Through Moreau, melodramatic epic takes the brunt of the comic attack. This study cannot be the place to determine conclusively whether Moreau’s art fits the definition of melodramatic epic established earlier here. In fact, Moreau’s paintings clearly lack the obsession with sexual conservatism that this study has made a hallmark of melodramatic epic. Moreau’s art was well known for its risqué sexual content, and a key reason Proust once admired his paintings was because of their large number of androgynous figures (Kaplan 7-8, Proust Notes 670, Carter 259). Nevertheless, scholarship on Moreau has already established the many epic qualities of his art, and the sheer theatricality of his paintings seems to have resulted in numerous other melodramatic qualities. Moreau’s artwork was also clearly part of the late nineteenth-century French religious reawakening, the cultural movement that had such a large impact on melodramatic epic. Julius Kaplan has written, “Like many late nineteenth-century idealist thinkers, who were appalled by the materialism of their society, Moreau too concluded that Christian mysticism and idealism offered the final solution to his dilemmas” (53).

The literary movement most closely associated with Moreau’s art is Decadence, along with its offspring Symbolism (Kaplan 50, Mathieu 251-256). Moreau’s greatest admirer in French literary circles was Joris-Karl Huysmans, the leader of the Decadents (Kaplan 50, Lacambre 2, Mathieu 251-254). Des Esseintes, the protagonist of A Rebours, the novel by Huysmans credited with giving rise to the Decadent movement, adores Moreau, collects his Biblical tableaux, and goes into raptures contemplating the paintings by Moreau that he owns (Huysmans 123-132). Huysmans and the entire Decadent movement constituted one strain of

the religious reawakening, as Ellis Hanson documented recently in his study Decadence and Catholicism. Hanson explains how Huysmans's writing, Moreau's art, and the Decadent movement overall opened up space for innovative approaches to sexuality in art and literature (1-26). In other words, the Decadents found a way to reconcile the renewed interest in religion with pioneering investigations into sexuality and sexual diversity. Proust was surely responding in a positive way to this sexually open-minded strain of the religious reawakening in his essay praising Moreau, whereas Zola was surely condemning it in his attack on contemporary art within his novels Paris and Fécondité. What the present study seems to show, however, is that the sexual openness that emerged within the Decadent strain of the religious reawakening was suppressed by the reassertion of strict morality at the end of the Dreyfus Affair. Although there will not be sufficient time to pursue this topic in any depth here, the reconciliation between religion and sexual diversity that the Decadents achieved in the 1880s and 1890s seems to have been nullified when the puritanical morality that lies at the core of melodrama reemerged with a vengeance after 1898. As a matter of fact, Gustave Moreau died in 1898, just as the intense melodrama of the anticlerical campaign was getting underway, and the comic barbs that Proust directs at the painter in the Recherche seem to suggest that the Moreau's mystically epic approach to religion and sexuality failed its greatest test in the crucible of the Dreyfus Affair's religious wars.

There is further evidence in the Recherche that Proust is mocking Moreau's epic decadence. In the middle of the well-known section "Un amour de Swann," Swann wonders whether the money that he is giving to his new mistress, Odette de Crécy, makes her "une femme entretenue" "a kept woman." He thinks back to how, in the past, the phrase "une femme entretenue" always made him recall Gustave Moreau's mystical paintings depicting diabolically dangerous women. Swann has difficulty perceiving as diabolically dangerous the

sweet woman with whom he has just fallen in love; and yet he also realizes that, objectively speaking, Odette really is a kept woman, based on the fact that she depends on the large sums of money that he gives her. The humorous implication is that, confronted with real romantic and sexual situations, Gustave Moreau's sensational, mytho-religious images appear simply ridiculous. Just as the ominous Biblical tale of Sodom and Gomorrah presides in mock-epic fashion over the entire second half of the Recherche, as an increasing number of characters are revealed to be homosexual, Gustave Moreau's sinister, mytho-religious images of the female form preside in similarly mock-epic fashion over Swann's agonizing efforts to discern whether Odette's love for him is genuine or is instead tainted by ulterior motives.

Un jour que des réflexions de ce genre le ramenaient encore au souvenir du temps où on lui avait parlé d'Odette comme d'une femme entretenue, et où une fois de plus il s'amusait à opposer cette personnification étrange: la femme entretenue, - chatoyant amalgame d'éléments inconnus et diaboliques, serti, comme une apparition de Gustave Moreau, de fleurs vénéneuses entrelacées à des bijoux précieux, - et cette Odette sur le visage de qui il avait vu passer les mêmes sentiments de pitié pour un malheureux, de révolte contre une injustice, de gratitude pour un bienfait... En effet, si ce mois-ci il venait moins largement à l'aide d'Odette dans ses difficultés matérielles qu'il n'avait fait le mois dernier où il lui avait donné cinq mille francs, et s'il ne lui offrait pas une rivière de diamants qu'elle désirait, il ne renouvellerait pas en elle cette admiration qu'elle avait pour sa générosité, cette reconnaissance, qui le rendaient si heureux, et même il risquerait de lui faire croire que son amour pour elle, comme elle en verrait les manifestations devenir moins grandes, avait diminué. Alors, tout d'un coup, il se demanda si cela, ce n'était pas précisément l'"entretenir" (comme si, en effet, cette notion d'entretenir pouvait être extraite d'éléments non pas mystérieux ni pervers, mais appartenant au fond quotidien et privé de sa vie...) (263-264)

Significant humor comes from the fact that Odette is not at all as sweet and honest as Swann believes her to be, but the Recherche will expose Odette's flaws humorously over the course of her numerous interactions with other characters throughout the rest of the long narrative. Viewed either way – either in relation to Swann's indulgent view of Odette in the flush of new romance, or in relation to the novel's later revelations of Odette's many flaws and weaknesses – Gustave Moreau's mystically epic images of women are made to look ridiculous by comparison. The end of this passage captures admirably well Proust's basic

method of comic deflation vis-à-vis epic Manichaeism. Through comedy, he exposes the seemingly mysterious and perverse as being just everyday details of private life. Yet even as he is deflating epic illusions of the mysterious and perverse, Proust also comically reveals how the everyday details of private life are far more complicated, interesting and baffling than the illusions that he is in the process of puncturing. For example, Swann's tortuous speculations as to whether Odette loves him for himself or for his money appear much more complicated and interesting than Moreau's paintings of she-devils.

Further demystification of the epic view of spirituality and sexuality vis-à-vis Moreau occurs in a scene set within the mansion of the Duke and Duchess de Guermantes. Entertaining friends with her outré opinions and anecdotes, the duchess tells about a visit she once made to the home of a family with a great deal of Empire-style furniture (Le Côté de Guermantes 807-811). The piece of furniture that the Duchess de Guermantes most admired was an ornately carved bed located in the bedroom of the son of the family. At the time she visited, the son was sick and confined to this elaborate bed, which had at its head a large wooden carving of a mythological Siren. According to the duchess, the sick young man, whose head rested near the carving of the Siren, resembled Moreau's painting Le Jeune Homme et la Mort, which depicts a young and dying male poet descending into Hades, with a female image of death by his side. This comparison seems lovely, if a bit absurd, until the moment when Oriane comically deflates her own story by admitting how ugly the sick young man was in real life and how he really only suffered from a head cold. He was healthy and fit again in short order. In other words, confronted with reality, Moreau's epic images of beautifully androgynous young poets descending into Hades seem absurd.

Le fils est même très agréable... J'ai été le voir une fois pendant qu'il était malade et couché. A côté de lui sur le rebord du lit, il y avait sculpté une longue Sirène allongée, ravissante avec une queue en nacre et qui tient dans la main des espèces de lotus. Je vous assure, ajouta Mme de Guermantes,...c'était émouvant; c'était tout à fait

l'arrangement du *Jeune Homme et la Mort* de Gustave Moreau. Votre Altesse connaît sûrement ce chef-d'œuvre."

La princesse de Parme, qui ignorait même le nom du peintre, fit de violents mouvements de tête et sourit avec ardeur afin de manifester son admiration pour ce tableau....- Il est joli garçon, je crois? demanda-t-elle.

- Non, car il a l'air d'un tapir. Les yeux sont un peu ceux d'une reine Hortense pour abat-jour. Mais il a probablement pensé qu'il serait un peu ridicule pour un homme de développer cette ressemblance, et cela se perd dans des joues encaustiquées qui lui donnent un air assez mameluck. On sent que le frotteur doit passer tous les matins. Swann, ajouta-t-elle revenant au lit du jeune duc, a été frappé de la ressemblance de cette Sirène avec *la Mort* de Gustave Moreau. Mais d'ailleurs, ajouta-t-elle d'un ton plus rapide pourtant sérieux afin de faire rire davantage, il n'y a pas à nous frapper, car c'était un rhume de cerveau, et le jeune homme se porte comme un charme." (809-810)

This particular deflation of Moreau's mystical and epic symbolism may be the most significant one of all from the Recherche, because it comedically smashes the absurdly grandiose aesthetic perspective that Proust once obtained from Moreau's paintings. By extension, Oriane de Guermantes's comical anecdote also smashes the general nineteenth-century French drive toward mytho-religious epic. The nexus of poet, painter, and mythological figure that Proust developed in his 1898 essay on Moreau is humorously dismantled in the duchess's story. Indeed, Proust's 1898 infatuation with Moreau's depiction of the dead Orpheus's penetrating eyes contrasts in a perfectly comical way with the absurdly languorous eyes of the sick young man who is compared here to Moreau's image of a dying poet. The eyes of the sick young man – and, by implication, those of the dying poet in Moreau's painting – “sont un peu ceux d'une reine Hortense pour abat-jour.” On top of that, the young man is ugly as a tapir and a waxen-faced Mameluke. Clearly, Proust's understanding of aesthetics changed enormously after he wrote the 1898 essay on Moreau. Le Temps retrouvé contains the best description of his new aesthetic, and the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic conclusion plays an important role in its formulation. How this is so will be discussed shortly.

Until now, scholars of both Proust and Moreau have emphasized how greatly the author of the Recherche esteemed the epic painter's art, but the evidence for this esteem all comes from early in Proust's career. The references to Moreau in the Recherche are all of the comically deflating variety, with Moreau's epic and mystical pretensions clearly among the chief targets of Proust's sophisticated humor. An understanding of melodramatic epic and of Moreau's close connection to the cultural movement that promoted this genre helps in understanding the vast change in attitude toward this painter found in Proust's writing over the span of more than a decade, a period that included the end of the Dreyfus Affair.

The arc of the career of Joris-Karl Huysmans, the author who championed Moreau's art the most vigorously, actually recapitulates the chronology that this study has revealed in the evolution of French culture at the end of the nineteenth century. The chief contribution made here, of course, is the discovery of an intensely melodramatic period in French culture and politics that lasted from 1898 to about 1904, the period of the Dreyfus Affair's anticlerical campaign. A principal cultural feature of this period was the emergence of an antiaesthetic ideology based on highly conservative sexual views. Huysmans was a leading figure of the religious reawakening that began in France the mid-1880s, and his novel A rebours triggered the Decadent strand of that movement. By the mid-1890s, however, Huysmans had converted to Catholicism, and his fiction became concerned with religious themes that were much more conservative than the daring blend of religion and sexuality exhibited in A rebours. By the time of the Dreyfus Affair's anticlerical campaign, Huysmans was fiercely anti-Dreyfusard and deeply interested in the defense of Catholic Church's political prerogatives in France (Beaumont 177-178). As has been seen here with many other writers and critics of this period, Huysmans's writing took a turn toward the moralistic; and, indeed, his anxieties over the

moral content of literature led him to give up writing fiction altogether soon after the turn of the century. Barbara Beaumont explains,

One feels that by the turn of the century Huysmans had virtually given up on the novel form; indeed, he produced no more fiction after L'Oblat. And so, paradoxically, he who had, as early as the mid-1880s, pointed the way forward for future pioneers of the novel such as James Joyce and Marcel Proust had either not known how to develop, or had lost interest in developing further those tentative steps he took with Des Esseintes in A Rebours towards the stream-of-consciousness approach to novel writing. A shift in Huysmans' own perspective on life seems the most likely explanation for this situation. The direction of his life changed radically after his conversion, which brought with it a shift in priorities. He was now far more interested in content than in form; the aesthetic, which still held pride of place in his artistic canon, was now to be combined with a moral and didactic purpose. (9)

What the conclusions of the present study might add to scholarship on Huysmans, as exemplified by Beaumont's work, is the finding that his abandonment of fiction due to "moral and didactic" interests probably formed part of a much larger trend that was taking place at the same time, the turn of the century. Indeed, an excellent study remains to be done on the parallels between Huysmans's final religious novels and the Évangiles of his former Naturalist mentor, Emile Zola. Only the suggestion can be made here that Huysmans likely contributed to the intensely melodramatic and antiaesthetic conclusion of the Dreyfus Affair, but the possibility is so tantalizing and Huysmans was so pivotal a figure in many of the cultural trends under discussion here, that the suggestion is well worth making.

In the Recherche, Proust does not only make fun of the religious pretensions of melodramatic epic, he also mocks the genre's tendency to denounce contrary or alternative views on religion and aesthetics. One way Proust makes fun of the shrill denunciations of melodramatic epic is actually by showing respect for what the genre denounces, which can be Christianity, paganism, or secularism, depending on the religious perspective of any given melodramatic epic. In other words, Proust finds a way to make demonstrations of respect for a variety of religious views humorous, at least vis-à-vis the typical intolerance of melodramatic

epic. This helps explain Margaret Topping's observation that the Recherche contains an unusual "blend of irony and homage" toward religious subjects.

Stéphane Chaudier's new study, Proust et le langage religieux : La cathédrale profane, complements Topping's work perfectly by adding an important insight concerning the intensity of the irony and respect exhibited toward religion in the Recherche. Chaudier explains that what makes Proust's approach to religion so remarkable is the intensity of its blend of irony and respect. Such intensity is unusual and exceedingly difficult to maintain, particularly when both registers are functioning within a single literary device, as often happens in the Recherche. The second epigraph to this chapter comes from Chaudier's study and begins to make this point concerning the intense religious paradox in the Recherche: "L'œuvre et le style de Proust témoignent d'une véritable passion pour les signes religieux. Emprunts à la Bible, à la théologie catholique, clichés littéraires, fragments de discours historiques...[sont] cités par le texte ludiquement encyclopédique de la Recherche" (10). Chaudier adds later,

Dans l'œuvre de Proust, le vocabulaire religieux et chrétien témoigne à la fois d'un vif intérêt pour les croyances religieuses et d'un refus énergique de reconnaître l'autorité spirituelle des églises, des organisations religieuses. Si Proust se soustrait à l'autorité d'une personne divine qui serait puissance de salut pour les hommes, il n'est pas indifférent à la passion religieuse qui anime les hommes, à la beauté d'une telle expérience et à ses dévoiements. C'est pourquoi le texte manifeste une irrépressible tendance à penser le monde avec les mots empruntés au domaine religieux judéo-chrétien. L'œuvre joue de ce paradoxe. Elle se nourrit des tensions entre le vocabulaire religieux et les sujets profanes dont elle traite. (15)

The best way to describe this major paradox that Chaudier finds in the Recherche is as a refusal to choose between Christianity and opposition to Christianity, a refusal to choose between support for Christian culture, Jewish culture, ancient pagan culture, and even modern scientific culture. Within the thousands of pages of the Recherche, Proust insists upon and

exercises the radical freedom to adopt any or all of these stances at any given time, as well as the freedom to humorously blend all of them in constantly varying proportions.

This insistence on the freedom not to choose any exclusive position concerning religion, particularly for the sake of his literary craft, and then the decision to suffuse the entire religious question with a sophisticated form of comedy seem to stand most directly in opposition to the tradition of melodramatic epic. Of course, Joyce, too, blends the Christian, the Jewish, the pagan, and the secular in a humorous bath within Ulysses. Yet Chaudier correctly says that the Recherche sets itself apart by creating the fundamental metaphor of the novel as a secular cathedral, secular not in the sense of being aggressively anti-Christian, but rather secular in the expansive sense of encompassing seemingly opposed traditions (437-447). Le Temps retrouvé contains one of Proust's clearest explanations of the novel as a secular cathedral patiently constructed by the author (609-610). Chaudier reveals that the Recherche architecturally constructs itself out of the materials of religious paradox. The opposite of this procedure seems clear. Proust's paradoxical blend of approaches to religion represents on a meta-level a humorous rebuke of texts that lack nuance and that viciously oppose each other in the name of phony religious distinctions. Whether Christian or anti-Christian in inspiration, melodramatic epics unwittingly reveal the hollowness of their differences through their similar endorsement of sexual conservatism and of an antiaesthetic censorship in the literature and the arts. With their grandiose and humorless ambition in the domains both of religion and aesthetics, melodramatic epics collectively have a clear relation, albeit a negative one, to the entire Western cultural and religious tradition.

This makes melodramatic epics the perfect intertexts for Proust's mock-epic dynamic, because Proust can oppose them by exhibiting either respect or humorous disrespect for the diverse religious and cultural traditions that this nineteenth-century epic sub-genre almost

inevitably attacks. Proust can make fun of the plentiful denunciations in melodramatic epic both by showing genuine respect for that which they denounce and by making humor out of what they denounce, because both humor and respect defuse the extreme anger behind such denunciations. The ironic and the respectful registers both serve to make fun of melodramatic epics, which therefore seem to be the Recherche's main intertext. In Proust's massive novel, even the respectful appropriation of religious terminology serves a higher level of comedy vis-à-vis melodramatic epics. This amounts to the discovery of a new layer to the comedy in the Recherche, a novel whose comedy that has long been recognized as being very multilayered. This also reveals within Proust's novel an order derived from intertextuality at a higher level than the intertextual patterns already discovered in previous scholarship. The use of melodramatic epics as the Recherche's primary intertexts has the advantage of leaving abundant room for the undeniable intertextual flows that occur between Proust's novel and all the other works that have been cited over the years as the novel's main intertexts.

Given that the category of melodramatic epic has never before been identified as the primary intertext for the Recherche, it obviously goes without saying that knowledge of this epic sub-genre is not required for appreciating Proust's brilliant humor. This may lead some to wonder about the real importance of these texts within Proust's novel. Riffaterre's theory of "the unknown intertext" 'l'intertexte inconnu' can shed light on this question. Riffaterre explains that an intertext operates and makes an important contribution even when its identity is unknown – indeed, even when its identity is completely unknowable. This raises the possibility that careful readers of the Recherche, readers sensitive to its richly layered, progressively building humor, may, over the course of its thousands of pages, develop intuitively the image of an epic that serves as foil for the novel's mock-epic humor. This process may not even take place in a fully conscious way, but if such readers were to verbalize

their mind's-eye image of the Recherche's epic foil, their description might closely resemble the definition of melodramatic epic provided here. After all, without any knowledge of Zola's Évangiles or of other melodramatic epics, one might easily conclude that the epic foil for such a richly comic and encyclopedic work as the Recherche would be a text that was Manichaean, highly moralistic – especially in sexual matters, humorless or nearly so, disdainful of aesthetics, opposed to large segments of humanity's literary and cultural heritage, vehemently passionate rather than humorously detached or intelligently enthusiastic, politically engaged in an exceptionally intense but rather conventional way, religious in a very conservative sense, rigid in its views on matters of class and economics, and flat in tone rather than ranging widely and deftly over the scale of literary tones.

This idea of semi-consciously deducing an unknown primary intertext may seem ridiculous to some, but Riffaterre's theory seems to lend credence to such a possibility. Furthermore, all by themselves, the typical characteristics of melodramatic epic, even without knowledge of any actual such epics, do seem to comprise a perfect epic foil for the Recherche. This is true not simply because one set of characteristics defines "bad" literature, while the characteristics of the Recherche define great literature. There are many ways that literature can be bad, and if melodramatic epics are indeed to be called bad, they are bad in such a way that make them perfect comic foils for Proust's Recherche. That seems like more than mere coincidence.

The fact that melodramatic epic has not been identified before as a key intertext for the Recherche surely means that its intertextual presence in Proust's novel is far from obvious. This may raise doubts as to how strong the evidence for this sub-genre's intertextual role in the Recherche actually is, apart from mere suppositions and hypotheses about its likely role. The precise quality of the evidence will be assessed here in a moment, but a preliminary

remark worth making is that melodramatic epic is not so invisible within Proust's novel as to make it an unknowable intertext of the type that Riffaterre discusses. Neither, however, does melodramatic epic have as conspicuous an intertextual presence as do most of the examples of intertext cited by Gérard Genette in his landmark study, Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré.

Although Genette's masterly and influential work takes into account a wide variety of intertexts, most of his examples involve very easily identifiable primary intertexts, which he calls hypotexts. In fact, Genette discusses a large number of well-known mock-epics, most of whose hypotexts are readily identifiable. Another sign of Genette's preference in Palimpsestes for easily identifiable intertexts is his extended discussion of pastiche in Proust's writing, including within the Recherche (88-140). For example, Le Temps retrouvé includes a famous, clearly identified, and lengthy pastiche of the Goncourt journal (287-295). Proust's fondness for pastiche is well known and Genette's extended discussion of this phenomenon in his writing attests to that. Pastiche differs significantly from the kind of intertextuality involving melodramatic epic being described here, because pastiche is not always humorous and depends for its effect entirely on knowledge of the intertext. Nevertheless, Proust's frequent use of pastiche bolsters the present study, because it clearly indicates his fondness for writing in imitation of other texts – writing, as Genette would put it, “in the second degree.” The fact that the visibility of melodramatic epic in the Recherche falls somewhere in between Riffaterre's and Genette's preferred degrees of visibility is a result of several factors. Two of those factors are the relative paucity of scholarship on this kind of epic and the lack of a clearly defined concept of this sub-genre both in Proust's day and ours, which hinders understanding what Proust is referring to even when he is at his most specific on this subject in the Recherche.

Before turning to Le Temps retrouvé, which contains the Recherche's most direct reply to the challenge of melodramatic epic, there is another important matter to dispose of – dating as precisely as possible the change in Proust's attitude toward the Dreyfus Affair. As stated earlier, Proust's personal opinion about the Affair matters far less here than the evolution of his literary representation of the scandal. That remains true, but there exists on this subject important evidence that blends the personal and the literary and that also speaks directly to the issue of the date of the change in attitude and approach. Another scholar, Annick Bouillaguet, has already collected and highlighted the most relevant evidence, and she has recently pinpointed as closely as possible the transition in Proust's perception of the scandal. Furthermore, Bouillaguet's evidence supports the claim that the religious warfare that broke out at the end of the Affair played a major role in changing how Proust thought and wrote about the scandal. Bouillaguet herself does not notice this relationship to the anticlerical campaign, but her evidence nevertheless points to it. In her article, "Marcel Proust devant l'affaire Dreyfus," Bouillaguet examines a great deal of Proust's fictional and personal writing on the Affair. She pays especially close attention to changes in how Proust wrote about the scandal within his vast personal correspondence.

Bouillaguet has identified 1899, particularly the end of 1899, as the pivotal moment in the transition of Proust's attitude from passionate engagement in the Affair on the side of the Dreyfusards to, at most, tepid and somewhat detached interest in the scandal (35-36, 39). Bouillaguet consults many different texts to establish this chronology, but the most important document is a long letter that Proust wrote to his mother on September 22, 1899. This date, September 22, 1899 was three days after Alfred Dreyfus was pardoned by the president of France for the crime of espionage for which Dreyfus had been convicted and sent to Devil's Island over four years earlier (Johnson 143-145). By any objective measure, the pardoning of

Dreyfus was a major turning point in the Affair. The pardon freed Dreyfus from having to serve any more time in prison, and it meant that he would never again be prosecuted in any court, civil or military, for any of the crimes related to the Affair. A pardon does not, of course, wipe the legal slate clean. In the eyes of the law, Dreyfus was still considered guilty of the crimes for which he had been convicted. That reason alone would probably have made the pardon controversial, even within the Dreyfusard camp itself. Some Dreyfusards did, in fact, argue that for the sake of his honor Dreyfus should not accept a mere pardon, which left his original conviction untouched (Johnson 143-144).

The pardon generated much more controversy than this among Dreyfusards, however, and for entirely different reasons. As Martin Johnson has explained, the question of “the pardon and the amnesty definitively shattered the Dreyfusard leadership,” because for the more radical Dreyfusards, “the Affair was larger than Dreyfus, it was a sacred fight for their visions of a Republic, a heroic fight whose outcome would shape France for decades to come” (143-145). In other words, radical Dreyfusards opposed the pardon, because they feared it would drain away the emotional energy their side had invested in the Affair, energy that they wanted to use to bring about a full-scale transformation of their country. Central to the revolution that they hoped for was shrinking, if not eliminating, the power of Catholicism in France (Johnson 143-146).

The anticlerical campaign still took place, of course, and it was a battle of tremendous ferocity, a battle that showed few signs of having been drained of energy by the granting of the pardon. Nevertheless, the moment of the granting of the pardon marked a highly visible divide between those Dreyfusards who were fighting primarily for Alfred Dreyfus’s freedom and exoneration and those Dreyfusards who were fighting primarily to weaken the Catholic Church, bring socialism to France, and create an alternative, quasi-religious creed out of faith

in progress, republican ideals, and socialism. For Proust, the granting of the pardon coincided with a general loss of interest in the Affair, and the letter of September 22, 1899 suggests that this was because of his staunch disapproval of the religious war that the radical Dreyfusards were in the process of unleashing. In fact, Annick Bouillaguet presents other letters from a bit earlier in 1899 showing that Proust's passion for the Dreyfus Affair had already begun to wane over a month prior to the pardon (35). The letter of September 22, 1899 marks a decisive rupture in Proust's thinking, however, as will be shown in a moment.

All of this goes to show not merely that Proust's passion for the Dreyfus Affair waned as the anticlerical campaign was gaining force, but that Proust's Dreyfusard passion waned in the period shortly after Zola's Évangiles began to be serialized in L'Aurore, the leading Dreyfusard newspaper. Fécondité, the first of Zola's Évangiles, began appearing in L'Aurore on May 15, 1899, just three months before Bouillaguet notices a clear drop in Proust's interest in the scandal. There is actually no direct evidence that Proust read the Évangiles, but there is plenty of evidence that he read L'Aurore, the newspaper that serialized Zola's final novels. First, the Dreyfusard petition that Proust himself signed, the famous "Manifeste des intellectuels," was published in L'Aurore on the day after "J'Accuse." Proust not only signed this manifesto, he solicited signatures from other writers, most notably from Anatole France (Bouillaguet 34). Jean Santeuil mentions L'Aurore in glowing terms (651). In the Sodome et Gomorrhe volume of the Recherche, Proust twice emphasizes the fact that the Prince de Guermantes, whose opinion was evolving in a Dreyfusard direction, read L'Aurore scrupulously every day (107, 109). Thus, there can be little doubt that Proust, who once described himself as "le premier des Dreyfusards," read conscientiously the leading Dreyfusard newspaper, which automatically means that he was exposed to the Évangiles in serial form (Bouillaguet 36).

Furthermore, although there is no proof that Zola's Évangiles were directly responsible for producing Proust's change of attitude, the fact that clear signs of Proust's waning interest in the Affair appeared only a few months after Zola's sexually reactionary novels started running on a daily basis in L'Aurore suggests, if not exactly cause and effect, then at least a significant impact. Zola's stature as the virtual leader of the Dreyfusards would have made the Évangiles all the more shocking, because in them Zola appropriates Dreyfusard rhetoric to promote an antiaesthetic and sexually very conservative agenda. In addition, although this study dates the Affair's melodramatic conclusion from 1898 – the year in which Zola's Paris, Tolstoy's What is Art?, and Brunetière's combat speeches first appeared – the Évangiles, being much more aggressively reactionary on sexual matters even than Paris, would logically have made a greater impact on Proust. Finally, there is a suggestion in Le Temps retrouvé that Proust, or rather the narrator Marcel, required some time to realize the full antiaesthetic implications of the cultural movement that developed at the end of the Dreyfus Affair, which might explain the year-and-a-half delay in Proust's reaction (460).

The contents of Proust's September 22, 1899 letter clarify these issues even more. This letter that Proust wrote to his mother while he was on vacation in Evian-les-Bains is the first chance that he has had to communicate his opinion to her on the pardoning of Dreyfus from three days earlier. In fact, Proust admits that he first learned of the pardon from his mother herself, in a letter she sent him a day or two before. Yet Proust does not say anything at all about the pardon of Dreyfus until very late in the letter. The first two things one notices about Proust's comments on the pardon are how late those comments appear in the letter and how brief they are – only eight lines in a letter of more than one hundred and twenty. Given the undeniable importance of the pardon for everyone interested in the Affair, Bouillaguet takes these simple facts alone as powerful evidence of Proust's disenchantment with the

scandal (36). Yet what Proust actually says is more shocking still. He uses quotations from two of Molière's most famous comedies to explain his reaction to the pardon. The two comedies are Les Femmes savantes and Tartuffe, both of which use brilliant humor to address the kinds of religious issues that were beginning to cause turmoil in France in the form of the anticlerical campaign. Short as it is, the passage on the pardon from Proust's September 22 letter is richly allusive and will require significant commentary. This is what he wrote to his mother on the subject:

J'ai appris par ta lettre la grâce de Dreyfus (il a dû dire à ses inflexibles partisans qui ne voulaient pas de la grâce « guenille si l'on veut (ou plutôt loque, puisque on dit toujours loque humaine), ma guenille m'est chère ». Mais c'est sincèrement que je dis « le pauvre homme ») (180)

The "inflexibles partisans" of whom Proust speaks are the radical Dreyfusards who opposed the pardon "la grâce de Dreyfus" on the grounds that they wanted to continue exploiting the furor of the scandal to bring about a new revolution in France, especially by staging a religious war against the Catholic Church. The fact that Proust is complaining about anticlerical warriors becomes clear from the two brief Molière quotations, but just as clearly evident is Proust's understanding of how the anticlerical campaigners intended to create a dangerous new religion of their own. Proust's choice of two biting satirical phrases from Molière to describe his reaction to the momentous event of Dreyfus's pardoning leaves Bouillaguet stunned. Referring to the fact that a year and a half before, Proust had been earnestly collecting signatures from prominent individuals for the "Manifesto of the Intellectuals," Bouillaguet writes about these few lines in the September 22 letter,

Mais comme on est loin de l'ardeur du chasseur de signatures de l'année précédente ! Dreyfus bien ou mal gracié, l'affaire semble sans rapport avec les préoccupations du moment, réduite à huit lignes de plaisanteries dans une lettre qui en comporte plus de cent vingt, plutôt futiles et où l'on voit Dreyfus assimilé lors de son unique apparition à des personnages proche de la farce. (36)

The phrase “plutôt futiles” ‘rather trifling’ refers to the fact that the rest of letter in which the eight lines about Dreyfus’s pardoning are buried is made up of a rapid succession of banal remarks about trivial social events. The frivolous context for his remarks on the pardon underscores further Proust’s loss of interest in the Affair.

The source of the two Molière quotations conveys most of Proust’s meaning, however. Short as they are, they convey a tremendous amount of meaning. The phrase “guenille si l’on veut ma guenille m’est chère” comes from Les Femmes savantes and forms part of the two-line reply, “Oui, mon corps est moi-même, et j’en veux prendre soin. / Guenille si l’on veut, ma guenille m’est chère” (107). The full reply, which is uttered by the character Chrysale, translates as “Yes, my body is myself, and I intend to take good care of it. It’s a rag perhaps, but one of which I’m fond” (Wilbur 530). Chrysale is a browbeaten, unambitious husband whose domineering wife, Philaminte, takes enormous pride in her erudition. Philaminte is the leader of the group of learned ladies for which the comedy is named. The philosophy that Philaminte teaches to her coterie of intellectually ambitious women is a kind of neo-Platonism transformed into a prudish and puritanical set of moral principles. Put simply, Philaminte’s philosophy is antisex, antimarriage, and preoccupied with ridding the human language of all words, and even of all sounds, that might offend the most delicate moral sensibilities (Les Femmes savantes 78-79, 131-132). In other words, Philaminte promotes an agenda remarkably similar in its extreme puritanism to the agenda that Brunetière, Tolstoy, and Zola, with some individual modifications, adopted at the height of the Dreyfus Affair’s intensely moralistic, melodramatic conclusion. Using the briefest of quotations from perhaps France’s most brilliant satirist prior to himself, Proust epigrammatically conveys precisely what troubles him about the moment of Dreyfus’s pardon, namely that the historic event is about to touch off a religious war with harmful consequences

for both aesthetics and the welfare of sexual minorities. The harm will come about through a two pronged, coordinated assault on both aesthetics and sexual diversity, and, as early as September 1899, Proust signals that his reaction will be one of relentless mockery.

What prompts the browbeaten Chrysale to reply that his body may be no more than a rag, but it was one that he intended to take care of, is a high-minded lecture from his wife Philaminte about the need to commit oneself entirely to spiritual and intellectual matters at the expense of the body. Of course, in the context of Dreyfus's pardon, Proust is simply saying that Dreyfus must have told his most radical supporters that, whether or not the pardon fully restored his honor, he was surely going to accept it, because there was not a snowball's chance in hell that he would voluntarily return to Devil's Island. As is so often the case with Proust, however, this literary reference contains many layers of meaning, most of them comic, and the funniest and most interesting are not the most obvious. The lines from Philaminte that immediately precede Chrysale's plea about his body being precious at least to himself are the following:

Que ce discours terrible asomme!
Et quelle indignité, pour ce qui s'appelle homme,
D'être baissé sans cesse aux soins matériels,
Au lieu de se hausser vers les spirituels !
Le corps, cette guenille, est-il d'une importance,
D'un prix à mériter seulement qu'on y pense,
Et ne devons-nous pas laisser cela bien loin ? (107)

In quoting Chrysale's reply, Proust is also clearly alluding to these lines from Philaminte that prompted the reply. In the increasingly moralistic and vitriolic cultural climate in which Proust penned this allusion, Philaminte's faux-elegant expression of disgust at bodily matters and her exhortation to lift oneself up toward the spiritual world stands not only as ridicule of the extremes of the late nineteenth-century French movement toward idealism, but also as

mockery of Zola's attempt to condemn those extremes with characters such as Hyacinthe Duillard from Paris and Charles Santerre from Fécondité.

The other short phrase that Proust quotes from Molière – “le pauvre homme” ‘the unfortunate man’ – comes from none other than Tartuffe, the very title of which is a byword for religious hypocrisy. The brevity and ordinariness of the phrase “le pauvre homme” might make it seem impossible to ascertain with certainty that Proust is referring to Tartuffe. After all, people utter this phrase every day without alluding to Molière. Nonetheless, Proust puts “le pauvre homme” in quotation marks, which indicates that he is citing another text. In addition, the proximity to the quotation from Les Femmes savantes leaves little doubt that Proust is still citing the master comedian Molière. Finally, Tartuffe contains an entire scene that turns on the repeated use of the phrase “le pauvre homme,” so Proust quite clearly makes use of the special meaning that this ordinary phrase acquires in the context of Molière's celebrated comedy.

Proust actually takes comedic advantage of the simultaneous ordinariness of the phrase and the special meaning that it acquires from Molière. On the most ordinary level, Proust calls Alfred Dreyfus ‘the unfortunate man’ out of sympathy for his ordeal as a recently returned inmate, a man who has to settle for a pardon rather than full exoneration. Through reference to Molière's Tartuffe, however, “le pauvre homme” becomes a comic attack on the religious hypocrisy of the anticlerical campaigners who were then gearing up for battle. In the fourth scene of Molière's play, the religious imposter Tartuffe is repeatedly called “le pauvre homme” by the man he has duped most thoroughly with his religious charade. The gullible fool who falls for the charade is Orgon, the owner of the house where the parasitic Tartuffe has taken up residence. As the maid Dorine recounts to her master everything that his houseguest Tartuffe has done that particular day, Orgon bursts out with the lament “le pauvre

homme” at the mention of every one of Tartuffe’s activities (35-36). Orgon’s uses this lament repeatedly, even though Dorine is trying to explain to him how Tartuffe has been taking advantage of his generosity, living in high style at Orgon’s expense. So convinced has Orgon become of Tartuffe’s piety and asceticism, however, he does not pay attention to what the maid is telling him, lamenting “le pauvre homme” at practically every mention of Tartuffe’s name, even though the lament is grossly inappropriate. In Proust’s letter, the religious hypocrite is not Alfred Dreyfus, the man who is called “le pauvre homme.” The satiric force of Molière’s use of this phrase is re-directed, taking as its target Dreyfus’s ostensible supporters, the religious warriors who would prefer that he refuse the pardon so that they can continue exploiting the scandal’s energy to attack the Catholic Church. Proust is thus saying that Dreyfus is unfortunate, because he has to put up with a bunch of Tartuffes who claim to be his supporters, when in fact they really just want to exploit his cause to start a religious war.

Combined with Bouillaguet’s research tracing the chronology of Proust’s change of attitude vis-à-vis the Affair, close analysis of this pivotal letter written by Proust just after Dreyfus’s pardon reveals that the future author of the Recherche grew alienated from the Dreyfusard cause in the second half of 1899. The September 22 letter strongly suggests that the reason for his disenchantment was the accelerating anticlerical campaign, a campaign that gave rise to the antiaesthetic and sexually reactionary melodrama that characterized the late stages of the Affair. Finally, Proust’s use of the two Molière quotations reveals that his response to these troubling cultural and political developments will take the form of highly sophisticated comedy. Brilliant as his epigrammatic references to Tartuffe and Les Femmes savantes are, the humor in the Recherche, written over a decade later, is even more complex and ingenious.

Annick Bouillaguet and the editor of Proust's collected correspondence both identify the source of the two Molière citations in the September 22 letter, but neither explores the deeper significance of Proust's selection of these particular citations from Molière. Perhaps no one who has read the September 22 letter in recent decades has perceived the sarcasm that Proust was directing toward the toxic politico-religious climate of the late Dreyfus Affair. The concept of melodramatic epic, combined with an understanding of the strong melodramatic shift that took place in the Affair starting in 1898, explains fully this part of the September 22 letter, even as it explains a great deal about Proust's fiction that would otherwise be opaque.

CHAPTER 8

MARCEL'S DIGRESSION IN LE TEMPS RETROUVÉ: CONTEMPLATING THE COMIC REVERSAL OF MELODRAMATIC EPIC

...[*A la recherche du temps perdu*] offre cette originalité de comporter un avant-dernier chapitre vers la fin du *Temps retrouvé* qui fournit au lecteur l'explication complète de tout ce qui précède (IV 433-496). Ces soixante pages peuvent être lues comme l'un des principaux traités d'esthétique au XXe siècle... Cette œuvre qui, à la fin, livre son mode d'emploi, inspirera la structure de fictions nombreuses au XXe siècle.

Luc Fraisse, L'Esthétique de Marcel Proust (12)

Aussi la meilleure partie de la jeunesse, la plus intelligente, la plus désintéressée, n'aimait-elle plus en littérature que les œuvres ayant une haute portée morale et sociologique, même religieuse. Elle s'imaginait que c'était là le critérium de la valeur d'une œuvre, renouvelant ainsi l'erreur des David, des Chenavard, des Brunetière, etc.

Marcel Proust, Le Temps retrouvé (471-472)

N'imitons pas les révolutionnaires qui par "civisme" méprisaient s'ils ne les détruisaient pas les œuvres de Watteau et de La Tour, peintres qui honoraient davantage la France que tous ceux de la Révolution.

Marcel Proust, Le Temps retrouvé (467)

Ce travail qu'avaient fait notre amour-propre, notre passion, notre esprit d'imitation, notre intelligence abstraite, nos habitudes, c'est ce travail que l'art défera, c'est la marche en sens contraire, le retour aux profondeurs, où ce qui a existé réellement gît inconnu de nous, qu'il nous fera suivre.

Marcel Proust, Le Temps retrouvé (474-475)

The explanatory power of this new understanding of melodrama becomes most evident when applied to the interpretation of what may be the most important section of Proust's Recherche. Le Temps retrouvé, the final volume of this vast *roman-fleuve*, contains a

sixty-page digression that provides the key for understanding all the rest of the novel. This is the section of the Recherche where the narrator concludes that he does, in fact, have a literary vocation. After thousands of pages in which his quest for a vocation has been stymied by self-doubt and obscured by his complicated interactions with the novel's numerous other sharply-drawn characters, the narrator reaches the end of his quest with an extended rumination on aesthetics. Marcel discovers that the impediment to his success and productivity as a writer has been all along his confusion about aesthetics. The pivotal sixty-page digression in Le Temps retrouvé thus constitutes a kind of treatise on aesthetics, in which Marcel realizes the mistakes of his former view of literary creativity and perceives a significantly different artistic path to follow. Quite unlike the aesthetic pronouncements deriving from melodrama that this study has examined so far, Marcel's discoveries on aesthetic do not shut down major avenues of artistic and literary creativity, nor do they condemn vast swathes of the Western cultural tradition. Nevertheless, the new insights presented within this crucial digression do take shape in opposition to a particular and contrary view of aesthetics, and that contrary view is the one that informs melodramatic epic. The rest of this chapter will show how, through the meditations of his narrator at this late stage of the Recherche, Proust rejects the fundamental impulse behind melodramatic epic, including its tendency to restrict severely the permissible areas of artistic exploration, especially in the area of sex. In rejecting the impulse behind melodramatic epic, Proust is not rejecting or condemning an aesthetic alternative to his own. Instead, Proust is defending aesthetic diversity itself and merely rejecting the antiaestheticism that melodrama pushed to its extreme promotes.

Mainstream scholarship on the Recherche considers Marcel's aesthetic discoveries in Le Temps retrouvé to be so crucial and revealing that the sixty-page digression is read not only as a retrospective commentary on all the rest of the Recherche, but also as a statement of

Proust's personal opinions on the process of artistic creation. The thesis of this study does not require acceptance of the latter view, although it does require perceiving the sixty-page digression as the single most important guide that the Recherche gives for its own interpretation. Most Proustian scholars support attributing this kind of significance to what is, essentially, a brilliantly written and wide-ranging essay inserted near the end of Proust's monumental achievement in fiction. Germaine Brée explains,

In terms of the narrator's life [*Time Regained*] brings into focus the whole span of events that precede it, dissolving "that aggregate of logical reason" that he "had called life" and replacing it by a new point of view acquired in a dramatic and urgent finale that elicits his re-evaluation of all that went before. It is also an essay, nominally written by the narrator, which addresses itself to the reader. It unfolds in technical terms, from the point of view which the narrator has just attained, the principles of composition of the narrator's future work.

Time Regained is in essence the mold that shaped Proust's novel, although it purports to shape the non-existent future novels of the narrator. It is thereby a key to the drama of the novel's construction. (231-232)

Not limiting her remarks here to the sixty-page digression, Brée writes more generally about Le Temps retrouvé in its entirety. Although the entire final volume of the Recherche does contain important insights on aesthetics, the most important section in this regard, the section where the key discoveries are explained in full, is in fact the digression. The phrase "nominally written by the narrator" makes clear that Brée considers the opinions on artistic creativity from the final volume of the Recherche to be, in fact, Proust's own. More important is Brée statement that the final volume is "the mold that shaped Proust's novel" and "a key to the drama of the novel's construction."

Luc Fraisse, one of today's leading specialists on Proust, has written specifically about the extended digression, for which he makes even bolder claims than Brée does for Le Temps retrouvé overall. In his study L'Esthétique de Marcel Proust, Fraisse calls the digression "one of the principal aesthetic treatises of the twentieth century," directly responsible for shaping a large portion of twentieth-century fiction. Fraisse is surely correct in

this assessment, because, as will be seen in a moment, the digression contains the most elaborate and cohesive development of the concepts for which Proust is most famous, concepts such as involuntary memory, metaphor, and the transcendence of time. Fraisse explains,

...[A *la recherche du temps perdu*] offre cette originalité de comporter un avant-dernier chapitre vers la fin du *Temps retrouvé* qui fournit au lecteur l'explication complète de tout ce qui précède (IV 433-496). Ces soixante pages peuvent être lues comme l'un des principaux traités d'esthétique au XXe siècle. François Mauriac a dit son étonnement de voir ainsi un romancier, après deux mille huit cent pages de récit, abandonner brusquement ses situations et ses personnages, prendre le lecteur au collet et lui enjoindre d'écouter maintenant ce qu'il avait voulu faire. Cette œuvre qui, à la fin, livre son mode d'emploi, inspirera la structure de fictions nombreuses au XXe siècle. (12)

Referring to the digression in Le Temps retrouvé as the “mode d'emploi” ‘the user’s manual’ of the entire Recherche attributes to these sixty pages precisely the role they need to have to show convincingly that Proust took melodramatic epic as his main intertext when writing his vast novel. The parenthetical information that Fraisse provides, (IV 433-496), indicates the page numbers of the digression in the most recent edition of the widely used Pléiade edition of the Recherche.

Another perspective on the importance of the sixty-page digression comes from Roger Shattuck, a leading expert on Proust now for several decades. Shattuck has recently explained how Proust developed the central aesthetic ideas from the digression before he began writing the Recherche and how these ideas fundamentally shaped the novel from the moment that Proust began writing it (169-171).

Given the scholarly consensus on the crucial role played by the essay on aesthetics that Proust inserts in the final volume of his novel, a fundamental reinterpretation of these sixty pages would likely produce a reinterpretation of the entire rest of the novel. In short, if the sixty-page digression can be shown reacting powerfully, systematically and

comprehensively against the principles that this study has already shown to undergird melodramatic epic, then the case can plausibly be made that the rest of the Recherche constitutes a much longer and more desultory repudiation of those same principles.

Although the narrator's elaboration of his final artistic vision has been referred to here as a digression and an essay, Proust does make an effort, arguably a successful one, to integrate Marcel's extended ruminations within the plot of the final volume. François Mauriac, as quoted by Luc Fraisse above, clearly did not agree that Marcel's long aesthetic revelation meshes well with the narrative of Le Temps retrouvé. Yet there are ample reasons to disagree, even with as prominent a figure as Mauriac, on this score. Strictly in terms of the plot of the final volume, Marcel has a perfect rationale to embark on a long meditation on artistic creativity. His extended reflections take place at a time when he has recently been ill, having just returned to Paris after a stay in a sanitarium. Marcel is truly at a crossroads in his life, and he remains disquieted by his continuing inability to decide whether he has the skill and temperament to be a great writer. He is also painfully aware of his own mortality and very unsure about how to employ his talent and energy in the years that remain to him. The specific occasion for the digression – if one were to continue referring to it by that name, certainly the most convenient of those available – is a contextually quite real interruption in the narrative flow. Having arrived late at a morning reception being given by the Princesse de Guermantes at her home, Marcel is required by a butler to wait by himself in the mansion's library while the other guests finish listening to a musical performance that is taking place behind closed doors. The Princess has given strict orders that the performance is not to be interrupted. With literally nothing to do, Marcel can only entertain himself with his own thoughts. As it turns out, some seemingly inconsequential events from earlier in the day have already put him in the right frame of mind to reach major new insights on the difficulties facing him at this stage of

his life. In addition, a library is the perfect setting, both practically and symbolically, for what will turn out to be a hugely important aesthetic revelation.

Further integrating Marcel's extended meditation within the narrative flow is the fact that his reflections are not limited, strictly speaking, to aesthetics. World War I rages in the background throughout all of Le Temps retrouvé, and Marcel's thoughts at times wander in the direction of the awful conflict. Yet Marcel's ruminations also touch significantly upon the subjects of politics, religion, and social change; and he considers these subjects in a broad historical perspective, most particularly from the perspective of French history since the Revolution of 1789. Simply put, there is much more in these sixty pages than what readers, including experts on Proust, typically focus on. Much of the evidence for the argument that melodramatic epic is the Recherche's top intertext comes from those parts of the digression that are usually overlooked or mentioned only in passing provide. Overlooked or not, the passages to be analyzed here are substantial ones that form an integral part of the section justifiably referred to as the "user's manual" of the Recherche. The digression is, genuinely, very tightly organized, with each of Marcel's unfolding ideas closely and inextricably connected to all the others. Thus, the passages that point most clearly to melodramatic epic stand in close relation to the much better-known passages that develop the concepts of involuntary memory, metaphor, and the transcendence of time. Indeed, Proust develops his most celebrated aesthetic ideas directly in reaction against what melodramatic epic represents.

A good example is the citation below, taken from the very middle of the digression. In this passage, Marcel expresses his new realization that art must capture a reality that is far removed from and much deeper than everyday reality, the plainly visible reality most easily accessible to the senses. Marcel describes the process of discerning this deeper reality in terms of two instances of involuntary memory that he experienced shortly after entering the

Guermantes' library. These highly significant involuntary memories were prompted by the slightest, most ephemeral of events, the clinking of a spoon upon a saucer and the swipe of starched napkin across the lips. Nevertheless, Marcel explains how these tiny events, along with the flood of important memories that they triggered, constituted for him a spiritual renewal much greater in impact than all the discussions that he ever had on precisely those issues that preoccupy the genre of melodramatic epic.

La réalité à exprimer résidait, je le comprenais maintenant non dans l'apparence du sujet mais dans le degré de pénétration de cette impression à une profondeur où cette apparence importait peu, comme le symbolisaient ce bruit de cuiller sur une assiette, cette raideur empesée de la serviette qui m'avaient été plus précieux pour mon renouvellement spirituel que tant de conversations humanitaires, patriotiques, internationalistes, et métaphysiques. (461)

The language in this short passage remains, admittedly, on a somewhat abstract and general level, but that very quality makes this a good quotation to present first from the sixty-page digression. Later citations from the digression will demonstrate the great specificity of Marcel's complaint against melodramatic epic. Here, however, Marcel rather clearly sets the process of literary creation in opposition to discussions of humanitarian, international, and metaphysical issues – precisely those issues on which melodramatic epic tends to pontificate in a highly contentious manner. The fact that the term “humanitarian epic” has been, along with the term “romantic epic,” the most common name for the literary genre that this study renames “melodramatic epic” obviously bears great relevance to Marcel's dismissive attitude toward “humanitarian conversations.”

Although patriotism may seem contrary to the universalist aspirations of the ambitious form of humanitarianism advocated by this genre, intense patriotism, even outright chauvinism, appears frequently in these works. Thus, Marcel's equally dismissive attitude toward “patriotic conversations” takes on new meaning in this light. Examples of the blending of humanitarianism and patriotism are scattered all throughout Zola's Évangiles. The

“apostles” Mathieu, Luc, and Marc Froment aspire ultimately to reform all humanity through their creed of fecundity, work, and truth; but their immediate aim is to transform all of France, the country that they hope will go on to lead the rest of the world in moral regeneration. As the absurdly optimistic schoolteacher Marc Froment explains in Vérité,

Il n’était qu’un rôle digne de la France, achever la Révolution, être l’émancipatrice... Quand la France entière saura et voudra, quand elle sera le peuple libéré, les empires les plus bardés de fer crouleront autour d’elle, envahis par son souffle de vérité et de justice, qui fera ce que ne feront jamais ses armées et ses canons... Marc ne concevait pas de plus beau rôle pour son pays, il mettait la grandeur de la patrie dans ce rêve de fondre toutes les patries en une même patrie humaine. (1149-1150)

The scheme to colonize “ancient, mysterious Africa” ‘l’antique, Afrique mystérieuse’ with the burgeoning French population at the end of Fécondité is another example of how melodramatic epic often blends chauvinism with universalist humanitarianism, or at least what the genre itself considers to be universalist humanitarianism (445-447).

Unlike melodramatic epic’s tendency to condemn alternative aesthetic views, Marcel does not angrily reject humanitarian, internationalist, metaphysical, and patriotic approaches to art. He merely comes to the realization that such approaches will not likely result in superior art and literature. Indeed, such preoccupations, along with the form of political engagement that they represent, can block artistic creation completely. Humanitarian, internationalist, metaphysical, and patriotic preoccupations can impede artistic creativity in several different ways. One way is very simple: any aspiring artist whose mind is engrossed by these concerns will not have available the mental and emotional reserves that the hard work of artistic creation requires. Another kind of impediment is more ominous for aesthetics generally: a large-scale social and/or political movement with these concerns at its core can muster the force to suppress art and literature that does not contribute directly to its cause. In

the passage below, Marcel is complaining more about the internal kind of impediment than the large-scale, collective kind, but reference to both kinds are detectable in his complaint.

Most important of all, however, is that he describes both forms of aesthetic impediment arising in particularly acute form during the moral crusade that took place at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. Marcel makes other direct references to the Dreyfus Affair in his sixty-page digression, but the reference below is one of the most directly relevant to the present study's topic. The Dreyfus Affair, and its accompanying moral crusade, provided aspiring artists and writers with powerful excuses not to do the hard work that real creativity requires. Previously in the digression, Marcel has explained how the signs or sensations recovered through involuntary memory need to be quietly reflected upon and interpreted, so that they can be "converted into a spiritual equivalent" 'convertir en un équivalent spirituel' (457). This process of converting the products of involuntary memory into a "spiritual equivalent" – by which Marcel means discovering the principles, laws and deeper connections that they represent – is, quite simply, artistic and literary creativity in its purest form (457). Below, Marcel compares the deciphering of these sensations to reading an "internal book of unknown signs" 'le livre intérieur de ces signes inconnus.' Yet Marcel complains below that many forces conspire to prevent a writer or artist from achieving the tranquility needed to undergo this process. A surprisingly large number of such obstructing forces arose at the time of the Dreyfus Affair.

Le livre intérieur de ces signes inconnus...pour sa lecture, personne ne pouvait m'aider d'aucune règle, cette lecture consistant en un acte de création où nul ne peut nous suppléer, ni même collaborer avec nous. Aussi combien se détournent de l'écrire, que de tâches n'assume-t-on pas pour éviter celle-là. Chaque événement, que ce fût l'affaire Dreyfus, que ce fût la guerre, avait fourni d'autres excuses aux écrivains pour ne pas déchiffrer ce livre-là; ils voulaient assurer le triomphe du droit, refaire l'unité morale de la nation, n'avaient pas le temps de penser à la littérature. Mais ce n'étaient que des excuses parce qu'ils n'avaient pas ou plus, de génie, c'est-à-dire d'instinct. Car l'instinct dicte le devoir et l'intelligence fournit les prétextes pour l'éluder. Seulement les excuses ne figurent point dans l'art, les intentions n'y sont point comptées, à tout

moment l'artiste doit écouter son instinct, ce qui fait que l'art est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, la plus austère école de la vie, et le vrai Jugement dernier. (458)

The war that Marcel refers to is World War I, of course. Both here and elsewhere in the digression, he suggests that this war generated antiaesthetic forces similar to those that arose at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. Discovering the identities of the “renegade” authors, critics and artists who contributed to this antiaesthetic movement at the time of the first World War should be the subject of future research. Nevertheless, there seems little question that the moral crusade of the late Dreyfus Affair constitutes Marcel’s prime and most convincing example of aesthetic annihilation.

The language of this last citation might seem to suggest that only other writers – not Marcel himself – succumbed to the temptation to become engaged in the Dreyfus Affair’s moral campaign, the campaign to “refaire l’unité morale de la nation.” In fact, however, the rest of the digression indicates that Marcel did become involved in the campaign, or at least was persuaded for a while by its rationale. The rest of the digression also reveals that the process of resisting engagement in “humanitarian, internationalist, metaphysical, and patriotic” debates is much more of a complex, ongoing, and even productive dynamic than it may seem here. Marcel suggests later that there exists a constant tension between the aesthetic drive and the drive toward engagement. Resistance to engagement or at least to the intellectual impulse behind engagement appears almost as a necessary first step to each new episode of artistic and/or literary creation. The undoing or dismantling of this impulse produces a release of energy and stored-up passion, a process of emotional release that resembles many theories of comedy, for example that of Arthur Koestler in The Act of Creation (51-63, 87-97). Overall, the process of literary creativity that Marcel describes bears great resemblance to the fundamental process of comedy itself, and there is a moment in the digression, to be cited here

later, where Marcel seems to acknowledge that humor, in its most general sense, results from aesthetics as he now perceives it.

Marcel's statement, "Seulement les excuses ne figurent point dans l'art," can be interpreted several ways, all of which are probably correct simultaneously. The excuses for political engagement certainly do not appear in art if they are wholly yielded to, because if they are completely given in to, one simply stops producing art and literature altogether to devote oneself entirely to engagement. Another, subtler reason the excuses do not appear in art "ne figurent point dans l'art" is that they will serve as the mostly invisible counterweight to the process of genuine creation. In other words, those who yield partially to the excuses and to the drive to engagement produce texts that can serve as an ongoing negative intertext to the creative process of those who resist more successfully. Marcel leaves little doubt that at least some of those who fall under the spell of engagement still manage to produce art and literature; the only question is whether what they produce is any good. Given his new insights, the answer clearly is that such works will not be very good, but the impact of these engaged artistic and literary productions can be reversed in the works of artists and writers who follow sound aesthetic principles. Thus, one set of texts can serve as the intertext, often invisible, to the other, more successful set. Given the sixty-page digression's ongoing complaint about an antiaesthetic trend in place since the French Revolution, a trend that was particularly exacerbated at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, the evidence accumulates that melodramatic epic is, in fact, the Recherche's main intertext.

The end of the last cited passage, "l'art est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, la plus austère école de la vie, et le vrai Jugement dernier," is a prime example of how Proust uses religious terminology and images for his own purpose. It also demonstrates how the abundant Biblical and mythological allusions in the Recherche are mediated by melodramatic epic and filtered

through its prism. This notion of art serving as the only real kind of Last Judgment appears in a paragraph devoted primarily to an admonition about giving in to the kind of moralistic pressures that became prominent at the time of the Affair. In such a context, the Last Judgment that will be enacted in Marcel's future novel, which is really the Recherche itself, appears primarily as a comic take on melodramatic epic's habit of condemning and destroying its villains at the end of its narrative, a process that itself derives from the classic Christian notion of Last Judgment. Of course, the reader of the Recherche will have some difficulty perceiving this complex intertextual network without knowing the kinds of intensely melodramatic texts that the Dreyfus Affair's moral campaign produced, texts such as Zola's Évangiles. Nevertheless, this is an example of how the Recherche's interaction with its Biblical and mythological allusions takes place at a remove of some significant intertextual distance, given the more immediate intertextual presence of nineteenth-century melodramatic epic. The entire intertextual and allusive process is vastly richer on account of this mediation.

An even more specific complaint about the warped notion of aesthetics produced by the Dreyfus Affair appears just two pages later in Marcel's digression. This is the passage where Marcel states most clearly that he succumbed at least a bit to the literary theories that were then fashionable. He says these theories "troubled him for a while," which in context means that he was momentarily fascinated by such theories. After all, one of the main features of the digression is its quality as a confession of past aesthetic misconceptions. The digression is the moment when Marcel perceives clearly his literary vocation, and this revelation is based both on new insights and the resolution of old misunderstandings. The melodramatic aesthetic promoted at the time of the Affair was, for a time, one of Marcel's prior misconceptions. Although not using the same terminology as the present study, Marcel is rather clearly speaking about melodrama, and most specifically melodramatic epic.

Je sentais que je n'aurais pas à m'embarrasser des diverses théories littéraires qui m'avaient un moment troublé - notamment celles que la critique avait développées au moment de l'Affaire Dreyfus et avait reprises pendant la guerre et qui tendaient à "faire sortir l'artiste de sa tour d'ivoire", à traiter de sujets non frivoles ni sentimentaux, à peindre de grands mouvements ouvriers, et à défaut de foules à tout le moins non plus d'insignifiants oisifs ...mais de nobles intellectuels ou des héros. (460)

The radically democratic, anti-elitist perspective of melodrama is what Marcel rejects here. Yet Marcel not only complains about the insistence that writers take only lower class figures and intellectuals as their subjects. The prior literary movement that Marcel laments insisted that writers depict "great workers' movements" with "noble intellectuals" and other sorts of "heroes." In other words, Marcel is deploring a time when a certain mode of epic was foisted on artists and writers. Given the clear indications from the rest of the digression that the aesthetic trend that Marcel disliked at the time of the Dreyfus Affair had pronounced moral and religious overtones, it seems clear that Marcel is ruefully remembering here the vogue for melodramatic epic.

The demand that writers leave their ivory towers and cease writing about frivolous subjects and about "insignificant idlers" 'd'insignifiants oisifs' sounds very similar to the aesthetic promoted in Zola's final novels. Given the issues of class that Marcel raises in the passage above, "d'insignifiants oisifs" could reasonably be translated as the "leisure class," to use a term coined by the early twentieth-century sociologist Thorstein Veblen. The wealthy French leisure class is precisely the segment of society that the despicable Hyacinthe Duvillard in Paris comes from, as well as being the class to which the wealthy, corrupt and doomed Séguin family in Fécondité belongs. Of course, the bourgeois and aristocratic French leisure class also happens to be the principal subject of Proust's mature fiction, but the comic perspective on class in the Recherche could hardly be more different from Zola's melodramatic perspective in his final novels. Indeed, the censorious demands that Marcel describes being made of writers at the time of the Affair sound very similar to the

(anti)aesthetic pronouncements uttered by Brunetière, Tolstoy, and Zola in their various works of fiction and non-fiction from this same period.

Neither Zola's nor Tolstoy's name appears anywhere in the sixty-page digression, but the absence of their names is perhaps not surprising. The case was made previously here that Zola, Tolstoy, and Brunetière were clearly the leaders of the antiaesthetic movement from late in the Dreyfus Affair. One might expect the names of all three to figure prominently in a digression devoted significantly to rejecting this very movement and the principles on which it was based. Ten pages later in the digression, Marcel actually does complain about Brunetière by name in a passage that serves as this chapter's second epigraph. Of course, the merest mention of the editor of the Revue des Deux Mondes inevitably summons up the specters of Zola, Brunetière's chief adversary throughout his entire career, and Tolstoy, the author and religious figure with whom Brunetière increasingly identified precisely during the Dreyfus Affair.

Nevertheless, the absence of Tolstoy and Zola by name requires some explanation. There are plenty of reasons why Proust – for once, this is an issue that involves only the author of the Recherche, instead of his narrator – may not have wanted to appear to be attacking Tolstoy and Zola too directly. Of course, as suggested a moment ago, the sixty-page digression does not really attack anyone. The tone throughout is calm and sober, perfect for the exposition of the brilliant new aesthetic ideas developed there. Yet mentioning Tolstoy and Zola as representatives, even leaders, of an aesthetic movement that Marcel intends to surpass would have been risky. Tolstoy and Zola enjoyed enormous reputations at the time Proust wrote the Recherche, starting around 1910. Tolstoy and Zola still quite obviously enjoy enormous reputations. Proust may simply have deemed it unwise and unseemly even to appear to challenge such major literary figures too directly. Furthermore, the author of the Recherche

clearly owed a debt to both these major writers, at least from their previous incarnations. Brunetière, however, was a different matter altogether. His reputation fell quickly after his death in 1906. Indeed, it had already begun to fall before he died, and one would be hard pressed to explain any significant intellectual or cultural debt that Proust owed him.

Marcel's complaint about the attack on frivolity in literature basically amounts to a defense of frivolous subject matter. A main thrust of this digression – indeed, of the entire Recherche – is the demonstration that nothing is too frivolous or ephemeral to make a significant contribution to the creative process. In Marcel's new perspective, the frivolous and ephemeral are actually essential, because only they can prompt the involuntary memories on which creativity depends. This defense of the frivolous has a direct bearing on sexual issues, particularly issues of non-traditional sexuality, which, from the standpoint of melodramatic epic, are considered utterly frivolous – and worse. Marcel's defense of the frivolous also has an obvious connection to comedy. The comic deflation of the excessively serious and grandiose through comparison to the trivial and trifling is one of the Recherche's basic comic processes. Indeed, this describes the novel's overall mock-epic dynamic vis-à-vis melodramatic epic.

According to the definition put forward here earlier, melodramatic epic fuses the political, social and religious in a super-heated mix. The origin of this particular blend of such potent forces can be traced back to the French Revolution. In his sixty-page digression, Marcel displays a perfect understanding of the genealogy of melodramatic epic. In doing so, Marcel makes clear that the entire revolutionary and post-revolutionary tradition of this genre serves as hypotext for the Recherche. The Dreyfus Affair's moral campaign – in other words, its super-melodramatic conclusion – remains the single most important intertext for the Recherche. Nevertheless, the entire tradition of melodramatic epic, including the revolutionary

crucible from which it was born, also plays a significant intertextual role. All of this is evident from Marcel's digression. In the passage below, Marcel speaks about social, political and religious polemics that took place in France over a long period, a period that clearly stretches back to the beginning of the nineteenth-century and probably back to the 1789 revolution itself. Just as the polemics at the time of the Dreyfus Affair caused many writers and artists to stray from their vocation, with disastrous results, the politico-religious battles from earlier in the French nineteenth-century, a century that perpetually struggled with the legacy of the 1789 revolution, posed grave dangers for writers and artists of earlier generations. Marcel reflects here on the many short-lived literary and artistic trends that emerged from the nineteenth-century's ongoing politico-religious combat. The writers and artists who stayed true to their vocation never fell under the sway of these trends, but those who allowed themselves to be distracted actually made the conflict worse.

Leur logomachie se renouvelle de dix ans en dix ans (car le kaléidoscope n'est pas composé seulement par les groupes mondains, mais par les idées sociales, politiques, religieuses, qui prennent une ampleur momentanée grâce à leur réfraction dans des masses étendues, mais restant limitées malgré cela à la courte vie des idées dont la nouveauté n'a pu séduire que des esprits peu exigeants en fait de preuves). Ainsi s'étaient succédés les partis et les écoles, faisant se prendre à eux toujours les mêmes esprits, hommes d'une intelligence relative, toujours voués aux engouements dont s'abstiennent des esprits plus scrupuleux et plus difficiles en fait de preuves. Malheureusement justement parce que les autres ne sont que de demi esprits, ils ont besoin de se compléter dans l'action, ils agissent ainsi plus que les esprits supérieurs, attirent à eux la foule et créent autour d'eux non seulement les réputations surfaites et les dédains injustifiés mais les guerres civiles et les guerres extérieures, dont un peu de critique port-royaliste sur soi-même devrait préserver. (472)

The sixty-page digression contains other, more specific references to the French Revolution and the early nineteenth-century. The context provided by these other references makes clear that the strife referred to here involving "social, political, and religious" questions is the specifically nineteenth-century struggle with the legacy of the French Revolution. Thus, in its own way, this passage proves that, like Don Quixote, the Recherche takes a distinct

literary tradition, one that continues up to the time of the novel's composition, as the main epic intertext for its mock-epic humor. This use of a cohesive collective intertext – or hypoggenre, as Genette would phrase it – solves the second great anomaly or void that scholars have identified within the Recherche, the seeming absence of the eighteenth-century, especially its second half, marked as it is by one of the most remarkable syntheses of literature and politics in the history of Western civilization. Even though, as Antoine Compagnon rightly observed, the politically engaged texts of the momentous French eighteenth-century do not seem to play a prominent role in the Recherche, Marcel fully understands their organic connection to nineteenth-century melodramatic epic and therefore develops his new aesthetic vision in response to the full historical sweep of this tradition within French literature.

Just prior to this long passage, Marcel explains that a great writer must find a way to silence the din produced within his or her own head by these myriad external voices of contention. Silencing the din is absolutely necessary before an attempt is made to produce truly creative work. Marcel thinks to himself, "...le talent d'un grand écrivain...n'est qu'un instinct religieusement écouté, au milieu du silence imposé à tout le reste, un instinct perfectionné et compris..." (472). Calling great literary talent nothing more than an instinct is part of a particular theme that runs throughout the digression, a theme according to which almost anyone has the potential to be a good artist or writer. A significant number of people even have the potential to be great artists or writers, but only if they learn the fundamental processes of creativity that Marcel has just discovered for himself. Marcel's new concept of aesthetics is therefore not snobbish and holds out to almost everyone the promise of becoming a truly talented artist or writer. Marcel's claim that the instinct must be "religieusement écouté, au milieu du silence imposé à tout le reste" is a key example of how the Recherche appropriates religious terminology specifically to neutralize the discord that melodramatic

epic had long generated around the same terminology. As will be seen in a moment, the silence that Marcel advises does not mean that great writers must show no interest at all in politics. They can, indeed they should have an interest in the major events of their day, but they also must know how to retreat into a kind of quiet refuge when the time comes to create.

The historical reference that Marcel uses to describe the kind of quiet refuge that is necessary may seem surprising. He calls for “un peu de critique port-royaliste sur soi-même.” Port-Royal was the monastery under whose influence Racine decided to abandon his literary vocation out of strict religious scruples and emphasis on a severe morality. Racine, whose classical dramas draw upon both mythological and Biblical themes, is one of the most frequently cited authors in the Recherche. According to the new interpretation of Proust’s *roman-fleuve* presented here, the many Racinian allusions and quotations in the Recherche should be mediated intertextually and comically by melodramatic epic. Marcel’s use of the adjective “port-royaliste” indicates how the mediation takes place. As seen previously, Brunetière, who throughout most of his career held up the classical purity of Racine as an example of the best in French literature, spoke approvingly of Racine’s abandonment of literature when the Dreyfus Affair’s intense melodrama led the influential critic to apply a new, highly moralistic aesthetic. In the citation, Marcel humorously turns Brunetière against himself by saying that individuals as perpetually combative as he was should follow the critic’s own advice, namely quit all activity for a while – but only for a while. What keeps Marcel’s reference to Port-Royal from becoming antiaesthetic, and what also keeps the reference comical, is the phrase “un peu” ‘just a bit.’ Writers and artists who exacerbate civil wars and even foreign wars “les guerres civiles et les guerres extérieures” should exercise “un peu de critique port-royaliste sur soi-même” ‘a bit of Port-Royalist self-criticism.’ Marcel’s willingness to recommend a bit of the approach followed at the religiously strict Port-Royal is

also a comic snub to the many anticlerical and anti-Christian extremists who would like to stamp out all traces of Christianity from France. Thus, viewed in light of the Recherche's crucial "mode d'emploi," the many references to Racine found throughout the novel take on a significant and significantly humorous contemporary meaning, a relevance to the cultural, political and religious battles of the Belle Époque. Even the most abstruse references to Racine in the rest of their Recherche have a direct relevance to the social, political, and religious battles discussed in the long digression from Le Temps retrouvé.

The passage where Brunetière is mentioned by name is also one where Marcel demonstrates an understanding of the process by which melodramatic epic's ambition to reestablish religious hegemony collapses into an obsession with personal morality. This particular passage also contains a direct reference to the French Revolution, which is completely appropriate, given that the 1789 revolution marked the first time that a large-scale effort was made to establish a new religion within a religious void, Christianity having been outlawed. Marcel understands that this very first attempt to re-establish religious hegemony resulted in an obsession with personal morality and a severely restricted view on sexuality, thus setting the regrettable pattern for similar efforts that would be made throughout the following century. Marcel skillfully conveys the entire historical development of melodramatic epic simply by mentioning three French cultural figures, each of whom contributed to the development of the genre in a different time period. The three cultural figures are the epic painters Jacques-Louis David and Paul Chenavard, and then finally, the editor and literary critic Ferdinand Brunetière himself. Marcel mentions David, Chenavard, and Brunetière together within the context of a complaint that he makes about the most educated and promising young writers at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. An earlier chapter here revealed that the antiaesthetic notions promulgated by Tolstoy had special resonance

among young French writers. Brunetière and Zola also made special appeals to educated young people to win them over to the new moralizing trend in art and literature that was gripping France at that time. Below, Marcel speaks directly about the toxic impact made by that these special appeals to young talent. He complains that young writers at the time of the Affair cared only about the moral and religious content of literature. He says they were repeating the mistake of David, Chenavard, and Brunetière.

Car la faculté de lancer des idées, des systèmes et surtout de se les assimiler, a toujours été beaucoup plus fréquente, même chez ceux qui produisent, que le véritable goût, mais prend une extension plus considérable depuis que les revues, les journaux littéraires se sont multipliés (et avec eux les vocations factices d'écrivains et d'artistes). Ainsi la meilleure partie de la jeunesse, la plus intelligente, la plus intéressée, n'aimait-elle plus que les œuvres ayant une haute portée morale et sociologique, même religieuse. Elle s'imaginait que c'était là le critérium de la valeur d'une œuvre, renouvelant ainsi l'erreur des David, des Chenavard, des Brunetière. (471-472)

Jacques-Louis David's inclusion in this list of cultural figures that Marcel criticizes may seem surprising, because of these three figures, his reputation is by far the most secure. Chenavard and Brunetière are today considered such failures, one in the field of painting and the other in that of literary criticism, that they hardly have any reputation to speak of. Yet Marcel has a definite purpose in grouping David, Chenavard, and Brunetière together, and his reason has everything to do with melodramatic epic. Indeed, the very fact that Marcel groups these three figures together reveals his firm grasp of both the history and the fundamental dynamic of melodramatic epic. Of course, it can probably never be repeated often enough here that the term "melodramatic epic" was unavailable to Marcel – and to Proust, of course – but its unavailability did not prevent either of them from clearly perceiving and discussing the phenomenon to which the term refers.

Admirers of David's work, of whom there are certainly many, are usually aware that he created paintings for and of the political leaders of his day. Given that David's career

spanned the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period, his paintings have a direct relevance to the political developments of these tumultuous times. David's paintings of Napoleon are probably the most famous images ever created of the first French emperor. His paintings representing key moments of the French Revolution are also widely admired. What may not be quite so well known is how intimately involved David was in the revolutionary effort to create a substitute religion for proscribed Christianity. In his study, Jacques-Louis David and Jean-Louis Prieur, Revolutionary Artists, Warren Roberts documents the close working relationship that David had with Robespierre in the period when the latter decided that the French people required a new outlet for their spiritual aspirations. Robespierre envisioned the Festival of the Supreme Being to counteract what he thought were the excesses of revolutionary atheism, and the Jacobin leader enlisted David to be the event's principal organizer (303-305). David did in fact organize the quasi-religious festival, and he applied his unrivalled skills as a painter to creating awe-inspiring art for the occasion (304). In Warren Roberts's other book-length study on David, he explains that the painter was heavily involved in additional revolutionary festivals with significant religious content. Roberts writes, "David's three major paintings in 1793-94 depicted martyrs of the Revolution and all were done in conjunction with festivals that he organized. (76) David's most famous painting of the revolutionary era is Marat Assassinated, the heavy religious overtones of which Roberts explains below:

The use of religious imagery in *Marat Assassinated* is obvious and often commented upon; it is realized through forms that suggest a descent from the cross. The secular savior, the revolutionary saint, has been cut down by an assassin who appealed to his humane instincts, to his adoration of the people. To underline that point Marat is seen holding his pen in the moment of death, with which, as Marat said he had been "writing for the people's happiness." (Jacques-Louis David, Revolutionary Artist 82-83)

In both his studies, Roberts claims that David's revolution era paintings were designed to provide the French people with images of secular saints, revolutionary martyrs whose superior virtue was supposed to inspire and uplift the masses. There was also a pronounced, virtually reactionary sexual politics that prevailed in the period of the revolution when Jacobins such as Robespierre and David were in the ascendant. In other words, Roberts shows not only that the cultural forces behind the Terror and the Festival of the Supreme Being were obsessive about personal virtue, a fact that is rather well known, but also that these same forces were inextricably bound up with an ultra-conservative sexual politics.

As a Jacobin, David was a dedicated member of the revolutionary club that played a key role in the movement against women. In the fiercely masculine and virtue-obsessed world of the Jacobins there was no place for women and no place for the moderation associated with their sex. As the Revolution swung to the left, measures were initiated which could succeed only if they were applied courageously, relentlessly, and severely. David was at one with the Revolution as it entered its most violent stages. (74)

Approximately a half-century later, during the revolution of 1848, Paul Chenavard was commissioned to paint huge canvases to decorate the interior of the French Pantheon. Joseph Sloane has written what is probably the definitive work on Chenavard, a painter who is almost totally forgotten today. The entire thrust of Sloane's study, Chenavard: Artist of 1848, is that Chenavard labored to decorate the Pantheon at a time when French authorities genuinely viewed the monument as a kind of cathedral of the new religion of humanity. Chenavard fully subscribed to the view that Christianity was moribund and that a new religion was needed to replace it. He conceived his paintings explicitly to be icons for this new faith. Just as David had done with his images of the martyrs of the 1789 revolution, Chenavard devoted the bulk of his Pantheon canvases to the depiction of the "great men" of France's past, figures whose superior virtue he tried to convey in his painting.

The base of the social difficulty lay in the conviction that society had lost its sense of moral direction. That the plan for a worship of great men was probably inferior to

the former greatness of the religious faith represented by Christ, Chenavard would probably have been willing to admit, but he was in search of a moral ideal which would serve to guide men, even though it be in a decadent period. A substitute for the saints had to be found...[He] was by no means alone in this belief nor in the solution which he was prepared to suggest, for the idea had been in the hearts of the French for over fifty years in spite of repeated failures to make it effective.

The “new saints” were by no means to be reduced to the level of ordinary humanity. On the contrary, the ultimate reason for their greatness lay in the fact that they were the possessors of some part of divinity itself. That power of God was successively revealed through them, and by means of it they left the impression of divinity on the moral consciousness of man, the sum of which was civilization. “Initiators,” he called them, the beginners of things – first working simply to bring some order out of the chaos that was savagery, later refining the minds and feelings of the mass toward new experiences. For this service they were apt to pay with their lives as had Zoroaster, Christ, or the martyrs, but this was the price exacted for being the agents of the Divine Will. (75)

Hardly anyone mentions David and Chenavard in the same breath today. Hardly anyone mentioned these painters in the same breath back when Proust was writing the Recherche. A central theme of Sloane’s study on Chenavard is that the artist’s reputation faded to near oblivion even before he died (4-7). Chenavard was never able to complete his ambitious canvases for the Pantheon, and the work that he did manage to finish was never displayed in the monument. The extremely divergent paths taken by the artistic reputations of David and Chenavard are illustrated by the fact that Warren Roberts and Joseph Sloane, the authorities on these two French painters, never once compare them to each other in the studies cited here. Thus, the only possible explanation for why the sixty-page digression compares David and Chenavard – the passage cited above does, for all practical purposes, compare these painters – is that Proust/Marcel correctly perceives their similar contribution to the century-long evolution of the genre of melodramatic epic. Of course, David and Chenavard contributed to this genre within their own particular field, which was painting. Yet Joseph Sloane emphasizes that Chenavard was truly an epic painter, one who tried to depict figuratively on canvas the same grand ideas that the French epic poets Hugo, Lamartine, Quinet and Ballanche were expressing in their writing (8). The fact that the citation from Le

Temps retrouvé includes in this mix Brunetière, a late nineteenth-century figure whose relation to melodramatic epic has already been discussed extensively here, indicates Marcel's understanding that the impulse behind this genre endured and thrived throughout the entire century, reaching right up to the period of the Dreyfus Affair.

Marcel also demonstrates an understanding of how melodrama in both its standard and epic forms tends to glorify common folk and children. As seen previously here, Tolstoy in his (anti)aesthetic treatise What is Art? virtually declares that all art and literature must be geared toward "simple people and children." Tolstoy wanted art and literature to be so easy to understand that the least educated and least intelligent could enjoy it without difficulty. He also wanted art and literature to be so wholesome in its treatment of sexual and romantic issues that even the most puritanical of parents would not hesitate to allow their children to enjoy it. In light of this summary of Tolstoy's treatise, it is very difficult not to read the passage below from Marcel's digression as anything other than a mockery of the great Russian novelist. Marcel derides the notion that there exists, strictly speaking, "popular art," a kind of art just for common folk. He claims that many working class people can appreciate the most sophisticated art, whereas many members of the upper class are unsuited for anything but art at its most simplistic. In the middle of the passage, Marcel also derides the idea of "children's literature," saying that books written specifically for children often bore their intended audience to tears. The end of this passage brilliantly relates this entire problem back to the French Revolution, which, Marcel complains, banned the works of such "frivolous" painters as Watteau and La Tour, who actually created masterpieces far superior to the works of properly revolutionary artists. Marcel also criticizes the very notion of "moral art and literature" suggesting that artist and writers must not be restricted in their subject matter, just

as Choderlos de Laclos and Gustave Flaubert did not write according to some moral code in creating the masterpieces Liaisons Dangereuses and Mme Bovary.

L'idée d'un art populaire comme d'un art patriotique si même elle n'avait pas été dangereuse me semblait ridicule. S'il s'agissait de le rendre accessible au peuple, on sacrifiait les raffinements de la forme "bons pour des oisifs"; or, j'avais assez fréquenté de gens du monde pour savoir que ce sont eux les véritables illettrés et non les ouvriers électriciens. A cet égard un art populaire par la forme eût été destiné plutôt aux membres du Jockey qu'à ceux de la Confédération générale du travail; quant aux sujets, les romans populaires ennuièrent autant les gens du peuple que les enfants ces livres qui sont écrits pour eux. On cherche à se dépayser en lisant et les ouvriers sont aussi curieux des princes, que les princes des ouvriers...N'imitons pas les révolutionnaires qui par "civisme" méprisaient s'ils ne les détruisaient pas les œuvres de Watteau et de La Tour, peintres qui honoraient davantage la France que tous ceux de la Révolution. L'anatomie n'est peut-être pas ce que choisirait un cœur tendre, si l'on avait le choix. Ce n'est pas la bonté de son cœur vertueux, laquelle était fort grande qui a fait écrire à Choderlos de Laclos les *Liaisons Dangereuses*, ni son goût pour la petite bourgeoisie petite ou grande qui a fait choisir à Flaubert comme sujets ceux de *Mme Bovary* et de *l'Education Sentimentale*. (466-467)

The single best piece of evidence that the Recherche employs melodramatic epic as its primary intertext in an active and sustained way comes from the moment in the digression when Marcel seems to make the most extravagant claim for literature. In the passage below, Marcel reaches a point where he finally exclaims, “La vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par conséquent réellement vécue, c’est la littérature.” This is not the exclamation of a literary snob, who considers writers superior to everyone else. Quite the contrary is the case, actually, because in the very next sentence Marcel insists that the aesthetic approach that he describes is available to everyone. The “genuine life” ‘la vraie vie,’ the life that incorporates periods of quiet reflection upon the meaning of crucially revealing involuntary memories -- that kind of life is accessible to all. For the most part, however, only successful writers and artists accede to it. In the remainder of the passage, Marcel elaborates on the distinction between “genuine life” and “phony life,” with the latter clearly being the result of a preoccupation with those issues and concerns that melodramatic epic takes to ridiculous extremes, issues of a social, religious, political import. The passage below does not

mention the Dreyfus Affair or its highly contentious moral campaign, about which Marcel complains in many other parts of the digression. Nevertheless, Marcel's description of "phony life" clearly needs to be interpreted in the context of those earlier, historically specific, complaints. When Marcel says that the "phony life" is dominated by "l'amour-propre, la passion, l'intelligence et l'habitude," he is simply speaking in a much more general way about the same mistake that would-be writers and artists at the time of the Dreyfus Affair made when they allowed themselves to become overly engaged in politics. Their engagement at the expense of their vocation was tantamount, in the most basic psychological sense, to a capitulation to pride, passion, abstract intelligence (as opposed to instinct), and habit. Of course, Marcel, too, capitulated for a while to these human characteristics. Indeed, the furious intensity of the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic conclusion could be characterized as a national capitulation to "pride, passion, abstract intelligence (as opposed to instinct), and habit." What makes this passage such a clear statement of the Recherche's fundamental mock-epic dynamic, even specifically vis-à-vis the Dreyfus Affair's melodramatic conclusion, is the way Marcel speaks about the function of literature as being one of "undoing" and "reversing" the harm caused by the "phony life" dominated by "notre amour-propre, notre passion, notre esprit d'imitation, notre intelligence abstraite, nos habitudes."

La vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par conséquent réellement vécue, c'est la littérature. Cette vie qui en un sens, habite à chaque instant chez tous les hommes aussi bien que chez l'artiste. Mais ils ne la voient pas, parce qu'ils ne cherchent pas à l'éclaircir. Et ainsi leur passé est encombré d'innombrables clichés qui restent inutiles parce que l'intelligence ne les a pas "développés"... Ce travail de l'artiste, de chercher à apercevoir sous de la matière, sous de l'expérience, sous des mots quelque chose de différent, c'est exactement le travail inverse de celui que, à chaque minute, quand nous vivons détourné de nous-même l'amour-propre, la passion, l'intelligence et l'habitude aussi accomplissent en nous, quand elles amassent au-dessus de nos impressions vraies, pour nous les cacher maintenant, les nomenclatures, les buts pratiques que nous appelons faussement la vie. En somme cet art si compliqué est justement le seul art vivant. Seul il exprime pour les autres et nous fait voir à nous-même notre propre vie, cette vie qui ne peut pas s'"observer", dont les apparences qu'on observe ont besoin d'être traduits et souvent lues à rebours et

péniblement déchiffrées. Ce travail qu'avaient fait notre amour-propre, notre passion, notre esprit d'imitation, notre intelligence abstraite, nos habitudes, c'est ce travail que l'art défera, c'est la marche en sens contraire, le retour aux profondeurs, où ce qui a existé réellement gît inconnu de nous, qu'il nous fera suivre. (474-475)

The key phrase, “notre amour-propre, notre passion, notre esprit d'imitation, notre intelligence abstraite, nos habitudes,” quickly acquires national significance when read in light of Marcel’s review of French history since the 1789 Revolution. The entire French nation, or at least a large part of it, including many of its most famous artists and writers, became involved in the ongoing epic politico-religious conflict that was “pride, passion, the spirit of imitation, abstract intelligence, and habits” pushed to ultimate extremes. The function of art, Marcel says at the very end, is to undo the harmful work of these common human flaws that escalated to perilously epic proportions during the Dreyfus Affair and at other moments of crisis since the French Revolution: “c'est ce travail que l'art défera, c'est la marche en sens contraire, le retour aux profondeurs, où ce qui a existé réellement gît inconnu de nous, qu'il nous fera suivre.” The *Recherche* does not “undo” just one person’s “false life.” Its humor is so powerful and its perception of historical forces so keen, that the depths to which the novel reaches back, in its “retour aux profondeurs,” extend all the way back to the French Revolution, the crucible of melodramatic epic. The entire history of melodramatic epic – including most especially, the end of the Dreyfus Affair – can thus be seen serving as the long-term phenomenon that the *Recherche* will undo and dismantle comedically. By serving in this capacity as an ongoing negative template for Proust’s novel, the genre of melodramatic epic thereby earns the title of the *Recherche*’s primary epic intertext.

The specifically comical quality of this process of “undoing” and of “walking in the opposite direction” ‘la marche en sens contraire’ is revealed in the gap between the gargantuan, hugely ambitious, and pretentious – characteristics that apply to the movements and trends about which Marcel complains – and the frivolous, slight, and ephemeral – which

Marcel cherishes and uses to maximal artistic advantage. The literary revelation of this large gap inevitably produces comedy as the pretensions and ambitions of “false living,” the same sort of pretensions and ambitions that fed melodramatic epic since its inception, are deflated through contrast with the frivolous and the ephemeral. The more bloated, turbulent and absurdly ambitious the “phony life” is the more it acquires epic dimensions, and the successful deflation and dismantling of it becomes, quite-simply, mock epic.

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