CONFLICTED SELVES:

WOMEN, ART, & PARIS

1880 – 1914

by

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Abstract

Scholars describe *fin-de-siècle* Paris as a city of dualities, and examine its past as a series of crises or a tale of burgeoning optimism and opportunity. Historians of women and gender have noted the limitations of this dualistic approach, and have explored new avenues of interpretation. Specifically, they have shown how the combination of positive and negative impulses created a dynamic space in which women could re-imagine and rearticulate themselves. While this approach illuminates the possibilities that existed for women in a complex urban landscape, it also indicates that *fin-de-siècle* Paris was a contested city, one fraught with challenges for women living in the French capital. If the mingling of crises and *belle époque* culture had stimulating results for women's emergence into urban spaces, it had confusing and conflicting effects as well.

My thesis shows how *fin-de-siècle* Paris was a contradictory city for women artists, at a time when both opportunities and constraints in their profession were at a premium. I examine the ways in which several notable women in the arts – painters Gwen John, Suzanne Valadon, and Romaine Brooks, sculptor Camille Claudel, and writer Rachilde – traversed this unsettling path, and evaluated their experiences through artistic representations of private life. Far from portraying the traditional sphere of domesticity, however, which was considered an important form of artistic expression among women at this time, I argue that their depictions of intimate spaces, bodies, children, and female selfhood, were complex and often ambiguous, and part of a larger attempt to grapple with the shifting nature of identity, both as women, and as professionals. John and Claudel created interiors that were signs of independence and artistic innovation, but also sad reflections of hardship; Valadon and Brooks invested images of the female and child's

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body with strength and power, but also with pain and suffering; and Rachilde developed heroines who were unsuccessful in their attempts to create a unique sense of self. Taken together, these representations demonstrate that women artists did not easily articulate a vision of modern female identity at the turn of twentieth century, but rather, highlighted the inconsistencies of this experience.

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Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Paris is often described as a city of dualities, and historians have long supported this view by examining its past through the lens of failure or fortune, as a series of crises or a tale of burgeoning optimism and opportunity.[1] The approach is part of a tendency, according to Jean-Pierre Bernard, to define "*les deux Paris*" by its "two inseparable dimensions"— "…its materiality, walls, life, and organs, and its immateriality, its symbolic charge, and aura…,"[2] and has resulted in a sizable body of literature which frequently characterizes the city's history as "beleaguered" or "belle."[3] Key proponents of Paris as a historical city of crisis, particularly for the period dealing with the second half of the nineteenth century, note the increased cultural obsession with crime and criminality, and have argued that urban dangers of every variety, from homicide and arson, to shoplifting and acid throwing, received frenzied attention from a growing mass press which aimed to increase its readership by reporting the shocking details.[4] Historians sympathetic to this approach also emphasize the political scandals and intrigues of the Boulanger and Dreyfus Affairs, as well as the painful legacy of the Franco-Prussian War, which created a sense of unease and disquiet among Parisians, and

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[1] Charles Rearick has commented on this continuing trend in "Introduction: Paris Revisited," *French Historical Studies: Special Issue – New Perspectives on Modern Paris,* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter 2004): 1-8.
[2] Jean-Pierre A. Bernard, *Les Deux Paris: Les Représentations de Paris dans la Seconde Moitié du XIXe Siècle* (Seyssel, France: Champ Vallon, 2001), 12.
[3] Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 2.
[4] Eugen Weber, *France: Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 40-62; Dominique Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang: Récits de crimes et société à la Belle Epoque* (Paris: Fayard, 1995) and *Crime et culture au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2005); Louis Chevalier, *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Frank Jellinek (New York: H. Fertig, 1973, 1st ed. 1958); Ann-Louise Shapiro, *Breaking the Codes: Female Criminality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). See also Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), and for the case of London, Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

contributed to a feeling that France was in a state of disrepair. They believed they were suffering from a moral and intellectual decline – a *dégénérescence* which doctors and medical experts diagnosed with increasing frequency.[5] Conversely, those who emphasize the pleasure and splendour of Paris at the turn of the twentieth century discuss the Universal Expositions, the Eiffel Tower, and the city's exciting boulevard culture of spectacle and consumerism, which were also fundamental to the years of the *belle époque*.[6] These accounts describe Paris as the vibrant and innovative cultural centre of Europe, that attracted artists and writers from all over the world to join in its labyrinth of cafés, cabarets, and art salons, and which stood as Europe's model of modernity as it faced the new century.

Despite the richness these studies have brought to the field, some historians have begun to note the limitations of this dualistic approach. Mary Louise Roberts, for example, has cogently asked how historians of *fin-de-siècle* France might move beyond the dichotomy of "cultural crisis or belle époque," in order to explore new avenues of interpretation.[7] In *Disruptive Acts*, Roberts has examined the intersections between these two modes of analysis, and shows how the forces of crisis, pleasure, and spectacle, actually coalesced at the end of the nineteenth century, and created a space in which Parisians, particularly women, could strike out in new and creative ways.[8] She

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[5] Shaprio, 2. Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness, & Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1984); Eric Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics* (London: Longman, 1996); Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[6] Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque: Entertainment & Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*, (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1986).

[7] Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 2.

[8] Ibid, 1-17.

emphasizes the ties between "the era's cultural crisis and its penchant for performance," and demonstrates the ways in which theatricality was not merely part of the splendour and entertainment of the *belle époque*, but was also an act of "subversion" and disruption, used by women as a means of articulating female identity.[9] By examining the interrelated nature of *les deux Paris,* Roberts has persuasively shown how historians might gain new insights into French and Parisian society at the *fin de siècle*, and has demonstrated how the combination of impulses, both positive and negative, created a dynamic public and urban space in which women could re-imagine and rearticulate their sense of self. While this approach illuminates the unique possibilities that existed for women in a complex urban landscape, it also indicates that *fin-de-siècle* Paris was a contested and conflicted city, one fraught with challenges and ambiguities for women living in the French capital. If the mingling of danger and pleasure, crises and *belle époque* culture, had stimulating results for women's emergence into urban spaces, I would like to suggest that it had confusing and adverse effects as well.

My thesis explores some of the ways in which *fin-de-siècle* Paris was a contradictory city for women of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, a place that was both welcoming and prohibitive, exciting and dangerous. Historians have carefully articulated the various ways in which women attempted and eventually succeeded at entering a male-dominated public realm, but have paid less attention to the ways in which their lives were not just a hard-won struggle for professional independence and equality.[10] Life in *les deux Paris* was also difficult and unsatisfying, filled with

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[9] Ibid.

[10] See for example, Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Sheri Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (London: Virago, 1987). For the case of Britain, see Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian*

anxiety and a sense of imperilled and confused identity, which was closely linked to the tensions of the modern city, and the multiplying representations of womanhood and individuality. Women artists occupied an ambiguous position in France at the turn of the twentieth century, a time when both opportunities and constraints in their profession were at a premium. By exploring the ways in which several notable women in the arts – painters Gwen John, Suzanne Valadon, and Romaine Brooks, sculptor Camille Claudel, and writer Rachilde – traversed this unsettling path of Parisian life, I argue that they not only gained recognition in the public sphere, but also attempted to evaluate its role in their lives. We can see this re-evaluation, in part, through their various art forms, which address themes of privateness. Far from depicting the traditional private sphere of domesticity, however, which some scholars have suggested was an important form of artistic expression among women at this time, I argue that their representations of intimate spaces, bodies, children, and female selfhood were complex and often ambiguous, and part of a larger attempt to grapple with the shifting nature of identity, both as women, and as professionals, at the *fin de siècle*. I demonstrate that women artists and writers re-worked traditional themes in their paintings, sculptures, and novels, in order to reflect their own lived experience. In this way, these women were not just emerging into new spaces and places, but looking at old things with new eyes.

This project situates itself within the rich field of historical studies that consider the ways in which French women emerged into the public sphere. Women artists of the *fin de siècle* were and are often grouped within the larger cultural and social phenomenon of the "new woman," a late-nineteenth century model of womanhood that represented an

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Women Artists (London: Routledge, 1993); Clarissa Campbell Orr (ed.), *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

independent life in the public sphere, one that held the promise of education and professional opportunities.[11] Feminist commentators have carefully charted the powerful cultural image of this new woman, who became a caricature in magazines and newspapers in Britain, America, and France. In forums such as *Yellow Book*, *Puck*, and *La Plume*, the new woman engaged in unconventional activities – she drank, smoked, and read books – and was often portrayed as abnormally masculine, sexually corrupt, and morally dangerous. Portrayals such as these were often critical and patronizing and, as Elliott has argued, most were drawn from categories of women, such as actresses, prostitutes, and lesbians, whose very existence challenged middle-class feminine ideals of the dependent wife and mother.[12] Other representations of the new woman emphasized her desire for independence, freedom of access to schools and professions, and a life outside of the domestic realm. By the 1890s, the character of this independent woman became central to novels such as Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Gissing's *The Odd Women*, and Bois's *L'Eve nouvelle*.[13]

The concept of the new woman emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, "partly in the context of feminist activism but also in conjunction with bohemian artistic circles and the rise of women's colleges."[14] British novelist and journalist Sarah Grand first used the expression "New Woman" in connection with this phenomenon in its Anglo-American context in 1894, and by 1896, *la femme nouvelle* had also spread into French public

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[11] Studies of the new woman include Bridget Elliott, "New and Not so 'New Women' on the London Stage: Aubrey Beardsley's Yellow Book Images of Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Réjane," *Victorian Studies* 1987 31(1): 33-57; Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle,* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990); Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000); Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France.*

[12] Elliott, 34.

[13] Showalter, Stansell, Elliott, and Roberts discuss themes of the new woman as represented in these, and other, novels.

[14] Roberts, 21.

discourse.[15] There was contemporary debate about whether the image of the new woman reflected a real person, or was merely a caricature of an independent, single, and educated woman, who did not truly exist – as an 1894 article in Vanity Fair stated, "We read of her in books, and we see her on the stage. But we have not met her…".[16] The low number of women who held typically male professions in *fin-de-siècle* France – for example, 3 percent of pharmacists, and 2.6 percent of chemists and engineers – underscores the doubt about the pervasiveness of new women at the turn of the twentieth century.[17]

However, fields in the arts – painting, sculpture, literature, and the theatre – did become important arenas for women's work and public expression at the end of the nineteenth century. Art historians such as Charlotte Yeldham and Tamar Garb have charted the difficult, yet ultimately successful journey for women toward public participation and recognition in the fields of painting and sculpture, and argue that, although they certainly did not dominate these fields, women markedly increased their presence in art academies and exhibition societies in both Britain and France.[18] So too in the field of literature did women have a long tradition of public participation. Carla Hesse and Dena Goodman have chronicled how French women contributed to the culture of letters at the end of the eighteenth century, and literary scholars, notably Naomi Schor, have examined the lasting legacy of French writer George Sand in the nineteenth

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[15] Roberts notes that Sarah Grand "christened" the term New Woman in an article that appeared in North American Review, 1894. See *Disruptive Acts*, 21.

[16] "Of the New Woman," *Vanity Fair* (18 October 1894): 265 in Elliott, pp.39-40.

[17] James F. McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000, 149) in Roberts, 7.

[18] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush;* Cherry, *Painting Women*; Siân Reynolds, "Running Away to Paris: Expatriate Women Artists of the 1900 Generation, from Scotland to Points South." *Women's History Review* v 9 no 2, 2000, 327-44; Charlotte Yeldham has compiled a collection of statistics and tables on women's art exhibits in her two-volume study of women artists in France and Britain during the nineteenth century. See *Women Artists in Nineteenth-Century France and England: Their Art Education, Exhibition Opportunities and Membership of Exhibiting Societies and Academies, with an Assessment of the Subject Matter of their Work and Summary Biographies,* 2 volumes (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1984).

century.[19]   Studies such as these, which explore the intersections between French women and the public sphere, have been particularly robust and dynamic over the last twenty years. They have probed the possibilities and limitations of how women articulated a sense of public identity, often in the face of adversity – a project which has involved a gendered revision of the public sphere as described by Jürgen Habermas.[20] Joan Landes and Goodman, in particular, have challenged Habermas's lack of consideration toward questions of gender, and have explored the ways in which women entered and were excluded from public institutions, how they represented themselves in the public sphere, and the various models of public womanhood available or created.[21] These and other historians have also focused on methods of political empowerment for women in the public sphere, as well as issues of cultural representation and agency, and have examined cases such as the *salonnière* of the eighteenth century, and the new woman of the late-nineteenth century, as proof that women were indeed a vibrant part of public life.[22]

Landes, Goodman, and Hesse have shown that the concept of public womanhood in France has foundations that stretch back to the project of the Enlightenment. Landes has explored the authority of the eighteenth-century salon as an "alternative sphere of cultural

[19] Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Naomi Schor, *George Sand and Idealism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[20] Habermas has argued that at the end of the eighteenth century, coffeehouses and salons of Europe became sites of rational discourse and critical discussion, which, because of their emphasis on reason, were open to anyone. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Berlin, 1962), trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989). Critical studies of Habermas include Craig J. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992) and Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians," *The Journal of Modern History* 72 (March 2000): 153-182.

[21] Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[22] Susan Dalton, *Engendering the Republic of Letters: Reconnecting Public and Private Spheres in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); On the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see Roberts, *Disruptive Acts,* and *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

production"[23] led by influential female *salonnières*, and how this influence was subsequently erased and "silenced"[24] by the rise of a "…bourgeois repudiation of aristocratic splendor and artifice in favor of values of nature, transparency, and law."[25] These republican values, according to Landes, were decidedly masculine and fundamental to the public and private divisions that existed in post-revolutionary France, where women were deemed most influential within the private sphere, as mothers and wives.[26] Goodman has also examined the prominence of *salonnières* in the public sphere of the eighteenth century, and has argued that the "central discursive practices" of Enlightenment literary culture – polite conversation and letter writing, for example – were areas governed and dictated by women, who organized and led the Parisian salons where philosophes congregated.[27]   According to Landes and Goodman, the experiences of figures like the *salonnière*, although challenged by the events of the French Revolution, played an important role in the development of public female identity in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Hesse has also examined the nature of public womanhood in the era of the French Revolution, and has demonstrated the ways in which women increased their presence in the public sphere during this time. She has argued that the rise of a market economy in the print industry, which "made possible public debate in

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[23] Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere,* 10.

[24] Ibid, 38.

[25] Ibid, 4.

[26] See Landes, "Rousseau's Reply to Public Women," 66-89. See below for the legacy of Rousseau's concept of republican motherhood.

[27] Goodman, 3; 53-54. Unlike Landes, who links the exclusion of women from the public realm to the French Revolution, Goodman locates it earlier: "The revolution that transformed the Republic of Letters began not in 1789 but in 1778, when men began to meet without the supervision of women... .When the literary public sphere was transformed into the political public sphere in 1789, it had already become masculine…" (280). Goodman has also collapsed the differences between the literary and political, salon discussion and political practice, by arguing that the Enlightenment of the Old Regime possessed values and practices through salon culture "that were republican at least as much as they were literary, because they were the values and practices of the Republic of Letters" (303). In this way, she claims that the philosophes were not Toqueville's "starry-eyed dreamers," but important contributors to the political landscape of revolutionary France, through their central institution of the Parisian salon. See 300-304.

all arenas of intellectual and political life," also allowed an "unprecedented entry of women into the public life of letters."[28]   Hesse contends that "at the very moment when male legislators determined that the new French Republic was to be governed by male heads of households alone, women were rushing into cultural space opened up by liberal economic policies."[29]   To substantiate this claim, she has charted an actual rise in the publication of literature by women toward the end of the eighteenth century, and argues that they used various literary tools, such as fictional narrative and historical allegory, "…as a means to engage in public discourse without overexposing their position to critical male scrutiny."[30]   These historians have been important contributors to the history of public life for French women at the end of the eighteenth and the start of the nineteenth century, and have explored both the ways in which they were excluded, and the unique channels through which they circumvented this exclusion and developed public voices.

When addressing the gendered nature of the public sphere during the nineteenth century, historians have paid close attention to the impact of industrialization on the development of women's work outside of the home. There was a growing presence of women in the labour force in industries such as textiles during the 1850s and 1860s, and the deplorable conditions, long hours, and disastrous health effects of factory work elucidate a difficult aspect of public life that intersected with economic survival.[31]   As

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[28] Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment,* 155.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid, 138. See chapter 2, "Women into Print," for a list of tables. For example, French women in print rose from 73 in the period 1754-1765, to 329 from 1789-1800. Hesse contrasts these figures with the more gradual and steady increase among British women writers during the same time period; 37-41.
[31] Accampo cites statistics from Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978): "The proportion of French women in the labor force increased steadily from about 24 percent in 1850 to about 43 percent by 1920." See Elinor A. Accampo, Rachel G. Fuchs and Mary Lynn Stewart (eds.), *Gender and Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4. Judith G. Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work: The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Mary Lynn Stewart, *Women, Work, and the French State: Labour Protection and Social Patriarchy, 1879-1919* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's

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Elinor Accampo has argued, "Working-class men and women throughout the industrial centers of France complained bitterly that industrial work ruined women's health and caused an increase in miscarriages, stillbirths, and maternal mortality."[32] These disruptions in family life increased fears among physicians and social hygienists about the degeneration and depopulation of French society, which were bolstered by a declining birth rate and increasing infant mortality by the end of the nineteenth century.[33] Concerns about the adverse effects of women's presence in the public realm also underscored the Rousseauian legacy of separate spheres, republican motherhood, and the cult of domesticity. Rousseau had praised the moral virtue of women, and believed they were integral to the survival of the republic; however, this virtuous nature was best utilized in the domestic realm, where women could educate and rear new generations of loyal republican citizens.[34] This belief was foundational to the idea of separate spheres, and Accampo has argued that the ideals of the republican mother and the cult of domesticity became increasingly relevant throughout the nineteenth century, "…as industrialization and urbanization further increased the spatial separation of home and work, reinforcing the dichotomy between private and public and, indeed, increasing the need or desire for female domesticity."[35]

However, these so-called private duties also had the important public function of maintaining a virtuous French society. Increasingly, politically active women responded to the complexities of women's private and public functions, and expressed their own visions of a woman's public role. Historians such as Joan Scott have examined the

University Press, 1989); M.H. Zylberberg-Hocquard and E. Diebolt, eds., *Femmes et travail au dix-neuvième siècle: Enquêtes de la Bataille syndicaliste, Marcelle Capy – Aline Valette* (Paris: Syros, 1984).
[32] Accmpo, 4.
[33] Accampo, 7.
[34] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, ou de l'éducation*, 1762 (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).
[35] Accampo, 13.

writings and lives of influential figures such as Olympe de Gouges, Hubertine Auclert, and Flora Tristen, and have charted their contributions to French feminism through issues such as suffrage and social reform.[36] Scott has been particularly influential in this debate and has questioned the traditional model of understanding nineteenth-century feminism as a development of either equality with or difference from men. For Scott, the path of feminism in France is not a predetermined "story of cumulative progress," an approach which she believes, "prevents us from analyzing, even from seeing, the downside of feminist experience: its intractable contradictions, the obsessive repetitions that seem to doom one generation to relive the dilemmas of its predecessors…".[37] Rather, Scott contends that the work of feminists such as Gouges and Auclert was paradoxical and contained "internal inconsistencies" because they were caught between republican values of universalism and feminism's necessity to speak for a distinct group.[38] The project of feminism is thus a historically contingent experience and expression of contradiction and complexity that may never be resolved.[39]

Finally, the work of Mary Louise Roberts has been important to the study of French women as public actors in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. She has explored the new woman of the *fin de siècle* and the modern women of the postwar era, and has argued persuasively for a more complex approach to the interplay between

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[36] See for example, Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Françoise Thébaud, *Ecrire l'histoire des Femmes* (Fontenay-aux-Roses: ENS éditions Fontenay Saint-Cloud, 1998); Sandra Dijkstra, *Flora Tristen: Feminism in the Age of George Sand* (London: Pluto Press, 1992); Patrick Kay Bidelman, *Pariahs Stand Up! The Founding of the Liberal Feminist Movement in France, 1858-1889* (London: Greenwood Press, 1982); Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984); Whitney Walton, *Eve's Proud Descendants: Four Women Writers and Republican Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
[37] Scott, 1-3.
[38] Ibid, 13.
[39] Ibid, 174.

women and the public sphere. She has argued that new women, particularly those involved with the press and the stage, used these performative mediums to experiment with different public selves, and contends that the "disruptive power of performance had everything to do with a specific historical moment," as material conditions of industries of mass culture "now existed for this type of change to take place, and on a sizable scale."[40] She hastens to add, however, that "the Great War brought to an abrupt halt the kind-hearted histrionics of the *belle époque* and, with them, the kind of subversive performance that distinguished the new woman."[41] The emerging modern woman represented a "privileged symbol of postwar cultural and sexual anxieties – a dominant symbol of change in the postwar cultural landscape."[42] In *Disruptive Acts*, Roberts has also argued that theatricality and performance were not just forms of "mere diversion" at this time, but also acts of subversion, thus making them an actual cause of cultural crisis.[43] This interpretation depicts *fin-de-siècle* Paris as a stage, upon which Durand, Bernhardt, and others were free to play deceptively with their audiences and with their public images, in order to challenge perceptions of femininity and womanhood, as well as to explore and exploit urban trends of spectacle, mass consumerism, and advertising.

This body of scholarship that addresses the role of French women in the public sphere – from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, to industrialization and women's work, to concerns with political empowerment and cultural representation – converges upon the premise that public life was gendered male. Historians have

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[40] Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 248. On performance and selfhood, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[41] Ibid.
[42] Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes*, 9-10, and also cited in *Disruptive Acts*, 248. In the latter, Roberts comments that the Modern Woman represented "…the full-blown crisis of liberal culture itself. With her fast, loose ways, her short hair, and low-cut dresses, the Modern Woman embodied, for the French, the war's power to undermine the certainties of nineteenth-century liberal society."
[43] Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 2.

thoroughly explored the various political, social, and literary channels by which women found unique ways to challenge and successfully enter this so-called masculine realm, in order to evaluate her role in society, her struggle for citizenship and individuality, and her control over her representation, and have demonstrated that the supposedly rigid and separate spheres of public and private life were of a much more permeable nature. They have shown that although French women could not vote and were not formally considered citizens at this time, there were a myriad of ways in which those who desired to articulate themselves in the public sphere could do so.

In this study, I explore the significance of public life as expressed through the urban landscape of Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, in order to chart the experiences, both liberating and troubling, of women artists as they made their way in a cultural public of middle-class readers and art viewers. I examine both how the sense of crisis in Paris not only allowed women to enter new public spaces—and thereby empowered them – but also presented them with new anxieties as they responded to conflict in the public domain. I also demonstrate how forces of contestation might be applied to specific artistic professionals of the late-nineteenth century, in an attempt to respond to Sîan Reynolds' call for historians to explore the "… wider 1900 generation of French women… in order to see what there was about them that was truly 'new.'"[44] What was "new" for women artists living in Paris at this time, I argue, was not simply that they could fight for work and an independent life in the *fin-de-siècle* city, but that they found this process to be a contradictory and ambiguous experience, one which they expressed through their various art forms.

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[44] Sîan Reynolds, review of Roberts, *Disruptive Acts* for Society for French Historical Studies and H-France, 2003.

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In dealing with notions of contradiction and ambiguity, and how they might be applied to the experiences of women artists in the *fin-de-siècle* city, the writings of Walter Benjamin and Rita Felski are particularly instructive, for both have noted the key role that these forces played in connection to nineteenth-century modernity. In his famous essay, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," Benjamin described life in the increasingly industrialized and urbanized centres of the nineteenth century as a complex web of fantastical and even illusory experiences, which often created a false sense of security and happiness for urban dwellers.[45] He defined these experiences as "phantasmagorias," a term of Baudelaire's from the 1860s, and used the example of the Parisian shopping arcades to demonstrate how modern places, such as exhibitions and markets, were ambiguous spaces – they represented both the private interior and the public street,[46] as well as "…the pomp and the splendor with which commodity-producing society surrounds itself…".[47] These contradictory spaces of urban life were incapable, in Benjamin's estimation, of "rejuvenating society," and were simply manifestations of a new and modern obsession with consumption.[48] For Benjamin, the physical spaces of urban life created an environment of conflicting sensations and experiences, which could

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[45] Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century, Exposé of 1939," *The Arcades Project,* Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin, trans. (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 14-26. Studies of Benjamin and his work on the city include Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989); Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 1996); Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Walter Benjamin for Historians," *American Historical Review,* Vol.106, No.5 (December 2001): 1721-1743.

[46] As Benjamin comments, "Ambiguity is the appearance of dialectic in images […] Such an image is presented by the arcades, which are house no less than street." "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century, Exposé of 1935," *Selected Writings, Vol.3,* 40.

[47] Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century, Exposé of 1939," 15. For Baudelaire's use of phantasmagoria and discussions of urban life, see "Peintre de la vie moderne" (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays,* Jonathan Mayne, trans. (London: Phaidon Press, 1964); Reinhard H. Thum, *The City: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verhaeren* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

[48] Ibid, 15-17.

be alienating and exploitative,[49] but also compelling. As Graeme Gilloch, a scholar of Benjamin and urban theory, has noted, "For Benjamin, the great cities of modern European culture were both beautiful and bestial, a source of exhilaration and hope on the one hand and of revulsion and despair on the other. The city for Benjamin was magnetic: it attracted and repelled him in the same moment."[50]

In a similar way, Rita Felski has explored the contradictions of modernity, not through an examination of the urban experience, but by exploring the ways in which gender was implicated in and shaped by the processes of modernity in the nineteenth century.[51] Like Benjamin, Felski stresses the complexities and ambiguities of the modern, particularly in its relationship to femininity, and by studying literary texts of the period, she argues that women often created "hybrid" and "contradictory identities" for themselves, in their attempt to articulate their own vision of and experiences with modernity at the *fin de siècle*, which often expressed itself as "yearning, dissatisfaction, and restlessness."[52] Both Benjamin and Felski have demonstrated the influential presence of contradiction, conflict and ambiguity in the various workings of European society at the end of the nineteenth century. Their work has shown that questions of urban space, gender, and identity were reevaluated and reexamined at the *fin de siècle* in terms of complexity and changeability. The emergence and development of modern cities as well as modern women in the latter decades of the nineteenth century was not a simple

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[49] Other critiques of this nature include Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* (New York, 1944), trans. John Cumming, (New York: Continuum, 1972), particularly "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception."

[50] Gilloch, 1.

[51] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995). Other studies of modernity include Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983); Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).

[52] Felski, 22, 210.

narrative of enthusiastic belief in the wonders of progress and "unambiguous improvement," but rather, was fraught with instability, ambivalence, and even dissatisfaction.[53]

It is this sense of conflict that I examine in greater depth in Paris's specific cultural, political, and social history from 1880 to 1914, and pay particular attention to the ways in which it affected and was influenced by the lives and careers of women artists who lived there during this time. I explore the cultural image of Parisian womanhood and the woman artist, and provide a focused study of several individual artists and writers, in order to evaluate the specific ways in which they interacted with and responded to their urban environment. By placing the lives and work of individual women at the centre of this study, I build upon a trend among French gender historians, such as Scott and Roberts, who ground their broader arguments about female identity in compelling examples taken from the individual lives and experiences of specific French women.[54] This approach, in part, follows what Jo Burr Margadant has called "new biography," and reflects a belief that "…cultural politics are most easily examined as well as emphatically imagined in the individual life."[55]   My study of the opportunities and constraints that faced women in *fin-de-siècle* Paris follows this approach, and incorporates the experiences of specific individuals as a way of illuminating and complicating the broader cultural context.   Building on Scott, I view the individual women in this study not as "heroines," but as "…historical locations or markers – where crucial political and cultural contests are enacted and can be examined in some detail," and see the factors that

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[53] Felski, 18.

[54] Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*; Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*.

[55] Jo Burr Margadant, ed., *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 7.

constitute their agency as complex and often contradictory.[56]   Agency is not just comprised of "autonomous individual will," but is the "effect of a historically defined process which forms subjects."[57]

I have selected the five women included in this study because they were some of the most well-known women artists of their day. All were visible public figures in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, and experienced a certain amount of success and public notoriety in their chosen professions of painting, sculpture, and writing.   Their words and images circulated among middle-class readers and art viewers in the public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century, where people bought, sold, read, exhibited, discussed, critiqued, enjoyed and despised their work. They all moved to or lived in Paris at the *fin de siècle*, and were involved, even if peripherally, in its world of artists and intellectuals. There are some links between these women – for example, both Gwen John and Camille Claudel had personal and professional relationships with sculptor Auguste Rodin – but they did not self-consciously recognize themselves as part of a coherent group or association.   This allows for an examination of diverse experiences and motivations, removed from collective aims and aspirations. The five women under consideration came from different countries, with varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds, and yet they show the similarities in their lives and careers, as they all came to Paris with hopes of success, and experienced struggle.   Their art and writings also contain similar themes of ambiguity and contradiction, and re-evaluate the nature of private life.   By exploring various manifestations of these themes, through their depictions of intimate space, bodies, and selves, I demonstrate the ways in which these artists used their public

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[56] Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, 16.
[57] Ibid, 15-16.

voice and mediums to express their new ideas about private life.[58]   Historians and

scholars of art and literature have chronicled the lives and careers of these women, and

have given them an influential place in the canon of artistic expression of the late-

nineteenth and early-twentieth century, but there has been less interest among cultural

historians in what these women can tell us about the nature of female identity in Paris at

the turn of the twentieth century, and the role that their work played in articulating this

experience.   By placing individual artists at the centre of this study, I not only argue for

the complex nature of female selfhood at the *fin de siècle*, but also contribute to the body

of scholarship on these specific women. I bring together these five artists in a unique way,

as historical actors who can help shape our understanding of the activities and roles of

women in the shaping of modern Paris at a critical moment in its inception.

The number of art historical studies dedicated specifically to these artists, until

recently, has been relatively small, and composed predominantly of biographies and art

surveys that focus on the unique circumstances surrounding their careers as artists, and

exhibition catalogues and *catalogues raisonnés* that document their *oeuvres* as well as

specific exhibits of their work.[59]   Along with providing an assessment of their art and a

chronology of their lives, these biographical studies served a recuperative function, aimed

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[58] For the importance of privateness to the cultural and social history of modern Europe, see Michelle
Perrot, ed., *A History of Private Life: IV. From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War* (Cambridge,
Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990).
[59] See for example, Whitney Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks*
(Berkeley: University of California Press in association with the National Museum of Women in the Arts,
2000); Cecily Langdale, *Gwen John: With a Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings and a Selection of the
Drawings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Reine-Marie Paris and Arnaud de la Chapelle,
L'Oeuvre de Camille Claudel (Paris: Adam Biro, 1990); Fondation Pierre Gianadda, *Suzanne Valadon*
(Martigny, Suisse, Jan 26-May 27: 1996). Important art surveys dedicated to the contributions of women
artists include Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, Third edition (London: Thames & Hudson,
2002); Frances Borzello, *A World of Our Own: Women as Artists* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000);
Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists*. (London: Routledge, 1993); Ann Harris and
Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists, 1550-1950* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1977);
Eleanor Tufts, *Our Hidden Heritage: Five Centuries of Women Artists* (New York: Paddington Press,
1974).

at legitimizing these women as talented and successful artists and thus rescuing them from the "margins" of art history.   For example, Angelo Caranfa has lamented that Claudel continues to be a marginal figure among famous sculptors, or else continuously "entangled" with her famous mentor and partner, sculptor Auguste Rodin.[60] Kristen Frederickson has echoed this concern and notes that critiques of Claudel's career, both past and present, have "...a tendency to focus on the effect of her sex on her status as an artist and the presence of 'the feminine' in her art, and a preoccupation with Claudel's dependence on men, especially Rodin."[61] As part of these efforts, art historians have also been concerned with re-evaluating and reinterpreting the art and careers of these women, in order to "…unveil fresh angles," and "…offer a more nuanced understanding" of their artistic contributions.[62]   For example, Whitney Chadwick has rethought the work of Romaine Brooks, and examined the connections between her paintings of the female nude and her identity as a lesbian,[63] and Alicia Foster and Sue Roe have revisited traditional interpretations of Gwen John, which described her as a woman and artist obsessed with privacy, to show her instead as an independent, motivated and highly professional artist, who closely followed the currents of the Parisian artistic community to further her

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[60] Angelo Caranfa, *Camille Claudel: A Sculpture of Interior Solitude* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999), 9. He has commented on the small number of studies dedicated to the life and work of Claudel, either in monograph form, or as part of larger collections on sculpture or women in art. See his "Preface," 9-14.

[61] Kristen Frederickson, "Carving Out a Place: Gendered Critical Descriptions of Camille Claudel and her Sculpture," *Word & Image*, vol.12, no.2, April-June 1996, 161-174, 162. This line of argument has challenged that of Adolf Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth who has argued that "…every artist [male or female] who worked with Rodin found it difficult to cast off the oppressive burden of his authority." See J. Adolf Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, *Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel,* (Munich: Prestel, 1994), 101.

[62] Joe Lucchesi, "Introduction," *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 9.

[63] Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 10-39. Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace have also discussed Brooks' construction of a lesbian identity through her use of cross-dressing in portraits of young women, which made them conform to a male aesthetic of dandyism at the turn of the twentieth century. See Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, "Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses? Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, and the 'Originality of the Avant-Garde,'" *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings* (London: Routledge, 1994).

career.[64]   These approaches have sought to critically augment or diverge from biographical studies that dramatize, sentimentalize, or sensationalize the lives and careers of these artists.   In each of the chapters dedicated to these artists, I engage with the current art historical and literary studies and attempt to build upon or re-evaluate their key debates. As a cultural historian, I also integrate these debates into a synthetic treatment of how women experienced their lives as public professionals at a critical moment in modern French history.   My thesis furthers this discussion by illuminating the contradictions of these experiences, and how they led to a reinterpretation and re-evaluation of private life.

A project of this nature requires the use of art and literature as primary sources, and an approach to the paintings, in particular, that is informed by some of the major trends in art historical scholarship.   These include concerns both of a traditional or formalist nature, as well as those shaped by questions of gender, class, and language.   H.W. Janson's *History of Art* is considered one of the "classic canonical texts"[65] of western art history and follows what Richard Brettell has described as a "…loosely chronological sequence of movements, most of which were given their current names as they developed."[66] This approach to art history recounts the various eras of artistic production through a series of "-isms" which have become "common currency" in our understanding of the history of art.[67] Art historians such as Brettell and Matthew Craske have refocused this formalist approach to art history, which "…[is] largely concerned with the process of

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[64] Alicia Foster, *Gwen John*, (London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd., 1999); Sue Roe, *Gwen John: A Life*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001). For an interpretation of John that emphasizes her reclusive nature, see Susan Chitty, *Gwen John: 1876-1939*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981).
[65] Kristen Frederickson, "Carving Out a Place," 161.
[66] Richard R. Brettell, *Modern Art 1851-1929, Oxford History of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.
[67] Ibid, 12.

classification rather than analysis," and have instead approached the standard litany thematically.[68] Brettell has examined the historical underpinnings of art in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, specifically the impact of urbanization, and has argued that, "modern art has been…part of an urban spectacle of display…[and] its exhibition before urban audiences of various scales is essential to its nature."[69] Instead of organizing his study around a series of chronological art movements, Brettell has proceeded thematically, and has organized his chapters according to what he feels to be the key moments in history of modern art – themes such as attitudes toward and depictions of sexuality and the body, social class, abstraction, and the impact of photography. I follow this approach, and analyze the art and literature according to themes such as the representations of intimate space, the body, and female selfhood, in order to examine the changing attitudes toward and depiction of subjects which were traditionally the domain of women artists.

In addition to the thematic organization of the paintings, sculptures, and fictional writings, I interpret the paintings and sculptures according to some of the key cultural readings of art. One of the most predominant methods by which women and art have been viewed is through the lenses of gender and feminism. In the 1970s, art historians such as Eleanor Tufts compiled catalogues dedicated to women artists, in an effort to "solidly annex [them] to the mainstream of history," and "…constitute a beginning in a redress of balances." [70] Other feminist art historians, however, have criticized these recovery efforts, stating that they "…seamlessly insert [women artists] into the existing

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[68] Matthew Craske, *Art in Europe, 1700-1830: A History of the Visual Arts in an Era of Unprecedented Urban Economic Growth, Oxford History of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.
[69] Brettell, 2.
[70] Tufts, *Our Hidden Heritage,* xv-xvii.

canon predominantly as appendages to their 'important' male counterparts…".[71] In 1971,

Linda Nochlin's influential essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"

offered an alternative, and argued that art historians needed to focus instead on the causes

of this exclusion. She concluded that "it was… *institutionally* made impossible for

women to achieve artistic excellence, or success on the same footing as men, no matter

what the potency of their so-called talent, or genius."[72]

In the 1980s and 1990s, art historians like Griselda Pollock examined constructions

of identity, gender, and sexuality in the work of women artists, and evaluated the role of

cultural representation and agency.[73] Pollock has explored how impressionists Mary

Cassatt and Berthe Morisot were excluded from painting images of masculine public

spaces, such as bars and cafés, and instead, depicted "spaces of femininity," which were

private – the bedroom, drawing room, veranda, and garden.[74] Part of the success of these

images, for Pollock, is that the women depicted in the paintings were no longer objects of

a male viewer, or gaze, but part of a sympathetic relationship between painter and

subject. In this way, painters such as Cassatt and Berthe Morisot "rearticulated" the

traditional spaces at their disposal, and inscribed their own vision of modern life.[75]

Conversely, Gillian Perry has examined an opposing tendency in her study of avant-

garde painters in Paris in the early decades of the twentieth century.[76] She argues that by

the 1910s, these "spaces of femininity" had changed, and one response for women artists

was to refigure conventional male subjects, such as the female nude, and offer their own

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[71] Frederickson, 161.
[72] Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988).
[73] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art,* (New York: Routledge, 1988).
[74] Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, chapter 3 entitled "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," 50-90.
[114] Ibid, 87.
[76] Gillian Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and "Feminine" Art, 1900 to the late 1920s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

conceptions of these themes. Perry has suggested that with this new work women were contributing to the "slow erosion" of the division between male and female bourgeois roles by appropriating traditionally "masculine" subject matter, and thus, carving out a new "marginal space" in their careers from which to work.[77] For Perry then, space is defined not only as images that appear on the canvas, but also the domains of the artistic profession.

These concerns are important to my own interpretations of the art included in this study, particularly in understanding the ways in which these spaces of femininity changed over the course of the *fin de siècle*. However, in my assessment of the individual paintings and sculptures, I have been struck by the predominance of themes of contradiction and ambiguity – interior spaces that are at once lonely and liberating, occupied and vacant; female nudes that are masculine and feminine, aggressive and introspective; children who are vulnerable and defiant. The artists included in this study all depicted typically feminine subject matter in their work, but in a way that foregrounded notions of inconsistency and multiplicity. These impulses are also present in the heroines of Rachilde's fiction, who attempt to redefine female subjectivity and identity, but are ultimately unsuccessful and stuck at an impasse among various modes of representation. They are at once sexually aggressive and independent, but also weak and hysterical, and oddly tied to traditional institutions of marriage and motherhood. By examining these conflicting themes in the work of women artists at the turn of the twentieth century, I draw attention to an overlooked element of their artistic legacy – that they did not easily articulate a unique vision of modern female identity, but rather, highlighted the inherent struggles and uncertainties involved in this process. In this way,

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[77] Ibid, 35.

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I modify the historiography by arguing that women artists were not simply expressing their agency through paintings of femininity or protagonists who provide alternate visions of selfhood, but that they were actually engaged in something more difficult – the attempt to capture the conflicted nature of their lives and careers as they moved into the professional world of art and literature in *fin-de-siècle* Paris.

Chapters 2 and 3 address the nature of Parisian life from 1880 to 1914, and establish the context for the world in which the women artists considered in this study worked and lived. Chapter 2 outlines cultural life in *les deux Paris*, and pays particular attention to its crises and splendours during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. I address the political crises of the early Third Republic, as well as Paris's developing mass culture, its shifting notions of gender and selfhood, and its cultural decadence, which all coalesced to create a contradictory and complex environment for women as they emerged into public and professional life. Chapter 3 explores the representations of womanhood and female identity that were linked to the French capital, and the ways in which Parisian women responded to the conflicted nature of their city. I examine one of the most enduring and ubiquitous images of Parisian womanhood, that of *la Parisienne,* and suggest that she was much more than just a symbol of femininity and grace – she also embodied many of the incongruencies that existed in Parisian society at the *fin de siècle.* I also examine articles written for the women's press *La Fronde*, and argue that alongside the hopeful and ambitious articles about suffrage and women's rights, women journalists at the paper used columns such as the *fait-divers*, reports, and editorials to emphasize their concern for the darker realities of life in Paris – crime, danger, and the so-called suicide "epidemic." Finally, I discuss the unique opportunities

and constraints that faced women artists in Paris at this time, and their varied responses to these complexities.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 shift from the context of Paris and its female inhabitants, to the experiences of five specific artists who lived in the French capital around the turn of the twentieth century – painters Gwen John, Suzanne Valadon, and Romaine Brooks, sculptor Camille Claudel, and writer Rachilde. I examine the various ways in which they re-worked traditional artistic themes for women – intimate spaces and interiors, the female and child's body, and the nature of female selfhood and subjectivity – to reflect their tumultuous and often ambiguous experiences in Paris during the early years of their careers. As part of an increasingly accessible realm, these specific women were some of the most publicly active female artistic professionals in Paris at this time; however, their crafts also emphasized expressions of a personal and subjective nature. This duality makes them particularly well-suited to a fuller examination of how women entered and experienced life in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, and the ways in which they captured these inconsistencies in their re-evaluation of private life. I have chosen the specific paintings, sculptures, and novels included as examples in these chapters for their representative nature. They are some of the most noted works by these women, and were all created during the years under consideration in this study. For some, like Gwen John, Suzanne Valadon, and Rachilde, the images and novels I have chosen reflect a style that was considered typical of their overall artistic approach; for others, like Camille Claudel and Romaine Brooks, the art selected represents a unique style they honed during the years of the *fin-de-siècle*, and from which they later departed.

At the heart of this study lies an interest in cultural expressions of identity and selfhood. I see female identity at the *fin de siècle* not as coherent and cohesive, but as

inherently complex, splintered, and constantly changing.[78] Harold Mah has described

identity in terms of multiplicity and "phantasy," and has demonstrated the various ways

in which French and German concepts of selfhood in the nineteenth century were caught

up in contradiction as well as cultural and political conflict.[79] Historians concerned with

questions of gender, I suggest, can benefit from this notion of a complex and conflicted

selfhood, particularly in its application to the ways in which women saw themselves and

responded to their surroundings in the contested urban spaces of *fin-de-siècle* Paris. I

argue that the experiences of women artists in the late-nineteenth century city cannot be

reduced to simple tales of oppression or brave expressions of female agency, but rather,

were part of a volatile and unpredictable struggle that often resulted in victory and defeat.

I show how these conflicting impulses ultimately led each woman to an impasse in their

own lives and careers, one that they tried to capture in their art and writings. Poised at

the intersection of opportunity and constraint, these artists were in a unique position to

explore the elusive and highly changeable nature of their experience, and in this way,

their artistic legacies shed new light onto the pathos but also the triumphs of life for

women in a modern Paris on the eve of the twentieth century.

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[78] Margadant, *The New Biography*, 6-7.
[79] Harold Mah, *Enlightenment Phantasies: Cultural Identity in France and Germany, 1750-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 12.

Chapter 2: A Cultural History of Paris, 1880-1914

In describing the duality of Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, historians have used phrases such as "les deux Paris,"[1] "Paris sphinx,"[2] and the "two-edged period," which captures the pervasive sense of crisis and splendour, the "anxious spectacle" that truly defined the years of the *fin de siècle* and *belle époque*.[3] As Christophe Charle has noted, Paris at this time was at once "a machine that produced glory and innovation, but also defeat and bitterness."[4] It was the glittering city of the Paris Expositions, the Eiffel Tower, and the boulevard culture of consumption, spectacle and consumerism, which "…both celebrated national accomplishment and material progress and seemed to confirm, in their opulence and accessibility, the democratization of leisure."[5] At the same time, Paris was infamous for its vices and illicit pleasures, its dangers and crimes, which made the city an attractive destination for some, but made daily life difficult for many. Indeed, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, women in Paris often found themselves at the intersection of these two forces, and in a complex and confusing space. This chapter examines these two sides of late-nineteenth century Paris, both its crises and splendours, and explores the ways in which they coalesced to form "les deux Paris."

Political Crises of the Early Third Republic

Formally proclaimed at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris on September 4, 1870, France's Third Republic came into being amid confusion and uncertainty. As the tide of the

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[1] Jean-Pierre A. Bernard, *Les Deux Paris,* 12.
[2] Christophe Charle, *Paris fin de siècle* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1998), 12.
[3] Colin Jones, *Paris: Biography of a City* (New York: Viking, 2004), 344.
[4] Charle, *Paris fin de siècle*, 12.
[5] Shapiro, 1.

Franco-Prussian War turned against the French, and forced Napoleon III's surrender at Sedan, members of the Assembly debated over the system that should replace the now-defunct Second Empire. As James Lehning and other historians of the period have noted, this time was one of controversy and conflict, as republicans argued with monarchists and Bonapartists about the future of France, and although the republicans were eventually victorious, the Third Republic was neither a unified nor clearly defined regime during its early years.[6] Republicans themselves disagreed over the nature of Republicanism – "… [it] was not a consistent ideology … but rather a collection of differing positions that generated tensions and conflicts within the republican camp itself and contributed to the instability of the Republic."[7] They disagreed about the nature and speed of reform, the relationship between the Catholic church and the state, and the degree of public participation to be enjoyed by the French citizenry.[8] Throughout the 1870s, and even into the 1880s, the Republic was a tenuous and complex mixture of factions, and heavily influenced by conservative and monarchist forces; indeed, it was not until the more moderate republicans gained control in 1879 that the Third Republic seemed secure from the threat of returning to monarchical rule. This spirit of instability also existed in France's economy, which was only starting to experience a period of strong industrial growth in the 1890s, after trailing behind Britain, Germany, and the United States for several decades.[9]

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[6] Studies on the political culture of nineteenth-century France include James R. Lehning, *To Be A Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001); Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995); Christophe Charle, *Les Élites de la République, 1880-1900* (Paris: Fayard, 1987).
[7] Lehning, *To Be a Citizen,* 2.
[8] Ibid, 1-3.
[9] France lagged behind these countries, in part, because of its delayed process of industrialization and ability to trade, which was linked to its comparatively large rural population (in 1911, 56% of France's

As the capital of France and the seat of government, Paris was centre stage for the political machinations of the early Third Republic. Paris had been the site of the devastating events of 1870 and 1871 – the Franco-Prussian War, the Siege, and the bloody days of the Paris Commune – which left a permanent scar upon the city and the nation during the last decades of the nineteenth century. As Weber and other historians have noted, the French experienced a profound sense of dishonour, disgrace, and shame at the loss of the war, and trauma after the *semaine sanglante* ("bloody week") which saw 20,000 French and Parisian Communards killed by fellow French soldiers.[10] The city itself had suffered from the destruction of bridges, homes, and public buildings, and important sites such as the Père Lachaise cemetery became new shrines to the many Frenchmen and women killed during the Commune. By the 1880s, these events, along with the insecure politics of the republic, formed a significant part of France's consciousness, and created a "tissue of legend" which would resonate as a legacy of crisis throughout the years of the *fin de siècle*.[11]

During the 1880s and 1890s, the political climate of the Third Republic continued its tenuous and polarized course, as moderate republicans, who gradually took control of the government, instituted a series of reforms aimed at secularizing the Republic. These laws, particularly the educational and school reforms put in place by education minister Jules Ferry in the early 1880s, angered many Catholics and conservatives, who felt

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population still lived outside of towns and cities, as compared with 38% of Germans) and stagnant population growth at the turn of the century. See Michel Winock, *La Belle Epoque: La France de 1900 à 1914* (Paris: Perrin, 2002), 50-71.

[10] Eugen Weber, *France Fin de Siècle*, 106-7.

[11] Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present,* Fifth edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 210.

alienated by the new anti-clerical approach to governing.[12] This growing bifurcation of the political left and right became even more acute during the late-1880s and 1890s, when France and Paris were divided by a series of political scandals that separated the government and the public along political, religious, and ethnic lines. The case of war minister General Georges Boulanger, whose popularity and political ambitions caused excitement and fear among government deputies, was the first of these crises from 1887 to 1889. Boulanger's dedication to the military and its soldiers, as well as his strong French patriotism and anti-German sentiment, helped him draw support from both radical republicans, who backed his belief in the common man, and the conservative right, who admired his militarism and French nationalism. The moderate government became increasingly uneasy as Boulangist fervour grew, and although they were successful in eventually removing him from office and discrediting his loyalty to the Republic, the right emerged from this episode as a stronger, more unified force in French politics. In its more extreme variety, the "new" right became linked to the causes of nationalism, authoritarianism, and militarism, all of which threatened the stability of the fragile republic.[13]

Following quickly on the heels of the Boulanger Affair was another crisis for the government, this one concerning the building of the Panama Canal. In 1892-93, the Chamber was embroiled in a dispute between the firm in charge of the canal's construction and its shareholders, who were embittered over the company's poor management of funds. The firm's eventual bankruptcy and revelations of bribery

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[12] For accounts of the reforms implemented by the Opportunists, including the Ferry Laws, see Charles Sowerwine, *France Since 1870: Culture, Politics, and Society* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 27-39 and William Fortescue (ed.), *The Third Republic in France, 1870-1940: Conflicts and Continuities* (London: Routledge, 2000), 24-49.
[13] Wright, *France in Modern Times,* 234-8; Lehning, *To Be a Citizen,* 102-6, 116-22.

prompted an investigation of the company's key directors, which was chronicled in the French and Parisian press. The investigation came to focus on two of the Jewish directors, who were targeted and accused of corruption. Edouard Drumont, a journalist who had become a "prophet of anti-semitism," led the assault with toxic rhetoric he had perfected in his 1886 publication, *La France Juive,* which as Eric Cahm has noted, was a "recapitulation of every known argument against the Jews."[14] Thanks in part to the scandal of the Panama Canal, Drumont's new daily paper, *La Libre Parole*, also became increasingly popular, and by 1894, had become the leading anti-semitic press in France, with a daily circulation of 200,000.[15] Although the two directors were eventually acquitted, the case played a significant role in agitating anti-Jewish sentiment in Paris and France, and put Drumont in a good position to exploit the next political crisis that occurred in 1894.

The Dreyfus Affair, known in French simply as "l'Affaire," was a culmination of the political and ethnic divisions that troubled the nation and its capital at the *fin de siècle.* Although the government had survived the problems of Boulanger and the Panama Canal, and finally seemed to have gained some measure of political control, it was now forced to deal with an accusation of treason within its military, a case that turned explosive when the emerging details implicated a Jewish officer by the name of Alfred Dreyfus. In November of 1894, France's media reported that Dreyfus had been arrested on a charge of treason against the republic, for allegedly selling classified information to the Germans. The evidence linking him to the crime was a covering letter, or *bordereau,* which outlined the confidential documents and which bore a resemblance to Dreyfus's

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[14] Eric Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics,* (London: Longman, 1996), 11-12.
[15] Ibid, 12; George R. Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 13, 20n.43.

handwriting. Historians have argued that it was, in fact, a myriad of forces that led the military to suspect Dreyfus – his wealth, for one, which isolated him from his fellow officers, and his Jewish background, which made his crime seem less surprising to some.[16] As Cahm has noted, for many officers, "…Dreyfus was not only a Jew, but one of the new technical elite, […] he was a bourgeois upstart and a *nouveau riche*…," which compounded their resentment towards him. [17]

When Dreyfus's arrest and court martial were made public, the press weighed in with editorials and articles about his guilt or innocence, which increased in number during his highly-publicized trial, conviction, and imprisonment on Devil's Island in 1895. The Dreyfus Affair was the first political event to be fought in the press on this scale – as Sowerwine has noted, "Mass media transformed the Affair into mass politics."[18] Drefyus's numerous supporters published defences and signed petitions calling for his release and acquittal, while the anti-semitic attacks of Drumont reached a fever pitch. Emile Zola's famous letter to President Félix Faure, "J'accuse," was published in *L'Aurore* on 13 January 1898, and publicly pointed the finger of blame at the military and the government for their acts of conspiracy and corruption against Dreyfus. This publication represented the pinnacle of a new method of public communication between the government and the French people, and demonstrated the power and growing proliferation of the press at this time.[19] As a response to Zola, Drumont published his

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[16] Michael Burns, *Dreyfus: A Family Affair, 1789-1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics*, and Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History*.

[17] Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics,* 6.

[18] Sowerwine, *France Since 1870,* 70.

[19] Printing technology, improved transport for distribution, and education, were all factors that contributed to the rise and spread of newspapers at the *fin de siècle*. These developments also reduced the price of a paper to a rate that was affordable for most French families (in some cases, 1 sou, or 5 centimes). *Le Petit*

own incendiary letter, which attacked "foreign Jews:" "The honest and patriotic population of Paris would not tolerate such provocations. IT WILL ESTABLISH ITS OWN POLICE [*sic*]. France will never be subjected to the outrageous pressures of foreign Jews…".[20] Drumont went even further, and formed an anti-semitic organization in 1899, the *Ligue nationale antisémitique de France*. Their statutes read, in part:

> The national league of anti-Semites in France has the purpose of defending the spiritual, economic, industrial, and commercial interests of our country with all appropriate means. […] Propagating the truth in broad daylight and employing social means, the league will fight the pernicious influence of the financial sway of the Jews whose clandestine and merciless conspiracy jeopardizes the welfare, honour, and daily security of France.[21]

Although Dreyfus was eventually released and pardoned for his wrongful conviction in 1906, the rhetoric connected to the highly contested case had reached many French citizens within and beyond Paris, and had divided "virtually the entire educated elite" of France in the late-nineteenth century; families were divided, and frequent clashes and duels were fought in the streets of Paris. [22] The Dreyfus Affair, as Christopher Forth has suggested, also became a lightning rod for debates over the nature of masculinity and manhood; intellectuals who supported Dreyfus were portrayed as weak and unmanly, their masculinity challenged by the sedentary and cerebral nature of their professions, while those against Dreyfus, soldiers and military men, depicted themselves as men of

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Journal, for example, had a daily circulation of 605,000 in 1880, and 1 million by 1890, and was the largest daily in the world. The day that Zola's "J'accuse" appeared in *L'Aurore*, the newspaper sold 300,000 copies, which was a record for the paper. See Sowerwine, *France Since 1870,* 69-70.

[20] Edouard Drumont, "Aux Français," *La Libre Parole,* 6 February, 1898, in Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History,* 159.

[21] Statutes of the *Ligue nationale antisémitique de France*, 1899, founded by Edouard Drumont, the marquis de Morès, and Jacques de Biez, in Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History*, Appendix 2, 343-4.

[22] Wright, *France in Modern Times,* 243.

action, virility, and physical strength.[23] Politically, the Dreyfus Affair contributed to the continued mobilization of the "new right," whose views of ultra-nationalism, anti-semitism, militarism, and Catholicism began to shape organizations that sought to protect and safeguard France from elements it deemed undesirable.[24]

Collectively, the political crises and scandals of France's *fin de siècle* brought instability and divisiveness to the early years of the Third Republic, and yet at the same time, helped to create a new level of public participation in government. The increased involvement in matters of the state was aided in large part by the development and proliferation of a mass press – widely-read, easily-accessible newspapers now provided more details and information to French citizens, and brought people together in a new dialogue with their government and with each other. These elements also helped nurture the growth of a mass culture in Paris and France, which had a profound impact, in ways both positive and negative, on many aspects of Parisian life at the turn of the twentieth century.

Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris

The development of broad-based Parisian culture during the late-nineteenth century has been a popular subject of recent historical inquiry, and many studies echo Benjamin's famous depiction of Paris as the "capital of the nineteenth century."[25] As Vanessa Schwartz has noted, Paris's position as a leading urban centre was solidified during Haussmann's redesign of the city during the 1860s. His vision for Paris, executed under

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[23] Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood,* 13.
[24] Some of these groups included Charles Maurras's *Action Française* and Déroulède's *Ligue de la Patrie français.* Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics,* 188.
[25] Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century, Exposé of 1939," 14-26.

the direction of Napoleon III and dubbed "Haussmannization," created a new sense of

space and convenience, with wide boulevards to accommodate increased traffic, a new

sewer system, and a reconstructed central market.[26]   These features made Paris a

decidedly "modern" city, and the increasingly commercial centre of France.[27]   This shift

brought with it a new intensity of consumerism and consumption, and was one of the

defining characteristics of Parisian society and culture by the *fin de siècle*. As Rosalind

Williams has noted, "France pioneered in retailing and advertising, the twin pillars of

modern consumer life. Its capital city became a sort of pilot plant of mass

consumption."[28] Indeed, Paris was transformed "from the cramped city of Victor Hugo to

a modern capital of consumption, a city of boulevards, cafés, electric lights, apartments,

advertising posters, the Métro, cinemas, restaurants, and parks, with production largely

exiled to an outer belt while the heart of the city was devoted to commerce."[29]   France

experienced an increase in purchasing power between 1850 and the outbreak of World

War I, and witnessed the emergence of new technologies that mechanized and increased

production, reduced the cost of goods, and created a seemingly unending array of new

things to purchase.[30]   The expanding consumer marketplace and the new ethos of

consumption in the French capital was perhaps best embodied in the Paris expositions of

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[26] Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 11-12.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Williams notes that a Parisian worker who had 100 francs to spend in 1850 had the equivalent of 165 francs by the early years of the twentieth century, allowing people to buy more nonessential items. Ibid, 9-10.

1889 and 1900, which brought together people from all over the world to witness, experience, and dream about the world of consumer goods.[31]

The impressive growth of France's commercial and consumer marketplace had profound implications for the ways in which class and gender developed during the late-nineteenth century. Historians have shown that the new realities of a consumer-driven economy "catapulted the bourgeoisie to new heights of economic power and fanned the flames of marketplace individualism."[32] This new spirit of consumption, or "marketplace modernism," as Tiersten has called it, was an active, creative, and even artistic enterprise, and played a crucial role in molding middle-class tastes into a social good.[33] Although shopping and purchasing were highly individual tasks, and often blamed for the moral decline and hedonism of modern society,[34] middle and upper-class consumers saw themselves as part of a "redemptive" process that assisted "the public good through the cultivation of French taste."[35] By honing their sense of what was chic, French bourgeois men, and particularly women, believed they could fulfil their own needs, and those of their families and homes, while also nurturing a republic of "social peace and plenty."[36] The development of a consumer-based society in France and Paris at the end of the nineteenth century placed new emphasis on the meanings of taste and style, which were extended beyond the aristocracy, and placed within the grasp of the wider middle classes,

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[31] Ibid, 12. See chapter 3 for further discussion of the Paris Expositions.
[32] Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2. By "consuming bourgeoisie," Tiersten refers to the middle and upper-middle classes, often called the *bonne bourgeoisie* or *haute bourgeoisie*, and generally comprised of liberal professionals, civil servants, and commercial proprietors. See 237, n.1.
[33] Ibid, 7
[34] Max Weber, *The Prostestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905), as cited in Tiersten, 9.
[35] Tiersten, 236.
[36] Ibid.

a process that had been underway since mid-century, when Britain's 1851 industrial fair at the Crystal Palace showcased French taste through consumer goods. [37]

Middle-class women played a particularly important role in the development and solidification of French taste and the accumulation of consumer goods. As Leora Auslander has argued, the home became a key repository for women's purchasing power and expression of style, and wives, mothers, and particularly single women were all key in this process: "After the turn of the century single women – divorced or never married – started to use their interiors to create and represent themselves alone and to write about their creation of such interior spaces."[38] Women of this period linked furnishing and decorating their homes not only to the domestic nurturing of a family, but to the development and representation of an independent self. Middle and upper-middle class women were also present in new public spaces of consumption such as shopping centres, and influenced consumer patterns by the products they purchased.[39] This was the great age of the Parisian department store, the "cathedral of modern commerce,"[40] and places like the *Bon Marché* and *Printemps*, which had opened during the Second Empire, expanded and flourished during the years of the *belle époque* to become a dominant force in retailing.[41] These stores created shopping as a new pastime for bourgeois men and women, who could stroll along Haussmann's gas-lit avenues after dark with an eye for

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[37] Whitney Walton, *France at the Crystal Palace: Bourgeois Taste and Artisan Manufacture in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[38] Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 278.

[39] Walton, *France at the Crystal Palace,* 16.

[40] Emile Zola used this expression in his 1883 novel *Au Bonheur des Dames*, which chronicles the culture of the Parisian department store: "…iron stairs rose from the ground floor and iron bridges crossed the space between them on both levels…There was more space everywhere, air and light entered in abundance, people moved freely under the solid span of the broad girders. It was the cathedral of modern commerce, solid yet light, made for a congregation of shoppers." See Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain (eds.), *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), 36-7 n.12.

[41] Sowerwine, *France Since 1870: Culture, Politics and Society,* 4-5.

buying, browsing, or merely gazing through the storefront windows. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, various Parisian department stores came to identify themselves with different clientele – the *Louvre* was seen as extravagant and conservative, the *Bon Marché* was more "middling and provincial," the *Samaritaine* popular and aimed at the working classes, and *Printemps* directed towards a young and modern bourgeois set.[42]   Women became a crucial component in the world of the department store – as Crossick notes, it was "a feminine universe *par excellence.*"[43] Not only did the department store provide a way for women to exert independence and connect to the marketplace, but it became a meeting place and venue of female sociability, where women could interact both as customers, and as employees. The *demoiselle de magasin*, or shop girl, who was hired with increasing frequency in Parisian stores, represented the "hope of social mobility for the daughters of the lower middle class," and the permeability of class and gender boundaries within the walls of the department store.[44]   At the same time, however, some historians have argued that shopping establishments remained powerful forces of paternalism within Parisian society. As Miller has noted, the owners of the *Bon Marché,* the Boucicauts, tried to nurture an atmosphere of bourgeois family values and protection by making their workplace enjoyable and secure – employees had medical plans, pensions, and leisure activities, all with the intent of encouraging loyalty to the company and projecting an image of a

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[42] Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 66-7, in Crossick and Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption,* 25, 43 n.115. Also see Tristan Gaston-Breton, *Galeries Lafayette: la légende d'un siècle* (Paris: ClioMédia, 1997).

[43] Crossick and Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption,* 2.

[44] Ibid, 30-31. For similar themes in the American context, see Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

grande famille.[45] These developments associated with the department store – its role in increasing women's mobility and visibility, as well as its regulation and perpetuation of the bourgeois family – were not lauded by all; they caused a significant amount of anxiety among social reformers who felt that the new obsession with consumerism was contributing to the erosion of moral values, and encouraging greed, avarice, and depravity, particularly among women. As one source described the shopping experience: "Eve's daughter enters the hell of temptation like a mouse in a trap […] she glides from counter to counter, dazzled and overpowered."[46]

This expanding consumer society thus contributed significantly to the rise of a mass culture in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, in which middle-class men and women increasingly congregated together to enjoy, witness, purchase, and be involved in the spectacle of the city. As Vanessa Schwartz has persuasively argued, this new collective spirit effectively created a "new crowd," one that was not a violent mob, but an "audience of and for urban spectatorship."[47] The phenomenon of "crowd-pleasing" became a new force, and novel practices and "institutions of the visual" took hold of Parisian society, which aimed to please a public newly invested with the powers of consumption.[48] Parisians came together not only to purchase, but also to experience strange and curious spectacles, which were designed to entertain and titillate a new crowd of spectators. Parisians of any age or class, for example, could take a tour of the morgue, and see first-hand the victims

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[45] Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1981), 77-112.

[46] Pierre Giffard, *Les Grands Bazars*, 1882, in Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 63. Rita Felski also explores this negative portrayal of the female shopper in literature of the day, particularly in Zola's *Au Bonheur des dames;* see "Imagined Pleasures: The Erotics and Aesthetics of Consumption," in *The Gender of Modernity,* 61-90.

[47] Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 5. For the nature of this new crowd's portrayal in the Parisian press of the late nineteenth century, see Gregory Shaya, "The Flâneur, the Badaud, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 109, no. 1 (February 2004): 41-77.

[48] Ibid.

of crimes they had read about in the press. The corpses were often displayed in windows that echoed those of the department stores, and contemporaries described the experience as one of entertainment and theatre: "They are lined up on the slabs; In front of the crowd that pushes forward; With the look of drunks, raided by a last drunkenness…; But in front of these horrible corpses; In front of whose terror you freeze; The crowd, content and without remorse; Takes their place as though at the theater."[49] Increased consumerism was not only about new products aimed at the middle and upper classes, but also brought Parisians together to form a new collectivity of spectators, joined in the common aim of witnessing both the splendours and gruesome realities of the modern urban experience.[50]

Of course, this new world of consumerism and leisure had its limitations, and many were excluded from the pleasures of consumer society in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. While Baron Haussmann's reorganization of the city had gentrified and modernized Paris's downtown centre at the height of the Second Empire, and provided the wide boulevards that had become crucial to the urban experience, he had also pushed many Parisians to the fringes of the city. The wider streets facilitated traffic flow, and allowed the leisured classes to see and be seen, but they also served as a pretext for demolishing some of Paris's worst slums.[51] Haussmannization had radically altered the social configuration of the city; prior to his re-building, Parisians of many different classes had lived side by side, often in the same building – the wealthy on the lower floors, those with average incomes on the middle floors, and the poor up in the garrets. The new buildings removed these mixed

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[49] Angelin Ruelle, *Les chansons de la morgue* (Paris: Léon Varnier, 1890), in Schwartz, 60.

[50] Jean-Pierre Bernard describes the recurrence of death as an important cultural theme in Parisian history. From the guillotine, to cemeteries and the morgue, he argues that cultural expressions of death were often a public and participatory experience for Parisians. See "La mort à Paris," *Les Deux Paris,* 129-173.

[51] Critics then and now have argued that Haussmann paid little attention to the quality of the new buildings constructed under his supervision, and largely ignored Napoleon III's instructions to maintain old buildings of quality. See David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 9, and Jeremy D. Popkin, *A History of Modern France* (New Jersey: Pearson, 2006), 128-9.

dwellings, and poor Parisians whose homes and neighbourhoods had been destroyed and who could not afford the increased rents were forced to move to cheaper housing at the city's limits. By the late-nineteenth century, this increased segregation of classes within Paris had created a bourgeois heart surrounded by a ring of lower and working classes, known as the "red belt" for its socialist leanings.[52]

These suburbs, or *faubourgs,* became closely connected to worries about crime and danger in the city. As much as the modern experience increased access to consumer goods and leisure time, the beginnings of a mass culture in Paris also involved a clear sense of trepidation and fear over the darker elements of urban society. Historians have shown that concerns over crime and urban danger existed throughout the nineteenth century, and indeed before,[53] but at the *fin de siècle*, these fears became part of a new complex of theories rooted in social science, which aimed to understand the criminal mind and the irrational impulses that guided often violent and dangerous acts of groups. The expanding realms of criminology and crowd psychology introduced new ideas about collectivity and collective consciousness, and theorists argued that crowds, as seen from the days of the Revolution, were unruly mobs defined by their depravity, violence, and criminality. According to Gustave Le Bon, a French crowd psychologist, crowds were a far cry from the leisured, bourgeois, consuming groups associated with the shopping and boulevard culture of the age; they represented the loss of the individual and the surrender

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[52] Wright, *France in Modern Times,* 164 and Popkin, *A History of Modern France,* 128-9.
[53] Louis Chevalier's *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes* chronicles the treacherous urban environment of Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the ways in which bourgeois perceptions linked the dangers of criminal activity to the displaced or "uprooted" labourers who migrated from the rural areas of France. See also John Merriman, *The Margins of City Life: Explorations on the French Urban Frontier, 1815-1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

of reason to the "primitive" and "unconscious motives" of modern society.[54] As Le Bon

wrote in his 1895 study *La Psychologie des foules (The Crowd: A Study of the Popular*

Mind):

> A crowd is not merely impulsive and mobile. Like a savage, it is not
> prepared to admit that anything can come between its desire and the
> realization of its desire. […] The notion of impossibility disappears for
> the individual in a crowd. As isolated individual knows well enough that
> alone he cannot set fire to a palace or loot a shop, and should he be tempted
> to do so, he will easily resist the temptation. Making part of a crowd, he is
> conscious of the power given to him by number, and it is sufficient to
> suggest to him ideas of murder or pillage for him to yield immediately to
> temptation.[55]

Explained this way, the phenomenon of collective action not only diminished people's

rational capacity to act as individuals, but invested them with a brute force and power that

was difficult to control because it was beyond reason. Writings such as these

demonstrated a concern about the condition of modern man in his world, and a desire to

control and repair the dangerous elements of an increasingly mass society. As Susanna

Barrows has argued, these theorists were voicing their fears and concerns about the

unsettling nature of urban life at the *fin de siècle* – despite the "wide range in the social

composition and behaviour" of French crowds, theorists fixated upon the evil and peril

associated with the modern, urban mob.[56] This fear underscored not only their own

concerns about urban chaos and unrest, but added to the proliferation of ideas that linked

crime, danger, and urbanization.

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[54] Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895), in Mike Jay and Michael Neve (eds.),
1900: A Fin-de-Siècle Reader (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 152-3.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Barrows concludes, in part, that these theorists distorted "reality" by condensing "a large number of
enemies into a single…adversary," in order to exert authority and influence in the arena of politics, where
they were largely ineffectual. Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors*, 192.

The increased concern among social theorists about the rise of crime and the urban mob in Paris was connected to a public fixation with criminality in the press and media, and was a manifestation of the era's worries over the development of a mass society. As Dominique Kalifa has noted, newspaper articles, detective and police novels, films, and songs were all engaged with tales of crime in the city: "Crime bloodied the paper and the entire country seemed taken in by a strange homicidal fever."[57] This obsession often centred on Paris and its growing suburbs, which, as Kalifa points out, was the perfect setting for the "social imaginary" of crime: "Crime and delinquency – as transgressions of the norm, cultural production, and political contention all at the same time – saturated Parisian public space."[58] As we will see in the next chapter, one of the most popular venues for daily doses of criminal tales came in the form of newspaper reports known as the *fait divers*, which reached many Parisians in the ever-expanding daily presses of the day.[59] Contemporary statistics on the rising crime rate, paired with a cultural obsession with criminality, formed a powerful argument for the increasing violence and danger in the French capital – homicides rose by 30 percent from 1865 to 1900, arson increased by 50 percent, robberies and thefts were up by 100 percent, and assault and battery increased by over 200 percent.[60] As Weber has noted: "Juvenile delinquency was rampant, shoplifting commonplace (department stores made it easier), assault and murder seemed to be everywhere: poison, acid throwing (this was the heyday of vitriol), hammer blows, knives and hatchets of every kind, canes, cudgels, truncheons, garrotes, lassos,

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[57] Dominique Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang*, 19. See also Simone Delattre, *Les Douze Heures Noires: La Nuit à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel. S. A., 2000).
[58] Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang* , 3; Kalifa, "Crime Scenes: Criminal Topography and Social Imaginary in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *French Historical Studies,* Vol..27, No.1 (Winter 2004): 175- 194, 175.
[59] See chapter 3, 107-122.
[60] Gabriel Tarde, *Essais et mélanges sociologiques* (1895) and J.-C. Chesnais, *Les Morts violentes en France* (1976), in Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle*, 40, 253 n.38.

swordsticks, shotguns and revolvers…".[61]   These figures paint a gloomy and violent

picture of *fin-de-siècle* Paris, and historians have used these statistics to understand larger

shifts about the nature of crime and criminality in French society.[62]   As Martin has noted,

"these statistics influenced what legal and political leaders – and through them the great

majority of educated French men and women – believed about crime and criminality, and

from that, about the larger society;"[63] and as Michelle Perrot has argued, "[t]here are no

'criminal facts' as such, only judgements about crime that create criminal acts and actors.

In other words, there is a criminal discourse that expresses the obsessions of a society."[64]

By using crime statistics in this way, historians have shown that worries about crime and

danger in late-nineteenth century France, "stemmed more from concerns about the

apparent pathologies of modern urban society than from growing rates of crime and

violence."[65]   With the rise of criminology, there was an increased desire at the *fin de*

siècle to understand, diagnose, and treat various forms of social deviance, including

criminal behaviour, which as Nye has demonstrated, was part of the "thoroughly *cultural*

aim of explaining to the French the origins of national decadence and the weaknesses of

their population" as the nineteenth century drew to a close.[66]

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[61] Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle*, 40.
[62] A popular source for studying crime in late-nineteenth century France and Paris are the court records of the *Compte général de l'administration de la justice criminelle,* which was issued annually by the French Ministry of Justice starting in 1825. As Benjamin Martin has noted, although these numbers show a general increase in crime throughout the nineteenth century, it is difficult to base conclusions about the nature of crime on these statistics – court records do not, for example, include figures for crimes that remained unsolved, or that contained insufficient evidence to win an indictment. Other "distortions" of the numbers come from changes in legal statutes or rules of police enforcement, both of which could change the type and quantity of offences recorded. Benjamin F. Martin, *Crime and Criminal Justice Under the Third Republic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 2-5.
[63] Ibid, 5.
[64] Michelle Perrot, "Déliquance et système pénitentiaire," *Annales* 30 (1975): 67-91, 72, as cited in Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France*, 20.
[65] Shapiro, *Breaking the Codes*, 226 n.57.
[66] Nye, xiii.

The idea that France was a nation in decline at the *fin de siècle*, emerged out of these debates over crime, danger, and the urban crowd, and came to focus on the larger theory of degeneration, as a way to explain the country's, and particularly the capital's, catastrophic state of disrepair as the "end of century" approached. The concept of degeneration emerged in the 1860s as a biological and scientific theory used to understand "abnormal individual pathologies;" by the end of the century, however, degeneration was adopted by the new forces of social theory and applied to the larger workings of modern society.[67] In France's case, the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Prussians, the bloody and divisive legacy of the Paris Commune, and the increased political polarization brought about by the Dreyfus Affair were all seen as compelling signs that France was weakening and in danger of losing its position of strength and power in Europe and the world.[68] Fear over the decline and degeneration of French society was echoed in other European centres at this time as well, particularly in London, which, as Judith Walkowitz and others have shown, was obsessed with its impoverished East End during the late-nineteenth century. Those living in the dangerous and crime-ridden neighbourhoods of East London were portrayed in largely middle-class media outlets and novels as a "degenerate class and species," who put other Londoners at risk.[69] The decline of the poor, increased crime and violence, and the worries over crowds and mob mentality, all coalesced to demonstrate that urban centres, and even nations, were at

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[67] Nye, 143. Nye cites the definition of degeneration in its original, clinical application: "…a pathological state of the organism which, in relation to its most immediate progenitors, is constitutionally weakened in its psychophysical resistance and only realizes in part the biological conditions of the hereditary struggle for life. That weakening, which is revealed in permanent stigmata, is essentially progressive, with only intervening regeneration; when this is lacking, it leads more or less rapidly to the extinction of the species." Valentin Magnan and Paul-Maurice Le Grain, *Les Dégénérés* (1895), Nye, 124.
[68] Nye, xii.
[69] Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 26-39; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

risk of degenerating into a wasteland of "outcasts" and animals as Europe faced the new century.[70]

Politicians, physicians, and social hygienists in France increasingly turned to a disturbing element in French society which they believed was a strong indication of the nation's degeneration – its declining population. Increased infant mortality rates in urban centres and a decreasing birthrate were two factors that led theorists to the conclusion that France was experiencing a "crisis of depopulation," a phenomenon which contributed to a sense of panic over France's perceived inability to sustain itself and thrive in the coming century.[71]   Part of the problem was attributed to the ills of industrialization, the changing role of women at the *fin de siècle*, and the negative effect these developments had on the breakdown of the family. As Accampo notes, in industrial centres across France, where women worked outside the home, infant and child mortality, stillbirths, and maternal mortality were on the rise. This reflected the unhealthy living and working conditions faced by many mothers, and also the stresses of industrial labour.[72] In addition to the dangers experienced by mostly working-class women in unsatisfactory working conditions, many French couples, although marrying early in life, were choosing to limit their family size.[73] This trend, combined with the increased presence of women in the

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[70] Andrew Mearns, "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London" (1883), as noted in Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight,* 27-8. Literary movements such as naturalism and the development of sociology also echoed these concerns over the degeneration of European societies. In *Germinal*, Emile Zola's epic tale of a French coalmining town, the terrible plight of the workers is not only linked to their class and lack of education, but is seen as part of a larger societal and generational decline that condemns each subsequent line of miners to a life of misery and poverty. Emile Zola, *Germinal* (1885), Penguin Classics, 2004.

[71] Accampo cites statistics from Francis Ronsin (1980) which show that France experienced a decline in the crude birthrate over the course of the nineteenth century, which fell from 281 per 10,000 people to 202, and an increased mortality rate of 23 deaths per 1,000 people. As well, between 1880 and 1901 the French population only increased by 3%, compared with a 20% increase in Germany. See Accampo, 7.

[72] Accampo, 6. She also notes here that the anonymity of cities were "magnets" for unwed mothers and unmarried pregnant women, whose illegitimate births were susceptible to complications resulting in illness or death.

[73] Ibid.

workforce, led critics to accuse French women of neglecting their familial duties and contributing to the deterioration of the family, and thus, the future of the nation. Opponents of women's independence and emancipation argued that feminists were threatening the stability and prosperity of the nation by shirking their duties as mothers, wives, and keepers of republican domesticity. As Karen Offen has argued, this fear of depopulation was a "…peculiarly male form of anxiety about national futures which arose in a context of mounting and imperial economic and military competition," as well as concerns over feminism.[74] One interesting expression of the concern over the breakdown of the family was the increased public attention given to the problem of juvenile delinquency; the mass press was rife with stories of bands of young thugs, "apaches," who were "born on the sidewalks of Paris," and who terrorized the city, particularly the *faubourgs*, with their acts of crime and violence.[75] Another manifestation of the crisis of the French family was the discursive interest in the female criminal. As Ann-Louise Shapiro has shown, the growing gap between the relatively low rate of crime committed by women in Paris at the *fin de siècle*, and the intense scrutiny they received in the press, demonstrates the ways in which women were perceived as a threat to the existing moral and social order of Paris, and responsible for the "national disease" of French *dégénérescence*.[76]

Thus, the development of a mass and increasingly popular culture was one of the hallmarks of Parisian society at the turn of the twentieth century, one which encompassed dynamic trends such as consumerism and increased leisure, as well as negative theories

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[74] Karen Offen, *Eurpoean Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 227-9.

[75] Michelle Perrot, *Les Ombres de l'histoire: Crime et Châtiment au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), 351-3. See also Kalifa, *Crime et culture au XIXe siècle*, 44-66; Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, *Peurs privées, angoisses publiques: Un siècle de violences en France* (Paris: Larousse, 2001), 29-36.

[76] Shapiro, *Breaking the Codes,* 16

about crowds, crime, and the degeneration of the nation. Implicit to both aspects of this early mass culture was an emphasis on how large groups of Parisians were joining together to participate in, or fall prey to, their changing environment, and the ways in which they were kept apprised of the details of city life, in all its splendour and danger, by an expanding press which could reach an unprecedented number of people on a daily basis. The complexities and contradictions of the urban experience increasingly led to, and were paired with, new theories about the changing nature of individuality and selfhood in the midst of a burgeoning urban public. Situated among the growing numbers of shoppers, spectators, dangerous criminals and crowds, the role of the individual was also scrutinized, as theorists and everyday citizens tried to embrace the dualities of the *fin de siècle*, and understand what it meant for their lives.

Unstable Selfhood and the Crisis of Gender

The intellectual and philosophical currents of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century had a profound impact on the nature of selfhood, and when combined with the context of a modern society that was prone to cultural and social crises, resulted in a powerful re-articulation of identity. Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud were two of the foundational figures associated with this re-evaluation of individuality, and their respective writings on the irrational and the unconscious attacked the authority of the liberal self, and its seemingly resolute characteristics of rationality, predictability, autonomy, and goodness.[77] Instead, they argued that the true nature of individuality and

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[77] The belief in a unitary self – a knowable, reasonable, and constantly improving individual – had been the accepted view from the days of the Enlightenment, and was firmly entrenched in modern society by the work of John Stuart Mill in the mid-nineteenth century. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 1859, (New York: Prometheus Books, 1986).

identity lay in one's primal instincts, urges, and dreams, which, along with the powerful forces of irrationality, formed the "intoxicated reality" of life.[78] The writings of Nietzsche and Freud illuminated an aspect of individuality not traditionally discussed – its complexity, instability, and propensity for irrational urges and desires. For both, knowledge derived from logic, reason, and law was supplanted by theories of perspectivism, free-thinking, and free association, which foregrounded inspiration and multiplicity, and rejected the existence of a single truth or answer.

Freud's work on the unconscious and the unknown depths of the human psyche had been inspired, in part, by his studies in Paris from 1885 to 1886, at the Salpêtrière hospital for nervous diseases under the supervision of Jean-Martin Charcot. Charcot's work in the field of mental health, particularly on the condition of hysteria, had laid significant groundwork for Freud's later theories of the unconscious and psychoanalysis, and was part of a larger trend in the late nineteenth-century to diagnose, medicate, and treat mental illness.[79] Charcot's Tuesday lessons at the Salpêtrière, where he demonstrated the techniques of hypnosis on a "half-clad hysterical patient" for a public audience, as well as his exhibitions of photographs which showed patients in various states of hysterical fits and convulsions, were important innovations among the medical community, but also brought hysteria into the public consciousness and made it a part of cultural life in *fin-de-siècle* France – as Mary Gluck has noted, it was a malady that was "amorphous and symbolically charged." [80] Indeed, although hysteria's existence as a medical condition

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[78] Nietzsche linked this primal, instinctive nature of selfhood with the Greek god Dionysus. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner,* (3rd ed. 1886), trans. Walter Kauffmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 38; Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), trans. Joyce Crick (London: Oxford World's Classics, 1999)

[79] Goldstein, *Console and Classify;* Nye, *Crime, Madness, & Politics in Modern France*.

[80] Mary Gluck, *Popular Bohemia: Modernism and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 132-3.

had a long history dating back to antiquity, by the late-nineteenth century, it had also come to embrace an entire set of cultural values – "It became shorthand for the irrational, the willess, the incomprehensible, the erratic, the convulsive, the sexual, the female, 'the Other.'"[81] The study of hysteria, neurasthenia, mental illness, and the psychiatric profession in general became part of Parisian society, and was often a source of macabre entertainment and public spectacle – Charcot's public lessons created a veritable theatre in which Parisians could witness the often eerie and discomforting effects of mental illness on the individual.[82] Hysterical conditions also found their way into the popular world of Parisian cabarets and *café-concerts*, with dancers incorporating elements of epileptic seizures into their performances. The Goncourt brothers described one such spectacle in this way: "Toward the back a theater stage with footlights; and on it a comic in evening dress. He sang disconnected things, interspersed with chortling and farmyard noises, the sounds of animals in heat, epileptic gesticulations […] The audience went wild with enthusiasm."[83]

The study of hysteria at the *fin de siècle* was also connected to gender. Women were most often linked with the malady, both in a medical and cultural context, because of their perceived susceptibility to weaknesses of the mind and nervous system.[84] The traditional medical view, which had been in place for a century, connected the uterus with

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[81] Mark S. Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), in Gluck, 132.
[82] Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, 379-380.
[83] Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Mémoirs de la vie littéraire,* 4 vols., in Gluck, 133.
[84] Mary Lynn Stewart, *For Health and Beauty: Physical Culture for Frenchwomen, 1880s-1930s* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Rachel Mesch, *The Hysteric's Revenge: French Women's Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006); Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 40-41; Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

the nervous system, and was thus responsible for making women "the nervous part of humanity."[85] In this way, hysteria and questions of mental illness not only encouraged new studies which focused on the unstable, weak, and diseased mind, as well as the fragility of identity, but also came to inform the changing nature of womanhood in the late-nineteenth century.   Rachel Mesch has noted that by the mid-nineteenth century, influential French doctors agreed that hysteria did not necessarily originate in a woman's body, but was just as likely to develop in her brain.[86]   Medical experts such as Jean-Louis Brachet argued that "[i]t is not only through the uterus that the woman is what she is; she is such in her entire constitution. […] You will find all her tissue and her organs different from the same tissues and same organs in man."[87] These differences were defined as "innate weakness" within a woman, and confirmed her biological inferiority to man as well as her susceptibility to nervous ailments and hysterical fits because of her femininity.[88]   A woman's biological disposition for hysteria also had social and cultural applications, and as women moved with increased force into the public sphere, there was a sense that their presence, both physically and intellectually, threatened to weaken and contaminate French society.[89] As Janet Beizer has noted, the use of hysteria as a cultural discourse – the "hystericization of culture" – figured prominently in literature, newspapers, and journals from the 1860s, and by the 1880s "…it had spread through the

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[85] S. Icard, *La Femme pendant la période menstruelle* (Paris: 1890) in Stewart, *For Health and Beauty,* 91-2.

[86] Mesch, *The Hysteric's Revenge*, 17.

[87] Jean-Louis Brachet, *Traité de l'hystérie* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière, 1847), 63, in Mesch, 17-18.

[88] J.P. Dartigues, *De l'amour expérimental ou des causes d'adultère chez la femme au XIXe siècle* (Versailles: A. Litzellmann, Librairie Médicale et Scientifique, 1877), 1, in Mesch, 18.

[89] Mesch, 19. See also Felski, *The Gender of Modernity,* 3; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol.1 An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Carolyn Dean, *The Frail Social Body: Pornography, Homosexuality, and Other Fantasies in Interwar France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

novel in near epidemic proportions."[90]   Hysteria became a powerful metaphor for the

crises of the French nation, and was used to describe the anxieties of the age: "The body

of the hysteric – mobile, capricious, convulsive – [was] both a metaphor and myth of an

epoch: emblem of whirling chaos and cathartic channeling of it."[91]

The nature of French womanhood was thus a topic of both intellectual and popular

discussion at the *fin de siècle*, and many came to associate female identity and selfhood

with the characteristics of hysteria – erratic, highly emotional, irrational, and unable to

control her mind and body. Not only was a woman perceived as physically and mentally

inferior, but when allowed to develop and move into the world of public and professional

life, she threatened the health and stability of France itself. This preoccupation with

French womanhood was part of a larger issue in early-Third Republic France that the

nation was facing an acute gender crisis. In addition to fears that women were shirking

their reproductive function, and contributing to the nation's depopulation, there was also

significant public debate about the profound changes occurring to traditional definitions

of male and female. From the independent new woman and the unmarried "odd woman,"

to the dandy and homosexual, there was a perceived blurring of male and female identity

and increased gender ambiguity – it was a time when "men became women, women

became men."[92]   As we have seen, the cultural phenomenon of the new woman was, in

part, a reflection of the changing social and political climate in France and other countries

at the turn of the twentieth century. As feminism grew and expanded, and policies in

France, such as the reintroduction of divorce in 1884 and increased access to secondary

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[90] Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 8.
[91] Ibid, 8-9.
[92] Karl Miller, *Doubles: Studies in Literary History,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), in Showalter,
Sexual Anarchy, 4.

and higher education, awarded women new opportunities and rights, many contemporaries believed they were witnessing a new age for women. Movements dedicated to the rights of women gained momentum at the *fin de siècle,* particularly between 1896 and 1901, as women's congresses in Paris increased, Marguerite Durand founded the feminist daily newspaper, *La Fronde,* and women began the French coalition of the Conseil national des femmes françaises, which was affiliated with the International Council of Women.[93] While many heralded these developments, others felt they caused fear and tension – as James McMillan has noted, "…new Eve aroused fear, not to say panic, in the breast of old Adam."[94] McMillan has argued that worry over new and independent women was largely cultural, and limited to the "fantasies" of a "coterie of frightened male intellectuals;" in actual fact, he contends, the realities of middle-class women were far less threatening and "bore little resemblance to the emancipated existence imagined by troubled male minds."[95] However, the phenomenon of the new woman did produce an incredible amount of public fervour and debate in Paris, and was part of an overall cultural discourse about the shifting nature of gender relations at the time, and in this way, reveals much of the ambiguity and contradiction surrounding the nature of French womanhood and identity at the *fin de siècle*.

In addition to the images and discussions of the "*femme nouvelle*," who was often portrayed as masculine and aggressive, the modern French woman was also depicted as overly sexualized and potentially dangerous to men. This deadly woman was known as the "*femme fatale*" or the "*fille d'Eve*," and was found frequently in Salon paintings from

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[93] Steven C. Hause and Anne R. Kenney, *Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 28
[94] James F. McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 141.
[95] Ibid, 142.

1885 to 1900, as well as in popular literature, illustrated journals and advertisements.[96] Images in sources of high and popular culture depicted French women in various states of dominance – a puppet-master who controlled doll-sized men on strings; an evil demon who abandoned her motherly duties through contraception and abortion; or a dangerous serpent who could poison and kill a man.[97] These demonic depictions of French and Parisian women were one expression of a perceived crisis of masculinity and a growing misogyny at the turn of the century, in which women were often vilified and represented as something to be feared.[98] The cultural image of women as sexual predators or masters was paired with an increased exploration of male sexual identity. As Robert Nye has argued, the French medical and scientific community focused great attention on the state of masculinity in France in the early Third Republic, and scrutinized, as never before, man's physical body and its masculine traits.[99] The shock of defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, fear over depopulation, and the shifting nature of gender roles, led to a belief that it was the responsibility of French men to revitalize their nation, and return it to a state of honour and glory – "…an 'ideal' or 'typical' male sexual identity was invoked, [and] those features were stressed that could contribute best to the national welfare: strength, vigour, decisiveness, courage, a manly appearance and comportment, and, of course, fertility."[100] A strong and honourable collective of French men was seen as essential to the preservation and perpetuation of the republic, and "masculine" practices such as the

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[96] Elizabeth K. Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 3. See also Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[97] Menon, 183, 224, 238.

[98] Suzanne R. Stewart, *Sublime Surrender: Male Masochism at the Fin de Siècle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 14.

[99] Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honour in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 97.

[100] Ibid, 96.

duel, where upper-class Frenchmen defended their honour and demonstrated their courage, were popular expressions of these qualities.[101]

In a similar way, anxiety over perceived threats to heterosexual masculinity, combined with developments in the fields of social science, led to a process of diagnosing "perversion" and "abnormality" in sexual identity, particularly in the form of homosexuality, which was considered aberrant and deviant.[102] Medical professionals began constructing "sexual 'others,'" as a way of demonstrating the weaknesses that needed to be rooted out of French society.[103] Male homosexuals were considered weak and effeminate, with "[c]urled hair, made-up skin, open collar, waist tucked in to highlight the figure; fingers, ears, chest loaded with jewellery, the whole body exuding an odour of the most penetrating perfumes, and in the hand a handkerchief, flowers, or some needlework: such is the strange, revolting, and rightfully suspect physiognomy of the pederast…".[104] Male homosexuals were also considered born criminals, with irrational tendencies that would lead them toward vices such as theft, assault, and even murder.[105] Although these characteristics had been attributed to homosexual men prior to the *fin de siècle*, what was new by the turn of the twentieth century was a desire to codify, chart and diagnose their acts of sexual inversion. As Rosario has noted, the medico-legal journals of the day dominated the scientific debate over homosexuality, and theorists such as

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[101] Ibid, 172-228. Nye has shown how French professionals used the duel to settle their journalistic and political disputes, or get even with their wives' lovers.

[102] Ibid, 100-108. Nye notes that the term *homosexualité* was not commonly used in France until the late 1890s, and was used alongside the older terminology of inversion, pederasty, and sodomy. See also Vernon A. Rosario II, "Pointy Penises, Fashion Crimes, and Hysterical Mollies: The Pederasts' Inversions," in *Homosexuality in Modern France*, Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan Jr. (eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 146-176.

[103] Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor,* 99.

[104] Ambroise Tardieu, *Etude médico-légale sur les attentats aux moeurs,* 7th ed. (Paris, [1857] 1878), 216-17, in Rosario, *Homosexuality in Modern France*, 151.

[105] William A. Peniston, "Love and Death in Gay Paris: Homosexuality and Criminality in the 1870s," *Homosexuality in Modern France*, 142.

Alexandre Lacassagne, a professor of legal medicine, proposed systems of classification which defined acts of perversion by degree and kind.[106] Theorists argued that deviance was not just a concern for the scientific and legal community, but had larger implications for the entire fabric of French society. As one researcher noted:

> These days, no one doubts that the number of degenerations, of cerebral derailings – expressed by the tendencies towards suicide, by phobias, etc. – results in large part from the fact that in our nation the genital functions are often not accomplished as they should be. Therefore it is necessary, from the point of view of the vitality, of the future of the race, to study the morbid causes, to discern the dangerous and evil elements, among which must be ranked for an appreciable part the creature stricken with sexual perversion: the pervert, the feminiform born-invert.[107]

The link between homosexuality, sexual deviance, and the decline of French society was an important way in which social theorists, sexologists, and medical researchers attempted to categorize departures from what they considered "normal" states of being. As some men and women diverged from traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity, intellectual and popular opinion argued that the results could be catastrophic for French and Parisian society. Through their studies, theorists and researchers hoped not only to diagnose deviance and perversion, but also to cure the individual, and in turn, heal France itself. Taken as part of the larger gender crisis that permeated elements of French society at the *fin de siècle,* we can see that concerns over social and sexual deviance were part of the constantly shifting notion of what constituted male and female identity at the time. This was particularly troubling for the state of republican manhood and masculinity, which as Judith Surkis has argued, was never a "presumptively stable

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[106] Lacassagne's system codified "Perversions of the Sexual Instinct" in this way: "I. Pathological Quantity 1) States of augmentation: erotic temperament, onanism, satyriasis, nymphomania 2) States of diminution: frigidity, impotence II. Pathological Quality 1) Inversion of the genital sense 2) Necrophilia 3) Bestiality 4) Love for inanimate objects (or 'nihilists of the flesh')." Lacassagne, 1884, in Rosario, *Homosexuality in Modern France,* 159.
[107] Laupts, *Tares et poisons* (Paris, 1896), 104-5, in Rosario, 160-1.

male subject," but contingent, "imagined and re-imagined."[108] For men in the early Third Republic, the risk of sexual deviance and the "rhetoric of crisis" demonstrated just how precarious and unstable heterosexual masculinity was as a cultural norm, one that they believed was in desperate need of regulation and stabilization.[109] As Surkis points out, this anxiety compelled legislators and social theorists to bolster institutions such as marriage and the conjugal family, and create government policies that would educate bachelors, soldiers, and male adolescents, in an effort to anchor and strengthen what they saw as a wayward heterosexual masculinity.

In addition to social and government policies designed to protect as well as create a republican heterosexual norm of masculinity, another crucial result of the gendered tensions of the *fin de siècle* was the medical and cultural interest in neurasthenia, a condition that struck the nervous system and was associated with the stresses and strains brought on by the difficulties of modern life. Introduced by the American doctor George Beard in the 1860s, neurasthenia came to be embraced at the *fin de siècle* as the defining condition of an eroding self, and was increasingly diagnosed by doctors.[110] The standard medical text on neurasthenia in France, *L'hygiène du neurasthénique,* appeared in 1897, and described various physical symptoms of the condition – "weakness," "suggestibility," and nervousness – which resulted from the "struggle for existence" in modern society; and unlike hysteria, which typically afflicted women, neurasthenia affected both sexes.[111] Emile Durkheim took the societal applications of neurasthenia further, and argued that the condition was a specific pathological reaction to the frenzy and "melée" of the urban

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[108] Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 12, 7.

[109] Ibid, 12.

[110] George Beard, *American Nervousness* (1881).

[111] Adrien Proust and Gilbert Ballet, *L'hygiène du neurasthénique* (Paris: Masson, 1897), 1-2, 75-78, cited in Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France*, 148-149.

experience, which unsettled one's "equilibrium" and made him acutely sensitive and fragile.[112]   Along with the fractured, irrational, and blurred nature of gender and identity, and a sense that one's basic desires and urges were increasingly hidden and unknowable, there was also a feeling that modern life had become difficult and exhausting. Neurasthenics and those afflicted with nervous conditions often believed they were suffering from a malaise and ennui brought on by the trials of an over-indulgent and over-civilized modernity, which led them to feel as if they had seen and experienced everything. These elements gave the infirmity a decidedly middle and upper-class air, for perhaps nowhere were these attitudes toward modern identity more celebrated than among the bourgeoisie, as well as with artists, writers, and intellectuals. Faced with the collapse of the liberal self and a new theory of individuality based on irrationality, illness, hysteria, and a perceived crisis of gender, a certain group of artists, known as the decadents, emerged in Paris at the *fin de siècle,* and chose not to capitulate but instead to take pleasure in the degeneration of society. This was an important aspect of artistic life in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, as many of the era's painters, writers, and poets found themselves at the centre of a world caught in the grip of instability, danger, and dedicated to vice and illicit pleasure.

The Pleasures and Decadence of the *Belle Époque*

The years from 1900 to 1914, although collectively part of the cultural ferment of the *fin de siècle* period, are also known more specifically as the *belle époque*, a time that refers to the pleasures, entertainments, and grandeur of Parisian culture – the "banquet

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[112] Emlie Durkheim, *Suicide,* 69, cited in Nye, 149.

years"[113] that preceded the start of the First World War, and which, from the perspective of those looking back after the tragedy of war, appeared to have been a particularly beautiful time.[114] It was during this time that Paris experienced a rise in the number of dance and music halls, cabarets, and café-concerts in the city – one contemporary account placed the number at more than two hundred by the turn of the century.[115] The neighbourhood of Montmartre, located in the northern part of Paris and known as the "Butte," became "…the leading belle-époque pleasure district," and combined bohemian cultural rebellion with "capitalist innovation in entertainment."[116] It bore many similarities with a quaint and traditional village, but was culturally open and free of the strict moral code usually associated with provincial towns – it was "an antidote to the pomposity and still class rules that reigned elsewhere."[117] As some historians have argued, in the growing number of café-concerts and dance halls of Montmartre, Parisians and outside visitors could escape their everyday routines of respectability and find bourgeois behaviour the subject of mockery and ridicule.[118] Rearick has commented that Montmartre "allowed [Parisians] contact with a lower world of colorful Bohemians, high-spirited criminals, and old-fashioned workers."[119] Montmartre played a key role in the development of mass entertainment, which gave Parisians from the middle and upper

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[113] Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France 1885 to World War I* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961).
[114] Historians have noted the distinction in the terms "fin de siècle" and "belle époque," although the two are often used interchangeably for the entire period from 1880-1914. See Weber, *France Fin de Siècle,* 2, and Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque*, xi.
[115] Maurice Talmeyr, "Cafés-Concerts et Music-Halls," *Revue des deux mondes*, 5ème période, 10 (1902), 159, cited in Johannes Willms, *Paris: Capital of Europe, From the Revolution to the Belle Epoque*, Eveline L. Kanes (trans.) (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1997), 335.
[116] Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque*, 52.
[117] Ibid, 62.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

classes, but also from the working classes, the opportunity to experience a new world.[120]

One of the most famous of these venues was the Chat Noir, a cabaret that opened in the

early 1880s, and provided a rich variety of entertainment – theatre, poetry, dance, song,

and art. Unlike the usual settings for these art forms, however, visitors to the Chat Noir

could interact and mingle with the performers and artists, and experience an exciting mix

of genres.[121]   Places such as the Chat Noir also often published journals and magazines,

which they used to bring their artistic endeavours to a wider audience, and embraced an

eclectic approach.[122]   As one-time cabaret performer Maurice Donnay observed, "If one

leafs through the 15-year run of the journal Chat Noir, one sees how eclectic it was, in

turn and at once joking, ironic, tender, naturalist, idealist, realist, lyrical, cynical, hoaxing,

Christian, pagan, mystic, republican, reactionary, anarchist, chauvinist."[123]

The exuberance of Montmartre's dance halls and cafés was also closely linked with

danger and vice – for some, the pleasures to be found here were described as "a dance on

top of a volcano."[124] Café-concerts and music halls such as the Moulin Rouge (1889) and

the Folies-Bergère (1886) were considered "shameless," and revealed "a desire for

uninhibitedness, langourousness, spectacle, and debasement that is peculiar to our

times:"[125]

> In the café-concert […] one smokes, drinks, comes and goes as one
> pleases, while watching highly suggestive acts and listening to incredibly
> risqué jokes. The café-concert is the paradise of libertinism and the most
> determined bad taste. […] For a few sous one gets everything that refreshes
> as well as excites. How then could one avoid coming here to still, or seem to

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[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid, 59-60.
[122] Other periodicals that multiplied in Montmartre during these years included *Le Courrier Français,*
L'Hydropathe, and *Le Décadent*. Philippe Julian, *Montmartre*, trans. Anne Carter (Oxford: Phaidon Press,
1977), 87.
[123] Maurice Donnay, *Mes Debuts à Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 1937), 239, in Rearick, 60.
[124] Georges Montorgueil, *La Vie des boulevards* (Paris, 1896), 226, in Willms, 338.
[125] Talmeyr, "Cafés-Concerts," 160f., in Willms, 335-6.

still, the freely admitted or secret desire for dissolute excess that currently plagues the *peuple* as much as good society?[126]

When the striptease and nude dancing appeared in these venues in the 1890s, their reputation as sites of scandal and sexual immorality only increased, and also contributed to the rise of Paris's brothels and prostitution trade.[127] Prostitution in Paris had existed almost as long as the city itself, and by the mid-nineteenth century, Paris was known as "Sodom and Gomorrah" or "Babylon," and considered a centre of prostitution and the prime destination for sex tourists.[128] By the *fin de siècle*, the sex trade had also become connected with the world of consumer culture and commercialization, and the increasingly public presence of women in Parisian society.[129] The brothel was a Parisian site where sex, consumption, and business all intersected, and which had been closely regulated since the early years of the nineteenth century. Doctor Parent-Duchâtelet had been crucial in laying the foundation for state-regulated prostitution in France, and his 1836 study, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, was read widely not only in France but throughout Europe.[130] Duchâtelet believed that prostitution was a reality in society, due to the perpetual demand, and the continuous supply of women prone to moral defectiveness and debauchery; he also added that the sociability of the modern city only exacerbated the situation: "In places where large numbers of people live together,

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[126] Ibid.

[127] Colin Jones, *Paris: Biography of a City*, 374.

[128] Higonnet notes that Paris counted 34,000 prostitutes in 1855, compared to 24,000 in London, a city with double the inhabitants at this time. Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 102.

[129] Higonnet, 103-105; see also Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990 [1982]) and Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).

[130] McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914*, 107; Dr. Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris considéré sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration*, 2 vols (Paris, 1836).

prostitutes are as inevitable as sewers, dumps, and rubbish heaps."[131] For Duchâtelet, women from the lower and working classes were most inclined to take up this lifestyle, based on both their weaker, biological predisposition and economic necessity.[132] Thus, it was imperative for the state to control prostitution, in order to prevent the spread of disease and infection.

In Paris, this duty fell under the jurisdiction of the Prefect of Police, and all prostitutes were obliged to register themselves, as well as obtain routine medical examinations by the late-nineteenth century.[133] By conducting regular tests on the city's prostitutes, Parisian officials hoped to limit the occurrence of venereal disease and syphilis, which was particularly feared at the *fin de siècle*. Prostitutes were expected to live and work in "tolerated" houses (*maisons tolérées*), and men were similarly expected to visit only these state-sanctioned brothels. In practice, this system of regulation was difficult to enforce, and by the end of the nineteenth century Paris was believed to possess as many as 40,000 clandestine and unregistered prostitutes (*insoumises*).[134] As McMillan has argued, the phenomenon of the clandestine prostitute "loomed large in the popular imagination as the carriers of disease and a serious threat to society."[135] The French and Parisian bourgeoisie believed prostitutes came from the "dangerous classes" of society, and threatened to pollute their homes and families; according to one contemporary study, 31 percent of *insoumises* were domestic servants.[136] Indeed, as Bernheimer has suggested, the possibility for clandestine and secret sexual exchanges between bourgeois

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[131] Higonnet, 107 and McMillan, 107.
[132] Ibid.
[133] McMillan, 107-8.
[134] Ibid, 108.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Dr. O. Commenge, *La prostitution clandestine à Paris* (Paris, 1897), 338, in McMillan, 109.

men and working-class women contributed "toward defining the particular excitements, anxieties, instabilities, and ambiguities of modern urban life."[137]

Working-class women were not the only ones associated with the world of prostitution – actresses, dancers, and singers were also traditionally seen as inherently available for sex because of the performative nature of their lives and actions on the stage. The world of the theatre had been linked to artifice, immorality, and women since the days of Rousseau. In his *Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre*, Rousseau argued that women in the theatre, indeed all public women, lacked virtue and were symbolic of the evils of an excessively spectacular life: "…when [women] seek for men's looks they are already letting themselves be corrupted by them, […] any woman who shows herself off disgraces herself."[138] The actress was particularly abhorrent in this regard, for as Rousseau asked, "[h]ow unlikely [is it]that she who sets herself for sale in performance would not soon do the same in person and never let herself be tempted to satisfy desires that she takes so much effort to excite?"[139] To a certain extent, this was true. As Lenard Berlanstein has argued, since the first quarter of the seventeenth century, nobles and aristocrats had taken actresses and opera singers as mistresses, as a way of confirming their "exalted status as lord, lover, and man."[140] This practice continued well into the years of the Third Republic, and even though an affair with an actress was beyond the reach of most middle-class men, fantasizing about the women on stage was considered one of the purposes of attending the theatre. As writer Montjoyeux noted in 1889:

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[137] Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute*, 165-6.
[138] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758), in Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 72.
[139] Ibid, in Landes, 75.
[140] Lenard R. Berlanstein, "Cultural Change and the Acting Conservatory in Late Nineteenth-Century France," *The Historical Journal,* 46, 3 (2003): 583-597, 584.

> We consider actresses as women to conquer, to seduce, to take … Besides the pleasure we find in the troubling and radiant nudity of their arms, shoulders, throats, we embrace the vague hope that all those parts could, perhaps, be ours. We do not believe in the virtue of theatre women. We know them to be, for the most part, available for affairs.[141]

At the same time, a career on the stage was one of the few options for women, and by the years of the *belle époque,* it was a popular profession for those who desired work, artistic expression, and celebrity. As a result, the years of the *belle époque* witnessed a profound shift in the attitudes towards women in the theatre – "a re-gendering of the theatrical experience" – as more women became spectators in the audience.[142] The proliferation of the media and rise of the mass press also took the cult of celebrity to new heights, and made successful actresses, dancers, and singers, sensations in Parisian society.[143] Far from Rousseau's evil and immoral theatre women, their counterparts at the turn of the twentieth century were often admired and emulated.[144]

Despite these developments, actresses and dancers still remained the subject of popular scrutiny, both favourable and unkind. They were the subjects of literary and popular fiction, salon paintings and advertising posters, and through cultural media, they maintained their status as sexual objects and represented the ills and vices of *belle époque* Paris.   Theatre women were often conflated with images of prostitutes, sexual predators, and brothels in *fin-de-siècle* art – as S. Hollis Clayson has noted, "as Parisian streets filled

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[141] Montjoyeux (pseud. Jules Poignard), *Les femmes de Paris* (Paris, 1889), 17-18, in Berlanstein, "Cultural Change," 585.
[142] Lenard R. Berlanstein, *Daughters of Eve: A Cultural History of French Theater, Women from the Old Régime to the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 168.
[143] Ibid. See also Kimberly van Noort, "Spectacles of Themselves: Women Writing for the Stage in Belle Epoque France," *A "Belle Epoque?" Women in French Society and Culture, 1890-1914*, Diana Holmes and Carrie Tarr (eds.) (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 139-152.
[144] As Noort and others have suggested, these developments helped to "de-sexualize" the theatre, and created a space that "could offer more subjective agency to both the female spectator and the actress." Noort, "Spectacles of Themselves," 142.

with prostitutes, so did French art and literature."[145] Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) for example, one of the most famous actresses at this time, was regularly portrayed as a serpent in the popular media of the day, a comparison that played on her sexually provocative stage spectacles, and her exotic charm as an actor. In Emile Zola's novel *Nana* (1880), a laundress who starts out in the Parisian slums rises to the status of actress and celebrated courtesan of the *demi-monde*, and uses the changing social conditions of the urban landscape, as well as her erotic power to her advantage.[146] As Felski has argued, Nana is portrayed not only as a public woman who thrives and flourishes in the consumer-driven society of the *fin de siècle,* but is "at the heart of the cash nexus, her social and sexual identity shaped by fashion, image, and advertising, her perverse erotic desires linked to modern urban decadence."[147] In this way, Nana is synonymous with the metropolis, a femme fatale "whose seductive cruelty exemplifies the delights and horrors of urban life."[148] Ultimately though, Nana pays the ultimate price for her sexual and consumer profligacy, and dies of a hideous disease, which Zola describes as smallpox, but which could also been seen as the "pox," or syphilis.[149] As Zola writes: "Venus was decomposing; the germs which she had picked up from the carrion people allowed to moulder in the gutter, the ferment which had infected a whole society, seemed to have come to the surface of her face and rotted it."[150]

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[145] S. Hollis Clayson, "Painting the Traffic of Women," from *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (1991), in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader,* Vanessa Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2004), 299.
[146] Emile Zola, *Nana* (1880), Douglas Parmée (trans.) (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1992). See also Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 74-79.
[147] Felski, 75.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Bernheimer makes this connection in *Figures of Ill Repute,* 224.
[150] Zola, *Nana,* 425.

This powerful combination of forces – theatre women, sex, prostitution, and disease – were all part of Paris' growing entertainment industry at the *belle époque*, where tourists and Parisians flocked to enjoy any number of illicit pleasures. Montmartre's artists, writers, and intellectuals also engaged in, and often perpetuated, the neighbourhood's culture of indulgence and spectacle, and formed a critical component of the area's allure. In addition to contributing to the "democratization of enjoyment,"[151] where more people could be included in the cultural practices of the cabaret and café-concert, Montmartre was also a breeding ground for the tight-knit, and increasingly exclusive community of artists and writers that made up *fin-de-siècle* bohemia and foreshadowed twentieth-century avant-garde aesthetics.[152] This bohemian culture had experienced many forms and variations throughout the nineteenth century, from Gautier's romantic hero of the 1830s and 1840s, to Baudelaire's urban flâneur of the 1850s and 1860s.[153] The typical characteristic of the bohemian as a modern artist was his existence as an isolated figure, aloof and removed from the workings of everyday society, and thus, able to critique and bear witness to his age in a way that was beyond the average citizen.[154] By the late-nineteenth century, the bohemian was most often associated with

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[151] Lionel Richard, *Cabaret, cabarets: Origines et décadence* (Paris: Plon, 1991), 61, in Gluck, *Popular Bohemia,* 119.

[152] Gluck, *Popular Bohmeia*, 119. Other historical and traditional interpretations of the avant-garde and modernist work of Parisian bohemian artists and intellectuals include Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*; F.W.J. Hemmings, *Culture and Society in France, 1848-1898: Dissidents and Philistines* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971); Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1945,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1973]). Jerrold Seigel's *Bohemian Paris* is somewhat more critical of this group of artisans centred around Montmartre, and argues that they were not carefree and independent creators, but rather, expressed their ambivalence toward middle-class culture through exaggerations of bourgeois life, which took such forms as dandyism, opportunism, personal eccentricities, drunkenness and drug-addiction. See Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986).

[153] Gluck, *Popular Bohemia*, 1-24.

[154] Gluck has challenged this view, and has argued that bohemian culture actually possessed many ties to popular Parisian society and culture throughout the nineteenth century, and occurred in direct relation to an expanding consumer society. She contends that artists were not aloof in their attempts to understand and

the artistic and literary movement of decadence, which captured many aspects of cultural life at the *belle époque*. It gave expression to fears and worries about the decline, disrepair, and degeneration of the French republic, and feelings of cultural malaise, ennui, fatigue, and boredom – that everything had been done, said, and written. The decadents emphasized a pessimism about life, and a nervousness which, as we have seen, often manifested itself as a kind of debilitating illness – a feeling that people were worn out and exhausted. The term implied a sense of opulence and luxury on the one hand, but also a sense that it was too much, too intense, and ultimately, destructive. Artists and writers who proclaimed themselves decadent believed that they were dying from over-civilization.[155]

These characteristics of the decadent figure were captured perfectly in the character of the ailing and eccentric aristocrat Des Esseintes, in J. K. Huysmans' novel, *A Rebours (Against the Grain)*, first published in 1884. Instead of describing the individual in his social environment, as a part of a larger class-consciousness, in *A Rebours*, Huysmans glorified the act of removing oneself from the world as a remedy for the ills of modern life. Des Esseintes is the only character, a man who has indulged in every luxury, abused every substance, and performed every sexual act, and is subsequently racked by an incredible fatigue and growing illness. He decides to remove himself from Paris, which for him represents the source of this decadent lifestyle, and builds himself a house in the countryside. The world that Des Esseintes builds for himself is completely devoted to the

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make sense of their modern world, nor were they marked by a withdrawal from society into an interiorized and esoteric world of art. Rather, they utilized popular forms of performance, theatricality, and ironic parody, to make their messages "legible" and "visible" to a wider public. See Gluck, *Popular Bohemia*, 119.

[155] Matei Calinescu, "The Idea of Decadence," in *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 151-224; Patrick McGuinness, "Introduction," *A Rebours (Against Nature)*, Joris-Karl Huysmans (1884) (London: Penguin Books, 2003), xiii-xxxvi.

exploration of the artificial – from his perfumes to his fake flowers and plants, Des Esseintes is obsessed with the belief that artifice can create a better and truer nature.[156] As his health progressively deteriorates, however, Des Esseintes ultimately realizes the futility and absurdity of his experiment and admits defeat. The more he attempts to banish the world and tries to escape, the more it returns to haunt him, and he is ultimately compelled to return to evil Paris to receive treatment for his neurasthenia, which threatens to kill him.[157]

In addition to its success as a literary movement, decadence also thrived in the form of artistic and performative associations in the cafés and clubs of Montmartre and other parts of Paris at the *fin de siècle*.[158] Groups such as *Les Incohérents* and the *Hydropathes*, instead of duplicating the artificial and rarefied world of Des Esseintes, dedicated themselves to a liberating agenda of artistic freedom, "spontaneous experience" and "direct communication" with each other and their audience; they fused many cultural forms together to create parodies, theatrical re-enactments, and "retrospective sketches."[159] Through these forms of artistic expressions, groups hoped to rejuvenate public culture and cure the stifling boredom of the age. As Jules Lévy, a *L'Incohérent*, commented: "…the intelligent have fled from the public square and stay at home these days, there to be bored at leisure. It is imperative to act and the Incoherents have set the

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[156] Huysmans, *A Rebours,* 82-115.

[157] This notion that Paris was the root and source of decadence, disease, and fatigue, and in a state of decline herself, was echoed in other literature of the time. In Maupassant's *Bel Ami*, for example, Duroy describes the city as a beast: "He could hear a rumbling, confused, immense, persistent, and made of many different and innumerable noises; a dull rumbling, both near and far, a vague and enormous palpitation of life, the sound of Paris breathing, on this summer's night, like a colossus exhausted with fatigue." Guy de Maupassant, *Bel-Ami* (1885) (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1983), 223-4.

[158] Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw (eds.), *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

[159] Gluck, *Popular Bohemia,* 119-130.

scene in motion."[160] The *Hydropathes* were likewise committed to an open forum for their club – "everyone had the right to appear, the public alone was to be the judge. This was not a coterie, nor a personal enterprise, but a sort of theater of poetry, open to all."[161] The aim for these bohemian artistic groups was to revive and make sense of the modern experience – for them, decadence need not signify the death knell of society; it was also a call for artistic rebirth and renewal. In this way, the decadents, and bohemian culture in general, did seem capable of giving voice to more than an isolated community of intellectuals. Through their performances, *fin-de-siècle* bohemians found a way to articulate, as Gluck has argued, "the secrets and hidden characteristics of what it meant to be modern."[162]

Conclusion

In almost every avenue of cultural life, historians have showed that Paris at the *fin de siècle* was a city in conflict. In addition to the well-documented political crises of the early Third Republic – the seemingly constant battles between emerging newly rising political parties on the left and right, and the scandals surrounding Boulanger, Panama, and Captain Dreyfus – there were also concerns about crime, danger, and illicit sexuality, ambiguous and changing roles for men and women, growing fears about unruly urban crowds, neurasthenia, and hysteria, and the unstable, shifting nature of identity and individuality.   At the same time, however, Paris was also a city of splendour, excitement, and modern innovation. From the rise of consumerism, department stores, and cabaret culture, to the proliferation of the press, more Parisians were able to enjoy more aspects

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[160] Lévy, *Le courier Français* (12 March 1885), 4, in Gluck, *Popular Bohemia,* 125.
[161] Goudeau, *Dix ans de bohème,* 220-221, in Gluck, 126.
[162] Gluck, *Popular Bohemia,* 119.

of their city than ever before. Of course, the case should not be overstated – a large portion of Frenchmen and women living in the capital still struggled for daily survival. However, the beginnings of a mass culture in Paris brought many, even those who could not participate, into contact with the economic, social, and cultural changes that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century. Taken together, all of these developments indicate that "les deux Paris" was a city of profound conflict and contradiction. As the editor of *Fin de Siècle* wrote in the journal's first issue: "All is mixed, confused, blurred, and reshuffled in a kaleidoscopic vision."[163]

Many elements of this confusing vision of Parisian culture and society were inexorably linked to women. Whether it was fear, disgust, or intrigue over prostitutes, hysterics, and new women, social theorists, artists, and cultural commentators demonstrated that women were more susceptible to the crises of the *fin de siècle*. At the same time, women were also implicated in the exciting innovations of Paris, as new consumers of increasingly accessible commodities, or as active, even "disruptive"[164] participants in public, urban life. Increasingly, the cultural image of Parisian womanhood, that of *la Parisienne*, was tied to these various aspects of cultural life, and further demonstrates the link between the urban experience and female inhabitants of *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Indeed, the phenomenon of *la Parisienne* saturated the public and cultural spaces of France and beyond by 1900, and as I argue in the next chapter, it was upon her widely circulated image that the various and incongruous aspects of the *fin-de-siècle* city converged. Beyond the image of *la Parisienne*, actual Parisian women were also involved with and responded to these cultural representations of gender, as well as to

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[163] François Mainguy, *Fin de Siècle. Journal Littéraire, Illustré* (Paris: January 17, 1891), in Weber, *France Fin de Siècle*, 10.
[164] Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*.

the contradictions of the urban experience, in a Paris that was at once welcoming and prohibitive, exciting and dangerous. As we shall see, journalists writing about their city at the turn of the twentieth century stressed many of the complexities and difficulties involved with living as women, and as professionals, in *fin-de-siècle* Paris.

Chapter 3: *Les Parisiennes* and the Contested City

In 1900, Paris hosted the world at the Universal Exposition. Alfred Picard, the Exposition's Commissioner, believed that the world's fair would showcase both the city and France as it stood at the edge of a new century: "It is important that the Universal Exposition of 1900 represents the philosophy and synthesis of the century; that it has grandeur, grace, and beauty, and that it reflects the pure genius of France."[1] The exposition had a long history in France, and was designed to exhibit the nation's innovations as well as display accomplishments from around the world in an elaborate collection of pavilions and arcades. By the years of the *belle époque,* the Paris Exposition had become particularly lavish and extravagant, and the increased emphasis on commercial entertainment had also made it an extremely popular tourist attraction. As one writer said of the 1889 exhibition, "There is only one cry: this is the most grandiose, the most dazzling, the most marvellous spectacle ever seen…".[2] The Exposition of 1900 was to be even more glorious – the *Guide-Boussole* claimed that "…Paris and the Exposition will become, for the entire world, the centre of civilization, the culmination of the passing age, and the dawn of the twentieth century."[3] By many accounts, it certainly was a success – during its six-month run, from 14 April to 05 November, the exhibits, which covered over 277 acres, attracted an unprecedented 51 million visitors.[4] These millions entered the fairgrounds through René Binet's *Porte Monumentale*, the

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[1] Alfred Picard, in Gustave Babin, *Après Faillite – Souvenirs de l'Exposition de 1900* (Paris: Dujarric, 1902), I.

[2] Lucien Biart, *Mes promenades à travers l'Exposition, souvenir de 1889* (Paris: A. Flennuyer, 1890) in Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque*, 120.

[3] *Guide-Boussole: 1900 Exposition et Paris – Pour se guider partout sans rien demander a personne* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1900), 1.

[4] Sowerwine, *France Since 1870*, 102, and Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque,* 127. See also, Richard D. Mandell, *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).

Exposition's main gate, which stood as a unifying symbol of the fair. And placed at the top of this gate, chosen to represent the spirit of the exhibition, the city, and the nation, was a 20-foot statue of a woman – *la Parisienne.*

The stucco figure depicted the modern Parisian woman of 1900. She was dressed in clothing designed by the fashionable couturier Paquin,[5] and extended her hand outward over the gates of the Exposition, in a gesture that both welcomed its visitors and showed off the pleasures and spectacle of the city. (Figure 1) She symbolized France's belief in its civilizing force and influence within Europe, and seemed to embody many aspects of *fin-de-siècle* Paris – its beauty, splendour, and fashion, as well as its dedication to consumerism, consumption, and modernity. An illustration by Albert René, which appeared in *L'Exposition Comique* the week of the fair's opening, highlighted these aspects of the statue. (Figure 2) In this drawing, the enormous *Parisienne* proudly presides over the gate to the Exposition, which is represented by the warm and welcoming glow of a fireplace. Caricatures of visitors from around the world approach *la Parisienne* with a certain amount of trepidation, and gaze up at her, hats in hand, as they prepare to enter the fair; the caption reads, "Come and warm yourselves at the hearth of civilization." This satirical portrayal of the Exposition reveals the organizers' belief that Paris was indeed the heart of the "civilized" world as it faced the twentieth century, and

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[5] See Higonnet, *Paris:Capital of the World*, 95-96; Weber, *France: Fin de Siècle*, 8,71.

Figure 1: "La Parisienne," *L'Illustration*, 14 April 1900, in Weber, *Fin-de-Siècle France*, 8.

Figure 2: "Venez vous chauffer au foyer de la civilisation," *L'Exposition comique*, 22 April 1900, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Banque d'Images, RC-A-53724.

underscores their decision to use the city's women, embodied in the image of *la Parisienne,* as its central symbol.[6]

The selection of *la Parisienne* seemed, in many ways, an obvious choice. As Louis Chevalier has commented, "Of all the myths of the capital, hers is probably the oldest, the most immutable, the most sacred. Myth? It ought to be called a dogma."[7] Synonymous with fashion, good taste, and elegance, the symbol of *la Parisienne* combined femininity, grace, and beauty, with a healthy dose of confidence and *coquetterie*, to become one of the most popular and enduring images connected with the city of Paris.   Some claimed that *la Parisienne* was born "like Venus" out of the waters of the Seine.[8] Others, like the journalist and self-styled sociologist Octave Uzanne, linked Parisian women to different neighbourhoods of the city, in what he called a "*Carte Gynécographique*" (Gynegraphical Map) of Paris.[9] In *Parisiennes de ce temps*, Uzanne commented that, "Those [women] of the Right Bank reflect exactly the tone, the spirit, the *chic,* and the general allure of the region they inhabit," while *la Parisienne* of the Left Bank was, "…in general, more contemplative, and more profoundly marked by her respectability."[10] Still others, such as the novelist Mme. Henri Lapauze, who wrote under the pseudonym of Daniel Le Sueur, linked the two in more profound ways:

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[6] Of course, there were detractors of the 1900 Exposition, those who felt it was an economic and scandalous disaster. Gustave Babin, for example, argued in 1902 that it was "… an enormous failure, a public calamity the likes of which we have not seen since the Panama [Scandal]…". See Babin, *Après Faillite,* I-II. For further discussion of some of the shortcomings of the 1900 Exposition, see Christophe Prochasson, *Paris 1900 – Essai d'histoire culturelle* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1999), 92-105.

[7] Chevalier, *Les Parisiens,* 10, as cited in Higonnet's *Paris: Capital of the World,* 114. For Higonnet's discussion of the myths of *la Parisienne,* see Ch.5, 95-120. Other studies of *la Parisienne* include Hubert Juin, *La Parisienne: Les élégantes, les célébrités et le petites femmes, 1880-1914* (Paris: Weber, 1978).

[8] Paul Perret, *La Parisienne* (Paris: A. Le Chevalier, 1868), 8-11.

[9] Octave Uzanne, *Études de sociologie féminine: Parisiennes de ce temps en leurs divers milieux, états et conditions. Études pour servir à l'histoire des femmes, de la société, de la galanterie française, des moeurs contemporaines et de l'égoisme masculin. Ménagères, ouvrières et courtisanes, bourgeoises et mondaines, artistes et comédiennes* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1910), 106.

[10] Ibid, 107-108.

> … [the] soul of the Parisienne […] is made of the traditions of Paris, of the immense artistic focus of light glowing in Paris, of the spirit, brilliancy, and fantasy of Paris. She is made of its monuments, gardens, pavements, and sky; of its memories, museums and great shops; of its workrooms as well as its drawing-rooms; of its subtle refinements as well as its joyous miseries. The soul of the Parisienne is the very soul of Paris.[11]

These comparisons not only linked the city to its female residents, but also gave Paris a decidedly feminine identity. In order to engage with the lives of women who inhabited the French capital at the *fin de siècle*, it is important to begin with this idealized and pervasive image of *la Parisienne*, for she reveals some of the ways in which Paris and its women were perceived and represented at the end of the nineteenth century. From the example of the Universal Exposition, we see that she reflected the optimism and enthusiasm of the *belle époque*; however, I will show that her highly celebrated form was also closely connected to other, more sinister aspects of Parisian culture and society at the *fin de siècle*. My aim in this chapter is twofold. First, I trace these themes of splendour and corruption as they appeared in the image of *la Parisienne*, and demonstrate that Parisian womanhood was represented in a variety of incongruent ways, many of which were directly linked to cultural life in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Indeed, the city was not only invoked as the cradle of *la Parisienne's* birth, but was often seen as the site of her demise in the waning years of the nineteenth century.

Secondly, I will shift from the representation of Parisian womanhood as a cultural construction, and examine some of the experiences of Parisian women living in the city at the *fin de siècle*, in order to explore the ways in which they articulated their urban environment. By examining the pages of *La Fronde,* a Parisian daily which was managed,

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[11] Daniel Le Sueur, "The 'Parisienne,'" Caroline Duer (trans), *La Beauté de Paris: Numéro Spécial de la Renaissance de L'Art Français et des Industries de Luxe* (No.7, September, 1918): xvii-xix.

administered, and written by women, I argue that alongside the hopeful and ambitious articles about suffrage and rights, lie reports which express a sense of uneasiness, uncertainty, and worry about life in the city. This concern manifested itself in columns and editorials dedicated to issues of crime, danger, and suicide, which reporters noted was reaching "epidemic" proportions among Parisians at this time. These reports often appeared in the popular form of the *fait divers*, which recounted the sensational scandals, crime, and drama of life in the city, and had become a standard feature in many periodicals by the *fin de siècle*. However, I would like to suggest that these writings in *La Fronde* are not only examples of a trend toward sensationalism in the press, and a tactic used to sell papers. They also provide a unique look at the city through the eyes of its female residents, and reveal some of the challenges that Parisian women faced in the waning years of the nineteenth century. The reporters of *La Fronde* described a Paris that was not only an empowering centre of modernity and opportunity, but was also a troubling, unsatisfying, and sometimes deadly place. By exploring the nature of the *fin-de-siècle* city through its women, both real and represented, I demonstrate that Paris at the turn of the twentieth century was indeed a contested city, one that posed distinct challenges to the ways in which women developed and understood the nature of female identity and selfhood.

Paris and *La Parisienne*

Defining the Parisian woman of the late-nineteenth century appears, at first, to be a fairly straightforward task – as the *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle* notes in

its 1866-76 edition, she is simply a "*habitante de Paris*" (resident of Paris).[12]   However, this definition fails to encompass the myriad of writings that were dedicated to understanding and explaining *la Parisienne,* and which attached a much more complex significance to her image at the *fin de siècle*. Almanacs were one popular form of writing about the Parisian woman*,* and there were many published during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Some, such as Grevin's *Almanach des Parisiennes*, were predominantly for entertainment, and consisted of caricatures and cartoons which poked fun at various "types" of Parisian women – from *grandes dames* at the theatre, to dancers and shop clerks – and titillated their presumably male readers with illustrations of women in corsets and other states of undress.[13]   Other almanacs had a more didactic and prescriptive function, and seemed to be aimed at a respectable readership. Those by Henri Boutet, for example, chronicled themes such as the evolution of Parisian dress throughout the nineteenth century, or a day in the life a bourgeois *Parisienne*, and were usually accompanied by witty anecdotes and lavish illustrations.[14]   Others were like a how-to guide that contained advice and tactics for women interested in transforming themselves into a *Parisienne.* Mme Emmeline Raymond's *Le Secret des Parisiennes* was in its third edition by 1885, and shared tips and strategies for emulating the clothing, makeup, and toilette of Paris's famous ladies.[15] She believed that all women "from every country" could benefit from "the science of the *Parisienne,*" and argued that Parisian women "…know how to reconcile economic demands with the need to adorn themselves

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[12] *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle,* Pierre Larousse, ed., Nimes: Lacour, 1991 (Réimpression de l'édition 1866-76), Tome 17, 292.

[13] A. Grevin, *Almanach des Parisiennes – 3 Tomes,* (Paris, 1870-1895).

[14] See, for example, Henri Boutet, *Almanach – Une Siècle de Parisiennes* (Paris: Librairie Melet, 1901); *Almanach – Les Heures de la Parisienne* (Paris: Librairie Melet, 1899).

[15] Emmeline Raymond, *Les Secret des Parisiennes suivi de Mélanges – Troisième Édition* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1885).

in every situation with a graceful outfit, and a *meticulous* appearance…".[16] Thus, not

only was *la Parisienne* admired and catalogued, but her form was broadcast to other

women in other cities and even countries as a type to be emulated and perfected.

Some studies of *la Parisienne* attempted to blend the entertaining catalogue format

of the almanac with more pointed social commentary about the nature of her

development.   In his study *Parisiennes de ce temps*, Octave Uzanne sought to create "a

true series of sketches" of the "contemporary woman," in order to convey not only her

nature, but also her current place in the "picturesque atmosphere of the French

metropolis...".[17] This penchant for cataloguing and categorizing various types of French

and Parisian citizens had been popularized by compendiums such as Sébastien Mercier's

famous *Tableau de Paris* (1781), *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-1843), and

Georges Montorgueil's *La Parisienne peinte par elle-même* (1897).[18] Uzanne argued

that, following in the tradition of these texts, which had contributed to the study of French

men and women, particularly during the nineteenth century, "…it seemed logical and

amusing to resume here, in a series of short chapters without pretension and within the

limits of one volume, a study of the most common characteristics and appearances of the

Parisian woman in all levels of society at the start of our twentieth century."[19] Uzanne

included chapters on "La Bourgeoise Parisienne," "Les Femmes de Théatre," and "Les

Dames d'Administration," as well as several about "La Femme Hors des Lois Morales"

(Women Outside of Moral Law), which included information about Parisian prostitutes

and courtesans. This interest in capturing *la Parisienne* as she existed across many social

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[16] Ibid, 3.
[17] Uzanne, *Parisiennes de ce temps*, 7.
[18] Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Paris & London: 1781); *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (Paris: L. Curmer, 1840-1843); see also Georges Montorgueil, *La Parisienne peinte par elle-même* (Paris: Librairie L. Conquet, 1897).
[19] Uzanne, *Parisiennes de ce temps,* 6.

classes was also important to Georges Montorgueil, who commented in his preface to *La Parisienne peinte par elle-même*:

> *La Parisienne* comes from everywhere, but it is only in Paris that she can become *la Parisienne*. Thus, she is *la Parisienne* in all classes and in all conditions. The exoticism of the foreigner as well as the peasantry of the wet-nurse transpose themselves in this atmosphere, and testify to the radiant city's stubborn hold on atavism.[20]

Studies such as these emphasized that the term *Parisienne* was not to be applied only to bourgeois women who strolled the boulevards, but encompassed a whole range of women and experiences. The tie that bound them together was Paris – the city was believed to possess a transformative power that was capable of recreating and refashioning its women, regardless of their origin. As Juin points out, "But what is *la Parisienne*? […] Not a woman born in Paris, but a woman of Paris."[21]

As the principal force implicated in directing and guiding *la Parisienne,* the city of Paris was connected to her image in other writings as well, most notably in travel guides. Parisian travel guides written for tourists in the second half of the nineteenth century contained significant commentary on how to find, approach, and interact with the infamous *Parisienne*. Many guides from this time abounded with praise and admiration for the spectacle of the French capital.[22] *Galignani's New Paris Guide*, for example, was re-issued in 1870 with a lavish preface that extolled the virtues of Baron Haussmann's renewed and redesigned city:

> Paris has undergone so many and such important alterations, as to astonish even the resident […] this revision has become more necessary than it was

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[20] Montorgueil, *La Parisienne peinte par elle-même,* v.
[21] Juin, *La Parisienne,* 5-6.
[22] For a study linking Parisian guide books and the development of surrealism in France in the early decades of the twentieth century, see Robin Walz, *Pulp Surrealism: Insolent Popular Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

before. The large thoroughfares, pierced through the most crowded quarters of the old city, have become a new and prominent feature […it] has every claim to be considered a magnificent and wonderful city […] even the public amusements of the capital tend to the improvement of the mind, and the advancement of civilization. The metropolis is naturally salubrious, and the purity of its atmosphere may be at once ascertained by viewing it from an elevated situation. How unlike the view from the top of St. Paul's in London, with its canopy of fogs and clouds, and its sickly sunbeams![23]

Similarly, by 1900, the famous *Baedeker* handbook for Paris, which was in its fourteenth French and English editions, also comments positively on the "magnificent metamorphosis of Paris 'from brick to marble;'" "Many squalid purlieus, teeming with poverty and vice, were swept away under the imperial regime, to make room for spacious squares, noble avenues, and palatial edifices."[24] The editors of these guidebooks not only described Paris as an attractive destination for visitors, but also drew lofty connections between the architectural improvements made to Paris during Napoleon III's Second Empire, and its unsurpassed reputation as a centre and capital of civilization and progress in the Third Republic.

However, these virtues were not the only attributes of Paris highlighted in guidebooks, in the hopes of enticing visitors. Books that showcased the darker aspects of the city, or as one guide put it, the "seamy side of Paris life," were also printed during the last decades of the nineteenth century.[25] Unlike the guides that emphasized the modernity and advancement of the structures of Paris at the *fin de siècle*, these books focused on learning about the people, most often the women, who lived within its walls and on its boulevards, as well as on the forbidden delights they could offer. As one French

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[23] *Galignani's New Paris Guide, for 1870* (Paris: Galignani & Co., 1870), i – iii.

[24] *Paris and its Envrions with Routes from London to Paris: Handbook for Travellers, 14th ed.* (Leipsic: Karl Baedeker, 1900), v.

[25] George Augusta Sala, *Paris Herself Again in 1878-9, In Two Volumes – Vol.II.* Fourth Edition (London: Remington and Co., 1880), 11-29.

guidebook, *Guide des Plaisirs à Paris*, (A Guide to the Pleasures of Paris), comments in its forward:

> Foreign visitor, why do you come to Paris? Because everyone has told you repeatedly that Paris is a city of extraordinary pleasures, the world capital of pleasure […] If you are alone, leave your own research and investigations behind, you will not see what you must, outside of the margins of the *Baedeker;* you will not know hidden Paris – you will not penetrate the Labyrinth, for fear of getting lost and being devoured by the sirens. Paris will not reveal any of its secrets to you, you will not savour its pleasures, and you will return home without having seen close up those two curious and unique beings: *le Parisien* and *la Parisienne*. I will make you see Paris in its intimate details […] Trust me, O noble visitor; I am here to take care of your wallet, your stomach, and your…heart.[26]

Here the wonders of Paris were linked not to its buildings or high culture, but to its inhabitants. Intermingling with Parisians promised to reveal forbidden and secret pleasures to the visitor who braved the city's streets and, of course, its women. Dangerous, intimate, and unsurprisingly, paired with vice, *la Parisienne* would not disappoint in satisfying the guest in search of adventure. An illustration from the *Almanach des Parisiennes*, captures these characteristics of *la Parisienne.* (Figure 3) Standing smartly in a wooded park, which was the place to see and be seen in late-nineteenth century Paris, the Parisian woman in this illustration looks demurely at the viewer. Over her shoulder is a board with advertisements for popular cabarets like the Moulin Rouge, and the caption below her reads, "Everyone finds pleasure where they find me."[27]

Mingling with Parisian women, however, was no simple task for a foreign visitor. The *Guide de Plaisirs* concedes that, "Among the plans of the traveller heading towards

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[26] *Guide des Plaisirs à Paris* (Paris: Édition Photographique, c.1900), vii-viii.
[27] A. Grevin, *Almanach des Parisiennes,* 1892, 45.

Figure 3: A. Grevin, *Almanach des Parisiennes,* 1892, 45, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.

Paris, the one he caresses with the most pleasure is certainly making the acquaintance of 'la Parisienne'…," but also warns that tourists often confuse what they call the "true Parisienne" with "women who please."[28] In a section specifically aimed at coaching the reader on how to identify these dangerous impostors, the *Guide de Plaisirs* listed some of the "principal guiles" and "tricks" by which these "coquettes" would quickly charm an unsuspecting man out of his money.[29] These mostly involved traps set by women who would lurk in popular spots around Paris – at the theatre, on the boulevards, or in restaurants – and attempt to get money, flowers, or a meal through their flattering and charming behaviour. The *Guide de Plaisirs* warned that, "All of these 'tricks' are classics. Oh! foreign amateur of 'Parisiennes,' oh! innocent traveller, be careful and take note of all of these conspiracies against your wallet. But tell yourself that these 'Parisiennes' – fortunately there are others! – have a devil's imagination…"[30]

Here then, we can see that the image of *la Parisienne* was not just paired with the wonders of the city; her image was also perpetually linked with the vices and sinful pleasures of Paris. Some of these notions of pleasure, vice, and their connection with Parisian women, came from the popular forms of entertainment that emerged in Paris at this time, which contributed significantly to the culture of decadence and hedonism that defined the years of the *belle époque*. This was the age of the cabaret shows of the Moulin-Rouge, the café-concerts and music halls, and the high-kicking cancan, which was advertised in posters such as those made famous by Toulouse-Lautrec.[31] (Figure 4)

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[28] Ibid, 182.
[29] Ibid, 183-185.
[30] Ibid, 185.
[31] The showgirl or dancer was also a popular representation of *la Parisienne,* depicted here in Lautrec's famous advertisement for the Moulin Rouge, which showed off the cancan, or *chahut*. The subject is the dancer Louise Weber, who was also known as "La Goulue" (the Glutton), a nickname she earned by her supposed ability to drink anyone under the table. Philippe Julian cites Jean Lorrain's comments about

Figure 4: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *La Goulue*, 1891. Lithograph in four colours. 191 x 117 cms. Private Collection.

Many cafés and cabarets were centred in the area of Montmartre, which as we have seen,

became the neighbourhood most connected with bohemian and artistic lifestyles during

the second half of the nineteenth century. By the years of the *belle époque*, Montmartre

was in full swing as the place where one could indulge in any number of pleasures –

including alcohol, drugs, women, dancing, and prostitution.[32] The image of the Parisian

woman was not only connected to the cabaret dancers and showgirls of places like the

Moulin Rouge and the *Moulin de la Galette*, but was also represented in the products that

were associated with this indulgent lifestyle. One exceptional example comes from the

pages of the periodical *Le Chat Noir,* which was connected to the café of the same name.

Elizabeth Menon has commented on a clever illustration entitled "Les Boissons,"

(Drinks), from 1894.[33] (Figure 5) Three women are depicted in this image and are meant

to stand for three types of alcoholic beverages – on the left, a revolutionary woman in

sans-culottes represents red wine; in the centre, what Menon has called a "classical"

woman, represents beer; and finally, on the right, the proverbially "modern" woman, who

is shot out of a popped bottle of champagne. The black stockings worn by this woman

were customary attire for prostitutes of the time, and her feather boa linked her to the

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Weber: "…La Goulue! Springing out of a tumbled froth of skirts, of swirling lace and expensive undergarments trimmed with delicately coloured ribbons, a leg appears, pointing straight up to the chandelier…and the leg quivers, witty and gay, voluptuous and full of promise, with its mobile, disjointed foot seeming to wave to the packed throng of onlookers all round. The *Chahut* and the *Chahutoirs*, those vast meeting places of idlers and whores, La Goulue is the star of them…" Julian, *Montmartre*, 100-101.
[32] Studies of Montmartre include Julian, *Montmartre;* Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque;* Gabriel P. Weisberg, ed., *Montmartre & the Making of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Jacqueline Strahm, *Montmartre: Beaux jours ... et belles de nuits* (Le Coudray-Macouard: Cheminements, 2001). For studies on prostitution in Paris and France during the nineteenth century, see Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute*; Corbin, *Women for Hire*; Joanna Richardson, *The Courtesans: The Demi-Monde in Nineteenth-Century France* (Edison, N.J.: Castle Books, 2004); Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).
[33] Carl-Hap (Karl Happel), "Les Boissons," *Le Chat Noir,* June 30, 1894, in Menon, "Images of Pleasure and Vice: Women on the Fringe," in *Montmartre & the Making of Mass Culture,* 37-71.

Figure 5: Carl-Hap (Karl Happel), "Les Boissons," *Le Chat Noir,* June 30, 1894, in Menon, "Images of Pleasure and Vice: Women on the Fringe," *Montmartre & the Making of Mass Culture,* 37-71.

theatrical actresses and cabaret performers of Montmartre's dance halls.[34] Although not

explicitly identified as *la Parisienne,* pictures and posters such as these mixed French

women with the powerful culture of sexual promiscuity, dancing, and alcohol that

permeated Parisian society at the *fin de siècle*, and contributed to the negative image of *la*

Parisienne.

Uzanne described this more controversial nature of the Parisian woman at length in

his study, *Parisiennes de ce temps*. He argued that by 1900, everything Parisians had

come to know and love about its women, all of their traits and temperaments, had

changed. Of her "physiology" he argued that:

> The ideas [of *la Parisienne*], the aesthetic style, manners, gestures, and
> gracefulness, all of that has changed. Today's Parisian woman presents
> herself with an absolutely distinct form; she wears, in her active life, an
> expression of art, a sensation of nervousness, a smear of cosmopolitanism,
> an allure of boyish swagger, and a pseudo-English style that we have not
> seen until now.[35]

In other studies of *la Parisienne,* he calls her "a little monster, no less mischievous than

charming, and cruel beyond belief…".[36] Of key interest here is the way Uzanne attaches

negativity to the modernizing elements of life for women in the French capital. Clearly,

the modern or "new" Parisian woman was not something that everyone embraced. In

addition to the image of *la Parisienne* which connected her to the pleasure-seeking world

of Parisian cabarets and café-concerts, a world which included the dangerous yet alluring

prostitute and courtesan, there also existed the image of an independent, modern Parisian

woman, who used the cosmopolitanism of the city to her advantage. The volatile and

tumultuous nature of the *fin-de-siècle* city was implicated in the transformation of *la*

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[34] See Menon, 41-42.
[35] Uzanne, *Parisiennes de ce temps,* 26-7.
[36] Octave Uzanne, *La Française du Siècle: Modes, Moeurs, Usages* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1886), 260.

Parisienne, which according to critics like Uzanne, had changed her into some sort of strange being, akin to the new woman or *femme nouvelle.* Grevin's *Almanach des Parisiennes* provides caricatures of the modern Parisian woman; one illustration depicts two of the most popular trademarks of the "new" *Parisienne* – the cigarette smoker, and cyclist.[37] (Figure 6)

Georges Montorgueil was particularly vocal in his critique of this latter type of Parisian woman, *la bicycliste.* In *L'année Féminine (1896): Les Parisiennes d'a Présent*, he connected the increased mobility to her new-found independence: "She travels by bicycle. Tomorrow it will be by automobile […] independent and self-sufficient, without master or god."[38] This independence was, in part, a reflection of the growing women's rights movements in France and elsewhere at this time, which caused panic and alarm in some quarters. For Montorgueil, the bicycle had not only spurred on women's emancipation, but the "democratic" device had created "a third sex."[39] Much of his argument rested on the clothing worn by *la Parisienne* when cycling, which he argued confused and blurred established gender norms: "It is not a man that passes by in baggy knickers, calves exposed, the […] size of a rower. Is it a woman?"[40] In *La Parisienne peinte par elle-même,* Montorgueil also attacks the bicycle, arguing that it is an "implacable enemy" – "More brutal than any revolution, it has entered into morality, upending accepted opinions and customs, crushing timid resistances, and laughing at

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[37] A. Grevin, *Almanach des Parisiennes,* 1894, 21.
[38] Georges Montorgueil, *L'année Féminine (1896): Les Parisiennes d'a Présent.* Illustrations de Henri Boutet (Paris: H. Floury, 1897), 4.
[39] Ibid, 14.
[40] Ibid.

— Tu préfères ça au canotage?
— J' t'écoute! D'abord, si on tombe, on ne risque pas de se noyer.
— Tu peux te casser les jambes.
— Tout au plus.

Figure 6: A. Grevin, *Almanach des Parisiennes,* 1894, 21, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.

longstanding laws about attire."[41] A Parisian woman who engaged with this affront to decency was thus to blame for any troubles she encountered: "…emancipated, more than emancipated, they [*les bicyclistes*] move among men, their hands in their pockets with the look of depraved street-boys, and they wonder why men have become disrespectful and less tender…".[42] No less than the cabaret dancer, actress, or streetwalker, the cyclist and other forms of new women were portrayed as yet another dark, sinister form of *la Parisienne* that threatened the moral fibre of Paris and its inhabitants, even as they admitted that the city was at least partially responsible for bringing her to life.

Alongside these contradictory impulses of desire and repugnance for *la Parisienne*, there was also, interestingly, a considerable amount of concern for her well-being. Montorgueil, for example, wrote about the difficulties for the Parisian working woman, particularly those in the garment and textile industries, which were places that perpetuated a "brutal 'everyman for himself'" environment.[43] He described the sad streets of Paris, and the sight of women walking to and from work, marked with the telling signs of their trade – the "reddened fingers of the florists," and the "untidy smocks" of those with the dirtiest jobs.[44] Despite the rigours and challenges of living and working in the city, however, he contended that the resilient *Parisienne* possessed a unique ability to overcome these hardships. Indeed, Montorgueil's writings were a far cry from those of serious and politicized commentators who were interested in improving the plight of working women in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century:

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[41] Montorgueil, *La Parisienne peinte par elle-même,* 183. For an additional consideration of this text, which addresses the specific nature of Parisian womanhood in the area of Montmartre, see Menon, "Images of Pleasure and Vice: Women on the Fringe," in *Montmartre & the Making of Mass Culture,* 37-71.

[42] Ibid, 190. Also cited in Menon, 55.

[43] Georges Montorgueil, *Les Minutes Parisiennes: Midi, le dejeuner des petites ouvrières* (Paris: Librarie Paul Ollendorff, 1899), 22-28.

[44] Ibid, 34.

> For men, hunger is the most pressing issue, the cry which must be heard
> and given in to before all others in the clamour of daily necessities: not so
> for *la Parisienne*. Her only appetite is to be pleasant and nice. To please is
> the burden to which all her other needs defer. Her vanity imposes itself upon
> her stomach; her coquetry kills her hunger, or at least tricks and allays it. In
> whatever class or profession she belongs to, her love of food is second to her
> desire to keep up appearances.[45]

This passage demonstrates that for Montorgueil, *la Parisienne* was also located in the world of myth and fantasy; she possessed an almost mystical quality, an otherworldliness which put her above the common man and his corporeal needs.   Regardless of social standing or profession, she could withstand the worst of life in Paris by simply relying on her famous qualities of poise, elegance, and grace.

Others were not so optimistic. Doctor Paul Valentin believed that Parisian women, particularly those from the elite classes, were in crisis, a state that had been brought on by their hectic urban lives in a "grande capitale" like Paris.[46] He published his findings in "La Parisienne d'aujourd'hui" ("Today's Parisian Woman"), which appeared in July's edition of *La Vie Normale, Revue d'études Psychologiques* in 1903. Like many other cases examined here, his subject was defined by her charm and style:

> A supreme woman refined by long centuries of urbanity, *la Parisienne*
> possesses the highest degree of perfection in the art of pleasing. That is
> to say that she marvellously embodies one of the purest instincts of the
> French soul: the instinct of *sociabilité*.[47]

According to Valentin, these unique and wonderful qualities needed the "special atmosphere" that can only be found in large, urban cities, in order to develop and mature.[48]

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[45] Ibid, 38-39.
[46] Paul Valentin, "La Parisienne d'aujourd'hui, Deuxième Conférence faite à Paris (saison d'hiver 1902-1903)," *Vie Normale, Revue d'études Psychologiques (juin 1903 – mars 1907),* July 1903, 56, in Dossier Parisienne, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris.
[47] Ibid, 49.

Unlike Montorgeuil, who believed that the Parisian woman's gifts were innate and enduring, Valentin argued that they were explicitly connected to the city in which she lived. However, this was a significant problem for *la Parisienne*, as Valentin saw it, because the development and perfection of these qualities came at a price. He contended that in Paris, *la Parisienne* was forced to hone her skills by restricting herself to the "artificial social circles in which she moves," and that this limitation had a profound impact on her physical and moral health.[49] As the "maitresse de maison" (the lady of the house), *la Parisienne* was expected to be controlled, tactful, and to have a skilled sense of finesse and *savoir-vivre*: "In all situations, she is what she must be: dignified, correct without seeming rigid, accommodating, clever and good, and she must know how to listen and understand…".[50] These attributes, according to Valentin, far from helping to develop a woman who was the master of her home and salon, had created an "artificial paradise" for *la Parisienne,* a world in which she was imprisoned, and a life that bore only the faintest resemblance to anything real.[51] Furthermore, this "artificial and complicated life" was one that Parisian women believed they were forced to adopt because they lived in a large urban centre.[52]

Valentin argued that this situation would have serious implications for the physical and mental well-being of *la Parisienne* as she faced the twentieth century. His list of illnesses included the progressive decline of her physical strength, a debilitated and disoriented nervous system, which could mutate into conditions such as hysteria or

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid, 50.
[50] Ibid, 51.
[51] Ibid, 50.
[52] Ibid, 56.

neurasthenia, and even neurological imbalances.[53] He concluded that *la Parisienne's* brain would become the "fragile and worn-out organism of a city dweller in the evil of extreme civilization."[54] This understanding of a modern Paris at 1900 was a far cry from the welcoming "hearth of civilization" that was applauded by the organizers of the Universal Exposition. Instead we see here another side of modern life – a fear of the descent into decadence and degeneration. Valentin warned that if *la Parisienne* was not encouraged to break out of this lifestyle, she would no longer represent the goodness of Paris, as seen in Paquin's statue atop the Porte Monumentale, but would be nothing more than "the toy or doll of a decadent civilization."[55]

Valentin was not alone in this depiction of a troubled *Parisienne,* and it was not just elite women who were believed to be suffering from the ills of modern Paris. Uzanne also commented on the adverse affects of the *fin-de-siècle* city on its women, and wondered if the modern *Parisienne* from the lower and middle classes was happier for her transformations and emergence into public life: "A serious question, to which the majority of interested responses would incline us without doubt toward the negative…".[56] Uzanne contended that Parisian women were struggling to survive in a city which was pitted against them, and which, for many, constituted a life of "…horrifying servitude."[57] He argued that, "…most [women] acquire, at a costly and terrible price, […] the right to live in this Paris that reserves so many injustices and disappointments for the creatures it houses."[58] The city was a "centre of vice," which made life increasingly difficult for

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid, 57.
[56] Uzanne, *Parisiennes de ce temps,* 29.
[57] Ibid, 14.
[58] Ibid, 29.

women.[59] Uzanne also laid blame for the corruption of *la Parisienne* at the feet of the city's men, and stated that women "… get […] their power from our desires, from our passions, from our vices; but they are often stronger than the morals they inspire, and these deities that we praise, these pretty girls that we desire […] are, alas! only too frequently our victims, our slaves, and the ransom of our pressing pleasures."[60] He continued:

> What is to be concluded? except that, left on their own in the confusion of social classes, status, and morals, forced to suffer and to surrender their dignity and conscience, today's worldly women endure training, without enthusiasm, in current morality that often pushes them infinitely further than they would like to go. Their life, without centre, without balance, without serious attachments, is in some ways unhinged and disturbed, and it is not at all surprising that they sometimes fall for the *best* as well as for the worst, but always to extremes. Here, as elsewhere, man is again at fault for this excessive situation.[61]

Uzanne's assessment of *la Parisienne* victimized her plight, and accused the city's men of failing her. They were the stronger, more dominant sex, according to Uzanne, and should have been dedicated to preserving and protecting their "angelic" women.[62] Beyond the rhetoric that emphasizes the powerlessness and incapability of Parisian women, Uzanne also indicates that Paris was a place of confusion, difficulty, and challenge; that the dangers and illicit pleasures of the city created a complex set of circumstances that often affected women in adverse ways, and often resulted in a life that was unbalanced, extreme, and "unhinged." His, and Valentin's, assessments of Paris in the early years of the twentieth century explore some of the unusual and detrimental ways in which women

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[59] Ibid, 42.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid, 38.
[62] Ibid, 13.

were believed to be changing and responding to the problems of the city at the turn of the twentieth century.

The descriptions of Paris, in which it is depicted as a centre of modernity and progress, and a "capital of pleasure,"[63] with a dark underbelly of urban dangers, underscore some of its complexities as a *fin-de-siècle* city, and demonstrate the contradictory ways in which the image of *la Parisienne* was implicated in this portrayal. The various images of the Parisian woman linked her inexorably to the city; her name was invoked to exalt the beauty and spectacle of Paris, or as a synonym for the decadent and corrupt culture of the *fin de siècle*. The representations of *la Parisienne* also reveal the conflicted ways in which she was understood and depicted as the embodiment of Parisian womanhood at the turn of the twentieth century. She was the elegant, fashionable hallmark of Parisian and French civilization, the image used to represent the city and the nation at the gates of the Universal Exposition; or the dangerous, lewd, and scandalous figure who stood for the pleasures and vices of the city. These conflicting images in turn generated debates about the nature of the "true" *Parisienne* – just who was this woman? While some, such as the author Montjoyeux, believed that "They are rare, the real women of Paris,"[64] others, like Le Sueur, argued that she was not a unique phenomenon – "There are thousands like her in our admirable Paris. That is their particular virtue; to cover the hardest work with a sort of smiling grace."[65] For her, the true Parisian woman was known for her "inner gifts" of "simplicity" and "grace," which she employed in the care and

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[63] *Guide des Plaisirs à Paris,* 16.
[64] Montjoyeux, *Les Femmes de Paris* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1889), IX.
[65] Le Sueur, "The 'Parisienne,'" *La Beauté de Paris,* xix.

maintenance of her modest home and family, and which were a product of her unique French "heritage."[66]   She contended that:

> Nothing is less "Parisienne" than the region "of pleasure." The stars who revolve there, and after whom the traveller hastens, heedlessly or maliciously, to establish a too positive judgment, are falling stars, sad stars, appearing from distant shadows and about to be engulfed in them again before long. They have not a particle of the soul of the Parisienne, nor a spark of her special flame.[67]

This image of Parisian womanhood was highly unstable, fleeting, and in a state of perpetual change and flux. The one constant was the presence of the city. Regardless of her "true" nature, the varied representations of *la Parisienne* did not grant her an identity beyond that of the city: "Paris without you, and you without Paris," Le Sueur comments, "that cannot be conceived. You are her ornament, her charm, her smile. Born of her, you perish if she perishes."[68] Tied to the city in this way, a conflicted and contested Paris was thus blamed for her fall from grace, regardless of class or social standing – it was responsible not only for her slide into debauchery and promiscuity, but also for her declining mental health and susceptibility to diseases of the mind – depression, hysteria, and neurasthenia.

Ultimately, *la Parisienne* was a potent and volatile representation of Parisian female identity. From the examples shown here, we can see that this image was popular, changeable, and often a reflection of similar contradictory impulses at work in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. In order to understand the pervasiveness and extent of Paris as a city of conflict for women, we also need to engage with the experiences of Parisian women, in order to assess how much they shared with their glorified and vilified image. How did

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[66] Ibid, xviii-xix.
[67] Ibid, xviii.
[68] Ibid, xix.

women of Paris encounter the contested city? Did they have or express opinions about *la Parisienne*? In what ways did their challenges and difficulties manifest themselves, beyond the cultural constructions and sociological studies, and what can this tell us about the unpredictable nature of female identity at the end of the nineteenth century?   For answers to these questions, the writings of women in the Parisian press are particularly valuable, as they capture the sentiments, concerns, and voices of some of the city's women, true *Parisiennes,* at the turn of the twentieth century. As we shall see, *La Fronde*, a popular newspaper started by Marguerite Durand in 1897, and staffed almost entirely by women, was one important periodical that discussed these and other troubling issues facing women in the city at the *fin de siècle*.

Women's Presses in Paris

There was a growing number and variety of newspapers, circulars, and journals that targeted female readership in Paris and France at the *fin de siècle*. Gregory Shaya has noted that the second half of the nineteenth century is commonly considered the "golden age" of the French press, with the emergence of new popular periodicals such as *Le petit journal* and *Le petit parisien*, and an overall rise in circulation by 1900.[69]   There was also an increased urgency among publishers to disseminate sensational stories as quickly and widely as possible, which made the press an integral part of a burgeoning mass public

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[69] For example, he has noted that in 1880, the circulation of the Parisian daily press stood at 2 million, and by 1910, it had reached 5 million. See Shaya, "The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910," *American Historical Review* (Vol. 109, No. 1, Feb, 2004: 41-77). For studies on the press in nineteenth-century France, see Thomas Ferenczi, *L'invention du journalisme en France: Naissance de la presse moderne à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1993); Dean de la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France* (Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

who read as much for entertainment and voyeurism as to be informed.[70] Women's presses

and newspapers, as Roberts has noted, drew on a long and illustrious history of feminist

journalism which started in the eighteenth century, and many presses came to be

categorized, by the *fin de siècle,* as either "feminine" or "feminist" in their approach.[71]

An example of the former included *La Gazette des femmes: Revue du progrès des femmes

dans les beaux-arts et la littérature*, which was published bi-monthly and was

predominantly aimed at bourgeois women in the city. It discussed Parisian fashion,

included embroidery and clothing patterns, and contained columns such as Jeanne de

Soisy's "Notes d'une Parisienne," which provided advice on childrearing and tending to

the home.[72] Other papers and magazines designed for a female readership eschewed the

label of feminism, but still held distinct opinions about the nature and direction of modern

French womanhood in the twentieth century. According to the writers at *Femina*, which

debuted in February of 1901, there existed no review in France which gave "an accurate

idea of all that happens in its charming kingdom," an oversight they sought to correct:

> This anomaly has disappeared because of *Femina*. And, let us clear up any
> misunderstandings right from the start: it has nothing to do with "feminism"
> or "social emancipation;" we leave to others the job of making woman more
> manly and masculine, and robbing her of her exquisite charm. On the
> contrary, *Femina* will be devoted to the real woman, to the French woman
> raised healthily in the best traditions of elegance, good form, and grace.[73]

Similar sentiments were echoed in *La Femme Française*: "The woman who wants to

resemble a man is abandoning her pedestal because her femininity is her true power."[74]

For these magazines, the real strength of the French and Parisian woman lay in her

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[70] Shaya, "The *Flâneur*," and Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*.
[71] Roberts, *Disruptive Acts,* 75-76.
[72] *La Gazette des femmes: Revue du progrès des femmes dans les beaux-arts et la littérature*, 1891.
[73] *Femina* (1 fevrier 1901: No.1), 2.
[74] *La Femme Française* (22 decembre, 1903: No. 26), 1.

traditional, essentialized characteristics, and as Lenard Berlanstein has argued, the editors of *Femina* saw no reason why they could not make feminism "compatible" with French femininity and commercial success.[75]

Presses like these were somewhat at odds with the more typical feminist presses of the late nineteenth century, who argued that theirs was a battle not to make women masculine, but to give voice to their desire for rights, independence and citizenship in the republic.[76] This collection of qualities, they contended, comprised the true nature of French and Parisian female identity at the start of the twentieth century. *Le Journal des Femmes: Organe du Mouvement Féministe,* for example, was forthright in its claims, and declared in its 1901 New Year's Day edition that the "the first day of the twentieth century," was to be "the century of the woman" – "Isn't this the birth of a new age? Some great change must certainly take place, and our utopian dreams of the nineteenth century will become the realities of the twentieth."[77] The editor, Maria Martin, also noted that, "We feminists can rightly congratulate ourselves. Almost all women between the ages of twenty and thirty know how to read. We can therefore pursue our campaign through books and newspapers."[78] Women who wrote for these kinds of papers were determined to use the growing and proliferated press in order to reach their readers and coalesce their common goals.

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[75] Lenard R. Berlanstein, "Selling Modern Femininity: *Femina*, a Forgotten Feminist Publishing Success in Belle Epoque France," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Fall 2007): 623-649, 625.

[76] Studies on the history of women's journalism in France include Nina Gelbart, *Feminine and Opposition Journalism in Old Regime France: Le Journal des dames* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Laure Adler, *A L'aube du féminisme: Les Premières jounalistes, 1830-1850* (Paris: Payot, 1979); Evelyne Sullerot, *Histoire de la presse féminine en France, des origines à 1848* (Paris: Libraire Armand Colin, 1966).

[77] Maria Martin, "Le Siècle de la Femme," *Le Journal des Femmes: Organe du Mouvemente Féministe*, No. 106 (janvier, 1901): 1.

[78] Ibid.

Some presses straddled the categories of feminine and feminist, and produced journals that tried to strike a middling path. They argued that to fight for women's rights did not necessarily equate to a loss of femininity for women – as Léonie de Bazelaire noted in *La Chevauchée,* a women's literary review, "…because she must work, it is only just that she demands her rights. But to believe that women will lose their loving nature as wives and mothers, is to be a bit too pessimistic."[79] Others advocated on behalf of modern Parisian and French women through wit and sarcasm. *Le Bas-Bleu: Gazette Mondaine*, for example, which took its name from the popular term for suffragettes, had nothing to do with suffrage or the fight for women's rights. The editor explained the paper's mandate in a column entitled "Nihilist Programme," which was included in the paper's first edition:

> *Le Bas-Bleu* is not revolutionary. It does not demand civil equality for women, and it will not support sending reporters to any feminist meetings… Equality? With who, God in Heaven? With your valet? […] *Le Bas-Bleu* will not give you any advice […] About hygiene? Your cheeks are as soft as peach skin. About fashion? You are overburdened by it! […] Furthermore, it does not come to fill a void, it does not respond to a need. *Le Bas-Bleu* does not want to be useful… *Le Bas-Bleu! Le Bas-Bleu!* But then what will we speak of? Everything… and nothing.[80]

Here was a journal for women that wanted to attract readers who perhaps did not feel that their views were neatly encompassed by two over-simplified categories. There were even contradicting viewpoints among staff members – a reporter by the name of Marie-Louise included an article in the same edition which challenged her editor's hard-line manifesto: "At the risk of undermining the respect of our dear editor, I hasten to pronounce a

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[79] Léonie de Bazelaire, "La Femme au XIXe Siècle," *La Chevauchée: Revue Littéraire des Femmes*, No. 8 (15 janvier 1901): 1-2.
[80] Pochon du Hautoir, "Programme Nihiliste," *Le Bas-Bleu: Gazette Mondaine*, No. 1 (15 juin 1879): 1.

rebuttal!"[81]   She argued that the staff of *Le Bas-Bleu* hoped the paper would become a truly "open forum" for women's literary and artistic contributions, one free of religious and political ideologies – "We will accept with gratitude everything that you wish to send us, *variétés*, verse, prose, fantasies…".[82] For papers like *Le Bas-Bleu*, the agenda was not to have one, and instead, to allow women the freedom and the space to voice their interests and concerns in whatever manner they chose.

We can see from these examples that despite the broad divisions of feminine and feminist women's presses in late-nineteenth century France, there was in fact a varied and multifaceted approach to discussing themes and issues that were considered to be important to women of the *fin de siècle*. How did *La Fronde* fit into this scene? Roberts has argued that the paper confused and confounded these two categories, and its writers tried to maintain a sense of "cultural illegibility" about its aims.[83] She has shown that male contemporaries from other papers felt uneasy and suspicious of *La Fronde* for the very reason that it did not conform to a certain discourse, whether that of a traditional feminine press, or one with a forward-thinking feminist agenda, and often included articles of both types.[84] The daily, started in 1897 by Marguerite Durand, proudly declared that it was "…managed, administered, written and composed exclusively by women."[85] As Roberts has noted, *La Fronde* was an innovative newspaper for its time, not only because of its female reporters and editors, who called themselves the *frondeuses,* but because it did not follow the template of the "woman's" periodical, which had traditionally focused on discussions of feminism or the coverage of fashion and the

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[81] Marie-Louise, "Prompte Rectification," *Le Bas-Bleu*, No. 1 (15 juin 1879): 2.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Roberts, *Disruptive Acts,* 76.
[84] Ibid, 73-77.
[85] *La Fronde,* 12 December, 1897, 1.

decorative arts. Instead, Durand and the editorial staff at *La Fronde* produced a paper that covered "politics, news, sports, and the stock market,"[86] and sustained a respectable circulation up until 1900.[87]   Roberts has argued that Durand and her staff created a newspaper that was "a veritable playground of gender identity," and was instrumental in their "subversive" attempt to "play at the meanings of womanhood."[88]   Some of their tactics included mimicking personalities such as the "male reporter, the moral missionary, and the loving wife" in their writings, but with their own twists – "she was the loving wife *but not quite*, just as she was the reporter *but not quite*."[89]   Roberts has shown that new women in the field of journalism developed their professional voices through their contributions to *La Fronde*, and successfully subverted traditional gendered expectations of their role as reporters and women.

To be sure, *La Fronde* included many articles on the struggles associated with women's political mobilization.[90] One particular case that illustrates this "feminist" side of their mission takes us back to the story of the Universal Exposition of 1900. We have already seen how this event brought worldwide attention to Paris, and how the organizers used the image of the city's women in the form of *la Parisienne* to represent the splendour of the city. Articles from *La Fronde* around this time tell quite a different

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[86] Roberts, *Disruptive Acts,* 5. For a discussion of *La Fronde* and its connections to New Women in France and Paris at the *fin de siècle,* see, in particular, her chapter entitled "Subversive Copy," 73-106. For studies on *La Fronde* and Durand, see Jean Rabaut, *Marguerite Durand (1864-1936): "La Fronde" féministe, ou, "Le Temps" en jupons* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996); Máire Fedelma Cross, "La Fronde: Fin de Siècle Feminism at the Dawn of a New Era," in Holmes and Tarr, eds., *A "Belle Epoque?"*, 95-115.

[87] For example, Roberts has commented that their circulation numbers sat consistently at 50,000 during the first few years of publication, which were comparable to other smaller papers such as *Le Figaro* (37,000) and *Le Gaulois* (30,000). By 1900, however, numbers dwindled to 14,660 and by 1902, had fallen to 2,250. Roberts contends that this lack of interest in *La Fronde* can be attributed, in part, to the "decline in newspaper reading after the end of the Dreyfus Affair." See *Disruptive Acts,* 278 n.3.

[88] Roberts, *Disruptive Acts,* 97-105.

[89] Ibid, 105.

[90] A few typical examples include recurring columns such as "Notes d'une Frondeuse," by Severine, which discussed issues of justice, the plight of the poor, and the fight for suffrage, as well as Aline Valette's "Le Travail des Femmes," which highlighted the various jobs and professions of French women.

story. While the image of the Parisian woman was given a place of honour at the top of the Porte Monumentale, real Parisian women were being short shifted within the pavilions of the exhibition. As early as December of 1897, articles appeared which reported on the paltry number of women involved in the organizing of the Exposition – the admission committees were comprised of 4,000 men but only 33 women.[91] One reported that a delegation of women's organizations had approached the minister of commerce about the oversight, only to be told that there was nothing he could do for that year – the decisions had already been made: "However, our demands contained nothing subversive […] we simply asked for a more equitable distribution [of committee members]. Who could blame us? All of the forces and resources of a country must be used…".[92] She continued, "Ah! if only we were voters! members of electoral committees! the reception would have been totally different! […] But we count for so little that our governing officials hold our complaints of no account."[93] By April of 1898, there were indications of cautious optimism when Camille Duguet reported that the Women's League for Disarmament was set to host a conference at the exhibition to discuss issues surrounding world peace.[94] This, she noted, was a significant achievement, and that "The Exposition of 1900 will

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[91] V. Vincent, "Exposition de 1900: Les Femmes dans les Comités d'organization," *La Fronde* (No.14, 28 decembre, 1897), 2. For a follow-up article, see Jeanne DeFlou, "Les Femmes dans les Comités d'admission: A l'Exposition de 1900," *La Fronde* (20 janvier, 1898), 1. This issue was also discussed in the *Almanach féministe*: "In this vast encyclopaedia of human activity, divided into twenty classes containing 4,000 names, we have collected only 33 names of women. This is a very limited number in comparison to the talent, the taste, and the genius of women engaged in our national production, in which they participate in all branches of arts, sciences, commerce, and industry." See "Les Femmes dans les Comités d'admission à l'Exposition de 1900," *Almanach féministe,* 1899, 41-49.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Camille Duguet, "Pour la Paix," *La Fronde* (No. 121, 8 avril, 1898), 1.

mark an important step for feminism," a shift from the dire reports of six months previous.[95]

In addition to reports about the public representation of women at events like the Universal Exposition, *La Fronde* was also vocal in its discussions of the nature of female identity at the end of the nineteenth century. Articles that dealt with these issues were more ambiguous in their approach. While *La Fronde* included reports on fashion, theatre, and the various comings and goings of Parisian society, when placed alongside politicized articles, these more "feminine" pieces took on a slightly different appearance. In one report, for example, Marie-Anne de Bovet tackled the myth of the "eternally feminine" woman, "this inexhaustible subject in verse and prose: the eternal mystery of woman and her endless illusion. We do not know why, for that matter, there is only an eternal feminine; we never speak of an 'eternal masculine.'"[96] According to de Bovet, the belief in this mythic femininity, or that women were "complicated" and full of "contradictions," particularly in matters of love, was false:

> And the mystery in all of this, the famous mystery, where is it? Nowhere.
> There is no female or feminine mystery. There is, of course, the mystery
> of each individual woman, but it is not an essential mystery, particular to
> her sex: quite simply put, it is her own personal secret.[97]

Articles such as these discredited stereotypical notions of femininity while still granting women a sense of individuality and uniqueness.[98] By focusing on these issues, the writers at *La Fronde* articulated ways in which French and Parisian women at the turn of the twentieth century were re-evaluating and assessing their position within society – not only

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Marie-Anne de Bovet, "L'Éternel Féminin!!!" *La Fronde* (No. 14, 22 decembre, 1897), 1.
[97] Ibid.
[98] See Roberts, *Disruptive Acts,* 103-106, for elaboration on this point.

by honing and developing their political voices, but by expressing their variation and individuality. These reports and articles demonstrate that *La Fronde* contained elements of both feminism and femininity, and show that its reporters chose to write about issues that they believed were meaningful to them, and to fellow *Parisiennes*. These Parisian women, who were dedicated to a cross-section of issues relating to women as well as to a general reading public, also wrote about the city of Paris at the *fin de siècle*, and by examining a collection of columns and reports from the paper, we can see that there was a considerable amount of commentary by Durand and her colleagues on the troubles and anxieties experienced by women trying to build and live successful lives in Paris.

La Fronde **and Writings of Danger and Death in the City**

Parisians of the late-nineteenth century loved a good scandal. By the *fin de siècle*, the burgeoning mass press was rife with stories of General Boulanger, the Panama Canal, and the Dreyfus Affair, and newspapers were designed to cater to a reading public whose demand for information about these debacles seemed insatiable. This, of course, was nothing new. Historians such as Sarah Maza have documented the penchant of the French for titillating courtroom dramas, political and royal intrigues, and other famous *causes célèbres* of prerevolutionary France, which were published with fervour in legal briefs and court cases.[99] By 1900 the extensive breadth and proliferation of the press could now reach an unprecedented number of French and Parisian citizens,[100] and, as Vanessa Schwartz has argued, "…beyond the mere circulation figures, the newspaper became an

[99] Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
[100] Historians have estimated that circulation of Parisian dailies increased by 250 percent between 1880-1914. Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le roman du quotidien* (Paris: Le Chemin Vert, 1984), 17, in Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities,* 27-28.

emblem of Parisian culture and its sensational reality came to stand for the best translation of the urban experience. […] Like the city, the newspaper celebrated speed, spontaneity, the unpredictable and the ephemeral."[101]

La Fronde was also involved in the trend toward sensational reporting. Roberts has demonstrated that the paper's coverage of the Dreyfus Affair in particular was important to its popularity and partly responsible for its rise in sales during the first few years of publication.[102] In addition to major scandals, *La Fronde* also included a recurring column known as the *fait divers*. The sensationalist *fait divers* press or news column took hold of French periodicals in the late-nineteenth century, and played a significant role in determining the ways in which news about crime and scandal reached Parisians.[103] Originally used to indicate a "news item," the term "*fait divers*" was first used in *Le Petit Journal* in 1863,[104] and had, by the turn of the twentieth century, come to denote any kind of sensationalist story of crime, murder, strange occurrence, or political scandal that was reported in the media with flourish and great attention to detail.[105] The *fait divers* had some of its origins in the earlier "tall tales," or *canards*, which often exaggerated the truth, but as Schwartz has noted, while the *canards* were brief and often fictitious, the *fait divers*, by contrast, reproduced stories that seemed unbelievable but were actually true –

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[101] Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities,* 28.
[102] See Roberts, *Disruptive Acts,* 278n3.
[103] Studies on crime, the press, and the *fait divers* in France include Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang* and *Crime et culture au XIXe siècle;* David H. Walker, *Outrage and Insight: Modern French Writers and the "Fait Divers"* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995); Michelle Perrot, *Les Ombres de l'histoire: Crime et Châtiment au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001); Gregory Shaya, "The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910," *AHR*, Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities;* Roland Barthes, "Structure du Fait Divers," *Essais Critiques* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964).
[104] Franck Évard, *Fait Divers et Littérature* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 1997), 30.
[105] Shaya, n.3.

"the genre consisted of exceptional events that happened to ordinary people."[106] The reports contained in the *fait divers* were a way of incorporating the average, everyday Parisian into a larger spectacle of voyeurism and sensationalism; according to Schwartz, they "implied that the everyday might be transformed into the shocking and sensational and ordinary people lifted from the anonymity of urban life and into the realm of spectacle."[107] When the four leading daily newspapers of the *fin de siècle – Le Petit Parisien, Le Petit Journal, Le Journal,* and *Le Matin –* adopted the format of the *fait divers,* it indeed became an important part of Parisian daily life, one that crossed many social and class boundaries.[108]

The *fait divers* was also part of a larger trend of studying and diagnosing criminality and social deviance in the late-nineteenth century, which, as discussed in chapter 2, was a growing concern at the *fin de siècle*. This obsession with crime and criminal activity came not only from the growing fields of criminology, used by the political, legal, and medical communities to detect, diagnose, and fight crime, but from the proliferation of cultural products aimed at the general reading public. There was a tremendous market for serial novels, newspaper reports, and images which discussed and depicted crime, danger, and deviance in the city, and the *fait divers* was one of the most popular and successful channels through which daily stories of crime reached the average Parisian. Durand and the writers at *La Fronde* included a recurring *fait divers* section in their paper during the first year of publication, which described the shocking details of daily crimes, violence, and danger in the city. Indeed, some of these stories echoed the sensational reports

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[106] Schwartz, 36. See also Maurice Lever, *Canards sanglantes: Naissance du fait divers* (Paris: Fayard, 1993).
[107] Ibid.
[108] Walz, *Pulp Surrealism*, 129.

included in other papers, meant to boost sales with the often gruesome and gory tales of urban scandal, such as one that recounted a "sinister discovery" on an express train to Paris on 29 January, 1898.[109] After noticing that part of the engine was soiled with blood and what appeared to be human flesh, the train's mechanic discovered a severed foot among the ashes and reported his findings to the officials at the Gare du Nord. Upon further investigation, the *fait divers* report noted that the remains of a young woman were found on the tracks of a neighbouring town, leaving the reader to speculate if it was an accident, foul play, or a possible suicide. Other cases focused on Parisian relationships that had gone terribly wrong, such as the report entitled "Jealousy," which told of Marie Rigot, whose long-standing and "violent hatred" of her roommate Louise Gaucher prompted her to attack and badly burn the woman with a bottle of *vitriol*.[110] These examples of *fait divers* were fairly typical of the period – they emphasized themes of drama and revenge, and carefully, but succinctly, recreated the details of the events in an attempt to emulate gossip, entertain, and shock their readers.

Despite the inclusion of these kinds of *fait divers* reports, the writers at *La Fronde* also conceded that the public "thirst for scandals" was not necessarily a good thing, and had, in fact, been created by contemporary journalists who increasingly used their "imaginations" in a vain attempt to satisfy this desire for sensationalism.[111] They believed that *La Fronde* could use its columns, including the *fait divers*, as a way to discuss the difficulties of life for women in the city. Some of the issues they discussed revolved around the nature of personal relationships in Paris. In one article, a reporter noted the growing disparity in the marriage rate between couples in Paris and the rest of France, and

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[109] "Sinistre Découverte – Fait Divers," *La Fronde,* 29 January, 1898, 3.
[110] "La Jalousie – Fait Divers," *La Fronde,* 16 January, 1898, 3.
[111] "Le Role de la Presse Féminine," *La Fronde,* 12 January, 1898, 1.

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commented that out of 1000 marriages, approximately an eighth survived beyond their

silver wedding anniversary in Paris, while a quarter of the nation's couples surpassed the

same milestone.[112]   The reporter expressed concern over this gap, and argued that reasons

for the divide included the weak moral fibre of Parisians and their shorter life

expectancy.[113]   Writers at *La Fronde* also discussed the insufficiency of women's wages

and the hardships involved in making ends meet in the city. As Aline Valette noted in her

column "Le Travail des Femmes," many of the city's women worked for "starvation

wages," which provided them with hardly enough money to pay bills and have sufficient

left over to feed themselves and their families.[114]   Undoubtedly, articles of this nature were

part of a larger project, as women fought for parity in the workforce and control over their

professional lives.[115]   However, these issues also reveal that the women of *La Fronde* had

and expressed concerns that were urban in focus, and that they utilized their expanding

public voices to reach a growing audience about their worries.

     In addition to concerns of this nature, reporters at *La Fronde* also devoted a

considerable amount of time to the issue of suicide in Paris. In the late-nineteenth century,

the "suicide problem" had become a growing concern discussed by medical professionals

and those in the developing field of sociology, most notably by Emile Durkheim in *Le*

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[112] "Ce que dure le Mariage," *La Fronde*, 18 December, 1898, 2.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Valette indicated that an average yearly salary for many working-class women in 1898 was about 900 fr., and after deducting rent and basic utilities, which cost approximately 435 fr. in Paris, she calculated that 1 fr. 27 was left for food each day. Elsewhere, however, she estimated that basic food costs would have been about 1 fr. 80 per day, thus demonstrating the inability for some to keep themselves afloat. She also noted that this was the best scenario, and did not account for unexpected expenses, such as illness or other emergencies. See Aline Valette, "Le Travail des Femmes – Les 'tireuses d'aiguelle,'" *La Fronde,* 19 December, 1897, 2; "Le Travail des Femmes – Salaires de famine," *La Fronde,* 3 February, 1898, 1.
[115] Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work*; Stewart, *Women, Work, and the French State*; M.H. Zylberberg-Hocquard and E. Diebolt, eds., *Femmes et travail au dix-neuvième siècle.*

Suicide (1897). Originally seen as a religious and ethical concern,[116] Durkheim argued that suicide was actually a socially determined phenomenon, one that was caused by "real, living, and active forces," such as marital and economic status, education, family, and religion.[117] The more support one received from community networks and systems, he contended, the less likely a person would commit suicide.[118] By using official statistics, Durkheim showed that France's suicide rates were on the rise in the late-nineteenth century, an increase he attributed to these as well as other factors, namely France's humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and a general malaise that he believed was connected to the stresses and tensions of urbanization and industrialization.[119] Durkheim's sociological approach to suicide was influential in France as well as in other countries, and became part of the pattern of diagnosing and treating social deviance at the *fin de siècle*.[120]

Other theorists echoed Durkheim's foundational work, and argued that suicide was a modern scourge upon France, particularly in the large cities of the nation. Louis Proal was one of many who attributed the increase in suicide and crime to the development of neurasthenia or "*nervosisme*" among Parisians, which was brought on by the intensities and difficulties of living in a modern city.[121] He argued that, "Modern life is more hectic

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[116] Jeffrey R. Watt has noted that early philosophers in Greece and Rome pondered theoretical concerns surrounding the ethical legitimacy of ending one's own life, while early Christians approached it with "inflexible opposition," and equated suicide with refusing to do God's will. See Jeffrey R. Watt (ed.), *From Sin to Insanity: Suicide in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 2.

[117] Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1951), 39.

[118] Watt, *From Sin to Insanity,* 3.

[119] Zilla Gabrielle Cahn, *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1998), 227-229.

[120] Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France,* xii; Olive Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian & Edwardian England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

[121] Louis Proal, *Le Crime et le Suicide Passionnels* (Paris: 1900), 304. For other contemporary accounts of suicide, see Gaston Garrison, *Le Suicide dans l'Antiquité et dans les temps modernes* (Paris: A. Rousseau, 1885); Léon Sarty, *Le Suicide* (Nice: Impremerie Centrale, 1889).

than in the past, especially in the large cities. […] This agitation in the cities is heightened by the preoccupations of struggling to live, which has also become more and more difficult."[122] Proal paid particular attention to the challenges presented by life in the capital, and noted that many Parisians lived with the fear of being unable to find work and incapable of paying their rent, a stress and worry that according to Proal, "weakens the nervous system."[123] Beyond the economic burdens associated with life in the city, Proal also discussed the adverse effects of Paris on men and women of means – "The excess of pleasures, mundane worries, the prolonged evenings spent in theatres and salons, […] make women very nervous. Men, for their part, find in large cities […] the intensity of competition, the high-spirited nature of professional rivalries…".[124] Studies such as these depicted Paris as an urban centre that threatened all social classes – the poor were faced with the struggles of basic survival, while the wealthy and leisured had to deal with an excess of excitement, indulgence, and luxury. Theorists believed that these "dangers" were responsible for agitating and unnerving urban dwellers to the point of causing them to harm themselves or others.

Unsurprisingly, tales of suicide were very popular *fait divers* items in the press, and as Robin Walz has argued, "…constituted one of the major categories of sensationalist journalism" in the late-nineteenth century.[125] Suicide reports were often limited to a few brief sentences, and were included in the *fait divers* as a way of filling blank space, in what journalists called a "*fait divers en trois lignes.*"[126] Illustrated papers, such as *Le Petit Parisien* also made great use of suicide as a subject for their images, and recreated the

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[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid, 305.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Walz, *Pulp Surrealism,* 131-132.
[126] Ibid.

most dramatic and scandalous reports for their readers. Some emphasized the manner in which the victims took their lives, in an effort to shock and titillate – a young couple who plunged "one hundred metres" off a cliff into the ocean, roughly bound together at the wrists by a rope, or a man who devised a makeshift canon with which to end his days by shooting himself in the face. (Figures 7 and 8) Other illustrations aimed to elicit pity and sympathy from the reader, by depicting the unfortunate demise of helpless victims – a group of young women who had perhaps made a foolhardy suicide pact, or an entire family found asphyxiated in their room. (Figures 9 and 10)

The journalists at *La Fronde* also believed that suicide was an increasing problem, and discussed the theme in their articles and editorials. In the 23 January edition, 1898, an article appeared by Marcelle Tinayre, which discussed the rising tide of suicides in France and Paris: "It is a sinister sign of the times: the constant spread and growth of suicides. It is not only men who find in the void an escape from their fruitless efforts and their dashed hopes; it is not only the elderly weary from poverty; it is women, young women."[127] Later that same year, in May of 1898, Marie-Louise Néron published an article entitled "Suicide Epidemic," which also chronicled the rising numbers of suicides in Paris and the nation: "Epidemic! Yes, this is the right word to describe the sickness that has been raging for the last few years, terrible and alarming, which has thrown many into the grave – rich and poor, young and old, who, weary of life, use suicide as a means of escape."[128] Néron argued that the intensity of public interest in and discussion of suicide only worsened its effect on contemporary society – in her estimation, popular literature and other writings,

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[127] Marcelle Tinayre, "La Nostalgie de la Mort," *La Fronde,* 23 January, 1898, 1.
[128] Marie-Louise Néron, "Epidémie de Suicides," *La Fronde,* 3 May, 1898, 1.

Figure 7: "Les Suicidés du Tréport: Une Chute de Cent Mètres," *Supplément Littéraire Illustré du "Petit Parisien,"* 7 February 1897, 48, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

UN SUICIDE ÉTRANGE

Figure 8: "Un Suicide Étrange," *Supplément Littéraire Illustré du "Petit Parisien,"* 6 April 1902, 112, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

LE SUICIDE DE QUATRE FEMMES

Figure 9: "Le Suicide de Quatre Femmes," *Supplément Littéraire Illustré du "Petit Parisien,"* 1897/1902?, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 10: "Le Drame de L'Avenue Marceau: Suicide de Cinq Personnes," *Supplément Littéraire Illustré du "Petit Parisien,"* 21 November 1897, 369, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

"glorify suicide [and] tell [victims] that it is easier to leave life behind than it is to stay, suffer, and put up a good fight."[129]

Ironically, while its reporters lamented this trend in sensationalized suicide reporting, *La Fronde* was also a part of the problem. It regularly featured stories of suicide in its *fait divers* column, and some emphasized the dramatic details of how the desperate acts were carried out. From the column on 23 April 1898, for example, we learn of two young women, Lucie Fournier and Marie Caille, who were placed under arrest after trying unsuccessfully to hang themselves with the sashes of their dresses in the neighbourhood of Les Halles. Although both were under surveillance in the police station on the Rue des Pourvaines, Fournier then managed to swallow a dozen pins, and was rushed to hospital in serious condition.[130] On the same day there was also a brief report of a woman, 47-year-old Jeanne-Marie Leperson, who was found dead in the Saint-Martin canal, near the Quai de Jemmapes.[131] In her pocket, along with her papers, was a note that explained that she had killed herself to escape poverty.[132] Another report which emphasized the drama of suicide was the story of Alexandrine Zélénine, a Russian student living in Paris, who entered the gardens of the Luxembourg Palace, stood between the Médici fountain and the bandstand, and "suddenly, before the guard had time to intervene, she stopped, removed a small revolver from her pocket, pointed it at her chest, and fired."[133] Although she did not succeed in killing herself, the report quoted Alexandrine as saying, "I can no longer live, and I will kill myself. I suffer so much! […] If I miss this

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[129] Ibid.
[130] "Deux Désespérées – Fait Divers," *La Fronde,* 23 April, 1898, 3.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] "Tentative de Suicide – Fait Divers," *La Fronde,* 24 April, 1898, 3.

time, I will try again."[134] Reports such as these recounted shocking episodes of death and violence in Paris, and often highlighted their connections to various urban locales throughout the city – markets, public gardens, and canals. Indeed, as Néron noted in her article about the suicide epidemic, physical spaces and places, particularly public monuments with their "invisible attractions," were often popular spots for suicide victims.[135] These dramatic scenes of death implicated Paris not only as the cause of misery, but also as the backdrop against which acts of great desperation often took place.

Although *La Fronde* did include these types of sensationalized reports of suicide in their paper, a closer look at the *fait divers* section reveals other cases of suicide that were expanded into editorialized segments. In these reports, the journalists departed from the typical format of the *fait divers,* and instead used the column as a tool by which to illuminate the difficulties of Parisian life. They discussed suicide, in particular, not as a source of voyeuristic entertainment, but as an unfortunate result of the trials of survival in the city. Several of their articles focused on young mothers, usually abandoned, who killed themselves out of desperation, or working women struggling to make ends meet in Paris. One such case was that of thirty-two-year-old Alexandrine Delfour, who hung herself in her room after being out of work for two months. The *fait divers* reporter noted that the woman "had exhausted all of her resources, and was at the point of starvation."[136] Another chronicled the demise of Constance Py, whose "maternal grief" and "inconsolable" spirit after the death of her three-year-old son led her to take her life by

[134] Ibid.
[135] Néron, "Epidémie de Suicides," *La Fronde,* 3 May, 1898, 1. She also notes from her research that in 1843, the Colonne Vendôme, the Tours de Notre-Dame, and the Arc de Triomphe were particularly popular spots.
[136] "Fait Divers – La Misère," *La Fronde,* 11 March, 1898, 3.

carbon dioxide poisoning (*réchaud de charbon*).[137] Yet another report began with the declaration, "These women are so numerous, alas! and nearly every day records this fact. Yesterday it was a young woman, very elegantly dressed, who threw herself into the Seine in front of the Quai de Passy."[138] An additional example is that of nineteen-year-old Leonie Lamy, who tried unsuccessfully to asphyxiate herself and her fourteen-month-old baby after being abandoned by her lover – "she found herself a stove [*réchaud*] in order to take refuge in death, where she could eliminate all of her suffering."[139] They were rescued by neighbours and although Leonie was saved, her baby died. The *fait divers* segment noted that:

> We understand that the unfortunate woman had tried in vain to apply for
> Public Assistance, a monthly amount given to young mothers [*filles-mères*]
> who are abandoned. She had only seen a small and insignificant sum, and it
> was in this state of desperation that she made her grievous decision. We have
> seen here a case of profound injustice.[140]

Reports such as these, which included editorial commentary, emphasized the struggles of work, motherhood, and living independently as women, and also reveal the decidedly difficult nature of trying to do these things in Paris. The writers at *La Fronde* argued that living in the city made life more difficult for many women – relationships were harder to find and sustain, work was more difficult to secure, families were harder to raise, and basic survival was simply more challenging. By using the *fait divers* and other sections of their paper to comment on these difficulties, especially the ways in which they often culminated in death, the women of *La Fronde* moved beyond the theme of suicide as merely a tool of sensationalist journalism, and used the sad tales as a tool through which

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[137] "Fait Divers – Chagrin Maternel," *La Fronde,* 6 June, 1898, 3.
[138] "Fait Divers – Les Désespérées," *La Fronde,* 31 December, 1897, 3.
[139] "Fait Divers – La Misère," *La Fronde,* 27 December, 1897, 3.
[140] Ibid.

to comment on the larger concerns of the *fin-de-siècle* city. While *La Fronde* was certainly a press of its time, one that utilized typical formats such as the *fait divers* in order to participate in the increasing sensationalism of the press, the writers and reporters at the paper also approached these popular formats with an interest in commenting, and in many cases, critiquing, the nature of urban life for women in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Although it was a common journalistic device in the presses of the day to describe the victims of suicide as "unfortunate," "desperate," and "hopeless," some of the cases discussed in the pages of *La Fronde* made larger statements about the hardships faced by their fellow *Parisiennes* in the city. Their articles and commentary in the *fait divers* and other sections of the paper, reveal that although late-nineteenth century Paris was a place of growing opportunity and optimism for women, for some it could also be difficult and deadly. By reporting on the pitfalls, drawbacks, and dangers of urban life, the writers at *La Fronde* provided Parisian women with a unique look at their city, one which reflected a portion of their urban experience, and which hoped to say something significant about the ways in which these experiences affected and influenced them. When placed alongside the volatile representations of *la Parisienne*, their writings of danger and death provide a clearer image of the troubling nature of life in the *fin-de-siècle* city*, and reveal that Parisian womanhood in the late-nineteenth century was often a contested and difficult experience. It is with this understanding of the complexities of urban life that I want to explore in greater detail the unique ways in which women artists traversed the unsettling and conflicted path of early Third Republic Paris.

Women Artists in Paris

In Emile Zola's novel *L'Oeuvre (The Masterpiece)*, Claude Lantier is an aspiring young artist who struggles with his craft and his artistic genius in the studios and cafés of *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Zola skillfully recreates this world of painters, sculptors, and writers, and describes the ways in which Claude and his friends gain inspiration and support from each other and from their city.[141] Indeed, when in need of stimulation, Claude and his group walk the streets of Paris, and draw strength and courage from its sites: "As they squared their broad young shoulders, these twenty-year-olds took possession of the entire pavement. Whenever they were together, fanfares cleared the way before them and they picked up Paris in one hand and put it calmly in their pocket. Victory was theirs for certain…".[142] The urban landscape gave the young artists hope and optimism about their vision for "open air" art, and when Claude is moved to cry out, " 'Ah! this Paris! It's ours! All ours for the taking!'," Zola presents us with a vivid example of the bold ambition and limitless opportunity that allowed the artists of his generation to dream and create without censor.[143]

This image of artistic inspiration and strength found and cultivated on the streets of Paris is quite different from the experiences of women artists in the late-nineteenth century. Unlike Claude and his friends, aspiring women artists in *fin-de-siècle* Paris often found the city to be a strange and conflicted place. In a memoir recounting his years as an art student in Paris during the 1880s, John Shirley-Fox described the thrill of watching

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[141] *L'Oeuvre* is considered the most autobiographical novel in Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, and chronicles, in some ways, his relationship with Cézanne and Manet. See Roger Pearson's "Introduction" in Emile Zola, *L'Oeuvre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii-xxiii.
[142] Zola, *L'Oeuvre,* 74.
[143] Ibid, 75.

receiving day at the art galleries.[144] Standing with a large crowd of art students and those

on "a mischief and 'ragging' bent," Fox watched from the street as artists who had been

accepted for exhibition at the Salon arrived with their submissions. One can imagine the

delight an aspiring painter or sculptor would have felt upon catching a glimpse of a

famous artist carrying their latest work.[145] What provoked the strongest reaction from the

crowd, however, was not an illustrious French painter, but the "appearance of some

attractive-looking woman artist, bearing perhaps a case of miniatures or some small

picture."[146] As Fox commented, the woman involved in these encounters often found

herself at the centre of a dangerous altercation:

> She was at once surrounded by a group of the more enterprising onlookers,
> and many were the proffered offers of assistance to which she was subjected.
> Attempts were even made to secure by force whatever she might be carrying,
> and she had to put up with many jests and rather risky compliments before
> reaching the security of the interior of the building. Sometimes, when things
> got a bit too rowdy, the police would make a charge, and a general scuffle
> would ensue. Two or three people generally got arrested in these encounters,
> and were marched off to the police station near at hand, escorted by a large
> and noisy party of sympathisers.[147]

Perhaps it is unsurprising that a young woman's arrival at the gallery would be met with

such aggressive enthusiasm by a group of predominantly young men. However, when

viewed from the perspective of the aspiring woman artist, this scene presents us with a

vivid example of conflict in the *fin-de-siècle* city. In one sense, the artist's work had been

accepted to the Salon for exhibition, an achievement that marked her official acceptance

into the public world of art. However, as Fox points out, the young woman involved in

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[144] John Shirley-Fox, *An Art Student's Reminiscences of Paris in the Eighties* (London: Mills & Boon, 1909).
[145] Ibid, 153-4.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.

this altercation arrived on the steps of the exhibit only to be met with tumultuous disrespect from fellow artists and passersby, who grabbed at her work, teased, and propositioned her. She may have been a formal part of the art world, but her presence at the gallery was enough to cause a small riot on the streets of Paris.

An example such as this underscores the connections between women artists in Paris and experiences of heightened tension as they emerged with increasing force into public life. The art world encountered by women at this time was undoubtedly entering a critical and momentous stage, and scholars have appropriately called them part of a "pioneer generation" who "…broke many taboos, crossed some literal and symbolic frontiers, and had benefited from the fairly sudden removal of obstacles of the past."[148] However, this did not necessarily translate into critical or long-term success, for a variety of reasons, many of which were linked to domestic responsibilities and ongoing institutional impediments. As Sîan Reynolds has noted, "Much of their energies had gone into the business of simply struggling for admission to the academy in the first place. Others, with only a relatively short training behind them, found it hard to sustain their motivation or to find favourable working conditions after marriage […] and children."[149] Struggles such as these were not uncommon among women artists at this time, and played a significant role in explaining why, as Reynolds puts it, "… of literally hundreds of women who studied in Paris in the 1890s and 1900s, relatively few are well known to us today."[150] A similar situation faced women writers, whose increasing numbers at the *fin de siècle* were part of a general "explosion" in women's writing throughout the nineteenth century, but who still

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[148] Sîan Reynolds, "Running Away to Paris: Expatriate Women Artists of the 1900 Generation, from Scotland to Points South," *Women's History Review*, v.9 no.2 (2000): 340.
[149] Ibid, 339.
[150] Ibid.

suffered from the uncertainty of their profession.[151] Educational reforms were partly to blame. Many of the new Ferry laws enacted during the early years of the Third Republic were designed to assist women – the creation of public secondary schools for women in 1880, and mandatory primary education for all French children in 1883, helped provide French women with unprecedented opportunities. However, as Juliette Rogers has argued, these reforms often had a "double-edged nature:" "While they promoted literacy and education for women of all social classes, they remained conservative about the long-term goals for women. Public education was supposed to help women to become better mothers and wives, not emancipated individuals in French society."[152] Rogers notes that for women writers coming of age at the *fin de siècle*, this tension manifested itself in the themes of their novels – protagonists choose careers as lawyers, professors, or journalists, only to give them up in the last ten pages of the story once they marry and start a family.[153] In this way, and as Fox's account demonstrates, women in the arts experienced new and exciting opportunities at the *fin de siècle,* while simultaneously encountering the opposite forces – difficulty, disappointment, and ongoing professional limitations.

Paris at the end of the nineteenth century played a crucial role in this process, as a leading centre of art and literature, and the principal destination for women interested in a life dedicated to the arts. But it was particularly in the field of visual arts – painting, drawing, and sculpture – that Paris experienced a surge in new institutional and organizational networks designed to assist women at the turn of the twentieth century. Professional associations and increased access to art education brought women to the

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[151] Alison Finch, *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1, 264 n.6
[152] Juliette M. Rogers, "Feminist Discourse in Women's Novels of Professional Development," in Holmes and Tarr, eds., *A "Belle Epoque?"*, 184.
[153] Ibid, 185.

French capital, and exposed them to new opportunities and outlets for their work. This process, art historians have noted, made the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries "glory days" for women artists in France, who could now receive artistic training and education, and possessed an "optimism" about their potential for careers as artists.[154] These opportunities were described and discussed in numerous booklets and articles of the day. Publications with titles such as "Lady Art Student's Life in Paris" and *A Woman's Guide to Paris* were written "…in response to the ever-increasing tide of women visiting the French capital alone or with other women, in order to provide them with practical advice on independent life in the city."[155] May Alcott Nieriker's *Studying Art Abroad and How to Do it Cheaply* helped provide American women in particular with helpful tips and suggestions for making the most of their time abroad in Paris, a city that was "…apt to strike the newcomer as being but one vast studio."[156] As Kirsten Swinth has argued, American art students at the *fin de siècle*, both male and female, believed that any good art education involved at least some time spent in Paris, in order to learn and absorb the wonders of its art scene. Indeed, Paris was seen as "the Mecca of art students of both sexes."[157]

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[154] Borzello, *A World of Our Own*, 128. See also Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*; Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*; Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane R. Becker (eds.), *Overcoming All Obstacles: The Women of the Académie Julian,* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Marina Sauer, *L'entrée des femmes à l'École des Beaux-Arts,* trans. Marie-France Thivot (Paris: énsb-a, 1990)

[155] Alice Ivimy, *A Woman's Guide to Paris* (1909), in Alicia Foster, *Gwen John* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd., 1999), 19. See also Clive Holland, "Lady Art Student's Life in Paris," *The Studio* (Vol.30 No.129, 1903), 225-233; May Alcott-Nieriker, *Studying Art Abroad and How to Do It Cheaply*, Boston, 1879; Marie Adelaide Belloc, "Lady Artists in Paris," *Murray's Magazine*, 8 (1891), 378. See also Hardy George, *Americans in Paris, 1850-1910: The Academy, the Salon, the Studio, and the Artists' Colony* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Museum of Art, 2003); Kathleen Adler, *Americans in Paris, 1860-1900* (London: National Gallery, 2006); H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and their French Teachers* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1991).

[156] Nieriker, 43, in Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals:Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 37.

[157] Clive Holland, "Lady Art Student's Life in Paris," 225, in Swinth, 37.

Conditions at the most traditional and institutionalized levels of art education, however, were slow to improve for women during this period. The *École des Beaux-Arts* did not permit women to enter until 1897, and it was only in 1903 that they could compete for the coveted Prix de Rome.[158] Many women artists in France mobilized around this cause, and fought during the 1880s and 1890s for the right to study at the *École* – Mme. Léon Bertaux campaigned through the *Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpters*, of which she was president, while others, such as painter Marie Bashkirsteff, wrote editorials denouncing the exclusionary practices of the *École*. Under the pseudonym Pauline Orell, Bashkirsteff wrote in 1880: "Although you admit [women] to the École de Médecine, why not to the École de Beaux-Arts? A mystery. Perhaps you fear the scandals the feminine element would provoke…".[159]   The reluctance of the most formal French art academy to accept women students did not mean that young women in the arts were not active in Paris. They emerged through a considerable, and ever-increasing number of ateliers, such as the *Académie Julian*, which as art historians have argued, stressed "competitiveness and innovation" in its arts program, and provided women with an art education that was comparable to that of men, including work with nude figures.[160]   The *Académie Julian* attracted those who were prohibited from joining the *École* – women and foreigners – and nurtured an atmosphere of camaraderie and openness in its curricula and classes.[161]

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[158] Monique Segré, *L'Ecole des Beaux-arts: XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), 67-8.
[159] Pauline Orell, *La Citoyenne,* 20.2, 1880, in Marina Sauer, *L'entrée des femmes à l'École des Beaux-Arts*, 7.
[160] Gabriel P. Weisberg, "The Women of the Académie Julian: The Power of Professional Emulation," *Overcoming All Obstacles*, 13. See also Catherine Fehrer, *The Julian Academy, Paris, 1868-1939: Spring Exhibition* (New York: Shepherd Gallery, 1989).
[161] The *École des Beaux-Arts* was open to French citizens only, although exceptions could be made if candidates were prepared to deal with considerable red tape. Once admitted to the *École*, however, tuition was free. At ateliers such as the *Académie Julian*, students had to pay course fees, but all were admitted without an entrance examination. See Robert and Elisabeth Kashey, "Introduction," *The Julian Academy, Paris, 1868-1939: Spring Exhibition,* iv-v. Due to this lack of standardization, Germaine Greer has suggested that the *Académie Julian* actually perpetuated artistic mediocrity and manipulated the "self-

Although they did not exclude students based on artistic training, gender, or nationality, however, they did charge fees for their courses, which made an art education of this kind accessible only to middle- or upper-middle-class men and women with financial backing.[162]

In addition to the atelier system, many women's art associations emerged at this time, which functioned as venues through which artists could gain important professional exposure at exhibits and salons. Some, like the *Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs*, combined their practical assistance with a wider, more politicized agenda, and played an active role in the fight to gain access to the *École des Beaux-Arts*.[163] As Garb has noted, the women of the *Union* were "… intent on providing a context for the flowering of 'feminine' art, of offering support to younger and struggling women artists, of representing their interests and campaigning for reform in the wider Paris art world, and of contributing to the elevation of artistic standards in general."[164] They helped women advance their careers and expand their professional circle, and provided much needed emotional and artistic support. Indeed, through art associations, ateliers, and other venues such as the *Paris Salon* and the *Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts*, women began to exhibit their work with increasing frequency by 1900.[165]

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delusion" of its women students, who falsely believed that their inclusion in an atelier system was a victory. Greer, "'A tout prix devenir quelqu'un': the Women of the Académie Julian," *Artistic Relations: Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France,* Peter Collier and Roberts Lethbridge (eds.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 40-58.

[162] In Clive Holland's article "Lady Art Students' Life in Paris," he breaks down the average costs for a few years' art study in Paris: "…cost of painting materials, etc., 125 francs (£5); furnished rooms, 750 francs (£30); attendance, 100 francs (£4); cost of living, 625 francs (£25). And to this can be added at least the sum of 250 francs (£10) for incidentals. This amounts to a total of 1,850 francs (£94) per annum." See Holland, 233.

[163] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush,* 4.

[164] Garb, 6. For the statutes of the *Union,* which include these points, see *Journal des Femmes Artistes*, 1 December, 1890, 3-4.

[165] See Yeldham, *Women Artists in Nineteenth-Century France and England*, *Volume I*, vol.2, 201-208.

All of these factors indicate that women encountered an art world of increasing optimism, dynamism, and opportunity in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. It was a centre of artistic training, study, and travel, where women could enjoy some of the same privileges as their male counterparts and develop as artistic professionals. However, there were also women's art societies forged in the city that had a decidedly different focus, and illuminate some of the more basic difficulties women artists faced as they fought to survive in Paris. One such group was the *Association mutuelle des femmes artistes de Paris,* a cooperative organization created in 1894 by women painters, sculptors, engravers, writers, and musicians living in Paris, who, according to their statutes, formed in order to "…grant financial compensation to participating members of the Association who, due to illness, are temporarily unable to carry out their profession."[166] Their statutes extensively outline the payment of dues, and the method by which artists who became ill could then draw assistance for a period of up to six months.[167] The group limited its active membership to 500 women, who were required to be residents of Paris, under fifty years old, and of good health at the time of enrolment.[168] Unlike the lofty goals of the *Union,* there is nothing in the statutes of the *Association mutuelle* that describes a vision for expanding the influence of women artists in Paris, or for providing crucial professional support through exhibits and shows. Instead, like other co-operative organizations of the time, they joined together to defend themselves against the pitfalls of life in the city, and the financial uncertainty connected with their profession. Articles from their statutes reveal the dismal lives some of these women led – members were prohibited from

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[166] Article 2, *Association Mutuelle des Femmes Artistes de Paris: Statuts* (Paris: Imprimerie et Librairie Centrales des Chemins de Fer. Imprimerie Chaix, 1894), 5. Dos 700 ART, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris.
[167] Article 23, Ibid, 10.
[168] Article 6, Ibid, 6.

collecting assistance if they were late with their dues, or if they were recovering from an attempted suicide.[169]

This organization is striking in several ways. First, these Parisian women described themselves as working professionals who relied on their artistic livelihoods for financial support and economic survival – this was not a social club. Félicien Fagus, writing for *La Revue Blanche* in 1901, described the *Association mutuelle* in this way: "They are little hands; people who […] show themselves unashamed of being craftsmen, hands working to live, that need to live from their work […] labourers: professionals…".[170] Fagus described these artists as proud and independent workers struggling to make a livelihood for themselves, not women of leisure engaged in a hobby, or artists dedicated to the cause of women in art. However, it is also clear from their statutes and from their existence as a cooperative that there were women artists in the city who suffered from depression, illness, and financial uncertainty – that they found it necessary to include an article which excluded attempted suicide cases from collecting benefits speaks to the commonality of this plight among its members. These articles indicate that the women of the *Association mutuelle* did not explicitly come together in order to advance their careers, but to provide themselves and each other with enough financial stability to make working possible. The *Association mutuelle* and its emphasis on providing aid speaks at once to the hardships faced by women who struggled to be artists in Paris, yet also to their independence and determination to create solutions for survival in the city.

In addition to the financial challenges faced by some women artists in Paris, there was also the problem of their public and critical reception, as well as questions regarding

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[169] Article 13, Ibid, 8.
[170] Félicien Fagus, "Association Mutuelle des Femmes Artistes de Paris," *La Revue Blanche*, January 1901, 144-145, Dos 700 ART, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris.

their legitimacy as professionals. As the historian Kirsten Swinth has noted, it was common for women's art to be seen as inherently amateur, and a product of their lack of formal art training: "The 'bad work' of amateurs was almost always understood to be the work of women, so that 'amateur' appeared consistently as 'amateur accomplishment,' associating it with the tradition of female parlor training."[171] A woman's art was also perceived as being less serious or less influential than that of a man, a deficiency that was often linked to gender. As Madeleine Bunoust noted, "They say that women are too *sensibles,* too emotional to be great artists. Women are all love, and thus incapable of detaching themselves. Mothers, girls, lovers, wives, apostles of the ideal, everything with them is passion or compassion…".[172] In 1902, Nina Estabrook wrote that the problem was women's lack of aggression:

> The cleverer a woman is the more timid she becomes, the more she hides
> herself away from the world and from all active participation in it. This
> is especially true of the artist painters. And if one did not go to them really
> and search them out from among their canvasses and their brushes, the
> impression might prevail that the only geniuses of the brush in Paris are men…[173]

The perception that women lacked a strong background in art, despite the contributions of *fin-de-siècle* ateliers, combined with the ongoing belief that a woman's natural *sensibilité* limited her professionally, led many art critics to castigate and dismiss women's artistic contributions in reviews such as this one from 1900: "If the proof hadn't already been demonstrated, the 19th Exhibition of Women Painters and Sculptors has affirmed the inaptitude of women working in the fine arts […] There is nothing [here] but familiar compositions, conventional colours, and a grievous simplicity. Women are naturally

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[171] Swinth, *Painting Professionals*, 27, 222 n.57.
[172] Madeleine Bunoust, *Quelques Femmes Peintres* (Paris: Libraire Stock, 1936), 15.
[173] Nina Estabrook, "American Women Artists of Paris," *Paris World,* March 1902, DOS 750 PEI, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris.

repulsed by effort and profound depth…".[174] Another reviewer from the *Echo de Paris*
noted that the impression of seeing the "sweet" submissions to the *Exposition des Femmes
Artistes* of 1900 was like "tasting strawberries and cream while swallowing almond
syrup…;" the implication was that these paintings lacked seriousness and depth, and
certainly did not evoke strong emotions from the viewer.[175] Critiques such as these
emphasized a woman's natural tendency towards superficiality and pleasant experience,
which when translated into the art world, was equal to mediocrity.

Conclusion

Thus, alongside feminist writings and organizations that proudly proclaimed
women artists to be part of the overall trend towards female professionalism at the turn of
the twentieth century, there was also a critical rejection of women's artistic contributions
at the *fin de siècle*. These two disparate and yet equally public pronouncements about the
value of women artists undoubtedly created an unusual and unsettling artistic and
professional environment for women with aspirations in the art world. On the one hand,
they were part of an exciting and vigourous community of professionals and educators,
who fought to join the *École* and used the ateliers of Paris to help them realize their
artistic goals. Women artists gained unprecedented access to art schools, salons, and
exhibitions at the *fin de siècle*, which helped increase their public visibility, but also
exposed them to attacks and criticism. This led some women to eschew the gendered
implications of their artistic endeavours altogether. When popular feminist and social
reformer Jane Misme interviewed French women who were engaged in "les Grandes

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[174] Rubrique "chronique" de la revue *Art décoratif,* Oct. 1900, in Segré, *L'Ecole des Beaux-arts*, 65.
[175] "Exposition des Femmes artistes," *Echo de Paris*, January 9, 1900, DOS 700 EXP, Bibliothèque
Marguerite Durand, Paris.

Carrières Féminines," which included medicine, pharmacy, and art, painter Clémentine-Hélène Dufau distanced herself from anything that resembled a feminist agenda.[176] When asked two questions, "Does your profession please you? Does it offer women a future?", Dufau responded: "Here are the only responses I can make to your two questions. The first one is useless. When a person devotes their life and all their strength to an art, it is because they love it and draw satisfaction from it. 2. Painting, as art, is only a future for those people, man or woman, who are predestined for it. And those people will always be rare among those who develop a profession."[177] By rejecting the connections between art and professionalism, and focusing on its existence as a calling or gift, regardless of sex, Dufau chose not to emphasize the role of artist as the latest fashionable and empowering career for women, and instead commented on the importance of the art itself, and of the passion involved in dedicating oneself to the pursuit of profound creativity. This variety of responses to the ways in which a woman identified herself as "artist" seems appropriate when viewed against the backdrop of a contested Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, a place that created new inroads for women in public and urban life, but also limited their opportunities. This conflict emerged in the cultural representation of Parisian womanhood, that of *la Parisienne*, and also in the lived experience of the city's female journalists and artists. As we move forward, and discuss specific examples of women painters, sculptors, and writers, who each responded uniquely to the contested city, we will see the various ways in which they captured the inconsistencies in their artistic expressions of spaces, bodies, and selves.

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[176] Jane Misme, "Une Enquête sur les Grandes Carrières Féminines," *Le Samedi,* August 19, 1911, in Dossier Misme, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris.
[177] Ibid.

Chapter 4: Boundaries of Intimate Space – Gwen John & Camille Claudel

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the interior became a powerful metaphor used to represent urban, middle-class life. It was often depicted as a domestic space, which, as Benjamin has argued, became, "… not just the universe but also the *étui* [case/cover] of the private individual" in the nineteenth century.[1]   Indeed, images of the interior "flooded" French, British, and American art and architectural journals, pattern books, and manuals, and advocated one's interior space as a new and important outlet for self-expression.[2]   Artists like Edouard Vuillard painted sitting rooms stuffed with ornate furniture, lavish tapestries, and endless bric-a-brac, which were meant not just as a cultural and artistic representation of modern living, but also as a critique of bourgeois identity.[3] Vuillard's figures disappeared amidst the clutter and jumble of colours and fabrics, which distanced and alienated the figures from each other.[4]   Artists used interiors at the turn of the twentieth century not only to evaluate class and represent modernity, but also to explore questions of gender and sexuality. As feminist art historians have argued, depictions of interior space became a tool for women artists at this time, a way for them to carve out a sense of their personal space, the "spaces of femininity," and lay claim to their domestic territory.[5] As Pollock has noted, the interior not only portrayed the walls and rooms of *fin-de-siècle* domesticity, but also the interiority and private experiences of the individual.   It was not just physical space, but "psychic space" as well, which, as

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[1] Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," 39.
[2] Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Guy Cogeval, *Vuillard, Master of the Intimate Interior* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002); Elizabeth Wynne Easton, *The Intimate Interiors of Edouard Vuillard* (Washington: Published for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).
[5] Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 50-90.

Sidlauskas has argued, was often a contradictory process for artists at the end of the nineteenth century, in part because "these were the years in which the borders between the self and world were understood to be both pliant and permeable."[6]

In this chapter, I evaluate the work of Gwen John and Camille Claudel, two artists who explored the boundaries of interiority and intimate spaces in their art, with decidedly complex results. Although each artist brought their feminine "vision" to their images of interiors and intimate spaces, I argue that they did much more than that – they also depicted their ambiguous and contradictory experiences as professional artists living in Paris. Specifically, John invested her paintings of her studio apartments with the independence and agency of a woman artist working alone in the city, but also with the trials and difficulties of this new life and career. Claudel used the "masculine" medium of sculpture to engage with a typically "feminine" form of expression – the miniature – but did so in a way that broke with the traditional aesthetics of the art form, and was praised by contemporaries as groundbreaking and innovative. Beyond her innovative technique and the small, intimate scale of her sculptures, however, Claudel also invested her pieces from this series with themes of isolation, loneliness, and loss. By examining these elements in their images of interiors and interiority, we can see how both John and Claudel re-evaluated the boundaries of intimate spaces, and infused them with powerful experiences of strength and agency, but also frustration, struggle, and disappointment.

Gwen John

Gwendolen Mary John (1876-1939) was born in 1876 in Haverfordwest, Wales.[7] Her father, Edwin William John, was a solicitor, and her mother, Augusta, who died when

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[6] Sidlauskas, 91.

John was eight, was an amateur watercolourist.[8] After Augusta's death, Edwin moved his four children to the nearby town of Tenby, where John spent most of her childhood. She left no record of her youth, and most of what historians know of her childhood comes from the autobiography of her brother Augustus, who also became a successful artist. In *Chiaroscuro,* he describes their childhood affection for drawing and writing, and how John turned the back attic into a studio of sorts, where she "…was always coming across beautiful children to draw and adore."[9] When Augustus declared at sixteen that he wanted to study art, his father reluctantly sent him to the Slade School in 1894, which at that time, was one of the most progressive art schools in London.[10] John joined her brother for studies in the autumn of 1895, at the age of eighteen, and was a student there for three years, "…a time which is considered a golden era in the history of the school."[11] The Slade's curriculum was based on the techniques of the Parisian ateliers, and allowed both men and women to sketch and paint from the life-model, a practice that had traditionally been deemed inappropriate for a woman's natural modesty and sensitivity.[12] This unique opportunity exposed John to figure drawing early on in her art career, and explains, in part, why approximately two-thirds of the students enrolled at the Slade during this time were women.[13]

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[7] Studies of Gwen John include Cecily Langdale, *Gwen John: With a Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings and a Selection of the Drawings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Alicia Foster, *Gwen John* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd., 1999); Sue Roe, *Gwen John: A Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001); Alison Thomas, *Portraits of Women: Gwen John and her Forgotten Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Cecily Langdale and David Fraser Jenkins, *Gwen John: An Interior Life* (London: Phaidon Press, Barbican Art Gallery, 1985).
[8] Cecily Langdale, *Gwen John*, 1-5.
[9] Augustus John, *Autobiography: Part 1 Chiaroscuro; Part 2 Finishing Touches* (Jonathan Cape [1952 and 1964] 1975) in Chitty, *Gwen John: 1876-1939*, 31.
[10] Chitty, 35.
[11] Foster, 10.
[12] Cherry, *Painting Women*, 53.
[13] Foster, 10.

In addition to her progressive education, John's studies in London allowed her to live independently in a large urban centre and visit galleries and exhibits from Britain and other countries.[14] She formed valuable friendships with other students while at the Slade, and together, these young women believed in their "modernity and place in the art world."[15] This decidedly modern sensibility was even expressed through their clothing – John, along with Edna Clarke Hall, Ida Nettleship, and Gwen Smith, all eschewed the traditional feminine attire of middle and upper-class ladies, particularly the corset, in favour of a more practical style, which identified them both as artists and as new women. John's *Self-Portrait* of 1900 captures the essence of this dress: "…the practical separate blouse and skirt and the large and dashing bow tie were modern innovations in women's dress and the New Woman was often characterized wearing similar clothes."[16] John and her circle won many awards and distinctions while at the Slade, and became known as an "exclusive group."[17] As her brother Augustus noted, "In what I have called the Grand Epoch of the Slade the male students cut a poor figure, in fact they can hardly be said to have existed […] Remarkably brilliant […] in talent, as well as in looks, these girls were supreme."[18] John won several awards while at the Slade, including the Melvill Nettleship Prize for Figure Composition in her final year, 1897-8.[19]

Despite their success at school, there were still considerable pressures and challenges for John and her contemporaries after they graduated from the Slade and

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[14] Ibid, 14.
[15] Langdale, 14.
[16] Ibid, 16. This self-portrait was Gwen John's first exhibited work, and showed in the spring of 1900 at the New English Art Club. The NEAC exhibited few paintings by women at this time, and as Langdale has argued, John's submission "provided a female alternative to images and ideas of male artistic genius." Langdale, 16.
[17] Chitty, 40.
[18] Augustus John, "Obituary to Gwen Smith," *The Times*, Feb. 1, 1958, in Thomas, *Portraits of Women*, 1.
[19] Langdale, 14.

attempted the difficult task of translating their successes at art school into prowess and stature in the public art world. A telling comment came again from John's brother who wrote that the advantages won by his sister and her friends at the Slade, "…for the most part came to nought under the burdens of domesticity," which underscores their position at a professional crossroads at the turn of the twentieth century.[20] Alison Thomas has argued, however, that this conflict did not stifle the careers of John's friends, and that, "…out of the women's individual struggles grew work of great integrity and personal vision. They resolved their personal and domestic dilemmas in very different ways that reflected their varied life situations and personalities…".[21] John's own perspective seems to have been different from her friends and colleagues, at least during the early stages of her career. In a letter to a friend around 1910, she wrote: "I think if we are to do beautiful pictures we ought to be free from family conventions & ties… I think the family has had its day. We don't go to Heaven in families now but one by one."[22] It was this independence and "single-minded dedication" to her work that took John to Paris in 1898, where she would live and create for the rest of her life.[23]

John's journeys to Paris began after her graduation in 1898, and were initially viewed as a crucial part of her ongoing training and development as an artist. In this way, John was part of the tide of women artists who, as we have seen, travelled to Paris from points abroad in order to expose themselves to the riches of France's art and cultural world. Like their counterparts in the United States, British art journals and women's

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[20] Augustus John, "Obituary to Gwen Smith," in Thomas, 1.
[21] Thomas, *Portraits of Women*, 5. She provides evidence, for example, that these women defended themselves against an often critical art community, who felt that they had surrendered great artistic genius "for the sake of marriage and motherhood." Against this particular criticism, which occurred after a major exhibition by Edna Clarke in 1924, Clarke responded in *The Evening News* that talent does not have to be "sacrificed at the alter of domestic happiness." See Thomas, 234.
[22] Gwen John, undated letter of about 1910 to Ursula Tyrwhitt, in Langdale, 31.
[23] Thomas, 235.

magazines increasingly targeted female art students at the *fin de siècle,* with articles that extolled the benefits to be gained from studying in Parisian ateliers and studios.[24] After her travels, John took up residence in Paris, where she moved several times throughout Montparnasse, a neighbourhood known for its artistic community and numerous studios. She often lived with friends, but also lived on her own, in rented rooms or small apartments. Like many middle-class art students, John's father had been financing her education and life in Paris; this, however, came to an abrupt end in 1898, when he visited John's flat in Paris to look into the matter of her allowance. Biographer Susan Chitty recounts the incident:

> She [John] had arranged a small supper party, putting on a new dress
> designed by herself from a dress in a picture by Manet […] and [it] probably
> displayed more of his [Edwin's] daughter's neck and forearm than he was
> accustomed to see. He greeted her with the words, "You look like a prostitute
> in that dress." She replied, "I could never accept anything from someone
> capable of thinking so…"[25]

Edwin John's comment reveals how susceptible young, single women were to accusations that challenged their moral character, but John's response also indicates how serious she was about living independently and finding her own way in Paris. As her biographers have noted, it was from this early date that she refused her father's financial support, and, determined to support herself, began taking work as an artist's model.

Modelling was a common source of employment for aspiring female artists at the *fin de siècle,* and as we will explore in greater depth in the subsequent chapter, was one of the key areas of conflict for women artists at this time – in order to secure and maintain their independence as professionals, many women, like John, depended not only on their

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[24] Foster, 19.
[25] Chitty, 49.

talents as artists, but on income derived from acting as objects for other, often male, artists.   As Juliet Carey has noted, John preferred sitting for women artists, as a way to avoid various indignities she had encountered while posing for men. However, these modelling sessions still brought her "…humiliation, sexual demands, fatigue, and financial exploitation:"

> Her letters are full of complaints about cancelled sessions, delayed payments, and painful poses. One painter liked John to hold a nude pose while she made love to a man in the next room; John stripped for a tea party of artists to help them decide whether to employ her; another artist suggested she exercise naked to keep warm. John feared that employers saw her not as a human being but as a puppet to be painted.[26]

John's modelling, often nude, was clearly something that was a necessity, and not a desirable source of income for her.   Although she knew it was an integral means of financial support, she saw posing mostly as a distraction from her own work and development as an artist.

By the summer of 1904, John had started her most significant modelling contract, posing for sculptor Auguste Rodin, and through him, met other notable artists of the time, including Picasso and Rilke. Rodin commented that John had "un corps admirable," and had her pose for his sculpture *Muse*, a commemorative monument to Whistler that he worked on from 1905 to at least 1912.[27]   She began spending much of her free time posing in his elaborate studios.   In a letter written in the fall of 1904, Augustus noted to his sister: "You are evidently becoming indispensable to Auguste Rodin.   It must be indeed a pleasure to be of service to such a man;"[28] and, in a letter to her friend Ursula,

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[26] Juliet Carey, "Gwen John," *Dictionary of Artists' Models,* Jill Berk Jiminez (ed.) (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 287.
[27] Chiaroscuro, 250, in Langdale, 31.
[28] Augustus John, undated letter of 23 October 1904 to Gwen John, Langdale, 31.

John commented that, "I am at Rodin's nearly every day now – he has begun a statue [...] I have so much to do [...] with drawing, posing & translating [...] Rodin says I am too thin for his statue & that I don't eat enough."[29] Their relationship was romantic, at least for a short time, as is documented by an extensive collection of several thousand letters that John wrote to Rodin.[30] Several studies of John's life and career have examined her relationship with Rodin in great detail, and many focus on John's dependence and almost obsession with him, who, according to Susan Chitty, "...was to take control of Gwen John's life. She looked to him as a father."[31] It is clear that Rodin had a strong influence on John's early years in Paris – letters indicate that Rodin helped John improve her drawing and that he expected her to spend a lot of time with her work. In a letter to Ursula, she confides: "I think I can paint better now than I used [...] I know I can."[32] He also helped her make connections within Paris's artistic circles.[33] However, these professional and practical gains were all part of a more complex relationship, which simultaneously placed John in the role of student, model, employee, and lover. Eventually, Rodin moved on and ended their affair, which hurt John deeply, and affected her happiness and productivity.

John's work as a model was necessary, in part, to help pay for her rented rooms and studio apartments in Paris, which formed a fundamental part of her urban and independent life.[34] John's brother Augustus remembered his sister's city dwellings as "slums" and "dungeons […] into which no ray of light could ever penetrate…," but also

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[29] Gwen John, undated letter of late 1904 or early 1905 to Ursula Tyrwhitt, Langdale, 31.
[30] Many of these letters are located at the Musée Rodin, Paris.
[31] Chitty, 71. Chitty emphasizes John's dependency on Rodin, and his eventual disinterest in her career.
[32] Chitty, 73.
[33] Foster, 29.
[34] For a detailed description of the different addresses and places where Gwen John lived between 1898 and 1911, see Foster, 19-29.

noted that, "… Gwen was delighted with her new quarters and would not listen to my arguments. She never did."[35] While it is not surprising that John would be proud of her meagre lodgings when dealing with her brother, these apartments were a considerable financial responsibility. As we have seen, contemporary art journals and magazines contained articles aimed at girls in Britain and America, who sought to study art in Paris. In one such article, Clive Holland described the average *appartement*: "… in most cases [there is] a bedroom, sitting-room and studio all in one, with a slip of a bathroom and kitchen, if she can afford it; she lives a solitary existence, varied only by the daily visit to the school or *atelier…*".[36] To be sure, Holland's description of a man's studio is quite similar, with the marked absence of the "solitary" life – indeed, the male students he describes in Paris use their small *appartements* as a central meeting place, where fellow artists, models, and patrons all coincide in a melée of activity and creativity.[37] In both cases, the cost of these studios was not insignificant, and would have required diligent saving, extra work, or financial assistance from family.[38]

During the early years of the twentieth century, John became increasingly known for her work with small, intimate interiors, which was part of a larger stylistic art movement at this time. Foster has argued that John's images of her studio apartments should be read not only as, "the sign for her individual life, [but placed] in relation to, or in conversation with, the work of her contemporaries."[39] These contemporaries included both Scandinavian artists and the French *peintres d'intérieurs*, whose work with the

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[35] Augustus John, "Gwendolen John," *The Burlington Magazine,* January-December, 1942, 236-240.
[36] Holland, "Lady Art Students' Life in Paris," 226.
[37] Holland, "Student Life in the Quartier Latin, Paris," *The Studio*, vol.27 no.115 (15 October 1902), 33-40. See also John Milner, *The Studios of Paris, The Capital of Art in the Late-Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
[38] See chapter 3, 119 n.161 for a general breakdown of the costs associated with art study, and lodgings in Paris.
[39] Foster, 42.

Symbolist interior influenced John's own art.[40]   John's professional motivations for choosing to paint interior spaces have been overshadowed by some art historians who argue that she was a recluse, and who have supported this claim by relying upon a heavily quoted passage from a letter she wrote to her friend: "As to whether I have anything worth expressing, that is apart from the question. I may never have anything to express, except this desire for a more interior life."[41]   Although her paintings of private, domestic spaces do emphasize themes of interiority, John's apartments were also a busy public and professional space, where she hosted patrons and potential customers to view and purchase her art, and eventually had models sit for her.[42]   Her relationship to the interior was multifaceted and complex – professionally, it was an artistic style which demonstrated her knowledge of and connection to the art world of the *fin de siècle*; as an artistic theme, it was a way for John to explore the nature of interiority and privacy in the midst of an urban setting; and practically, the interior of her home was also her office and studio, a place where she hosted and conducted her work, but which was a burden to maintain. John's images of interior spaces, therefore, are compelling examples of a woman's shifting relationship with both public and private life, and demonstrate the ambiguities of her urban existence.

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[40] See Foster 46-50, for a detailed discussion of John's knowledge and appreciation of the work of some of these artists, including Vilhelm Hammershøi, Bonnard, and Vuillard.

[41] John McEwen, "A Room of her Own," *Art in America*, (vol 74, June 1986), 111-14.

[42] One of John's most prominent patrons was an American art collector, John Quinn, who commissioned many of her paintings until his death in 1924. See Foster, 26. During these years in Paris, John also exhibited with some degree of frequency, although she often only submitted one or two paintings. The New English Art Club (NEAC) was one of the key recipients of her drawings and paintings from 1900—1911, but by 1911, she began to grow tired of its conservative tradition. In 1911, the British foundation of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS), which developed out of a response for the promotion of modern art in Britain, bought two of John's paintings, and subsequently presented them to the Tate Gallery in 1917. John also exhibited at the *Société du Salon d'Automne* in Paris, the *Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts,* and *Société des Artistes Français*. She was very active throughout the 1920s, exhibiting some of her paintings at the *Salon des Tuileries* in 1924 and at the *Vienna Secession* in 1927. See Langdale, 240-1, for an exhibition list of John's showings during her lifetime.

Two paintings that demonstrate some of John's early work with the interior were completed when she travelled to Paris and other parts of Europe in the late-1890s and early-1900s. The setting for *Interior with Figures* (1898-9) was the top floor flat at 12 rue Froidevaux, shared by John and her classmates Ida Nettleship and Gwen Salmond during their Paris stay in the fall and winter of 1898-9. Nettleship described their lodgings in this way: " We have a very excellent flat – & charming studio room – so untidy – so unfurnished – and nice spots of drawings & photographs on the walls…".[43] And to her mother, she wrote: "It has 3 good rooms, a kitchen and W.C and water and gas – and a balcony. Good windows – very light and airy."[44] Nettleship speaks of this space with some affection and enthusiasm, which is understandable considering it was the first time the young students had ventured away from home. Foster points out that the dresses worn by both Nettleship and Salmond in the painting were of the latest Parisian style, and indicate that the women were aware of current fashion and could purchase or emulate the styles and cuts themselves.[45] While these facts surrounding the context of the painting point to an exciting time of adventure for John and her friends, the atmosphere of the painting itself feels vacant and gloomy. The women in the foreground are dwarfed by the cavernous, empty room behind them, and the colours are muted, drab shades of grey and black. Although a large window looks out onto a tree, there does not appear to be much light or "airiness" coming into the room. There is a similar mood in *The Student* (1903-4), a portrait of John's friend Dorelia which she painted while they travelled through France in the autumn of 1903. They stopped at Toulouse and rented a room, an

[43] Ida Nettleship, undated letter of late 1898 to Michele Salaman, Langdale, 135.
[44] Ida Nettleship, letter of 20 September 1898 to her mother, Langdale, 135.
[45] Foster, 20.

experience that John noted made her feel "like any bourgeoise….".[46] As Langdale has

noted, the portrait contains rich dark tones set against a contrast of light and shadow,[47]

and John portrays the subject bathed in an illuminating light that seems to be cast from a

candle just out of sight. A contemporary critic, Lawrence Binyon, described *The Student*

this way: "Here is that intensity, quiet and shy though it be, which counts for so much

more than brilliancy, and which is so rare in contemporary art. It is a picture of singular

delicacy and beauty."[48] Dorelia does appear very quiet and pensive, as she regards the

texts on the table in front of her. However, there is also an air of disquiet about this

painting – unlike *Interior with Figures*, which is vacant, cold, and empty, the subject in

The Student seems stifled within the close quarters of the walls that surround her.

Dorelia's shadow adds an ominous mood to the image. In these early images of interior

space, John's use of perspective, colour, and light create a curious atmosphere of intimacy

but also isolation, which is in odd contrast to the fact that both paintings record moments

that represent freedom and excitement in the lives of John and her classmates, as they

travelled and studied.

Once John set up her residence in Paris, she continued to paint images of interior

spaces, and often used her studio apartments as the subject. John McEwen has noted that

John's interiors present a view "… through a Victorian keyhole, an intimate window on

the world – a bit spinsterish in other words, a bit detached and nervous."[49] The art

historian David Fraser Jenkins has emphasized similar themes in John's interiors, noting

that, "[John] cultivated privacy, and a sense of privacy is one of the dominant feelings of

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[46] Gwen John, undated letter of 1903 to Ursula Tyrwhitt, Langdale, 25.
[47] Langdale, 25.
[48] Lawrence Binyon, "Our Young Painters and a Critic," *The Saturday Review*, vol. 108, no. 2824 (11 Dec. 1909), 726, Langdale, 137.
[49] McEwen, "A Room of her Own," 111-14.

her painting."[50] Indeed, when looking at images such as *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris* (1907), or *Woman Dressing* (1907), we can see these themes of privacy and intimacy. In *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, the studio is presented as a pleasing, feminine, and cheerful domestic space, one that she worked hard to maintain, and was a source of enjoyment and independence. John wrote to Rodin, and described her room as "pretty" – "When I return from a walk or from posing, I find it so charming […] my pictures on the walls – my books, the clean and neat furniture and curtains, and the pink floor."[51] John took pride in her things and this contributes to the sense of intimacy and ownership in the painting. The colours are warm and inviting, and create a feeling of peace and tranquillity. The light and gauzy curtains bring a brightness into the room, and the window acts as a contrast to the dark corner on the left of the canvas.   However, this room also represents other aspects of John's life. As we have seen, John's professional path was one of financial hardship and loneliness, and these factors are also captured in her painting. The empty chair and sparse furnishings highlight the solitude, vacancy, and frugality of her home – the umbrella and jacket resting against the chair are artistic props, but are also the sole signs that the room is inhabited, which creates a curious feeling of both presence and absence. The prominent window, although bright and clear, is closed to the city outside, and makes the room appear separate, detached, and isolated from the exterior world. John is both living in Paris, and yet set apart, and the closed window adds a feeling of stuffiness and stillness in the room. John's room was also her place of work – it was both her studio and often the subject matter of her paintings.   This knowledge casts her room in another light, as a space of professional development and serious work. As

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[50] David Fraser Jenkins, "Gwen John: An Appreciation," *Gwen John: An Interior Life*, 19.
[51] Gwen John, undated letter of about 1906 to Auguste Rodin, Langdale, 138.

the artist, John is removed from the setting, yet we still feel her presence in the room. Her small apartment is at once a pleasant, feminine, and intimate private space, as well as a professional, independent, and public work space, and yet also possesses an overall feeling of vacancy, loneliness, and solitude. All of these elements interact simultaneously in John's painting of her Paris studio, and present the viewer with multiple interpretations and meanings.

In *Woman Dressing,* John articulates the themes of isolation and alienation more explicitly. As with *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, John creates an interior and domestic space, with a similar composition. She depicts one corner of the room, with a window, and includes some sparse furnishings. Her use of shading and shadow creates a dark and gloomy atmosphere, which is in contrast to the small square of light that comes from the window. Unlike *A Corner of the Artist's Room*, this window is open, but the light it casts into the room is so feeble, that it fails to bring any brightness or airiness to the image. The greatest difference in *Woman Dressing* is the presence of a figure, who is nude, seated on the chair, and facing the window.   Her back is to the viewer and her head is hung, which allows us to gaze upon her unchallenged and creates a sense of vulnerability and despair in the image, despite the title's insistence that she is merely a woman dressing. She does not face the light from the open window, and looks down at herself. It is impossible to determine whether she is tending to some aspect of her clothing, perhaps fastening a button, or lost in a moment of quiet reflection or even sadness. The figure's identity is also unclear – it could be the artist herself, or a model – and her nudity adds to the feeling of privacy and intimacy. Her posture and static position next to the small table suggest that they are somehow similar, a pair of inanimate objects. There is nothing dynamic in her body which separates her from the furniture next to her,

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and the use of dark shading on both the table and the clothing hung on the back of the chair add to the sense of symmetry.   In this image, John captures the privacy of an interior space, but also communicates a powerful sense of longing, loneliness, and isolation. The presence of the female figure adds an elusive element to the image – her role and function in the setting is unclear. She is dressing herself, but this action is at odds with the profoundly ominous and alienating atmosphere of the interior, which leaves the viewer unsure of the meaning.

In a recent review of an exhibit of John's work at the Tate in London, David Boyd Haydock has noted that, "Some have seen Gwen John, […] as a feminist icon: an embodiment of sadness, loneliness, incipient madness. Perhaps it was the lack of real recognition in her lifetime, or the fact of having worked in the shadow of great men, but the truth is that her work remains enigmatic, curious, and out of reach."[52] I would suggest that the curious and elusive nature of John's early images of interiors are connected to the complex ways in which she infused them with several themes at once – freedom, independence, and professional life, alongside hardship, loneliness, and isolation – which were connected to the trials and ambiguities she faced as she traversed professional and urban life as a woman artist in *fin-de-siècle* Paris.   John worked as a paid model for Rodin, and through him made important contacts and artistic strides, but ultimately, she was abandoned and suffered from his patronage. She was able to exhibit and sell some of her work, which brought her joy and professional credibility, but it was rarely enough to truly support her life in Paris. John's images of her rented rooms and studio apartments

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[52] David Boyd Haydock, "The troubled genius of Augustus John (and his more talented sister): People are like shadows," Review of Gwen and Augustus John exhibit, Tate Britain, 2005, *Times Literary Supplement,* October 22, 2004, 18. His comment about John's "madness" refers to the later years of her life, into the 1920s and 1930s, when John removed herself further and further from society. She eventually left Paris for the suburb of Meudon, where she would remain until her death in 1939.

are compelling examples of these years in the city, specifically the ways in which she invested images of privateness and interiority with a sense of alienation and vacancy, on the one hand, but, at the same time, with a powerful sense of intimacy, self-possession, and self-knowledge. In this way, her depictions of intimate spaces represent more than feminine themes of domestic interiority, or even feminist themes of self-inflicted struggle – they do both simultaneously, and through this process, depict profound ambiguity and change. As we will see with one of her contemporaries, Camille Claudel, John was not alone in the ability to capture the complexities of her urban and professional life through a re-evaluation of the boundaries of intimate space.

Camille Claudel

Unlike Gwen John, who was an expatriate living in Paris, Camille Claudel (1864-1943) was French, and was born and raised in the Champagne region.[53] Like John, and many other aspiring artists of the late-nineteenth century, Claudel moved to Paris when she was a young woman in order to pursue an art education. In 1881, at the age of eighteen, Claudel moved to Montparnasse with her mother and younger siblings, while her father, Louis-Prosper, stayed behind to continue his job as a registrar of mortgages.[54] Claudel's mother, Louise-Athanaïse, was from a well-established family in Champagne, and was heir to substantial property. As Ayral-Clause has noted, her mother possessed

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[53] There are numerous studies, collections, and exhibition catalogues of Camille Claudel's life and work. Some of these include Odile Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002); Hélène Pinet and Reine-Marie Paris, *Camille Claudel: Le génie est comme un miroir* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003); Camille Claudel, *Correspondance*, Anne Rivière and Bruno Gaudichon, eds. (Paris: Gallimard, 2003); Angelo Caranfa, *Camille Claudel: A Sculpture of Interior Solitude* (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1999); Danielle Arnoux, *Camille Claudel: l'ironique sacrifice* (Paris: EPEL, 2001); Jacques Cassar, *Dossier Camille Claudel* (Paris: Librarie Séguier, 1987); *Camille Claudel* (Martigny, Suisse: Fondation Pierre Gianadda, 1990).
[54] Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life,* 10-11.

decidedly middle-class values of duty and thrift, and was quite rigid, while her father was her "staunchest supporter."[55] Upon arrival in Paris, Claudel began studies at the Académie Colarossi, which was known for its expertise in sculpture instruction.[56] Like the Académie Julian, the Colarossi was an atelier that gained popularity among young women art students, but was known for its cheaper fees – "M. Julian demands double fee from women and only gives them in exchange half the teaching received by the men working in his studios."[57] The Colarossi charged forty francs for a month of half days while the Julian charged sixty.[58] It was here that Claudel developed her training as a sculptor and began to make valuable connections in the Parisian art community.

In 1882, shortly after beginning her classes, Claudel set up a studio near her family's home on rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, and divided the rent with some of the British art students from the Colarossi, Amy Singer and Emily Fawcett. Sculptor Alfred Boucher, who had been a tutor from Claudel's youth, became a patron of the atelier, and when he left to study in Florence in 1883, he procured Auguste Rodin to take over his mentoring duties.[59] Biographers have noted that Claudel's atelier was a cheerful space, which acted as both a working studio and sitting room; Persian rugs and paintings hung on the walls and there was even a piano – the emphasis was on work and artistic production, but also on sociability and camaraderie.[60] According to the journalist Mathias Morhardt, Claudel was the "… spirit of the group. She chooses the models. She sets the

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[55] Ibid, 12-13.
[56] Camille had shown early artistic talent in grade school, and was given a more rigorous education than was usually available to young girls – she studied literature, languages, art and sculpture alongside her brother Paul. See Ayral-Clause, 15-17.
[57] Marie Adelaïde Belloc, "Lady Artists in Paris," *Murray's Magazine,* Ayral-Clause, 27.
[58] Ayral-Clause, 27.
[59] Pinet and Paris, *Camille Claudel: Le génie est comme un miroir*, 24-25.
[60] Ibid, 28-29.

pose. She distributes the work. She assigns each one their place."[61] Unlike Gwen John, who used her apartment as both a home and studio, and did most things alone, Claudel lived with her family and was able to maintain, along with the help of other artists, her own separate work studio, which brought her into closer contact with the artists and sculptors of Paris.

In 1884, another British artist, Jessie Lipscomb, joined Claudel's studio group; she was another student who had crossed the Channel to study art at the Colarossi, and boarded with the Claudel family.[62] Together they worked on their art, interspersed with regular visits from Rodin, who provided the young artists with critiques and evaluations of their current projects. Despite the time and effort Claudel and her friends dedicated to developing their skills as sculptors, sculpture continued to be a restrictive medium for women in the late-nineteenth century, and although more were drawn to it by the end of the century, it was still predominately seen as a man's art; and even then, it was considered by some, like Claudel's brother Paul, to be a "…constant challenge to common sense…".[63] For one thing, sculpting was dirty, messy, and required a certain degree of physical strength; in many ways, it was as much manual labour as it was creative expression, and sculptors had to work long hours with their hands, arms, and bodies, often standing on ladders, in order to mold and fashion their pieces of clay and plaster. It was also an expensive art form. Clay and plaster were cheap but fragile, and in order to ensure the longevity of a bust or figure, sculptors had to cast their pieces in

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[61] Morhardt, in Pinet and Paris, 29.
[62] Odile Ayral-Clause, "Camille Claudel, Jessie Lipscomb and Rodin," *Apollo* no. 424 (June 1997): 21-26, 23.
[63] Paul Claudel, "Ma soeur Camille," 280, in Ayral-Clause, 30.

bronze, which was a costly and difficult process.[64] However, these challenges did not

deter Claudel, and she began exhibiting her work in 1882, when her plaster bust *La Vieille

Hélène* was accepted at the Salon of the Société des Artistes Français.[65]

By 1884, Claudel began working at Rodin's atelier as one of his assistants, which

was a great accomplishment for a young artist in the late-nineteenth century. In order to

maintain a sense of feminine decorum, and to satisfy Claudel's family, Jessie Lipscomb

also accompanied her to Rodin's studio – the idea of a young woman spending time alone

in an atelier full of men was inappropriate in the eyes of her respectable mother. As

Hélène Pinet and Reine-Marie Paris have noted, it is easy to imagine the pride that these

two students would have felt as they entered the "sanctuary" of the great sculptor – the

studio where he was hard at work on *The Gates of Hell* and *Victor Hugo*.[66] Their work

was difficult, long, and often tedious; Claudel worked, as was the custom for assistants,

on the hands and feet for Rodin's figures. And as Morhardt commented in his 1898

article about Claudel, she quickly became Rodin's favourite assistant in his studio: "He

consults her about everything […] He deliberates each decision with her, and it is only

after they were in agreement that definitely proceeds."[67] Thus, from this early stage in

Claudel's career, she had made a powerful ally in Rodin, one who identified her talent and

respected her opinion. Unlike Gwen John, who initiated her relationship with Rodin as a

paid model, and then naturally benefited from his artistic guidance, Camille Claudel was

from the beginning, a student and protégée of the great master. It helped that they worked

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[64] Ayral-Clause, 34-35.
[65] Yves Lacasse and Antoinette le Normand-Romain, *Claudel et Rodin: La rencontre de deux destins*
(Martigny: Fondation Pierre Gianadda, 2006), 24-26. Claudel exhibited a total of seven times at the Salon of
the Société des Artistes Français in the 1880s alone. For a full catalogue of Claudel's exhibits, see
"Catalogues des Oeuvres Exposées," *Claudel et Rodin: La rencontre de deux destins*, 351-369.
[66] Pinet and Paris, *Camille Claudel*, 32-33.
[67] Morhardt, "Mademoiselle Camille Claudel," in Ayral-Clause, 53.

in the same medium, but even in relation to his other assistants and students, Claudel was special and distinct. Ayral-Clause has noted that someone with the stature and respect of Rodin could help his students gain access to prestigious Salons, get press coverage, and meet important clients and buyers. He did all of this for Claudel, while Lipscomb received little attention.[68] However, Ayral-Clause also makes the important point that, "…more than pure admiration for his pupil's sculptures motivated him, for by 1885 he was passionately in love with [Claudel]."[69]

Claudel's personal and romantic relationship with Rodin has been the subject of much analysis, debate, and discussion; their letters and correspondence have been meticulously organized and documented, and the details of their affair painstakingly retraced and chronicled.[70] In these accounts, Claudel is most often depicted as Rodin's "muse and mistress," to quote from the title of Paris's 1984 biography; or in other studies, she is portrayed as the student who could never quite emerge from Rodin's impressive shadow. Eisenwerth Schmoll has been particularly critical of Claudel in this regard, arguing that "…when she at last tried to break free of [Rodin's] massive influence, she proved incapable of making the transitional leap that might have led to genuine originality and independence."[71] Other scholars, particularly biographers and feminist art historians, disagree with this analysis, and emphasize Claudel's astounding achievement in the world of sculpture, which was undoubtedly connected to Rodin's influence in Paris, but was also

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[68] Ayral-Clause, 56.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Reine-Marie Paris, *Camille: The Life of Camille Claudel, Rodin's Muse and Mistress*, Liliane Emery Tuck, trans. (New York: Seaver Books, 1988); *Claudel et Rodin: La rencontre de deux destins*; Antoinette le Normand-Romain, *Camille Claudel & Rodin: Time Will Heal Everything* (Paris: Éditions du musée Rodin, 2003); J. A. gen. Eisenwerth Schmoll, *Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel* (Munich and New York: Prestel Verlag, 1994); Odile Ayral-Clause, "Camille Claudel, Jessie Lipscomb and Rodin," *Apollo* no.424 (June 1997): 21-26.
[71] Schmoll, *Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel*, 101.

the mark of an independent, professional artist, working hard to develop her career at the *fin de siècle*. These interpretations, however, often focus on the regret of a woman bound by the circumstances of her social reality. As Ayral-Clause has put it – "… [Jessie and Camille] were left with the narrow choice that society bestowed upon women of the nineteenth century: abandon art or struggle alone. While the latter possibility was available to male artists […] it was an unlikely alternative for women."[72]   This variety of interpretations, as with the studies of Gwen John, indicates that Claudel found herself at a juncture in the waning years of the nineteenth century – on the one hand, she had unprecedented access to an art education and, through her ties to Rodin, to the Parisian art community; on the other, she remained limited by her gender and societal expectations of a woman's rightful place. She was at once Rodin's muse, model, and mistress, but also his partner, associate, student, friend, and colleague, a myriad of identities that were complex and conflicting. As Claudel's relationship with Rodin developed in the 1880s, she would attempt to clarify their bond and solidify their future together.

Despite the divergent assessments of the tie between the two sculptors, the devotion, passion, and ultimate pain and disappointment of Claudel and Rodin's relationship has continued to spark interest among scholars and art enthusiasts, in part, due to the veil of secrecy surrounding the details – new letters discovered as recently as 1988 continue to shed light on their bond.[73] Biographers are in agreement that by 1886, Rodin and Claudel had become lovers; Claudel was 22, and Rodin, 45. Rodin had a long-time companion and partner, Rose Beuret, which complicated matters, and made Claudel the other woman. They did their best to keep their affair secret, particularly from Claudel's family, but were

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[72] Ayral-Clause, "Camille Claudel, Jessie Lipscomb and Rodin," 26.
[73] Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life,* 57, 59, 261 n.4.

honest about their feelings in some of the letters they exchanged during this time – from Rodin, "My Camille be assured that I feel love for no other woman, and that my soul belongs to you;"[74] and from Camille, "I go to bed naked to make myself believe that you are there but when I wake up it is not the same thing."[75]   To maintain her reputation, Claudel remained at home with her mother and siblings; they believed that Rodin was married to Rose Beuret, and thus, did not object to the time the two spent together in his studio. Claudel also continued to live her life as a young, single woman, and took several trips to England to visit the homes of her girlfriends. A questionnaire she completed for fun while on one of these visits reveals her independent nature and comical spirit during these years. While staying with Florence Jean in 1888, Claudel completed a document from an album, popular at the time, entitled "An Album of Confessions to Record Thoughts, Feelings, etc." A series of questions were printed beside which Claudel wrote in her answers:

> Your favourite virtue: *I don't have any: they are all boring*
> Your favourite qualities in man: *To obey his wife*
> Your favourite qualities in woman: *To make her husband fret*
> Your favourite occupation: *To do nothing*
> […] Your idea of misery: *To be the mother of many children*[76]

Claudel also continued to dedicate herself to her art and worked tirelessly to complete new sculptures: "I am working now on my two large figures […] You can imagine how tired I am; I regularly work twelve hours a day, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and

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[74] Letter from Auguste Rodin to Camille Claudel, undated, Archives de musée Rodin, in Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life*, 59-60.
[75] Letter from Camille Claudel to Auguste Rodin, 25 June 1892, Archives de musée Rodin, in Paris, *Camille: The Life of Camille Claudel, Rodin's Muse and Mistress*, 13.
[76] Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life,* 67-68; Normand-Romain, *Camille Claudel & Rodin: Time Will Heal Everything*, 27.

when I come back I can hardly stand on my feet and I go to bed right away…".[77] She also continued to exhibit, and showed pieces at the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français and the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts during the late 1880s and early 1890s. Two pieces in particular, *Sakountala* (1888) and *The Waltz (La Valse)* (1893), attracted the attention of Parisian art critics. André Michel wrote, "A young girl, Miss C. Claudel, knew to include in her collection of unequal execution but powerful inspiration, *Sakountala*, a profound sentiment of chaste and passionate tenderness; an impression of quivering, of restrained ardour, of desire and stifled lament."[78] And later, in 1895, Octave Mirabeau wrote in *Le Journal* that, "It is clear that she [Camille Claudel] has genius, […] This young girl worked with a tenacity, a strength, a passion…".[79] These factors indicate that Claudel was working hard to develop herself as an artist in her own right, and although some critics inevitably compared her to Rodin, others were quick and careful to point out her own unique qualities and gifts as a sculptor.

Despite the positive reviews and exciting life that Claudel now enjoyed, her relationship with Rodin quickly brought her troubles. She was jealous and angry over his continuing relationship with Beuret, and became increasingly possessive of his role as artistic mentor. Ayral-Clause has argued that Claudel's relationship with Rodin was not based on love and passion, but on her ability to use his status and artistic connections in Paris. While she was in England visiting with her friends, she kept her distance from Rodin, despite his letters that pleaded for some news and affection. Finally, in October of

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[77] Camille Claudel to Florence Jeans, s.d. [8 november 1886], Archives de musée Rodin, inv. Ma 84, in *Correspondance*, 41-43.
[78] André Michel, "Salon de 1888," *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* Sept. 1888, in Pinet and Paris, *Camille Claudel*, 100.
[79] Octave Mirabeau, "Çà et Là," *Le Journal,* 12 March 1895, in Pinet and Paris, *Camille Claudel*, 101-102.

1886, Rodin succumbed to her wishes and sent her a letter that would act as a "contract" of sorts between the two lovers:

> In the future starting from today 12 October 1886, I will have as a student only Mademoiselle Camille Claudel and I will protect her alone through all the means I have at my disposal by my friends who will be hers especially by influential friends. I will not accept any other students so that no other rival talent could be produced by chance, although I suppose that one rarely meets artists as naturally gifted. At the exhibition, I will do everything I can for the placement and the newspapers. I will not go anymore to Mme… to whom I will not teach sculpture any more. After the exhibition in May, we will go to Italy and will stay there for at least six months, the beginning of an indissoluble liaison after which Mlle Claudel will be my wife…[80]

However, the promises made in this letter went largely unfulfilled, and although Rodin devoted his attention to Claudel, he never took steps to leave Rose Beuret or make Claudel his wife. Furthermore, Claudel's demands to be Rodin's only pupil alienated her from her friends Lipscomb and Singer, who had come from England specifically to work with him. Lipscomb expressed her frustrations to Rodin in a letter on 15 March 1887:

> You know I come to tell you honestly that we came especially from England in order to receive your advice, and that you promised to give it to us. We don't care to stay with Miss Claudel if it annoys you, and the disagreements you have with her do not concern us. I hope we will have your lessons as in the past and we are ready to do what you wish. Tell us honestly what you intend to do with us so that we know whether to stay here in Paris or to return to England.[81]

Claudel's demands ultimately ended her friendship with Lipscomb, and she found herself increasingly isolated in Paris, without the strong support of her fellow artists and studio mates. Matters only worsened when her family discovered the truth about their daughter's relationship with her tutor, and forced Claudel to move out in the fall of 1887.

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[80] Letter from Auguste Rodin to Camille Claudel, 12 October 1886, in Ayral-Clause, "Camille Claudel, Jessie Lipscomb and Rodin," 25.

[81] Archives of Robert Elborne, grandson of Jessie, in Ayral-Clause, "Camille Claudel, Jessie Lipscomb and Rodin," 26.

Her mother and brother Paul both felt a profound sense of betrayal and shame, and never forgave the scandal Claudel had brought upon the family. Rodin quickly stepped in and paid the annual rent for Claudel's new apartment at 113 boulevard d'Italie, on the south-eastern edge of the city.[82] Although she may not have had the same financial concerns experienced by many women artists of her time, she was paying a heavy price for her relationship with Rodin, one that would come to harm her in other ways.

As the 1890s began, things began to deteriorate between Claudel and Rodin. He had taken a new studio down the street from Claudel, where the two maintained their relationship, but by 1893, their affair had ended.[83] Ayral-Clause has argued that Claudel had at least one abortion during this time, and spent part of the summer of 1892 alone, away from Paris and Rodin.[84] From 1893, Claudel worked and lived separately from Rodin, and continued to develop her career. She was 29, and had spent much of her life as a young artist working for or with Rodin; it was now her opportunity to see what she could accomplish without him playing such a large role in her life.[85] As she wrote to an art collector in the spring of 1894, "I work now for myself…".[86] This new, emancipated existence, however, quickly brought along its difficult realities; Claudel was running out of money, and was forced to turn to her family for help. As she wrote to her brother: "I thank you for your offer to lend me some money. This time I will not refuse because I ran out of the 600 francs from Mother and this is the time when my rent is due; I ask you

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[82] Pinet and Paris, *Camille Claudel,* 49-50; Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life*, 92-93.
[83] Paris, *Camille: The Life of Camille Claudel, Rodin's Muse and Mistress*, 14-15.
[84] Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life*, 114-115.
[85] Biographers have noted that although their romantic relationship ended in 1892-3, Rodin continued to help Claudel from the sidelines, orchestrating reviews of her work, and helping her with applications for government commissions. By 1898-99, this too had stopped. See Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life*, 126, 148, and Camille Claudel, *Correspondance*, 98-99.
[86] Letter from Camille Claudel to Maurice Fenaille, s.d. [spring 1894], Société des manuscrits des auteurs français, in *Correspondance*, 98-99.

then, if it does not cause you any trouble, to send me 150 to 200 francs."[87] Rodin had paid

for her studio in 1893, and Claudel was fortunate that she could turn to her mother to pay

the rent for the following year. But it was not only rent money that Claudel required – as

we have seen, sculpting was expensive, and cost a yearly sum of about 1,500 francs.

Reine-Marie Paris notes that in late-nineteenth century Paris, the price of clay, armature,

and casting was about 600 to 800 francs; models cost from 400 to 1,000 francs; and to

work with bronze or marble added significantly to the overall costs incurred by the

artist.[88] Claudel did have some patrons and collectors who were interested in her work,

but this did not cover all of her expenses. As a result, "…Camille accumulated debts and

was hounded by creditors."[89]

In addition to financial strains, Claudel found life without Rodin's daily presence

and her friends' companionship somewhat alienating and isolating. She was lonely in

Paris – her family was distant, and her studio's location on the outskirts of the city

reduced the number of her visitors. As Ayral-Clause has noted, "at times she was

overcome by the weight of this new solitary life…",[90] and the journalist Mathias

Morhardt said that the concierge was the only person Claudel ever seemed to speak with.

She did serve on the jury of La Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts from 1893 to 1899, a

prestigious position that put her into contact with her peers and colleagues, but as Paris

has commented, "Those who knew her [Claudel] then described her as a recluse, avoiding

people and working relentlessly."[91] To ease her loneliness, Claudel took to the streets of

Paris, and observed the people living in her working-class neighbourhood. It was these

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[87] Letter from Camille Claudel to Paul Claudel, s.d. [December 1893], Société des manuscrits des auteurs français, in *Correspondance*, 96-98.
[88] Paris, *Camille: The Life of Camille Claudel, Rodin's Muse and Mistress,* 60.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life*, 120.
[91] Paris, *Camille: The Life of Camille Claudel, Rodin's Muse and Mistress*, 59.

walks in the city that became a source of artistic inspiration, and led Claudel to a new and intriguing approach to her sculpture; as Morhardt wrote, "A passer-by, a glimpse of a group of people, a swarm of workers busy at their task – all of this suggested a thousand ideas for future work."[92] Claudel described some of these new ideas in a letter to her brother:

> I have a lot of new ideas which would please you enormously, really thrill you. They agree with your ideas; here is a sketch of the last one (*la Confidence*): [Sketch] Three people listening to another behind a screen; *Grace*: [Sketch] Some very small people around a large table listening to grace before the meal; *Sunday*: [Sketch] Three farmers in the same new shirts seated on a very high wagon leaving for Mass; *The Sin*: [Sketch] A young girl huddled on a bench cries; her parents look at her with complete astonishment…[93]

Thus, during the mid- to late-1890s, at a time when she felt discouraged about her profession, her relationships, and her life in the city, Claudel channelled this frustration into her work, and decided that she would create something new and different from the work of her contemporaries. She began a series of sculptures that were distinct from her work with larger figures and busts, and began a series of small sculptures that focused on intimate spaces and scenes from everyday life in Paris. This, for Claudel, was a way to break free from her past training and do something completely unique, which was, as Paris has commented, "…a courageous move since she had no other influences or sources to fall back on."[94] Instead of depicting characters from antiquity, or the classic nude, Claudel would attempt to sculpt regular Parisians, often clothed, engaged in daily, intimate contact with one another, and placed in settings. For Claudel, this attempt to capture the intimacy that existed between people and their environment, was in one sense

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[92] Mathias Morhardt, "Mlle Camille Claudel," 1898, 731, in Antoinette le Normand-Romain, *Camille Claudel & Rodin: Time Will Heal Everything*, 61.
[93] Letter from Camille Claudel to Paul Claudel, s.d. [December 1893], *Correspondance*, 96-98.
[94] Paris, *Camille: The Life of Camille Claudel, Rodin's Muse and Mistress*, 55.

a reflection of her frustration and loneliness as she fought to maintain her independence in Paris. At the same time, however, it was also a shrewd and calculated professional tactic, designed to distance herself from her mentor, and attempt to do something new and exciting with her medium. As Paris has noted, "these pieces belong to no other artist or school of sculpture…".[95] Even the materials she chose were unusual – she used onyx, which was a very hard stone to carve, and often mixed materials together in one sculpture, combining bronze with onyx and marble, which was rare for a sculptor of the time.[96] In this way, as with the interiors of Gwen John, Claudel's small sculptures of intimate spaces contain a complex combination of themes and forces, and are the product of her difficult experiences as a woman, and as an artist. Some critics have noted that these small pieces demonstrate Claudel's retreat from "serious" sculpture, into the traditional, feminine domain of miniatures and decoration.[97] However, when seen in the context of her life and experiences at the time, against the backdrop of her personal, professional, and even urban struggles as a woman living in Paris, these small, intimate sculptures, take on a more powerful meaning. They represent "feminine" themes of intimacy, privacy, and self-reflection, a clever and unique professional strategy, as well as a reaction to loneliness and isolation.

Although Claudel created a number of sculptures based on the ideas of intimacy and a smaller scale, there was only one from the original list she wrote to her brother that was ever realized. This was *La Confidence*, or *Les Causeuses* (The Gossips), which she first exhibited in its plaster form at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1895. (Figure 11) The idea for this sculpture came to Claudel when she observed four women sitting and

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[95] Reine-Marie Paris, *Camille Claudel, sculptress: From genius to madness* (Paris: ARHIS, 1993), 86-87.
[96] Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life*, 125.
[97] Schmoll, *Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel*, 105-106.

Figure 11: Camille Claudel, *Les Causeuses*, 1897. Marble / onyx and bronze. Musée Rodin, Paris, from Antoinette le Normand-Romain, *Time Will Heal Everything*, 63.

talking together on a train. The women in the sculpture are seated in close proximity to one another on benches, protected and hidden by a screen that provides an interesting sense of depth and perspective. The three women listen attentively as their friend shares a particularly riveting piece of news or tantalizing secret, and their bodies convey a strong sense of tension and inquisitiveness. Together, they form a small but powerful group, bound together by the act of sharing and communicating with one another. With their backs turned in a circle of privacy, the women maintain their exclusivity and ensure that the viewer cannot participate in their secret conversation. *Les Causeuses* was an immediate success. The influential art critic Roger Marx praised it in his article about the Salon: "Eloquent poses, arched backs, crossed arms, translate in a miniscule and admirable group, the human being totally transfixed by the act of listening."[98] Morhardt echoed these feelings: "I do not think I am mistaken in saying that there is no other work which has the scope of *the Gossips* […] It has the providential clearness of creations which do not originate in a known creation…".[99] Indeed, *Les Causeuses* was a successful sculpture for Claudel, and brought her some much-needed income; she created a version in green onyx for the 1897 exhibition, that also met with critical acclaim, and can be seen today at the Musée Rodin in Paris.[100] With this small sculpture, Claudel took a traditionally "feminine" subject – gossiping women – and presented it in a new and powerful way, one that broke with standard sculptural themes and practices. By using a

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[98] Roger Marx, "Salon de 1895," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1895), 119, in Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life*, 124.

[99] Morhardt, "Mlle Camille Claudel," 1898, 745, in Normand-Romain, *Camille Claudel & Rodin: Time Will Heal Everything*, 62. See also Anne Rivière, Bruno Gaudichon, Danielle Ghanassia, *Camille Claudel: Catalogue Raisonné*, 3rd edition (Paris: A. Biro, 2001), 134-136.

[100] Normand-Romain notes that several versions of *Les Causeuses* were cast in marble and onyx for the Norwegian painter Fritz Thaulow; other collectors, Mirbeau, Geffroy, and even Rodin bought plaster versions; after 1900, Blot commenced the bronze edition, and made six or ten copies. See Normand-Romain, *Camille Claudel & Rodin*, 62.

unique composition, unusual materials, and an unorthodox subject matter, she was able to demonstrate the strength of female intimacy and privacy in the midst of a busy, urban setting.

The success of *Les Causeuses* seemed to validate Claudel's instincts about her artistic and creative ideas, and she quickly followed it with the creation of *La Vague* (The Wave), which she also exhibited in its plaster form at the Salon of 1897.[101] Claudel began an onyx and bronze version, for which she found financing, but was not completed until 1902, with help from other collectors.[102] (Figure 12) As with *Les Causeuses,* Claudel placed a small group of women against a backdrop; this time, a powerful wave, which she carved in a naturalist style reminiscent of the Japanese artist Hokusai's *Wave*.[103] This wave acts as a setting for the figures, and threatens to crash down upon them as they look up in astonishment. Again, the women are circled in an intimate group, bound not by conversation, but by the physical bond of hand-holding, which creates a union between the figures. Unlike *Les Causeuses,* who use speech and listening to establish their union, the women in *La Vague* are silent in the presence of the mightier forces of nature. The contrast, made particularly dramatic by the use of bronze and green onyx, heightens the interaction and sense of anticipation between the women and the wave. The mood of the figures is difficult to read decisively, which adds to the intensity of the sculpture – they could be bound together in fear, awaiting a certain doom, or as

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[101] This plaster was purchased by the industrialist Henri Fontaine, and sold to Mathias Morhardt. Normand-Romain, *Camille Claudel & Rodin*, 64.

[102] Claudel received about 2,500 francs from Maurice Fenaille, but *La Vague* was eventually completed by Fançois Pompon in 1902 for 500 francs. Normand-Romain, *Camille Claudel & Rodin*, 64, 66.

[103] In *La Vague*, Claudel successfully incorporated this Japanese aesthetic, which was popular in *fin-de-siècle* France. Armand Silvestre's poem, published in 1897 for the Salon and entitled "Mlle Claudel. La Vague," contained Japanese drawings and patterns on its front page, which also echoed this style. See Anne Rivière, et al., *Camille Claudel: Catalogue Raisonné*, 163-164 and Dossier Claudel, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris.

Figure 12: Camille Claudel, *La Vague*, 1897. Marble / onyx and bronze. Musée Rodin, Paris, from Antoinette Normand-Romain, *Time Will Heal Everything*, 64.

Gustave Geffroy wrote, "…dancing on the shore, waiting for the waterfall with shivers of joy…".[104] With *La Vague,* Claudel did not reproduce subjects taken from her urban walks through Paris, as she did with *Les Causeuses,* but she created a similar circle of private dialogue between the female figures, infused with a powerful sense of intimacy, intensity, and dynamism.[105]

In 1898 and 1899, Claudel created a final pair of sculptures on a small scale that followed the themes of intimacy represented in *Les Causeuses* and *La Vague*. These two works, *La Profonde Pensée* (Deep Thought) and *Le Rêve au coin du feu* (Dream by the Fire), recreated a domestic interior, and placed a lone female figure within the décor of a home environment.[106] (Figures 13 and 14) The bond Claudel created between the subjects in the previous two sculptures is replaced here by an air of solitude, quiet self-reflection, and thoughtful reverie. In both pieces, a woman sits or kneels before a fireplace, casting her glance into the hearth; her thoughts are private, and kept from the viewer, and there is a profound sense of voyeurism in these small sculptures, as if we have entered the room and caught these women staring into the fire, unaware of our presence. In this way, these two sculptures bear a strong resemblance to Gwen John's *Woman Dressing*. Claudel's use of an interior setting and clothing creates a familiar and yet decidedly modern sculptural scene. As with *Les Causeuses,* the figures are not classical beauties from the age of antiquity, but regular woman, perhaps Parisian, who are engaged in a mundane, yet timeless, act. Perhaps they are housekeepers or maids, taking a well-deserved rest from house work, or they may be bourgeois women – *les femmes au foyer* (women of the

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[104] Gustave Geffroy, 1897, 365, in See Anne Rivière, et al., *Camille Claudel: Catalogue Raisonné*, 162.
[105] For contemporary critiques that echo these sentiments, see Laure de Margerie, "Les 'Croquis d'Après Nature – Camille Claudel: L'Affranchissement," *Claudel et Rodin: La rencontre de deux destins*, Fondation Pierre Gianadda (Paris: Hazan, 2005), 244.
[106] The marble version of *Deep Thought* appeared at the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris. Normand-Romain, *Camille Claudel & Rodin*, 66.
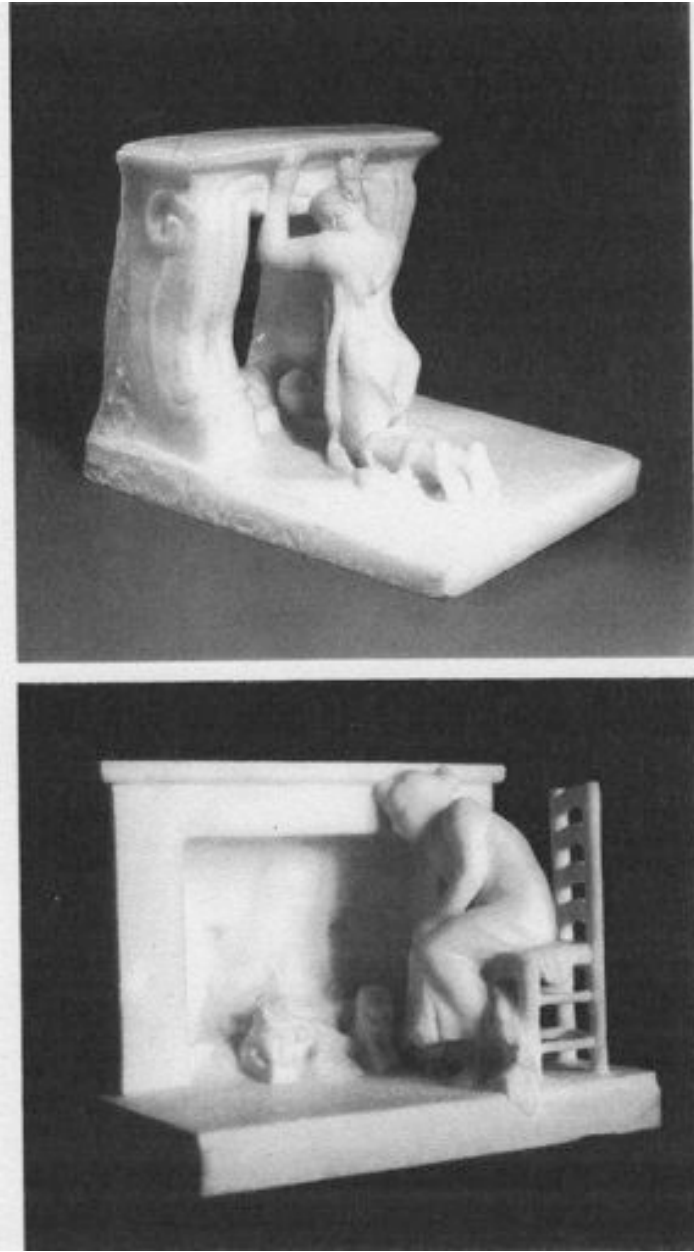
Figure 13 (top): Camille Claudel, *La Profonde Pensée*, 1900. Marble. Sainte Croix Museum, Poitiers, from Antoinette Normand-Romain, *Time Will Heal Everything*, 66.

Figure 14 (bottom): Camille Claudel, *Le Rêve au coin du feu*, 1899. Marble. Municipal Museum, Draguignan, from Antoinette Normand-Romain, *Time Will Heal Everything*, 66.

hearth) – who were an integral part of the clearly-defined and separated gender roles of the nineteenth century. As Ayral-Clause has noted, these two small sculptures were also "straight genre scenes," which gave them a slightly decorative, as opposed to a purely artistic sensibility.[107] Claudel was forced to sell *La Profonde Pensée* as a night light in order to buy food. The small bulb was placed behind the marble, which lit the "wood" and illuminated the figure of the woman crouched before its flame.[108] This fact adds an interesting dimension to the role that these two sculptures played in Claudel's career and life – as art, they embodied her attempt to shed her previous style, and create something new and distinctive, while also giving expression to her creative energies; but because of the trials and realities of her life and living conditions, she was forced to turn this art into an everyday commodity, something she sold as a household, decorative item, as opposed to a work of sculpture. As her brother Paul wrote, "Il faut vivre!" (One has to live!)[109] In these two small sculptures, Claudel also captures a feeling of profound loneliness, fatigue, and sadness.   The reason for each woman's deep gaze into the hearth is shrouded and elusive, which creates an element of uncertainty and discomfort.   The woman in *La Profonde Pensée* seems almost desperate, as she kneels in front of the hearth, with her hands clutching the mantle and her head hung. Similarly, the woman in *Le Rêve au coin du feu* leans against the fireplace, and rests her head against the stone hearth, as if tired or sad. Both women exude a feeling of isolation, alone in their domestic setting, but also maintain a sense of privacy and intimacy through their secret thoughts.

Perhaps the sadness and isolation depicted in these two sculptures really did echo similar tensions in Claudel's own life. Biographers have noted that by 1899, despite

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[107] Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life,* 157.
[108] Reine-Marie Paris, *Camille Claudel, sculptress: From genius to madness*, 90.
[109] Paul Claudel, preface cat. exp., 1951, 12, in Rivière, et al., *Camille Claudel: Catalogue Raisonné*, 173.

some sales and commissions of her work, Claudel was sinking deeper into financial trouble, and retreated further into her own, isolated world. She moved to the Ile St. Louis, a "refuge" in the heart of the city, in an attempt to get away from the hectic pace of Paris.[110] She also severed the final ties she maintained with Rodin at this time, and the help she had received in the form of contacts and well-placed requests, stopped. The final separation between the two artists occurred over a sculpture Claudel created around the same time. *L'Age mûr* (The Age of Maturity), depicted an aging man being led away from a young, beautiful girl by a wicked demon. When Rodin saw this sculpture at the 1899 Salon, he was angered by the way Claudel had made a public spectacle of his private life. Biographers note that it seems he used his powerful connections to cancel the commission for the bronze version that Claudel had received from the French government; and the following year, when Claudel tried to exhibit the sculpture at the 1900 Universal Exposition, she was shocked when it was rejected.[111] This frustration led Claudel to increasingly grow suspicious and even paranoid about Rodin – she began to view him as "a villain intent on destroying her."[112] In 1902, Claudel turned down an opportunity to exhibit her work in Prague alongside Rodin, because, as she wrote to the exhibitor:

> …if I agreed to exhibit side by side with Monsieur Rodin, he could claim
> as much as he wanted that I was under his protection and make believe that
> my works are due to his inspiration […] But I am in no mood to be deceived
> any longer by the crafty devil in false character (*master to all of us,* he says),
> whose greatest pleasure is to take advantage of everyone.[113]

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[110] Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life*, 153.
[111] Ibid, 148.
[112] Ibid.
[113] *L'Oeuvre de Camille Claudel,* 264, in Ayral-Clause, 162.

Claudel continued to alienate herself professionally and personally, and by 1909, could only rely on her brother Paul, and her aging father for help. Her mother refused to allow Claudel to come home and be with her family, and no amount of persuading from her husband would change her mind. Claudel was left to languish and fall deeper into seclusion and mental deterioration. She turned to the homeless beggars in the street, and often welcomed them into her home for raucous parties, using what small monies she received from friends and family to buy champagne and party decorations.[114] After one visit Paul made to her atelier in September 1909, he recorded her condition in his journal: "In Paris, Camille mad. Wallpaper ripped in long strips, the only armchair broken and torn, horrible filth. Camille huge, with a dirty face, speaking ceaselessly in a monotonous and metallic voice."[115] In 1913, after their father had passed away, Paul and his mother began the proceedings to have Claudel committed. In the doctor's medical report, he noted that Claudel was living in filth and squalor, despite the fact that her family paid her rent directly to the landlord, and gave her a sum of 200 francs monthly for living expenses, an amount, he wrote, "which would be enough for her to live in comfort."[116] Claudel was placed in the Ville-Evrard Asylum under complete sequestration – biographers have noted that these extreme restrictions were not as connected to the severity of her mental condition as they were a reflection of her mother's desire to avoid further scandal brought to her family's name.[117] Unsurprisingly, under these harsh conditions, with no visitors or guests, Claudel deteriorated further. During the war, in 1914, patients at Ville-Evrard had to be evacuated to avoid the German advance, and

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[114] *Dossier Camille Claudel*, 445, in Ayral-Clause, 181.
[115] Paul Claudel, September 1909, *Journal*, vol. 1, 103-104, in Ayral-Clause, 185.
[116] Rivière, Gaudichon, Ghanassia, *Camille Claudel: Catalogue Raisonné*, 246.
[117] Ayral-Clause, 192-193.

Claudel was moved to Montdevergues Asylum, not far from Avignon. It was here that she would spend the remainder of her life – thirty years. Some of her friends and critics from the art community tried to defend Claudel's sanity and her talent as an artist. In 1905, a retrospective of her work had been exhibited at Eugène Blot's gallery, and her supporters were vocal in their praise of her skills: "… [Camille Claudel], who has not found the place she deserves, who has known distress, destitution, who fought alone, scornful of Salon cliques, is one of the most authentic sculptors of our time;"[118] and in the Preface to another exhibit in 1907, Vauxcelles wrote that, "Camille Claudel is without doubt a unique woman sculptor in whose face shines the sign of genius."[119] But this support was not enough to stem the tide that was rising against her. In the end, Claudel had challenged the existing boundaries of her profession, and had pushed forward in ways that had previously been unattained by women in art, but ultimately fell victim to the complex forces that were working against her.

When placed in the context of the horrible end to Claudel's life and artistic career, her work with intimate spaces in the years before things went terribly wrong perhaps take on a deeper meaning. Odile Ayral-Clause has argued that Claudel's small scenes "harbour disturbing elements; squeezed into a corner or dwarfed by their environment, the small characters reflect the shrinking world of Camille as she increasingly withdrew, soon to live in complete isolation."[120] Indeed, as we have seen, there is something

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[118] Louis Vauxelles, preface to *Oeuvres de Camille Claudel et de Bernard Hoetger* (December 1905), in Ayral-Clause, 171-172.
[119] Louis Vauxelles, preface to *Exposition de Sculptures Nouvelles par Camille Claudel et de peintures par Manguin, Marquet, Puy* (November 1907), in Dossier Claudel, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. Claudel had been dubbed a woman genius earlier in her career, most notably in *Femina*, a popular woman's press of the time. See Gabrielle Réval, "Les Artistes Femmes au Salon de 1903," *Femina* 55, May 1903, 519-521. See also Marie-Victoire Nantet, "Camille Claudel, 'Une Femme de Génie,'" *Claudel et Rodin: La rencontre de deux destins*, 325-335.
[120] Ayral-Clause, 140.

"disturbing" in Claudel's sculptures of intimacy and small spaces, which capture feelings of isolation, loneliness, and despair. However, they also articulate the strength and power of female intimacy, and embody her freedom as an artist, her determination to challenge conventional aesthetics of sculpture,[121] and her desire to work independently despite financial and personal difficulties. Claudel's intimate sculptures contain and communicate all of these complex circumstances and emotions at once, and it is for this reason, despite their small size, that they had a profound impact on the Parisian art world.

Conclusion

In 1904, just as Gwen John was beginning her modelling and brief affair with Rodin, Camille Claudel had entered her downward spiral of destitution, despair, and mental instability. Indeed, the master sculptor had a profound impact upon the lives and careers and both of these artists. His teaching, patronage, and financial assistance, combined with the romantic aspect of their relationships, created a complex web of ties that linked Rodin to each of these women.[122] He represented the powerful world of the Parisian art establishment, and demonstrated the ways in which both John and Claudel had to manipulate themselves and their circumstances, in order to make the most of their chances for success as artists at this time. John's role as his model, and Claudel's role as his protégée, each brought benefits, but ultimately, tough consequences for both artists.

Beyond the influence of Rodin, however, both of these artists, as we have seen, also struggled with other trials of Parisian life at the end of the nineteenth century. Life as a

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[121] Angela Ryan has argued that Claudel also succeeded in creating a "new vision of non-gendered social space," in which women were depicted in a such a way that "…freed [them] of stereotypical 'male-gaze' voyeurism." See Ryan, "Visions of Reciprocity in the Work of Camille Claudel," in Holmes and Tarr, eds., *A "Belle Epoque?,"* 167-179.

[122] There was nothing found in the course of my research that indicated that either Gwen John or Camille Claudel had any knowledge of each other.

woman artist in the city could be a lonely, alienating, and difficult journey, one that challenged John and Claudel to find inventive solutions for survival. In many ways, these women were successful – their work remains known to us today, and both artists experienced a certain degree of success in their own day. Specifically, it was their unique approach to and depiction of intimate spaces that brought them some of their most critical attention. John's paintings of her studio apartments in Paris represented her tangible independence and freedom, but also captured her struggles with separation and financial uncertainty. In a similar way, Claudel worked with intimate spaces in her sculpture at a time when she too was lonely and alienated, and drew on her urban surroundings for inspiration. What both of these artists managed to do in their work, was not simply to replicate the traditional and typical themes of "femininity" – domesticity, intimacy, and interiority. Rather, John and Claudel infused their intimate spaces with all of the conflicts and complexities they experienced as artists and as women in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. By studying the difficult historical circumstances under which these paintings and sculptures were created, we can see that for both of these artists, it was important to articulate the power of human and feminine intimacy and privacy, often in the midst of an urban or domestic setting, while also staying true to the realities of their lives in Paris. As well, and just as importantly, these images also represented a conscious, professional, and career-driven goal on the part of both artists – to paint or sculpt something in a new way, and in so doing, create a unique space for themselves in the art world. In all of these ways then, we see with the work of John and Claudel, an attempt to articulate and redress the boundaries of intimate spaces, both in their art and in their lives.

Chapter 5: Bodies of Ambiguity – Suzanne Valadon & Romaine Brooks

The image of the human body is often inscribed with cultural and historical meaning. As art and cultural historians have noted, society has the power to "leave its mark" on the body, and create images of men and women that conform to its expectations "…in setting, pose, attributes, and physical characteristics."[1] In the modern era, the tenets of science and philosophy dictated that bodies of men and women should be markedly different from one another, and remain true to traditional characteristics of masculinity and femininity. This, according to Tamar Garb, "…testified to the maintenance of a social order based on visible distinctions. If boundaries were transgressed, chaos could ensue."[2] Sexual and gendered difference was of ultimate importance to bodies, and their image, in nineteenth-century culture – men were to be virile, strong, and muscular, while women should exude grace, delicacy, and modesty. Any deviation from these standards was cause for alarm, fear, and even disgust.

There were, of course, many instances at the *fin de siècle* in which these carefully delineated boundaries were challenged and blurred, both in society and in art, and in many ways, became one of the principal cultural hallmarks of the era. Art historians have shown the ways in which French artists including Degas, Renoir, and Caillebotte, depicted male and female bodies that rebelled against the strict and gendered categories of the nineteenth century, and "disobeyed" their designated social roles.[3] The results were images of the body that transgressed or "eroded" dominant social relations of the

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[1] Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd, 1998), 11.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid, 11-14.

time – figures that were brazenly sexual, or even ambiguous, in their nudity. The female body, in particular, played a dominant role in expressing these cultural and artistic changes, and was a key testing ground for new artistic methods and techniques. In the realm of academic art, the female nude had always been seen as the embodiment of Beauty, Truth, and the Ideal.[4] As Kenneth Clark wrote in the 1950s, the nude was far from a deformed or disgraceful figure, but was "clothed" in art, "…the most complete example of the transformation of matter into form."[5] In nineteenth-century Paris, the annual art Salon was the site in which the female nude was most commonly exhibited, viewed, and evaluated. As Heather Dawkins has noted:

> The jury evaluated the nude based on a criterion known as the 'ideal', a kind of aesthetic composite that used artistic precedents as a guide for distilling an ideal beauty from the diverse and imperfect characteristics of woman's bodies. The conventions of the ideal required that body hair not be depicted and that the pubes be transformed into undivided flesh. With these transformations, the female body came to represent purity and beauty.[6]

In this way, the academic tradition of painting the female nude strove for a standard of perfectibility, and artists believed that by separating the body's perfect form from its corporeal shortcomings, they could depict timeless images of beauty and truth.[7]

By the mid-nineteenth century, the academic tradition of the Paris Salon was under attack by artists who wanted to break with the image of an ideal female body, and replace it with a reflection of the nude as it might be seen in the contemporary, modern world. The realist artist Edouard Manet shocked the Salon public with *Olympia* in 1863, a

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[4] Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture, 1870-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.
[5] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (London: John Murray, 1956), 1.
[6] Dawkins, 16-17.
[7] Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538) is often cited as a classic example of this tradition. The polished veneer of the skin, the elegant and refined contours of the body, and the customary half-glance of the subject all combine to make this image of Venus one of classical beauty, delicacy, and modesty.

portrait that completely disregarded the formalist tradition of painting the nude, and depicted a low-class prostitute sprawled out on an unmade bed. (Figure 15) Contemporaries labelled Manet's technique rough and crude, his brushstrokes hurried and inconsistent, and his use of colour alarming.[8] Olympia's skin, in particular, caused outrage. Unlike the polished finish of classical nudes, Manet had used tones of yellow and grey, which made her skin look sallow, and had outlined her figure in a rough, dark line, which gave her a flat and two-dimensional appearance. Art critics noted that Olympia had "dirty hands and wrinkled feet;" "her face is stupid, her skin cadaverous […] she does not have a human form."[9] They also criticized Manet's break with the traditional rules of the gaze. Unlike Venus's seductive, yet demure and mysterious half-glance, Olympia stared brazenly out from the canvas. Her forceful gaze communicated confidence, defiance, and self-possession, which was disarming when paired with her nakedness. The subject matter was also roundly criticized. Manet had painted a common prostitute, not a genteel courtesan, and had made no attempt to conceal this fact. As T. J. Clark has noted, her placement in a comfortably bourgeois setting added to the shocking effect of the painting, and in the figure of Olympia, Manet had successfully bared the social taboos of prostitution, illicit sex and disease, all of which were growing concerns during the second half of the nineteenth century. With this image, Manet had created what he felt was a realistic, honest, depiction of the female body, one that was stripped of the artistic traditions of form and technique, and connected to some of the disconcerting elements of modern life.

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[8] T. J Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Age of Manet and his Followers*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984, 134.
[9] Charles Bernheimer, "Manet's Olympia: The Figuration of Scandal," *Poetics Today*, Volume 10, Issue 2, Art & Literature II (Summer 1989): 255-277, 256.

Figure 15: Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas. 130.5 x 190 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

These challenges to the academic depiction of the female body continued into the *fin de siècle*, and in some cases, women artists also took up the genre. Traditionally, women art students had been barred from studying the nude figure because it was considered "antithetical to respectable femininity" and a threat to the serious, asexual tone of the class – as Dawkins has noted, "…the ideal of the genre required a repression of sexuality that maintained the purity of the nude," a purity and professionalism that the *École* believed would be compromised if women were granted admittance to the life-class.[10] Dawkins has argued that these institutional restrictions kept women "disengaged" from the artistic portrayal of the human body, and prohibited them from developing their own "culture of the nude."[11] This had adverse consequences for the genre and for women artists, who failed to truly engage with or challenge traditional conventions of representation, and instead created images of the nude that were constrained and tentative.[12] There were, however, some women who did break with these traditional and gendered expectations, and engaged with the body in their work – artists such as Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot – but it was not until the start of the twentieth century that women artists came to evaluate and describe the powerful image of the human body in greater numbers. Gill Perry has argued that between 1900 and 1920 there was a gradual opening up of the nude as an artistic theme for women, and artists such as Emilie Charmy and Suzanne Valadon used the body more often and with greater success – "…the growth in professional and educational opportunities for women artists brought with it a slow erosion of some of the social divisions in male and female bourgeois roles, and a growing

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[10] Dawkins, 115. See also Garb, *Sisters of the Brush* and "The forbidden gaze: women artists and the male nude in late nineteenth-century France," in Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon, *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)*, 33-42.
[11] Dawkins, 133.
[12] Ibid.

involvement by women in 'modern' artistic practices."[13]   By occupying a "fragile" and

"marginal space" within the bounds of the artistic profession, Perry has noted that women

artists were able to use the nude as a way to position themselves as modern artists, and

create opportunities for their own development.[14]

The *fin-de-siècle* period, then, running roughly from 1880 to 1914, marks a distinct

shift in how women artists approached and dealt with the human body, particularly the

nude, in art.   Feminist theorists and art historians have thoroughly discussed the

importance of this shift and the ways in which it gave women artists new opportunities to

exert power and agency over the body's representation, and explore the complex issues

of performance, spectatorship, display, and the gaze. As Rosemary Betterton has argued,

"Claiming the right of women to represent themselves has been central to a feminist

agenda since the struggle for the vote began over a century ago."[15]   Betterton has also

argued that because of the reconfiguration of "female embodiment," both politically and

artistically, that occurred during this period, women artists of the *fin de siècle* slowly

began to negotiate a wide range of forces, as "nineteenth-century ideals of femininity"

gave way to "new and emergent representations of women...".[16] According to Betterton,

this new range of possibilities allowed women artists the necessary freedom to create

images of the body that were increasingly bold, self-aware, and striking in their sense of

"clarity."[17]   This is certainly true of the two artists considered in this chapter, Suzanne

Valadon and Romaine Brooks, whose images of the human body communicated intense

emotions of strength, power, and singularity, and who became known in contemporary

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[13] Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, 35.
[14] Ibid, 11-12, 35.
[15] Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), 8.
[16] Ibid, 3.
[17] Ibid, 7.

and critical art circles of the *fin de siècle* for their highly unusual and original work. By boldly engaging with the human body, both Valadon and Brooks broke with traditional conventions of "women's art," which, as we have seen, was often described as "delicate," "intuitive," and "light-hearted."[18] Because of their innovative use of colour, line, and subject matter, many considered Valadon and Brooks to be masculine in their approach to art. Some art critics did identify a feminine instinct at work in their art – as Francis Carco argued, Valadon's female nudes struck a "balance between the severity of a masculine vision and that quality which through a faintly defensive instinct is deliberately left to the feminine touch … The line becomes human and here it is clear that Madame Suzanne Valadon is a woman."[19]   However, most believed that their depictions of the human body were a masculine interpretation of a classical theme.

While it is clear that both Valadon and Brooks created images of the human form that were empowering, strong, and self-actualized, a closer examination of their work reveals a more nuanced and complex picture.   There are also other themes at work in their paintings and sketches, themes that are less certain, less clear, of a decidedly ambiguous nature. Their paintings and sketches of women and children also convey themes of sadness, dislocation, isolation, and even death, which in part, reflect the trials and difficulties of the artists' context – the rigours of life in Paris, the contradictions associated with their profession, and the attempts to engage with an artistic genre that had only recently been appropriated by women artists.   The result of this combination of impulses are bodies that appear conflicted and caught between various modes of

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[18] Tirza True Latimer, *Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 46-50.

[19] Francis Carco, *Le Nu dans la Peinture Moderne* (Paris, 1947) in June Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre: A Life of Suzanne Valadon* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1998), 219.

interpretation. They elude definitive analysis, and possess sentiments of both intimate

self-knowledge and alienated subjectivity, and are ultimately a site of struggle that cannot

be resolved. By exploring the presence of these themes in the paintings and sketches of

Suzanne Valadon and Romaine Brooks, we can see how the image of the body, as painted

by a woman artist, was certainly a profound and ambiguous repository for cultural and

historical meaning at the *fin de siècle*, and was executed in a way that underscores both

the progress for women artists at this time and also the profound instability and struggle.

Modelling Bodies

Closely connected to depictions of the female body in art is the role of the artist-

model, which was one of the most complex and contradictory negotiations that existed

between the woman artist and the body in the late-nineteenth century. As noted in the

previous chapter, modelling was often an important source of income and artistic

connections for aspiring women artists in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, including Gwen John,

Camille Claudel, and Suzanne Valadon. Various neighbourhoods, particularly

Montmartre, became the centre of a bustling model industry in the late-nineteenth

century, and at the Place Pigalle, "…would-be models draped themselves around the

fountain dressed up in brightly coloured rags as nymphs, cherubs, and Greek Gods… ".[20]

These "model markets" emerged in any quarter of Paris frequented by artists, and was not

just a rite of passage for would-be artists, but a serious profession for many Parisian

women as well.[21] Although nude female models were prohibited in the École des Beaux-

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[20] Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre*, 230.
[21] Marie Lathers, *Bodies of Art: French Literary Realism and the Artist's Model* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001)*, 42.

Arts until 1863, they began posing in ateliers at the start of the nineteenth century.[22] As

Marie Lathers has argued, this process began as early as the 1830s, when fees and

working conditions associated with modelling were also systemized and regulated.[23]

Previously, during the eighteenth century, female models had been banned from the

studios of the French Academy, and male models were the standard. Susan Waller has

commented that the male model at this time acted as a substitution for the "*beau idéal*" in

art, and was used to represent characters from antiquity and history.[24] By the end of the

Second Empire, the authority of this academic tradition was challenged by new

innovations in artistic representation, and as history painting was displaced by genre

painting – the depiction of subjects and scenes from everyday life – so too were male

models replaced by women to represent this new, more natural style.[25]

Many female models came from the working classes or from immigrant families,

which added support to the new artistic interest in realism and images of contemporary

society, devoid of classical themes. Indeed, certain "types" of female posers enjoyed

popularity throughout the nineteenth century. Lathers notes that:

> An evolution is traced in the preference for different racial and ethnic
> model types, from the Jewish model, most popular in the 1830s and 1840s,
> to the Italian immigrant model favored by the painters in the 1850s, 1860s,
> and 1870s, to the Parisian poser (*la Parisienne*), the "New Woman" model
> of 1880s and 1890s. The 'heyday' of the female model is identified as the
> 1880s and her decline as a ubiquitous social type as following thereafter.[26]

Thus, the female model became a pervasive and provocative cultural image in the late-

nineteenth century, one that was also discussed and described in popular literature and

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[22] Susan S. Waller, *The Invention of the Model: Artists and Models in Paris, 1830-1870* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2006), 42.
[23] Lathers, *Bodies of Art*, 4.
[24] Waller, *The Invention of the Model*, 121-122.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Lathers, *Bodies of Art*, 15-16.

fiction of the day. Zola's *L'Oeuvre* showcased the seedy underworld of Parisian artists and their models, and in books such as Georges Montorgueil's *La Parisienne peinte par elle-même*, the model was described as "art's humble servant," and catalogued in all her various forms – the young debutant, the chatter-box, as well as the "inconsiderate" and "sentimental" posers.[27] Cartoons from the *Almanach des Parisiennes* underscore this point, which depict female models engaged in lively banter with artists and their patrons as they sit or stand around their atelier in various states of undress. (Figures 16 and 17) What is interesting in these images is that in none of these cartoons are the women actually engaged in the work of modelling, a fact which makes their nudity seem sexually charged and titillating, as opposed to detached and professional. In one image, the model sits at her podium, clutching a canvas to hide her body, which when not posing, becomes mere nakedness.

Against these cultural images of the model, or the artist-as-model, which portrayed a life of bohemian fun, the reality of existence for these women was often grim. Lathers has noted that for every model who became an actress, singer, artist, or "grande dame by marriage," there were many others who "…ended as battered women, alcoholics, prostitutes, or suicides."[28] Their moral character and private lives was often the topic of gossip, or fodder for novels and satirical cartoons. They were often the subject of anecdotes that recorded their participation in games, pranks, and scandalous parties at the

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[27] Emile Zola, *L'Oeuvre* (1886); Georges Montorgueil, *La Parisienne peinte par elle-même* (Paris: Librairie L. Conquet, 1897), 123-132. In *Bodies of Art,* Marie Lathers discusses the various ways in which the female model was represented in literature of the nineteenth century. Susan Waller also discusses the "cultural stereotypes" associated with the artist's model in French society; see *The Invention of the Model*.
[28] Lathers, 26.

— Monsieur Alfred Baudruchon, s'il vous plaît?
— Monsieur, je l'attends... Si vous voulez faire comme moi.

Figure 16: A. Grevin, *Alamanach des Parisiennes: 3 volumes* (1870-1895), 1888, 14, Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris.

— Comme ça, vous n' voyez rien à faire avec moi aujourd'hui?
— Rien du tout!
— Alors, faut que j' rengaine?

Figure 17: A. Grevin, *Alamanach des Parisiennes: 3 volumes* (1870-1895), 1881, 14, Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris.

ateliers – John Shirley-Fox wrote about some of these episodes in his memoirs of life as an art student in Paris in the 1880s. In one case, he borrowed the hat and cloak of the model in his class, and tricked his classmates into thinking he was there to find some work posing. He sat "demurely in the corner by the fire" until his friends tried to compel him to pose for the class, and his true identity revealed.[29] In other instances, Shirley-Fox and his friends hypnotized the models, and got them to act as if they were drunk on champagne, or put them into states of hysterical rage and "religious" ecstasy.[30] In one case, he describes a model who was almost shot while he and another friend were indulging in some target practice in the studio.[31] In all of these anecdotes, Shirley-Fox hopes to entertain the reader with tales of pranks and harmless fun from his youth, but they also reveal the ways in which the models in his atelier engaged in activities that had very little to do with their jobs, and which in some cases, put them in danger.

The relationship between the model and a famous artist could be even more precarious. As we have seen with Gwen John and Camille Claudel, posing for Rodin led to difficulties for both artists, and for John, posing was something she tolerated, but did not enjoy; as Lathers has noted, "…if they move from the pedestal to the bed they are subsequently shunned by their artist; if their artist does not succeed, they are blamed for his failures."[32] These kinds of pressures added strain and uncertainty to the profession, and often blurred the line between professional models, or aspiring artists, and girls who were involved in modelling with other, less respectable objectives in mind. In addition to the stigma and judgement connected with nude modelling, the work itself was often

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[29] John Shirley-Fox, *An Art Student's Reminiscences of Paris in the Eighties,* 125-6.
[30] Shirley-Fox, 176-191.
[31] Ibid, 227.
[32] Ibid.

difficult and exhausting. Alice Michel, who posed for Degas in the early 1900s, published a memoir of the experience in the *Mercure de France*, which reveals some of the trials and rigours of her work for the famous, and notoriously difficult artist.[33] Told from the perspective of "Pauline," Michel describes the pain and exhaustion of standing for extended periods of time in extremely awkward positions: "Standing on her left foot, her knee slightly bent, she lifted her other foot behind her with a vigorous movement, caught her toe with her right hand, then turned her head to look at the sole of her foot, while her left elbow rose very high to re-establish her balance."[34] These scenes suggest that a model's work was, at the very least, an unwanted distraction for an aspiring artist, and at the worst, a source of pain and hardship for those who attempted to pose for a living. As Dawkins has noted, women who posed nude often "negotiated the contentious ground between art and indecency."[35] She cites a survey of models in Paris published in the feminist paper *La Citoyenne* which notes that about a third of the women had been convicted of participating in the production of obscene photographs.[36]

To combat these challenges, reputable Parisian models sometimes grouped together to form unions, as a way of protecting their profession. In the *Journal des Femmes Artistes*, J.G. de Najaille comments on the organization of one of these labour groups, *Olympe*: "…by grouping together in a professional union, they will establish a separation between the true, serious, and conscientious models, who are the indispensable assistants of artists, and… the others, who little by little will find themselves eliminated by the force

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[33] Heather Dawkins has assessed this text in *The Nude in French Art and Culture,* and argues that Michel's published memoir acts as a "public dispute" in which she exposes Degas's domineering and abusive character. See Dawkins, 90-114.
[34] Louise Michel, "Degas et son modèle," *Mercure de France,* 16 February 1919: 457-58, in Dawkins, 93.
[35] Dawkins, 31. Dawkins also notes that the wages for modelling started at 2 francs and went up to 50 francs for a four-hour session. See 178 n.64.
[36] "Échos," *La Citoyenne*, July 1886, 4, in Dawkins, 31.

of things and will no longer harm the good reputation of the profession."[37] Indeed, as Waller has noted, models were often classified into two groups, "modest" and "immodest," meant to describe those who were either shy or sexually brazen. The organization *Olympe*, however, underscores the existence of what Waller has categorized as a third group of models, those who were "unmodest," that is, unconcerned with feeling shy or brazen because they saw themselves as professionals.[38] Although erotic encounters could and often did occur between artists and their models in the studios and ateliers of Paris, this was not inevitable; there were many models who did not respond personally or sexually to the gaze of the male artist, but who identified the exchange as one of professionalism and detachment.[39]

Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, the artist's model represented a complex mixture of forces – she was an image of modern womanhood and a professional career choice, but could also be a thin veil for the seedy world of prostitution. Modelling was a job that could also marginalize its young posers – working-class models in particular were "mute recipients of the look, not practitioners engaged in a critical or creative process."[40] For aspiring artists, modelling could represent a way into the exciting world of opportunity and connections, as well as a chance to make some money. However, it also had the potential to take time away from the development and creation of their own art, and placed them in compromising, often damaging, situations with their famous peers. All of these elements of the modelling experience reflect the profound ambiguity

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[37] J.G. de Najaille, "Le Syndicat des Modèles," *Journal des Femmes Artistes*, no. 17, October 1891, 1-2.
[38] Waller, 43-47.
[39] Ibid, 47.
[40] Dawkins, 86.

that existed for women in art at the *fin de siècle*, and demonstrate the contradictory ways in which they often negotiated the use of their own bodies as inspiration for another's art.

Suzanne Valadon

One of the most well-known and successful artist-models of *fin-de-siècle* Paris was Suzanne Valadon (1865-1938). She has been the subject of recent critical study, and Marie Lathers has even dubbed those who study artists-as-models, as engaged in the "Valadon paradigm."[41] Suzanne Valadon was born Marie-Clémentine in Limoges in 1865. She was the illegitimate child of a sewing maid and never knew her father.[42] Her mother Madeleine moved the family to Paris in 1870 with hopes for a better life, but this was not to be, and from the age of ten, Valadon took jobs to help with the family income – she worked as a shop assistant, a factory worker, and even a trapeze artist. By 1880, at the age of fifteen, she began modelling for artists.[43] The bohemian world of Montmartre, where Valadon settled, was the perfect place to connect with artists and other figures of the Parisian *demimonde*, and she was quickly introduced to the world of posing through her friend Clelia, one of the Italian girls who hung around the Place Pigalle.[44] Between 1880 and 1890, Valadon worked for Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, among others, and her affairs with these men and her

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[41] Lathers, *Bodies of Art,* 9.
[42] Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre*, 13. Other studies of Suzanne Valadon include *Suzanne Valadon*, Daniel Marchesseau, ed. (Martigny: Fondation Pierre Gianadda, 1996); Thérèse Diamand Rosinsky, *Suzanne Valadon* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1994); John Storm, *The Valadon Drama: The Life of Suzanne Valadon* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958); Robert Rey, *Suzanne Valadon, Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1922)
[43] During the early 1870s, Valadon received a basic education at a convent school, but did not have much formal education beyond that. Rose, 31.
[44] Rose, 39.

"free-wheeling lifestyle" were legendary.[45]   The images created of Valadon by these artists are equally compelling, as they capture various aspects of her youth as well as scenes of bohemian life in Paris. A painting by Renoir, for example, depicts Valadon as a young and graceful woman, while that of Toulouse-Lautrec portrays her as the victim of a carousing and indulgent Montmartre lifestyle, both of which were accurate descriptions of Valadon's own life. (Figures 18 and 19)

By 1882, Valadon, now known as Maria, had obtained an excellent reputation as an "intelligent" and "hardworking" sitter.[46]   Alongside her work as a model, however, Valadon was also passionate about her own art and dreamed of becoming an artist. She constantly sketched and painted, and without the luxury of formal and costly art training, she carefully observed and in some cases emulated the work of the artists for whom she sat. As she said of Puvis de Chavannes in an interview in 1921: "I was in awe of him, I didn't know how to talk to him and I didn't dare confess that I was trying to draw myself, that since the age of nine I had sketched on any scrap of paper that came my way, much to my mother's annoyance."[47] It is worth noting that some of these men held particularly strong views about women as artists. Renoir, for example, commented in a letter in 1888: "I think of women who are writers, lawyers and politicians as monsters, mere freaks…the woman artist is just ridiculous."[48]   Puvis de Chavannes was also unsupportive of

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[45] Dawkins, 86. The details of Valadon's bohemian life in Montmartre are often debated for their veracity. Part of the problem stemmed from biographies published after her death which emphasized her eroticism and scandalous lifestyle. As well, as John Storm has noted, she did not keep a diary or journal, and the memories of her aging contemporaries also had its difficulties. See Storm, *The Valadon Drama*, 13-16.
[46] Rose, 55.
[47] Valadon, Adolphe Tabarant, "Suzanne Valadon et ses souvenirs de modèle," *Bulletin de la Vie Artistique* (Paris, December 1921), in Rose, 43.
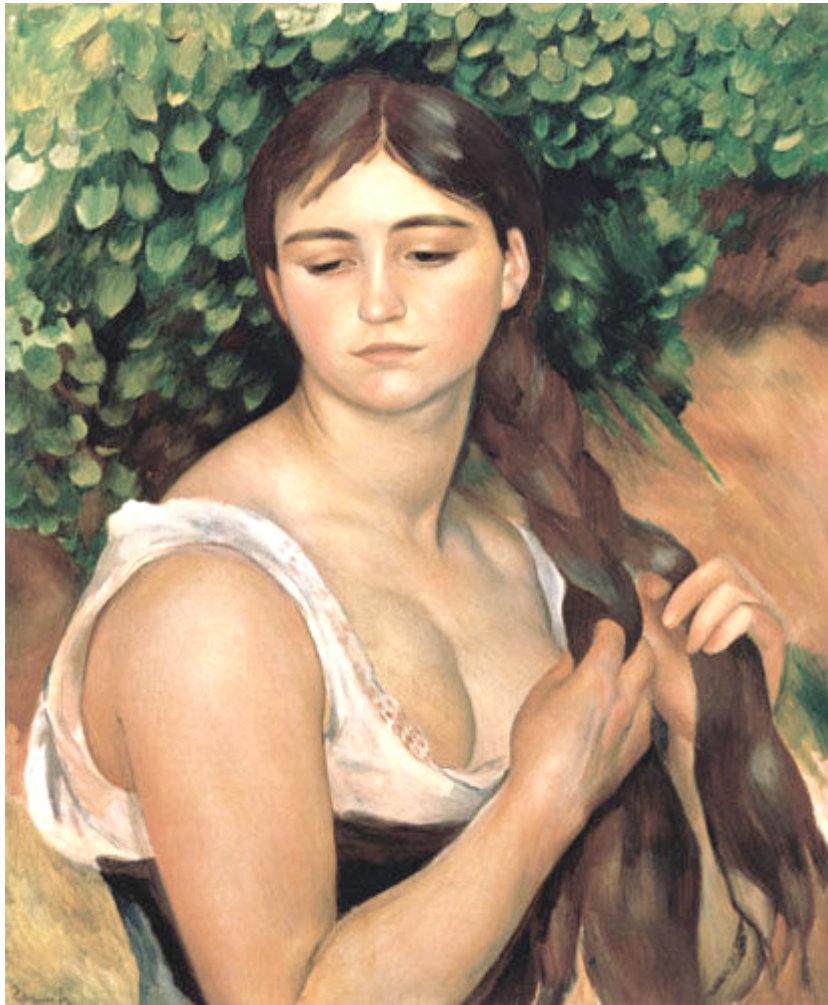[48] Auguste Renoir to Philippe Burty, Paris, 8 May 1888, in Rose, 60.

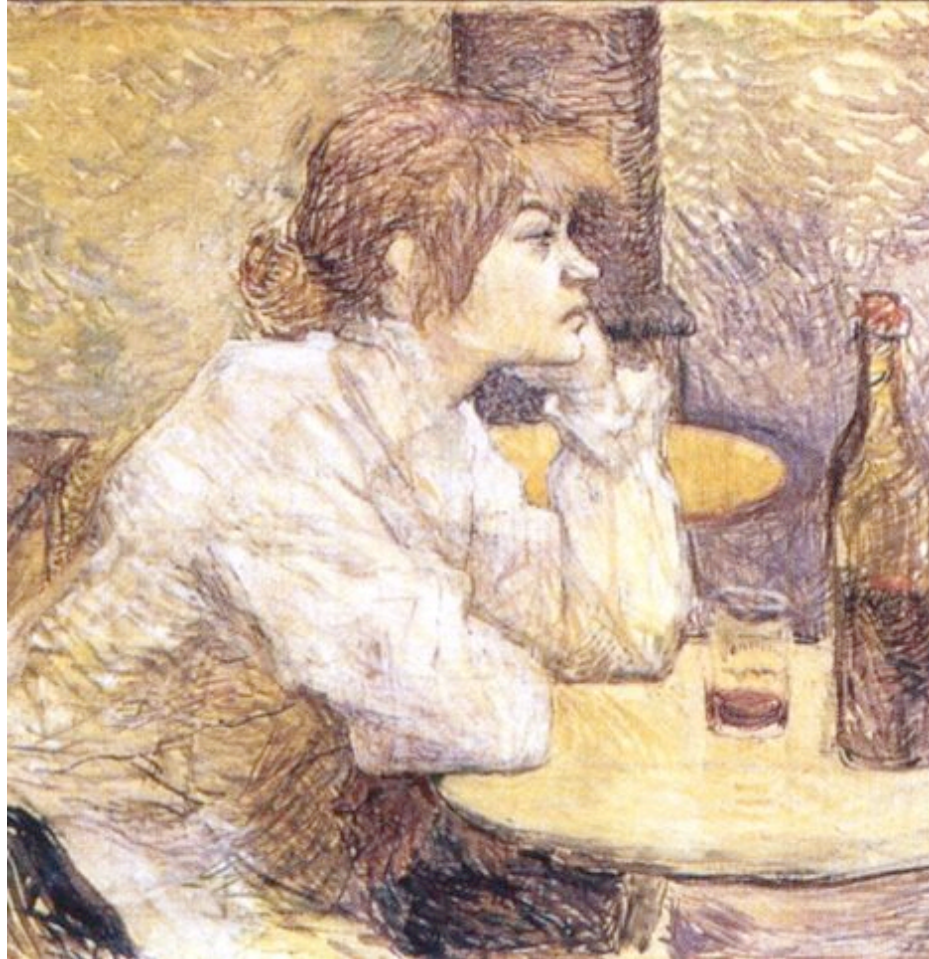Figure 18: Auguste Renoir, *La Natte*, 1887. Oil on canvas. 57 x 47 cm. Museum Langmatt, Baden.

Figure 19: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *The Hangover*, 1887-89. Oil on canvas. 49.05 x 53.34 cm. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.

Valadon's work; when she approached him to sponsor her work to the Société Nationale, he reportedly scoffed and chastised her for her lack of training and apprenticeship.[49]

However, Valadon did make some key artistic allies in Paris, and she gradually became part of a circle of artists, intellectuals, and writers who, like her, frequented the cafés and cabarets of Montmartre, particularly the Chat Noir and the Lapin-Agile. Toulouse-Lautrec was impressed by her early drawings, and arranged a meeting for her with Degas. He, in turn, was also intrigued by Valadon's raw talent, particularly for someone with no formal training, and became her mentor and most important colleague during the early years of her career. Valadon benefited from Degas's advice, guidance, and fame, and although most biographers have noted that she did not model for him, Fernande Olivier, Picasso's partner at the turn of the century, recalled her visit to Degas's studio in 1904:

> I visited Degas's studio with Benedetta Canals, who used to model for him. He's not painting at the moment, but is working on small statuettes from his model S.V. [Suzanne Valadon] I wouldn't be his type as a model. He's a strange old man, with a tough, sarcastic quality that comes from his strength, and a kindness that comes from his humility.[50]

Regardless of whether she modelled for him or not, Valadon's relationship with Degas was built on a respect for her work as an artist.[51] He wrote several letters to her during the late 1880s, addressed to "terrible Maria," which reveal his admiration for her art: "Sunday. My dear Maria. Your letter arrived punctually, as always, along with the other serious and sealed letters… From time to time, in my dining room, I look at your drawing

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[49] Rose, 109.

[50] Fernande Olivier, September 1904, in *Loving Picasso: The Private Journal of Fernande Olivier*, Christine Baker and Michael Raeburn, trans. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2001), 146.

[51] Valadon adopted the name Suzanne from Toulouse-Lautrec. He joked that she should call herself Susanna after the character from the Apocrypha who is lusted after by old men, a situation not unlike that between Degas and Valadon, Lautrec thought falsely. See Rose, 86.

in red pencil, that is always hung there; and I always say to myself: 'this devil Maria has the genius of drawing.' Why don't you show me more? …".[52] Valadon's art connections and life in Montmartre made her situation unique among women artists, and gave her access to a world that was closed to most women involved in the arts at the *fin de siècle*. These contacts certainly helped her career, and placed her in the company of artists who saw her talent, not only her sex. In fact, during the early years of her artistic development, Valadon herself disliked the idea of women artists exhibiting separately from men, and distanced herself from groups like the *Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs*, who, in her opinion, pursued an agenda of feminine art. As June Rose has noted, Valadon described a "hint of misogyny" running through her work, which she claimed came from Degas's influence.[53]

Valadon continued her development as an artist, but was forced to return to modelling when she became pregnant in 1883, at the age of eighteen.[54] Her son Maurice was born at Christmas, and Valadon's mother helped take care of the baby while Valadon worked, but her pregnancy and nursing had reduced the amount of modelling she could take during the final months.[55] After the birth of her son, Valadon was able to return to modelling and her art, but correspondence written to her half-sister during this time reveal

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[52] Degas, in Robert Rey, *Suzanne Valadon, 28 reproductions de peintures et dessins précédées d'une étude critique* (Paris: Éditions de la "Nouvelle Revue franaise," 1922), 8-9.

[53] "Suzanne Valadon par elle-même," *Prométhée*, (Paris, March 1939), in Rose, 230.

[54] There was, and continues to be, much speculation over who fathered Valadon's child. She had several lovers at this time, one of whom was the Spanish artist Miguel Utrillo. The story often recounted by biographers notes that when Utrillo asked Valadon who the father might be, Valadon responded, "I don't know whether the little fellow is the work of Puvis de Chavannes or Renoir…", to which Utrillo replied, "Well, I would be honored to sign my name to the work of either of those fine artists." Indeed, it was possible that Utrillo himself was the father, and he officially adopted Maurice in 1891. Thérèse Diamand-Rosinsky has noted that Valadon, her son, and mother moved from a small studio to a three-room apartment not long after Maurice was born, which she believes was financed by Miguel Utrillo, her only lover of financial means at the time. See Rose, 93-94; Storm, 93-95; Thérèse Diamand-Rosinsky, "Suzanne Valadon's many identities: Marie-Clémentine, 'Biqui,' or 'Terrible Maria'?," in *Suzanne Valadon,* Fondation Pierre Gianadda, 40-41.

[55] Thérèse Diamand Rosinsky, *Suzanne Valadon*, 18.

Valadon's poor health and financial struggles in Paris – she wrote thank-you letters for parcels of food and household provisions, and commented on the cold and her frequent illnesses.[56] Maurice was also a source of considerable concern – in 1891, a psychiatrist diagnosed him with mental debility, but Valadon refused to place him in an institution, preferring to treat him herself with therapeutic painting.[57] Despite these difficulties, Valadon's dramatic personal life continued. In the early 1890s, she had a brief affair with the musician Eric Satie, and in 1895, she married Paul Mousis, a stockbroker. He was practical, monied, and their relationship afforded Valadon the freedom to once again give up modelling and work full time on her own art.[58] Mousis rented her a studio in Paris, and moved the family to a village north of the city – Valadon now spent her weeks in Paris and her weekends in the country. Rose has noted that neither her mother Madeleine nor her son Maurice were happy with this new arrangement, and they felt isolated, forgotten, and lonely in the small village of Pierrefitte.[59] For Valadon, it was a comfortable lifestyle that allowed her time to dedicate herself to her work, but also required her to manage a busy, bourgeois household of servants and guests.

It was also during these years of the *fin de siècle* that Valadon's artistic career began to flourish.[60] Her drawings incorporated some of the techniques she had learned from her colleagues – Lautrec's simplified drawing and heavy black outline, and Degas's "penetrating and unsentimental eye."[61] But it was her approach to the nude that captured

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[56] Rose, 102-104.
[57] Ibid, 93-94.
[58] Rosinsky, 18; Rose, 106-08.
[59] Rose, 113.
[60] Degas promoted her work, and helped draw the attention of art dealers and shops. Over the years, Degas himself bought twenty-six of Valadon's drawings and etchings. See Rose, 88. In 1894, various galleries in Paris, including *Le Barc de Boutteville* and *Le Veel* began to carry Valadon's drawings, and she exhibited some of her etchings in 1897. See Rosinsky in, *Suzanne Valadon*, 45.
[61] Rose, 95.

the attention of the art community, and was noted for its unorthodox and original style. Valadon became famous, some said notorious, for her unique and unusual representations of the nude figure, which as we have seen, was a subject traditionally reserved for male artists.[62] Art critics wrote that she "tortured" the academy with her nudes – their "ugly anatomy" possessed a sense of "fiendish sensual pleasure."[63] As one critic wrote: "[Valadon] always paints with the same intense talent […] but with such rage!"[64] Others noted that she painted with a "severe realism,"[65] and an "almost masculine force."[66] Contemporaries felt that Valadon painted and sketched "like a man," a statement that was not only connected to her choice of subject matter, but also to the sense of aggression she applied to her colour, line, and form.[67] Valadon's work as a model was important to her choice of subject matter – it gave her the training, knowledge, and the freedom to paint the nude figure free from the limitations of feminine propriety that was often found in the art of women from the upper classes.[68] In many ways, Valadon's experience with modelling was both limiting and yet empowering for her work as an artist – her connection to working-class Montmartre precluded her from a traditional art education, but at the same time, her access to the world of modelling was critical to the formation of

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[62] As Yeldham has pointed out, women were not allowed to study from the nude figure at the Royal Academy in London until 1903 and at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* until 1900, which was the mark of a true art education. Yeldham, *Women Artists in Nineteenth-Century France and England*.

[63] Adolphe Basler, *Suzanne Valadon, Collection "Les Artistes Nouveaux,"* Ed. George Besson (Paris : G. Crès, 1929), 11.

[64] André Salmon, *Montjoie*, décembre 1913, as cited in Robert Rey, *Suzanne Valadon: Les Peintres français nouveaux, no.14* (Paris : Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue française, 1922), 14-15.

[65] Louis Vauxcelles, "Exposition Suzanne Valadon," Galerie de l'Elysée, Paris, in Dossier Valadon, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris.

[66] Desmulie-Ennesch, "Bruxelles – Exposition de Suzanne Valadon," *Minerva*, 24 February 1932, in Dossier Valadon, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.

[67] Patricia Mathews has argued that this characterization of Valadon's work was an attempt by male critics, who were "ill-equipped" to deal with the strength and power of her work, to label and force her "...into categories which helped formulate and sustain masculine creative hegemony." Patricia Mathews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 211.

[68] Dawkins, 88-90.

her artistic style, aesthetic, and subject matter, and gave her a unique and unusual vantage point from which to view and participate in the Parisian art world.[69]

Valadon used this myriad of experiences and influences to create images that shocked and enthralled the art establishment, such as with her 1909 painting entitled *Neither Black nor White* or *After the Bath*. (Figure 20) The nudity of the women in the image is at first confrontational. The thickness and heaviness of their limbs, hands, and breasts, as well as their strong faces and posture, underscore a feeling of masculinity.[70] Their skin is mottled and discoloured in places, as one might truly look after emerging from a hot bath. Their hands are red and manly, and their poses do not conform to those of the traditional reclining nude. Their faces are strong and clear, and do not possess features of delicate femininity. Both figures appear to possess their bodies with strength and self-assurance, and do not engage with the viewer. This is one way in which Valadon is able to remove the sense of voyeurism and sexuality from the painting – although it is a depiction of women drying themselves after a bath, they appear oblivious or ambivalent to the gaze of the viewer, which gives them a sense of power, agency and control over their bodies.[71]

However, in Valadon's attempt to create a female nude that is self-possessed, she also infused these figures with odd and unsettling characteristics. The women appear uncomfortable and awkward in their poses. This is particularly true of the figure on the left, who is slumped over the cushions or bed behind her. By using a flattened

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[69] Mathews, *Passionate Discontent*, 179.
[70] Rosinsky, 77-79.
[71] In reference to another painting, Betterton has argued that Valadon's distortion of perspective is a technique used to "disrupt the continuity between the viewer and the viewed," as it offers no ideal or comfortable position for gazing upon the nude figure. Rosemary Betterton, "How do women look? The female nude in the work of Suzanne Valadon," in *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*, Rosemary Betterton, ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 229.
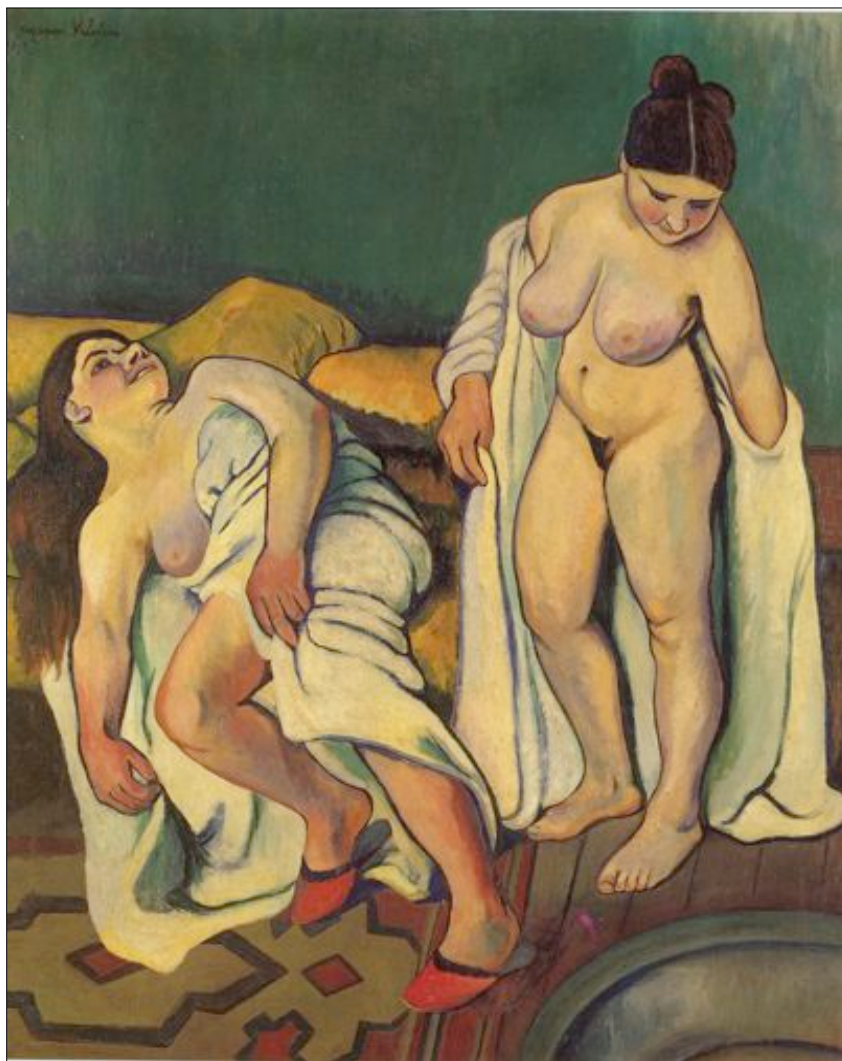
Figure 20: Suzanne Valadon, *Ni blanc ni noir, ou Après le bain*, 1909. Oil on cardboard. 101 x 82 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. © Estate of Suzanne Valadon / SODRAC (2008)

perspective, Valadon creates a sense that this woman is somehow suspended, or in danger of sliding right out of the picture. Neither woman interacts with or even looks at her fellow bather, which creates an odd air of isolation and separation in the painting, despite the intimacy of their actions and their proximity to each other. Each figure seems lost or fixed in her own personal space, as if disconnected from the scene and perhaps even from her body, which is stiff, static, and devoid of movement. The masculinity of their bodies and faces also has an unsettling effect – it is true that it disrupts the logic of the traditionally male sexual gaze, but it also makes these women particularly unattractive and disturbing, even ugly.[72] Her image of these nude women is fraught with ambiguity – they are both masculine and feminine, powerful and strong, and yet awkward and detached from their bodies. By eliminating the sexual voyeurism from the painting, Valadon is able to create a profoundly personal and reflective image in *After the Bath*, but it is simultaneously unsettling, and strange to view. Although she attempts to invest her female nudes with agency and a stark artistic realism, the actual visual effect is to make a body that looks profoundly unstable and uncertain.

Valadon echoed these conflicted representations of the human body in her sketches of children, particularly those of her son Maurice. While her depictions of the female body stand as a portrayal of the complexities and inconsistencies of womanhood and the challenge of painting a nude woman who is truly in possession of her body, Valadon's sketches of her son illuminate the difficulties of life as a woman artist and as a mother in late-nineteenth century Paris. Unlike children painted by women artists such as

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[72] Elizabeth Kahn has argued that by eliminating the sexual element from her nudes, Valadon actually "denies" these women the right to their own sense of pleasure, and "blocks their negotiation with the erotic." Elizabeth Louise Kahn, *Marie Laurencin: Une femme inadaptée in Feminist Histories of Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 103.

Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Mary Cassatt, who are depicted at robust play or in loving embrace with their mothers, Valadon's portraits of children challenged the traditional, warm gaze of a mother. Her son Maurice's "skinny body and air of suffering" evoked empathy in her,[73] and her sketches of him demonstrate her interest in capturing the often uncomfortable truths of his life. As Rosinsky has noted: "Valadon's art and work are inseparable. […] It was her daily life – the familiar faces of her family and friends, the gardens and landscapes of her neighbourhood – that she retraced for her viewers."[74] Valadon used a powerful and blunt realism to show things as they were – "One should never put suffering in drawings, but all the same one has nothing without pain. Art (is here) to eternalize this life that we hate."[75] As a single parent, Valadon certainly had to deal with pain and difficulty, as she worked to provide for her son while trying to develop her artistic career, and her images of Maurice captured the rigours and trials of their lives in Montmartre at this time.

Indeed, when looking at her sketch of Maurice from 1894, *Maurice Utrillo enfant, nu, debout, jouant du pied avec une cuvette*, (Figure 21), these trials are evident. Valadon draws her son isolated, alone, and naked. He is placed in a cold, empty, and lonely room, and is separated from his mother. His body is thin and frail, and his arms and legs are particularly weak, set in stark contrast to his over-sized hands. He plays forlornly with a pot on the ground, and is removed from the cosy domestic scene that typically acted as the backdrop for children in paintings. His gaze is downcast and removed from the viewer, and exudes feelings of profound sadness, dislocation, and neglect. Like the

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[73] Florent Fels, *L'Art vivant de 1900 à nos jours,* vol. 2, Geneva, 1950, in Rose, 87.
[74] Rosinsky, 12.
[75] *Suzanne Valadon ou l'Absolu*, Archives of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, CNAC Georges Pompidou, Paris, in Rosinsky, 25.

Figure 21: Suzanne Valadon, *Maurice Utrillo enfant, nu, debout, jouant du pied avec une cuvette*, 1894. Pencil on paper. 41 x 23 cm. Private collection. © Estate of Suzanne Valadon / SODRAC (2008).

women in *After the Bath*, Maurice looks awkward and uncomfortable in his body, as he twists himself in unusual ways. Similarly, in *Fillette nue assise sur le sol, les jambes allongées* (1894), Valadon presents a young girl who is equally isolated, naked, sickly, and almost frozen in place upon a cold and sparse floor. (Figure 22) As with *Maurice Utrillo*, her thin body is sickly while her hands are unnaturally large and disfigured. Her gaze is transfixed, yet because of the empty room around her, she appears to be looking out into nothingness. There is something disturbing about the nudity of both of these children – they are without their mothers and it feels inappropriate to gaze upon their young bodies.

In images such as these, Rosinsky has argued that Valadon explored the physical dejection, despair, and poor health of the child's body, which was more profound because she placed this relentless gaze upon her own son.[76] In doing this, Rosinsky notes that Valadon chose "her role as artist over that of mother."[77] However, as with her images of the female nude, Valadon infuses her sketches of the child's body with much more than a simple critique of her life as a single mother. Her drawing of Maurice also captures themes of tenderness and intimacy, and Valadon is not afraid of revealing her son's private and personal identity. She captures this intimacy and quiet reflection in his face, which appears gentle and soft against his stark and misshapen body. Maurice's slender nose and delicate features communicate a soft air of introspection, which works against the ugliness of his body. In this way, Valadon's love and affection for her son still resonate in her sad sketch, and is a powerfully intimate portrait as seen through the eyes of a mother who was not afraid to explore her child's humanity and individuality. These

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[76] Rosinsky, 13.
[77] Rosinsky, 33.

Figure 22: Suzanne Valadon, *Fillette nue assise sur le sol, les jambes allongées*, 1894. Charcoal and white gouache on paper. 22.7 x 28.9 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. © Estate of Suzanne Valadon / SODRAC (2008).

elements of her sketch indicate that Valadon was not "choosing" her role as artist over that of mother, but tried to combine both aspects of her identity into her son's portrait, which result in a curious tension and ambiguity. On the one hand, she had the eye of an unflinching artist, who did not shy away from depicting the realities of the harsh and difficult life she shared with her son, but on the other, she approached Maurice with the tender eyes of a mother, who sought to capture the delicate and youthful spirit of her son. It is this combination of forces that emerge in Maurice's body, and create an unusual and ambiguous image. Valadon's unique portrayal of children demonstrate both the difficulties of single motherhood in Paris, but also the liberating ability to portray the truths of this experience. By casting her harsh and yet loving gaze upon the body of her son, Valadon was able not only to re-articulate and re-evaluate the traditional and private role of motherhood, but cast the challenges she experienced as both a mother, and an artist, in a decidedly new light.

As Valadon's talent and career developed, she would continue to paint images that pushed conventional artistic themes, but it was her work with the nude body, particularly that of her son, completed during the years of the *fin de siècle*, that truly captured her innovative abilities as an artist. Shortly after her sketches of Maurice, in 1895, Valadon married Mousis, and although her marriage brought some well-needed economic stability into their lives, Valadon continued to have a difficult relationship with her son. He had trouble with alcohol from an early age, got into fights, and lost jobs because of his outbursts and belligerence – he was even institutionalized briefly after attacking his mother in a drunken rage.[78] In 1901, Maurice was diagnosed with schizophrenia and upon the suggestion of a local physician, Valadon taught her son to paint as a form of

[78] Rose, 127.

therapy.[79]   He showed great talent, and would become a famous artist in his own right, but painting did little to assuage his alcoholism or his mental condition. Despite her comfortable life in the country, Valadon was still drawn to the bohemian world of Montmartre and continued to paint and exhibit in the city. In 1909, she began an affair with André Utter, who was a friend of her son's. Valadon divorced Mousis and made her way back to the streets and cafés of Montmartre that she loved, and set up a studio with Utter and her son.   Together, they became the subject of much gossip in the neighbourhood, and were known as the "trinité maudite" ("terrible trio").[80]   Fernande Olivier recounted seeing them together:

> He [Utter] was just beginning to paint, with Suzanne Valadon encouraging
> and tutoring him. As they took their sentimental strolls along the *Butte*,
> they would occasionally come across [Maurice] Utrillo, drunk and asleep
> against a stone in a little side-street near the Sacré-Coeur; and Suzanne,
> assuming the role of vigilant mother, would take him home with her...[81]

Eventually, the love and care that Valadon bestowed upon her son would end in sorrow. Maurice Utrillo's own artistic career flourished during the 1920s and 30s, and provided the family with a generous income, but when he married in 1935, his wife began to manage his artistic output and his money. As Rosinsky has noted, Valadon was left "...with no money and a broken heart."[82]   She died two years later of a stroke, and although many important figures in the Parisian art world attended her funeral, including

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[79] Rosinsky, *Suzanne Valadon*, 45.
[80] Rose, 139.
[81] Fernande Olivier, *Picasso and his Friends*, Jane Miller, trans. (London: Heinemann, 1964) first published in 1933, 80-81.
[82] Rosinsky, *Suzanne Valadon*, 53.

Picasso, and critics wrote that Montmartre was "in mourning,"[83] her son was noticeably absent from the ceremony.[84]

In one of the few documents Suzanne Valadon left behind, which were to be part of an autobiography she was writing entitled *Suzanne Valadon ou l'Absolu*, she described the powerful way in which she approached her art – "I drew madly for when I wouldn't be able to see any more. I have eyes at the ends of my fingers."[85] This sense of immediacy speaks to the strength and unrelenting gaze that Valadon applied to her subject matter. This was particularly true of her images of the body, which broke with existing artistic norms of painting from the nude figure. She abandoned a refined use of colour and line in favour of an intense and shocking colour palette, and positioned her subjects in moments of awkward introspection or uncomfortable movement. The effect of these techniques brought a stark realism and power to Valadon's art, which critics and scholars of the time, and since, have argued was unique among female and male artists at the turn of the twentieth century. Her images of the body are infused with agency and strength, but also appear lonely, isolated, and disconnected from themselves, which captured the inconsistencies, but also the truths, of her experiences as an artist, woman, and mother.

Romaine Brooks

One year after Valadon painted *After the Bath*, with its awkward and unusual nudes, another woman artist in Paris was also breaking with conventional and gendered artistic practices of the day and creating innovative images of the female body. Romaine Brooks

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[83] Francis Carco, "Montmartre en deuil," *Journal,* 23 April, 1938, in Dossier Valadon, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.
[84] June Rose has noted that Utrillo was "frantic and almost insane with grief," and kept from attending the funeral by his wife Lucie. Rose, 247.
[85] Valadon, *Suzanne Valadon ou l'Absolu*, in Mary Ann Caws, *Glorious Eccentrics: Modernist Women Painting and Writing* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

(1874-1970), an American expatriate living in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, held her first solo exhibition at the prestigious Galéries Durand-Ruel in 1910, which created a stir among the Parisian art community.[86] As Meryle Secrest, one of Brooks's principal biographers, has noted: "The exhibition established her overnight as an artist of the first rank. A total unknown, she had arrived fully formed on the French scene, been measured against the most rigorous artistic standards of the day, and found worthy."[87] Indeed, reviewers had interesting things to say about Brooks and her work – some compared her paintings to those of Whistler and Manet,[88] and noted that they were "delicate," "refined," and "works of the first rank."[89] A reviewer for *Studio* wrote that Brooks "...has a taste for sweet and tender harmonies, which give her palette great subtlety,"[90] while Raymond Bouyer, writing for the *Bulletin de l'Art ancien et moderne* noted that she "seem[s] to cherish the unusual and strange,"[91] and a reviewer for *L'Art et les artistes* commented that her images were "...a bit contemptuous."[92] The influential art critic Claude Roger-Marx wrote the preface to the exhibit's catalogue, and commented that Brooks possessed the "cult of truth, fervent [and] harsh," and Guillaume Apollinaire concluded that she "…paints with firmness but also with sadness, yes, really too much

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[86] The Durand-Ruel family had galleries in Paris and London, and exhibited and purchased the work of Monet, Renoir, Degas, Pissaro, and Cassatt. As Françoise Werner has pointed out, their Paris gallery was one of the most influential in the city at this time, and they did not need to risk their international reputation on a "young unknown American woman;" thus, Brooks' solo exhibit here was an important step in her artistic career. See Françoise Werner, *Romaine Brooks* (Paris: Plon, 1990), 184.

[87] Meryle Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 193.

[88] Raymond Bouyer, *Bulletin de l'Art ancien et moderne* (Paris, 21 May 1910), 167; *L'Art et les artistes* (Paris, June 1910), vol.11, 132; *The Studio*, (London, June 1910), no.50, 64. Other important reviews of this exhibit include Louis Vauxcelles, *Gil Blas* (Paris, 14 May 1910) and Robert de Montesquiou, "Cambrioleuse d'ámes," *Le Figaro* (Paris, May 1910).

[89] *The Studio*, 64.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Bouyer, *Bulletin de l'Art ancien et moderne*, 167.

[92] *L'Art et les artistes*, 132.

sadness."[93] These divergent reviews reflect the complexities at work in the group of thirteen studies of women that Brooks submitted for exhibition, shortly after her arrival in Paris. Although the exhibit was an undeniable success, and brought her the attention of "tout Paris," Brooks recalled the experience very differently in the pages of her memoirs:

> I was very elated while arranging my exhibition. I had all the red-plush
> walls covered over with a simple beize stuff and then hung up my pictures
> to their best decorative effect. But when all was finished and I surveyed the
> array of sad, introspective figures recalling as they did my own moods, I
> had a strong revulsion of feelings. How was it possible to expose in such
> fashion one's inner self to the world? I felt no less nude than were the nudes
> on the walls. Were it possible I would have given orders then and there to have
> my paintings taken down and sent back to my studio.[94]

This recollection from the 1930s, admittedly distant from the year of the actual exhibit, indicates the emphasis Brooks placed on the intimate nature of her art, and the way it exposed her own feelings and vulnerabilities at the time. In this way, the paintings from the 1910 Durand-Ruel exhibit are a powerful collection of images that represent the early days of Brooks's career and her experiences as an artist at the start of the twentieth century.

By contrast, scholars of Brooks tend to deal with her paintings from the interwar period, which capture her full and mature style as a portraitist for Paris's lesbian elite. Brooks continued to paint and impress Parisian art society, and by the 1920s, had become a key figure in the "upper echelons of Paris's cosmopolitan lesbian society."[95] As historians and feminist scholars have noted, women who lived in or migrated to Paris and France during the interwar period enjoyed societal changes that had been brought about

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[93] Werner, *Romaine Brooks,* 185-186.
[94] Romaine Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories*, unpublished autobiography, c. 1938, 219.
[95] Tirza True Latimer, *Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 44.

by the Great War. As Tirza True Latimer has noted, "Unmarried adult women, celibates, bachelors, lesbians – in short, women without men – cut an increasingly visible figure on the urban scene. The wartime decimation of France's male citizenry threw this new populous of 'single' women into high relief."[96] Lesbians, in particular, were able to benefit from this shift in traditional gendered roles, which as Latimer notes, "released them from pre-determined schemas of femininity," and allowed them to strike out in various professional spheres, including the arts, in unique and authentic ways.[97] Brooks was part of this endeavour, and by the 1920s, she moved and worked among Paris's intellectual elite, which was loosely defined around the literary salon of fellow-American, and life-long partner, Natalie Barney, and included participants such as Paul Valéry, Colette, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Rainer Maria Rilke.[98] Latimer has argued that during this period, Brooks created powerful portraits of women who boldly "look back" at the viewer, a technique which embodied both her desire to articulate and give shape to her sexual identity, and recorded the strength of the influential community in which she lived and worked.[99] Through these portraits and self-portraits, Brooks attempted "…to negotiate the boundaries of female and lesbian identity within that cultural context."[100] It was also during this period that Brooks perfected her signature aesthetic composition of bold outlines, clean lines, and a muted colour palette of greys and black, which critics

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[96] Ibid, 8. Other studies of women in France and Paris during the interwar period include Roberts, *Civilzation Without Sexes*; Dominique Desanti, *La Femme au temps des années folles* (Paris: Stock, 1985); Françoise Thébaud, *La Femme au temps de la guerre de 14* (Paris: Stock, 1986); Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank, 1900-1940*; Andrea Weiss, *Paris was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).
[97] Latimer, 8.
[98] Weiss, 111. Studies of Barney and her relationship with Brooks include Suzanne Rodriguez, *Wild Heart: A Life, Natalie Clifford Barney and the Decadence of Literary Paris* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 2002); Diana Souhami, *Wild Girls: Paris, Sappho, and Art: The Lives and Loves of Natalie Barney and Romaine Brooks* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004).
[99] Latimer, 44-5.
[100] Joe Lucchesi, "Introduction," in Chadwick, ed., *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 8.

agreed marked her as an innovative artist, one quite apart from the *femme peintre,* a term often used in a derogatory manner as a synonym for amateur.[101]   As with Suzanne Valadon, critical responses to Brooks's work often focused on qualities typically attached to her male counterparts – her art was described as "vigourous," "cerebral," and "original."[102]

Although Brooks's later work reflects her maturity as a professional artist and as a woman in Paris, her earlier paintings, those exhibited in the Durand-Ruel gallery in 1910, reflect her early beginnings in the city, and the start of her professional career, and it is here that I want to focus my attention. In these images we can certainly see the roots of her later signature style, but, as I argue, they also contain various elements that are less clear, less certain, and filled with less of the proud assurances so evident in her later work.   In her early studies of young women and girls, we can see the curious and often disturbing ways in which Brooks assessed the female body, both as a nude figure, but also clothed and placed within interior settings. Specifically, Brooks utilized items such as dresses, veils, and screens, as well as dark colours and shading, to shield and conceal her feminine subjects, and infuse them with a sense of darkness, loneliness, and foreboding. However, like Valadon's bodies, these figures also communicate strong emotions of self-possession and power, which gives them a decidedly conflicted air. They possess themes of both display and concealment, beauty and ugliness, and even life and death, and in this way, act as bodies of ambiguity, which was connected to her unstable beginnings in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century. As Brooks wrote in her memoir: "It was as usual through the medium of work that I found relief and the disconsolate figures which I

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[101] Latimer, *Women Together / Women Apart*, 46-50.
[102] Ibid.

painted at that time clearly show the troubles that were agitating me. That such subjective paintings should have found outside appreciation came to me as a surprise. But such was the case."[103]

Romaine Brooks was born Beatrice Romaine Goddard on 1 May, 1874 in a Roman hotel.[104] Her mother was Ella Waterman Goddard, whose father, Isaac S. Waterman Jr., made his fortune in mining and settled in Philadelphia in the 1870s; her father, Major Harry Goddard, descended from a famous Providence furniture maker.[105] Her parents separated shortly after Brooks's birth, and Ella, "capricious and self-obsessed," took Romaine and her older siblings, sister Mary Aimée and brother Henry St. Mar, to Europe, where she "…began the uneasy pilgrimage from one European grand hotel to another."[106] By her own recollection, Brooks's childhood was very difficult – her mother was increasingly erratic and prone to irrational behaviour, and her brother, St. Mar, was also emotionally unstable. Brooks wrote about this painful time in an unpublished autobiography, aptly entitled *No Pleasant Memories*,[107] in which she chronicled her abusive relationship with her mother, and often accompanied her reflections with sad and sparse drawings:

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[103] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories*, 219.

[104] Critical and biographical studies of Romaine Brooks include Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks* (1974); Werner, *Romaine Brooks*; Chadwick, ed., *Amazons in the Drawing Room*; Latimer, *Women Together / Women Apart*; Souhami, *Wild Girls*; Blandine Chavanne and Bruno Gaudichon, eds. *Romaine Brooks, 1874-1970* (Poitiers: Musée Ste. Croix, 1987); Adelyn D. Breeskin, *Romaine Brooks in the National Museum of American Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971); *Romaine Brooks: Portraits, Tableaux, Dessins* (New York: Arno Press, 1975); Tirza True Latimer, "Romaine Brooks and the Future of Sapphic Modernity," in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, Laura Doan and Jane Garrity, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Bridget Elliott, "Housing the Work: Women Artists, Modernism and the *maison d'artiste*: Eileen Gray, Romaine Brooks and Gluck," in *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1880-1935: The Gender of Ornament*, Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland, eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

[105] Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 15-17.

[106] Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 11.

[107] Romaine Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories*, unpublished autobiography, c. 1938, National Collection of Fine Arts Research Material on Romaine Brooks, 1874-1970, Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art, Washington D.C., microfilm reel no. 5134.

> On looking back at this time, I see my mother as a crazy ring-master directing her own small and private circus. In her opinion, evidently, life in this world was beyond contempt, but there being no immediate escape either for herself or her son, it was expedient that everyone should be put through their paces as uncomfortably as possible. Her place was in the centre of the ring madly cracking a whip an bringing despotic energy to quicken the strides.[108]

At the age of six, Brooks's mother abandoned her in the care of a washerwoman in New York; she was rescued by Ella's family, and placed in a New Jersey boarding school. Later, after returning to the care of her mother, Brooks spent time at a convent school in Genoa, Italy, and at Mademoiselle Tavan's Private Finishing School for Young Ladies in Geneva.[109] After two years in Geneva, at the age of nineteen, Brooks's mother agreed to allow her to complete her education in Paris, where she could study art and music, and sent her to board with the Givends, who prepared girls of good families for a singing career.[110] Despite Brooks's money and influential family, her childhood and youth were spent in almost constant transit, shipped from one school to the next, and the time she did spend with her mother and St. Mar was conflict-ridden.

As Chadwick has noted, in Paris in 1893, at the age of nineteen, Brooks was able to "…gradually liberate herself from the pernicious influence of her mother's rage and increasing preoccupation with 'astral spheres,'" a spiritual practice she began using in an effort to reverse her son's diminishing mental state.[111] In 1895, she decided to leave the Givend household without telling her mother, and attempted to make her way on her own in Paris. She had saved 1,000 francs, 500 of which her mother had sent her to buy a new dress, and was able to rent a small garret in the eighteenth arrondissement of Montmartre,

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[108] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories*, 38.
[109] Secrest, 76-79.
[110] Ibid, 79.
[111] Chadwick, 15.

which as we have seen, was the natural destination for those inclined towards a life in the arts. As a young woman from a family of wealth and means, Brooks was perhaps less equipped to manage independent life, but her solitary childhood had taught her how to take care of herself and rely on her own resources.[112]   She recalled this experience as "escape" in her memoir:

> My choice of a small and sparsely furnished room on a top floor proved unjudicious, for the terrific din that mounted from the Avenue extended far into the night and began again in the early hours of the morning; and when the window was closed there filtered through the cracks of the door unpleasant odours emanating from a lavatory with its unsanitary, dirty hole in the floor. But these discomforts, and many others, were to be cheerfully accepted as part of the game for Freedom.[113]

Despite these difficulties, Brooks was also able to take advantage of the atmosphere among young women in Paris, who, as Chadwick has described it, were "…fleeing the stifling world of Victorian domesticity in search of education and a degree of social freedom."[114] Brooks followed a similar path to that of the other women considered thus far – she took up work as an artist's model, sang briefly in a cabaret, and joined a cycling club that met in the Bois de Boulogne.[115] She was able to conceal her true location from her mother by passing news through her sister that she had gone to London to become a governess, and through her mother's doctor, was able to communicate her hope for a small living allowance. Her mother Ella finally capitulated in September of 1895, and sent her reply through the family physician:

The letter you sent to America was forwarded to me. I wish you to understand

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[112] Secrest, 83.
[113] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories*, 112.
[114] Chadwick, 15.
[115] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories*, 113-114; 121-123.

that my executors have no authority to pay out my money to you or to anyone without my consent. Considering the manner in which you ran away you have nullified even a right to consanguinity. I am much amused at your logic – to earn your own living independently of me and yet ask for my money to do so. However as I know it is not so easy to set the Thames on fire as you had supposed I enclose you Frs. 300 – which you must promptly acknowledge to me – particularly if you wish me to assist you in the future.[116]

With her monthly allowance of 300 francs, Brooks's income was well above that of a working-class Parisian woman, who averaged about 900 francs a year at this time, but it was still well below the lifestyle to which she had become accustomed.[117] With her basic income secured, Brooks contemplated her next step. Although she had a keen interest in art and drawing, she had not received any formal training in this regard, and was reluctant to apply for art classes, in case her mother should suddenly revoke her allowance.[118] Towards the end of 1896, Brooks travelled to Rome, where she was accepted and studied art free of charge at the La Scuola Nazionale, and joined a sketch class that met every night at the Circulo Artistico. Although she was the only woman in her class at the Scuola, and often went without food for lack of money, she persevered.[119] After sojourning in Rome and Capri, Brooks returned to Paris in 1899, and enrolled in the Académie Colarossi for the fall term with money from the sale of her first paintings. She took three classes a day, but the cost of her courses quickly ate into her allowance and often left her without enough for food or warm clothing. Nevertheless, with the occasional help of some classmates,[120] Brooks managed to continue her studies at the Colarossi, the atelier that had trained Camille Claudel in the 1880s.

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[116] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories* 120.
[117] See chapter 3, 105 n.113, and Stewart, *Women, Work, and the French State,* 26-28.
[118] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories,* 136.
[119] Secrest, 106-109.
[120] Secrest, 136.

In 1901, Brooks's brother St. Mar died, quickly followed in 1902 by her mother, Ella. This marked a profound change in Brooks's life – as she wrote in her memoir, "From possessing almost nothing, I now had six flats in Nice alone, another in Monte Carlo, one in Dieppe, an unfurnished one in Paris and a chateau near Mentone…".[121] The deaths of her mother and brother had left her with an immense inheritance – Brooks was now a very wealthy woman. She spent a few years between Capri and London, where she befriended fellow artists, including Augustus John, Gwen John's brother, and continued to develop her painting. She also had a brief, one-year marriage to John Ellingham Brooks, a friend and poet, with the idea that as a married couple, they could feign the appearance of heterosexual propriety in exchange for an independent life.[122] When Brooks finally returned permanently to Paris in 1905, she bought a grand apartment in the sixteenth arrondissement, the city's most exclusive neighbourhood, and began her new life as a member of Paris's bourgeoisie. Her lavish home was both a site of artistic production and exhibition, and as Bridget Elliott has demonstrated, became a chic and fashionable *maison d'artiste*, in which Brooks re-created her muted artistic palette of greys and blacks in her furnishings and wall colours.[123] She also frequented literary salons and socialized with Parisian intellectuals and writers such as Colette, Proust, Valéry, and Cocteau, and developed relationships with the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio and the dancer Ida Rubenstein, and eventually, her lifelong partner, Natalie Barney, whom she met in 1915.

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[121] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories,* 205.
[122] Chadwick, 16.
[123] Elliott, "Housing the Work: Women Artists, Modernism and the *maison d'artiste*: Eileen Gray, Romaine Brooks and Gluck," in *Women Artists and the Decorative Art*, 185.

Despite Brooks's new-found economic independence and comfortable Parisian life, she developed a distant and cold attitude towards her adopted city. As Souhami has noted, Brooks "suffered" Paris, and sought refuge in the peaceful atmosphere of Capri and Fiesole whenever she could.[124] For Brooks, Paris still represented the struggle and trials of her earlier years – as Françoise Werner has commented, the city remained for her "… a symbol of a humiliating life, of duress, and of effort."[125] Later in life, she would describe Paris as a desert, "wanting in all calm, beauty, and dignity,"[126] and which made her feel like a "prisoner."[127] Brooks also had little interest in the culture of Parisian salon life, and was protective of her privacy and solitude, despite her influential relationships and connections.[128] In her memoir Brooks noted that she spent most of her time in a rented studio on the Left Bank, and that her grand apartment on Trocadero, "…became a sort of storeroom where countless invitations accumulated that I did not respond to and which represented the detestable side of my life."[129] For Brooks, living in Paris was a necessity that could accommodate her artistic dreams, and provide her with the opportunities to pursue her career; and now, with her financial independence secured, she could take advantage of these things – "… I was living in Paris solely because I wished to work in an art centre…".[130]

This knowledge of Brooks's beginnings in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, sets her exhibition at the Galéries Durand-Ruel in 1910 in an interesting context. Many of the paintings were completed when Brooks had just recently made her permanent

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[124] Souhami, 2-3.
[125] Werner, 146.
[126] Brooks, 16 May 1952, in Souhami, 138.
[127] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories,* in Werner, 212.
[128] Souhami, 2.
[129] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories,* in Werner, 177.
[130] Brooks, *No Pleasant Memories*, section entitled "Une Réputation."

move to Paris, was dealing with the residue of her painful and traumatic family life, and establishing herself in the city.[131] Although she came into her inheritance in 1902, which freed her from financial constraints, this still remained a volatile time for Brooks, and in many ways, she was like the other women we have examined thus far – struggling to find her way in Paris and its art world. Indeed, her elite contacts and social connections gave her access to the possibility of exhibiting her work at a prestigious Parisian gallery, but as we have seen, her feelings about this experience were conflicted. Brooks's relationship towards Paris was also complex. She harboured negative feelings towards the city that would come to embrace her as a talented and promising artist, based on her somewhat dismal introduction there at the *fin de siècle*. She saw it as a place of entrapment, one that had to be tolerated for the sake of her work, but from which she fled at the earliest opportunity for sojourns on the Italian coast. In the early years of the twentieth century, Brooks was at a personal and professional crossroads – the deaths of her mother and brother left her empty, but also liberated and wealthy, and her establishment in Paris after 1905 marked a new course in her life, but one that continued to present her with challenges and difficulties.

Latimer has argued that in her paintings from this period, Brooks was concerned with creating feminine figures who conformed to the gendered rules of costume, in order to demonstrate the ways in which female fashion acted as a constraint that "kept women in their place" at the *fin de siècle*.[132] She contrasts the femininity of her early female subjects with Brooks's more mature and self-assured portraits of the interwar period, which capture both her own confidence as a woman and as a lesbian, and the atmosphere

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[131] Werner and others have noted that the majority of the paintings included in the 1910 exhibit were painted between 1905 and 1908, some in Paris, and others while away from the city. See Werner, 180.
[132] Latimer, 25.

of increased mobility and freedom gained by woman during this period.[133]   While this argument rightly points out the ways in which Brooks critiques traditional femininity in her early paintings, it fails to incorporate some of the inconsistencies and complexities that are also at work in these portraits. As we have seen, the turn of twentieth century was a period of great change and flux in Brooks's professional and personal life, and for women artists in general, and it is these conflicts that emerge in her early portraits from these years. They capture themes of emptiness and vacancy – which led one critic to dub her the "Thief of Souls" – alongside powerful sentiments of strength, defiance, and self-possession, as well as beauty and ugliness, life and death.[134] In this way, Brooks's early portraits were not simple critiques of traditional heterosexual femininity, but ambiguous depictions of the female body engaged in a struggle to define itself in light of the trials and inconsistencies for women at the turn of the twentieth century.

Among the paintings in the 1910 exhibit was *La Jaquette Rouge* (The Red Jacket), a study of a nude girl waiting behind a screen at the doctor's office.[135] In an interview conducted in 1966, Brooks commented that in this image she had decided to paint "a poor, small creature; it was a small model who died; she was very sick." [136] (Figure 23) Joe Lucchesi has argued that the tension between the girl's frailty and her nudity acts as a morbid symbol of "fin-de-siècle fantasies that linked female sexuality with death;"[137] however, Brooks herself commented later in life that, "…it was not erotic at all, it was a

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[133] Ibid.

[134] Robert de Montesquiou, "Cambrioleurs d'ames," *Le Figaro,* May 1910, press clipping in Research Material on Romaine Brooks, reel 5134.

[135] Secrest, 193-4.

[136] Interview, Romaine Brooks - Michel Desbruères (1966-1967), in Blandine Chavanne and Bruno Gaudichon, eds. *Romaine Brooks, 1874-1970* (Poitiers: Musée Ste. Croix, 1986), 113.

[137] Joe Lucchesi, "'An Apparition in a Black Flowing Cloak': Romaine Brooks's Portraits of Ida Rubenstein," *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 75.
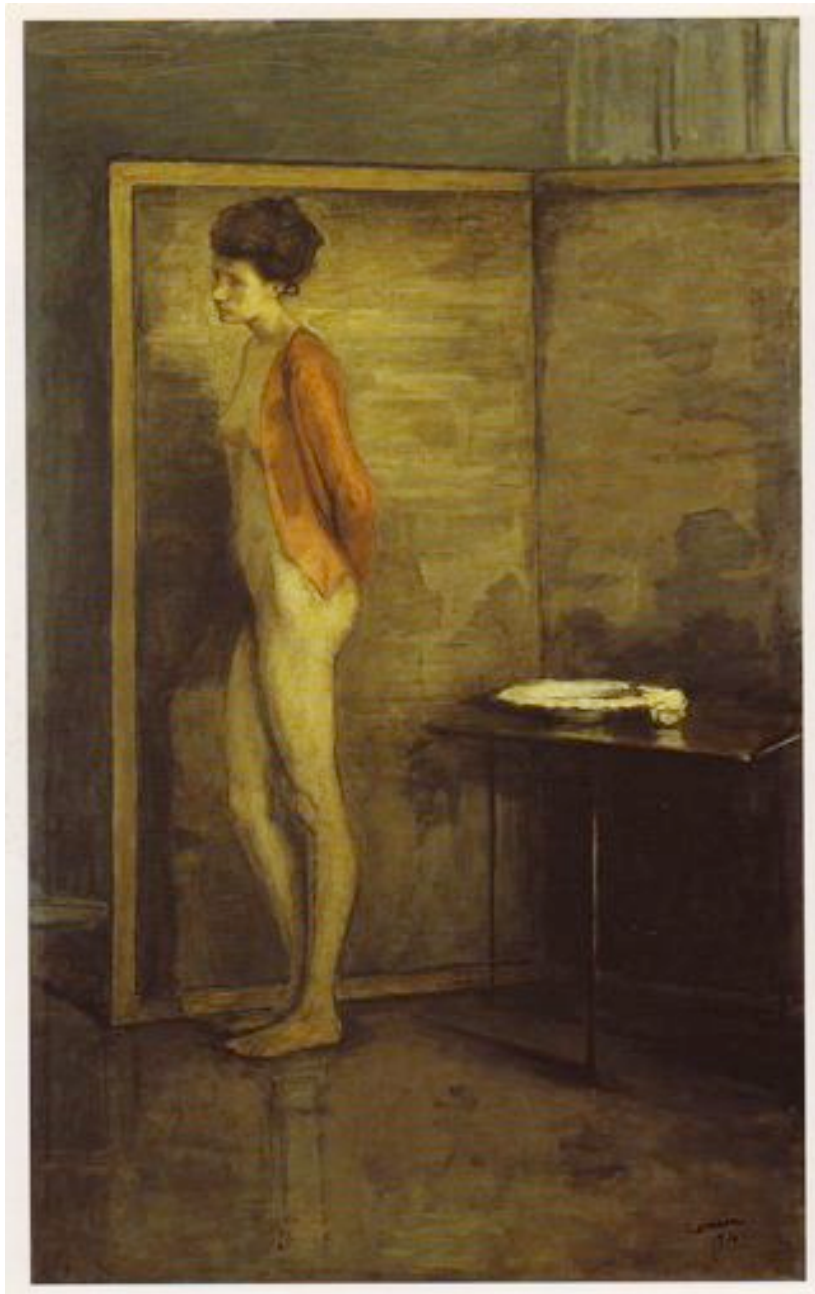
Figure 23: Romaine Brooks, *La Jaquette Rouge*, 1910. Oil on canvas. 239.4 x 148.5 cm. Smithsonian Art Museum, from Whitney Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 48.

poor young woman who was cold."[138]   Indeed, there does not appear to be much that is sexual in this portrait of a young, barely-dressed woman, who awaits her turn with the doctor.   The painting is of a dimly-lit interior, with a female figure placed in the foreground by a screen, who gazes off into the distance.   Her fixed posture and distant glance create a static atmosphere, and her pallid skin tone blends with the dingy browns and yellows of the room that surrounds her.   She seems to disappear into the gloominess, while at the same time, the screen sets her apart from the rest of the interior.   What is most remarkable about this image, is the way in which Brooks painted the young model.   By placing the solitary figure in one small item of clothing, Brooks creates a nudity that is regular, common, and devoid of sexuality.   Naked except for a small, red jacket, the figure embodies themes of display and exposure, but also communicates intimacy, vulnerability, and privateness.   In addition to these impulses, there is also something strong and clear in this portrait, despite the viewer's knowledge that the model is, in fact, quite ill.   She is in possession of her body, and does not look objectified or victimized.   She inhabits the setting with an air of calm and serenity, which is at odds with the dark and gloomy appearance of the room.   Like Suzanne Valadon, Brooks uses the nude female figure here as a way to show introspection and personal subjectivity, while also making a bold statement about the ways in which the female body could be represented.   Like the women in Valadon's *After the Bath,* Brooks infuses the figure in *La Jaquette Rouge* with a sense of agency and self-knowledge by removing the typical feminine sexuality that usually accompanied paintings of the female body.   However, the woman also appears isolated, worried, detached, and sick, which clashes with these themes of strength and self-possession.   The result is an image of a young model whose ambiguous

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[138] Interview Romaine Brooks – Michel Desbruères (1966-1967), in Chavanne and Gaudichon, 113.

body demonstrates some of the trials and difficulties of her profession, even as she works independently.

These themes are also present in some of the other paintings that Brooks created around this time, notably in *The Veil* (1907) and *La Debutante* (1910). (Figures 24 and 25)   In *The Veil* Brooks painted another anonymous young female worker, this time a concierge, whom she outfitted in one of her own dresses, along with a large hat and veil, which as Brooks noted, "…was more important than her."[139]   The hat is used in this image to both draw attention to the woman's clothing and attire, but also as a way of concealing her face. Her nose and sombre mouth are visible, but her eyes are hooded and shielded from the viewer's gaze. The theme of concealment continues with the woman's dress, which appears to trap her within its feminine and bourgeois finery, complete with parasol. She is also placed in an interior, one that echoes the composition and sparse background in *La Jaquette Rouge*, and creates a similar, unsettling atmosphere of loneliness and detachment.   The air of stillness in *The Veil* is not one of peaceful tranquillity; rather, the woman's body appears frozen and static, as she stands buried under layers of fabric against a bare wall. Yet, despite these elements of the painting, there is a similar air of defiance and self-possession in this woman. Her gaze, although shielded, communicates a profound strength that resonates outward from the heavy fabric and dark atmosphere, and meets the viewer's gaze directly. In *The Veil*, Brooks uses the woman's body, this time clothed, to create a atmosphere of concealment, gloominess, and even suffocation, alongside themes of power, agency, and self-knowledge. As in *La Jaquette Rouge*, this intermingling of contradictory themes and impulses creates an strange and unsettling ambiguity in the image. These impulses are taken to the extreme in

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[139] Interview Romaine Brooks – Michel Desbruères (1966-1967), in Chavanne and Gaudichon, 105.

Figure 24: Romaine Brooks, *Le Chapeau a fleurs* or *The Veil*, ca. 1907. Oil on canvas. 214 x 128.9 cm. Collection Lucile Audouy, Paris, from Whitney Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 46.

Figure 25: Romaine Brooks, *La Debutante* or *The Pink Dress*, 1910. Oil on canvas. 200.2 x 116.5 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, from Whitney Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 46.

La Debutante.   In this painting, another young girl is placed against a sombre, muted background, which unlike the previous two paintings, is almost entirely dark.   The girl stands frozen in place, next to a ceramic object, and gazes outward from under her hooded and heavily shadowed eyes.   She does not meet the gaze of the viewer, but stares off into the distance, which creates an eerie and disconnected atmosphere.   Her gown, feminine and pretty in its pinks and creams, is concealed by dark shadows, and has a sullied and dirty appearance. Brooks extends the dark shading of the dress to the girl's skin and face, which appear grey and lifeless, as if she exists in some liminal state between life and death, beauty and ugliness.   And as with *The Veil*, although the young woman appears trapped by the heavy fabric of her party dress and, by extension, her gendered and classed title of "debutant," she is still able to communicate strength and self-possession of her body.   She does not appear weak, submissive, or dainty, but, like the female figures in *La Jaquette Rouge* and *The Veil*, resonates a troubled, but strong energy through the darkness.

Conclusion

Both Suzanne Valadon and Romaine Brooks were artists who lived and worked well into the twentieth century. They kept their ties with Paris, and became celebrated artists who were known for their daring and compelling depictions of the human body. As I have demonstrated, this form of expression was intimately connected to their experiences as women and as professionals living in Paris at the *fin de siècle*.   Although both women would come to enjoy the fruits of their labours, during the early stages of their careers, both were engaged in a struggle to emerge and thrive professionally, and both artists captured these struggles in ambiguous and conflicted images of the body.

Their images of women and children communicate powerful feelings of self-possession, agency, and ownership over their bodies, but also isolation, awkwardness, sadness, and discomfort. This clash of themes creates bodies that are filled with ambiguity and uncertainty, and appear to be caught in a struggle they cannot resolve. This conflict is connected to the complexities of life as a woman artist, a model, and a mother in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century. Valadon and Brooks approached the female and the child's body with an eye for the truth, and in the process, not only re-articulated some of the traditional themes of late-nineteenth century femininity – privateness, motherhood, and female subjectivity – but also captured some of the inconsistencies and difficulties of these experiences – the difficulties of modelling, the trials of single motherhood, and the challenges connected to the artistic profession. This is not to argue that Valadon and Brooks were unhappy and unfulfilled artists, but to cast a new light onto the complexities of these experiences, and the ways in which they found their way into each artist's approach to the woman's and child's body. Ultimately, these artists created a vision of female selfhood that reflected their realities at the turn of the twentieth century, a reality that was complex and constantly shifting, and often connected to the city in which they lived. Susan Sidlauskas has argued that the image of the body was integral to this quest for selfhood, at a time of "competing demands [and] mixed alliances."[140] As we have seen, this endeavour was particularly challenging for women, but the critical success enjoyed by Valadon and Brooks, both then and now, stands as a testimony to the truth, with all of its complexities and ambiguities, that they were able to inscribe on the figure of the body.

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[140] Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, 149.

Chapter 6: Rachilde & Narratives of Conflicted Selfhood

While the artistic pursuits of painting and sculpture were relatively new sites of expansion for women in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, women writers in the late-nineteenth century were part of a long and active tradition in France, one that dated back eight hundred years.[1] In particular, the salon culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fostered a rich climate of authorship and literary sensibility among French women, and *salonnières* such as Germaine de Staël and Marie-Jeanne de Roland became an integral part of Parisian literary society.[2] By the last decade of the nineteenth century, there was a marked increase in the number of women who published and were acknowledged in the contemporary press, which was linked to developments in female education during the early years of the Third Republic, an increased proliferation of publishing and the mass press, and a significant increase in the female reading population.[3] As Linda Nochlin has pointed out, literary expression was also perceived as a more open and egalitarian process for women than the visual arts, which required a specific knowledge base of techniques and skills carried out in an institutional setting. By contrast, "anyone, even a woman, has

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[1] Germaine Bree, *Women Writers in France: Variations on a Theme* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1973), 5.

[2] Rachel Mesch, *The Hysteric's Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), 2. For studies on women writers and literary culture of the eighteenth century, see for example Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*; Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*; Dalton, *Engendering the Republic of Letters*.

[3] Diana Holmes, *French Women's Writing, 1848-1994* (London: Athlone, 1996), 18-19; Mesch, 3. Other studies of women writers in nineteenth-century France include Sonya Stephens (ed.), *A History of Women's Writing in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Alison Finch, *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*; Walton, *Eve's Proud Descendants*; James Smith Allen, *Poignant Relations: Three Modern French Women* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Epoque: Love as a Lifestyle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

to learn the language, can learn to read and write, and can commit personal experiences to paper in the privacy of one's room."[4]

This is not to say, however, that women writers witnessed the linear and progressive improvement of their craft throughout the nineteenth century. In fact, as Rachel Mesch and others have noted, this was in many ways a period of erasure for female authors, not because they failed to write and publish, but because their genres were increasingly delegitimized.[5] As the tenets of realism and naturalism took a place of literary prominence during the latter half of the nineteenth century, sentimental idealism, a popular genre of women's' fictional writing, became marginalized and categorized as a "feminine" form of writing, one that was considered less intellectually rigourous and preoccupied with frivolous themes.[6] Critics also denigrated the work of women in the press, which increased as journalism became a more accessible and popular venue for women's writings at the end of the nineteenth century. As Jennifer Waelti-Walters has noted, because of their public voice and visibility, women writers and journalists were often linked to the cultural phenomenon of the new woman, and criticized for "flooding the market" with their feminist and emancipatory ideas.[7] Mesch has argued that this criticism and denigration of women writers, particularly at the *fin de siècle*, was part of a larger critical fear over the power of the female mind, and a belief that women's creative and intellectual potential was both troubling and threatening.[8] The result of this fear,

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[4] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971), *Women, Art, and Power and other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 163.
[5] Mesch, 2.
[6] Mesch, 3. Naomi Schor has also made this point in relation to the work and reception of George Sand. She has argued that literary idealism was linked with the feminine, and that this "gendering of aesthetic categories" was used as a way to marginalize women writers. See *George Sand and Idealism*, 3, and *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
[7] Waelti-Walters, 175.
[8] Mesch, 1, 12.

according to Mesch, was the development of a discourse that attempted to discredit women writers by linking them with themes of "moral decay" and "mental instability" – indeed, the woman writer in France was seen to be "…as reviled and as intimidating a figure as the prostitute and the hysteric,"[9] or as "part women, part men, neither women nor men, monsters, *hybrid* beings."[10] Literary critics discussed these ideas, in an often derogatory attempt to make sense of the success of women's writing at the *fin de siècle*. Jules Bertaut, for example, wondered if the increasing number of French women writers was a "…crisis or the first stage in an evolution," which would see their continued proliferation.[11] He noted that earlier beliefs about the anomalous nature of the woman writer no longer held true. They were not merely a "fashion" that would "pass like any other and will not count any more in the development of our national art than the vogue of the crinoline or the corset."[12] In a similar way, Paul Flat argued that women's writing at the turn of the twentieth century was a "ferment" that represented the "dissolution of moral ideas."[13] In many of these cases, the spread of women writers was linked to the theme of crisis and instilled worry about the decline of traditional roles for women in French society, which were based on domesticity and private duties linked to marriage and motherhood.

These factors indicate the complexities that existed for women writers in France at the *fin de siècle*. On the one hand, they were part of an illustrious tradition, one that was

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[9] Ibid, 1-4.

[10] Christine Planté, *La Petite Soeur de Balzac: Essai sur la femme auteur* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1989), 269, in Jeri English, "Virginal Perversion/Radical Subversion: Rachilde and Discourses of Legitmation," *A Belle Epoque?*, 215.

[11] Jules Bertaut, *La Littérature féminine d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Librairie des Annales Politiques et Littéraires, 1909), 5.

[12] Ibid, 2.

[13] Paul Flat, *Nos femmes de lettres* (Paris: Perrin, 1909), 238. Mesch also discusses these texts in *The Hysteric's Revenge*, 9-13.

also expanding and bringing new opportunities for accomplishment and publication; on the other, as they moved into the public sphere, critics spoke of them as part of the crisis of the late-nineteenth century, and sought to dismiss their achievements as amateur and unprofessional. Historians and literary scholars have studied some of the ways in which French women writers responded and reacted to these challenges, and have noted the various techniques they employed to circumvent this often hostile environment and articulate their agency through writing. Roberts has shown how French journalists at *La Fronde* used tactics of performance, subversion, and disruption in their writing, in order to challenge existing norms of gendered subjectivity, and create a sense of selfhood.[14] Similarly, Mesch has argued that women writers at the *fin de siècle* used negative characterizations of themselves to their advantage. They created protagonists who used hysteria, fetishism, and even monstrosity as a way to articulate female identity – a literary tactic that amounted to "the hysteric's revenge," and a way for women writers to take control over their bodies, minds, and selves.[15] These kinds of studies rightly emphasize the powerful role of subjectivity in women's writing at the turn of the twentieth century, and the belief that the "act of achieving selfhood" was as much a creative endeavour as it was a reflection of socio-political circumstance and restriction.[16]

However, as we have seen with women who worked in the visual arts, this approach does not incorporate some of the complexities and ambiguities experienced by women writers as they worked and gained notoriety in late-nineteenth century Paris. In this chapter, I examine a prominent woman writer of the period, Rachilde, and demonstrate

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[14] Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*.
[15] Mesch, 21. Felski has made a similar argument about Rachilde in *The Gender of Modernity*, 179-180; 184-185.
[16] Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, 149.

the ways in which her novels, specifically her female protagonists, capture some of the inconsistencies for women at this time. Just as Gwen John and Camille Claudel articulated the trials of urban life through their depictions of intimate space, and as Suzanne Valadon and Romaine Brooks captured the ambiguities of the *fin de siècle* in their images of the body, so too did Rachilde give voice to the shifting and changing nature of female identity and selfhood in her novels at the turn of the twentieth century. Although her protagonists embodied characteristics of the "abnormal" woman – the hysteric, *femme fatale*, coquette, widow, and even androgyne – which suggests her desire to create female characters who exercise influence and power through their unconventional identities, the heroines she created in her fiction are also fraught with inconsistencies and conflict that ultimately leave them at a profound impasse, one that ends in despair, dysfunction, and death. In different ways, the women depicted in Rachilde's novels are on the cusp of achieving something "new" and significant, only to be stunted and undone by circumstance and inconsistencies in their own characters. In some ways Rachilde's writings represent a culmination of the themes explored in this study – her experiences in Paris shaped much of her professional and personal adult life, and her novels succinctly capture the conflicts and ambiguities of female identity and subjectivity at the end of the nineteenth century.

Since the publication of Rachilde's first novel in the early 1880s, critics and scholars have interpreted and studied her writings, in part because of their scandalous and perverse subject matter. In 1889, Maurice Barrès wrote a preface to a new edition of Rachilde's decadent novel *Monsieur Vénus*, in which he noted that her sexually depraved story was particularly compelling because it was written by a young lady of twenty. He wrote: "I have never known anything more mysterious than this knowing depravity that

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erupts in the dreams of a virgin – as mysterious as crime, as genius, or as the temerity of a child, and with something of all three."[17] His emphasis on Rachilde's femininity, youth, and innocence was a way to accentuate the perversity of the sexual themes in the novel, and hopefully entice readers to experience this tale of "virginal perversion."[18]   Barrès's description reflected a belief at the *fin de siècle* that women's writing was necessarily autobiographical, and often the product of a degenerate and hysterical female mind, suffering from the "maladie du siècle."[19] This approach to Rachilde's work, as a literary aberration created by an unusual woman, was replaced by literary scholars and historians who began to explore the significance of her writings to the development of feminism and women's writing in France.   Some, such as Jennifer Birkett, have been critical of Rachilde's use of female perversion, and have argued that her sexually deviant female characters merely pandered to conventional, patriarchal visions of the *femme fatale* – indeed, the idea of a "vengeful female" protagonist may temporarily triumph over the male subject in her novels, but is ultimately a "collaborator"[20] in misogyny by repeating traditional male fantasies.[21]

More recently, however, scholars have moved away from this interpretation, and instead have discussed Rachilde's use of violent and sexually perverse women as a tactic of "radical subversion," and a way to destabilize established gender roles through

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[17] Maurice Barrès, "The Complications of Love," preface to Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, 1889 ed., translated by Liz Heron (Sawtry: Dedalus, 1992), 1.
[18] Jeri English, "Virginal Perversion/Radical Subversion," 212
[19] Maurice Barrès, "Complications d'amour," preface to Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, 1889 ed., in Michael Finn, *Rachilde-Maurice Barrès: Correspondance inédite 1885-1914* (Brest: CNRS, 2002), 179. See also English, 216; Melanie Hawthorne and Liz Constable, "Introduction," Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus: A Materialist Novel*, translated by Hawthorne (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2004), xiii. Hawthorne points out that Barrès's preface was also an important publicity tactic which drew attention to his friend's book and helped advance her career.
[20] Diana Holmes, "Rachilde (1860-1953): Decadence, Misogyny and the Woman Writer," *French Women's Writing*, 69.
[21] Jennifer Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France, 1870-1914* (New York: Quartet Books, 1986), 161.

performance. [22] This view is part of an attempt to introduce a sceptical feminist public to a more positive reading of Rachilde's work, and align her more closely with studies of female agency and gendered subjectivity. They have demonstrated the ways in which Rachilde inverted traditional gender roles, sexual stereotypes, and feminist themes, and "twist[ed] them into a startling new life"[23] through the use of satire, irony, and themes of decadence. According to these studies, Rachilde successfully blurred traditional themes of femininity, motherhood, marriage, love, sexuality, and friendship as a way to articulate female agency and critique existing social conventions in her writing.[24] Diana Holmes has produced some of the most comprehensive critical studies of this nature, and argues that Rachilde's narratives of female transgression were motivated, in part, by the societal oppression, misogyny, and patriarchal authority present in early Third Republic France.[25] She has noted that Rachilde's protagonists follow "…a logic of rebellion: each heroine explicitly refuses her society's normative definition of what a woman is and what a woman might do with her life."[26] According to Holmes, however, the results of this rebellion are angry, bitter, and frustrated female characters, who ultimately recognize the limits of their attempts for "revenge."[27]

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[22] English, 211-212.

[23] Finch, *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France,* 208-209.

[24] Some of these studies include Claude Dauphiné, *Rachilde* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1991); Regina Bollhalder Mayer, *Éros décadent: Sexe et identité chez Rachilde* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002); Dorothy Kelly, *Fictional Genders: Role & Representation in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Epoque*; Maryline Lukacher, *Maternal Fictions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Renée Kingcaid, *Neurosis and Narrative: The Decadent Short Fiction of Proust, Lorrain, and Rachilde* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992); Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*; Finch, *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France*; Mesch, *The Hysteric's Revenge*; Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*; Diana Holmes, *Rachilde: Decadence, Gender and the Woman Writer* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

[25] Holmes, *Rachilde: Decadence, Gender and the Woman Writer*; Holmes, "Rachilde (1860-1953): Decadence, Misogyny and the Woman Writer," *French Women's Writing*, 75-78.

[26] Holmes, *Rachilde: Decadence, Gender and the Woman Writer*, 142.

[27] Holmes, *French Women's Writing*, 82.

These approaches account for the difficulties women experienced at the end of the nineteenth century, and emphasize the ways in which Rachilde, in particular, included these trials into her writings about female subjectivity. They also successfully incorporate the notion of performance as an important way for women writers to create narratives of female selfhood in an atmosphere of continued restriction. However, to describe French culture and society at the turn of the twentieth century as only misogynist, patriarchal, and oppressive for women, is to exclude the host of achievements and developments that, as we have seen, were also an essential part of life for women at the *fin de siècle*. An argument that only focuses on the anger, rebellion, and desire for "revenge" present in Rachilde's writing and characters does not account for the complexities and nuance of French society at this time. It was certainly difficult and troublesome, but was also a place of opportunity and advancement for women. I will argue that it is this tumultuous combination of forces, both positive and negative, that actually comes through in Rachilde's writings, and that drives her female characters. Indeed, her heroines are at times angry, hostile, and violent; but they are also tender, joyous, ambitious, and almost desperate for love. It is this odd and ambiguous mix of characteristics that ultimately defines Rachilde's heroines. They are conflicted, paradoxical selves, who embody the traits of both strength and struggle, independence and servitude, and which represent more closely the true experiences of women during the years of the *fin de siècle*. Ultimately, Rachilde's heroines become caught in the inconsistencies of these contrasting narratives, and are left at an impasse, a dead end which results in paralysis. This tendency is particularly true of two of Rachilde's most famous and notorious female protagonists, Raoule de Vénérande from *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), and Eliante Donalger from *La Jongleuse* (1900).

Marguerite Eymery Vallette: Rachilde

Marguerite Eymery Vallette, who wrote under the pseudonym Rachilde, cultivated a scandalous persona, both through her writing and self-image, and led symbolist poets and other French intellectuals of the *fin de siècle* to call her "Queen of the Decadents," the "Marquise de Sade,"[28] and "Mademoiselle Baudelaire."[29] She was born in 1860, in a small town just outside of Périgueux, France, to parents Joseph Eymery and Gabrielle, née Feytaud. Marguerite's father was a career military officer, a profession which caused her family to move frequently as his regiment changed garrisons. After the Franco-Prussian war of 1870[30], however, Marguerite's family returned to her birthplace and settled just outside the village of Château-L'Evêque, where she would spend a difficult childhood and adolescence as an only child.[31] By her own account, Marguerite's father had a deep and profound impact upon her youth, while her mother was removed from her daily life.[32] As biographers have noted, however, both parents were emotionally detached and disconnected from their daughter, and made it very clear to her that they had wanted a son – Gabrielle gave Marguerite the "only partially affectionate" nickname of "little slug,"[33] and attempts to win her father's affection were unsuccessful.[34] As

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[28] This was also the title of one of Rachilde's novels, first published in 1887. Frazer Lively, "Introduction," *Rachilde: Madame La Mort and Other Plays*, Kiki Gounaridou and Frazer Lively, trans. eds. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3-7.

[29] This nickname was given to Rachilde by Barrès. Hawthorne, "Introduction," *Monsieur Vénus: A Materialist Novel*, xiii.

[30] Captain Eymery participated in the war, and was taken prisoner after surrendering on 29 October, 1870. He was held for a year in a Hamburg prison, where he contracted smallpox. This time was extremely difficult for Marguerite and her mother, and although he eventually came home and was placed on inactive duty, Hawthorne notes that he returned "in body, though arguably not in spirit." Hawthorne, *Rachilde,* 40-45.

[31] Rachilde chronicled some of her memories of her formative years in *Quand j'étais jeune* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1947). Other studies that discuss her childhood include Auriant, *Souvenirs sur Madame Rachilde* (Reims: A l'Ecart, 1989); Ernest Gaubert, *Rachilde* (Paris: Sansot, 1907); Hawthorne, *Rachilde*; Holmes, *Rachilde*.

[32] Auriant, *Souvenirs*, in Hawthorne, *Rachilde,* 29.

[33] Auriant, *Souvenirs,* 27, in Hawthorne, *Rachilde*, 35.

Marguerite grew, things became more difficult. Captain Eymery verbally and physically abused both his wife and daughter, and Gabrielle was increasingly unstable, which left Marguerite with significant household responsibilities beyond her years.[35] In one incident, at the age of fourteen, Marguerite's parents tried to arrange a marriage for her to one of Captain Eymery's officers, but when she supposedly tried to drown herself to avoid the union, the engagement was dropped.[36] According to biographers, Marguerite channelled all of these difficulties into a rebellious and imaginative nature, one that would serve her remarkably well for her life as a writer.

Around this time, at the age of sixteen, Marguerite began to write fiction and plays and published in local newspapers under assumed names and the initials M.E. It was also around this time that she adopted the pseudonym Rachilde, a name she said had belonged to a Swedish nobleman who contacted her regularly as a spirit.[37] She claimed she was the medium for this man, and that it was he who dictated stories to her during séances. This "spirit voice" was really just an alibi for her writing, one that Rachilde used as a way to deal with her father's strong resistance to her literary aspirations.[38] Indeed, Captain Eymery did not hide his contempt for "plumitifs," or "scribblers." He believed that "journalists are the curse of society," and that writing was not a suitable vocation for a middle-class girl – "a woman can only emancipate herself through marriage…Talented or not, you'll lose all social status." [39] Despite this lack of encouragement, Rachilde continued writing, and in 1878, at the age of eighteen, she made her first trip to Paris.

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[34] Hawthorne, *Rachilde*, 36-37.
[35] Hawthorne, "Introduction," *Monsieur Vénus*, x, xxxi n2. Hawthorne writes, "Marguerite's mother heard voices and seems to have had the symptoms of what we would now call paranoid schizophrenia."
[36] Frazer Lively, "Introduction," *Rachilde: Madame La Mort and Other Plays*, 5-6. Hawthorne has discussed this episode at length; see *Rachilde*, 48-62.
[37] Gaubert, *Rachilde*, 8-9.
[38] Hawthorne, "Introduction," *Monsieur Vénus*, xi.
[39] Rachilde, *Quand j'étais jeune*, 11, 166, in Holmes, *Rachilde*, 28.

Ironically, it was her usually unsupportive mother who first accompanied her to the capital – a cousin on her side of the family was the editor of a woman's magazine, *L'Ecole des femmes*, and through this contact, Rachilde met various literary figures and made connections with people such as Catulle Mendès and Sarah Bernhardt.[40] Although her work at the magazine provided Rachilde with a practical introduction to the world of journalism and the Parisian press, she felt "…out of her element among the learned and pedantic blue-stockings, as well as among the frivolous women writers who write bits of fashion articles between two canapés."[41] Indeed, the traditional world of women's writing was not Rachilde's strength or interest, and she often criticized the work of women writers in the prefaces to her novels: "It takes on average one year to write a good novel, six months to write a passable one, three months to write a bad one … those who write them in a month and a half, like my fellow women writers, belong to the category of hysterics…".[42] Comments like these set Rachilde apart from the traditional world of the woman writer, and led some to accuse her of being a misogynist.

By 1881, Rachilde was living permanently in Paris, in an attic on the rue des Écoles, and as Patricia Ferlin has noted, it was here that Rachilde began her "vie de bohème" – "she did not eat every day, and neglected her toilette, but she was in Paris, which is what mattered."[43] She worked hard to establish herself as a gender-neutral writer, and took great pains to distance herself from her *bas-bleus* contemporaries.[44] Along with her unfeminine pen name, she created calling cards which introduced herself

[40] Holmes, *Rachilde*, 28.
[41] Rachilde, "Préface," *À mort*, 1886, in Finn, *Rachilde-Maurice Barrès: Correspondance inédite 1885-1914*, 166.
[42] Rachilde, "Preface," *Madame Adonis*, 1888, ix, in Kingcaid, *Neurosis and Narrative*, 112.
[43] Patricia Ferlin, *Femmes d'encrier* (Paris: Christian de Bartillat, 1995), 86-87.
[44] Holmes, *Rachilde*, 34.

as, "Rachilde: Man of Letters,"[45] and in December 1884, she wrote the prefect of police

in Paris to seek permission to wear men's clothing, a request she argued was necessary

for the often active demands of life as a reporter and journalist.[46] She asked the police,

"…not to confuse my request with that of certain lower-class [*déclassées*] women who

seek scandal by dressing in the clothing under question."[47] Rachilde's request was

eventually rejected by M. Puybaraud, the superintendent of police, who informed her that

female cross-dressing went against French law, except in cases of illness.[48] He recorded

his impressions of the young writer in his report, and noted that her appearance, "blond

and small," was "more like a small boy than feminine."[49] He noted that Rachilde

apparently accepted his explanations against wearing male clothing, and that their

discussion then turned to the question of her recently published novel, *Monsieur Vénus*.

She told Puybaraud that she had had no luck writing "moral novels," and after meeting a

Belgian editor, who commented that she was "dying of hunger," advised her to try her

hand at writing "obscenities," – "you will see, it's a good trade, and we would publish

you in Brussels."[50] It was thus that the idea for *Monsieur Vénus* was born. Puybaraud

recorded the end of his "stupefying conversation" with Rachilde, in which she

commented that "I prostituted my pen, I admit it, but my self, my body [*personne*] are

intact and I don't have to blush in front of my mother."[51] Thus, from early on, Rachilde

carefully constructed her image and persona as an untraditional woman writer, one who

built on the example of George Sand, and who sought to separate herself from the typical

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[45] Lively, "Introduction," *Rachilde: Madame La Mort and Other Plays*, 7.
[46] Rachilde, letter to Monsieur le Préfet, in Auriant, *Souvenirs sur Madame Rachilde* (Reims: A l'écart, 1989), 60-61.
[47] Ibid.
[48] M. Puybaraud, "note de M. Puybaraud relative à son entretien avec la Mlle Rachilde," in Auriant, 61-62.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

characteristics of the female novelist. She called herself a "man of letters," and tried to dress the part, and although her formal request to the police was rejected, biographers note that she did cross-dress at parties at least on a few occasions.[52] Her comments to Puybaraud also demonstrate that her choice of licentious and sexually explicit subject matter was, at least in part, a tactical decision, one which would improve her chances of professional success as well as the quality of her life in Paris.

In the early 1880s, Rachilde began to make important contacts among writers who loosely comprised the decadent movement of late-nineteenth century France. It was among these avant-garde figures that Rachilde continued to develop herself as a serious writer and playwright. As she recalled in the preface to *À Mort*, she entered the *Café de l'Avenir* alone one evening, and heard, "…a group of neurotics, neurotics like her, but *more level-headed than she was.* (The word decadent was still not in style). […] Now she was truly saved! In reality, as she had come to the café alone, they took her for a prostitute, and a *thin* one at that."[53] Once Rachilde was able to convince these young men that she was, in fact, a writer like them, some gradually welcomed her into their disparate and artistic ranks. She met regularly with writers such as Albert Samain, Paul Adam, Jean Moreas, Félix Fénéon, Verlaine, and Jean Lorrain, and together, they formulated the aesthetic and attitude of decadence.[54] With these writers, Rachilde was able to cultivate her scandalous image and eccentric behaviour; she attended parties in elaborate costumes, participated in literary salons and cafés, and published some of her work in various

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[52] Lively, 8. Hawthorne discusses Rachilde's cross-dressing in *Rachilde*, 101-113.
[53] Rachilde, "Préface," *À mort*, 170.
[54] Dauphiné, *Rachilde*, 44; Holmes, *Rachilde*, 36-37. For a discussion of some of the major themes and tenets of literary decadence, see chapter 1.

Parisian literary journals.[55] Diana Holmes describes the important influence these artists

had on Rachilde's professional life:

> … they shared the desire to attack the rational, materialist faith in progress
> and democracy of their elders, and the literary aesthetic that supported this.
> With little or no financial support from her family, Rachilde worked
> hard to survive by her pen, but she did so in the highly charged, agreeably
> comradely milieu of young artists convinced of their own talent and power
> to upset the staid society around them.[56]

It was through this group that she met her future husband, Alfred Vallette, while attending

a party in 1885 dressed in a man's suit.[57]   Vallette was a young literary critic and writer,

and although he was not part of Rachilde's decadent circle, they shared some of the same

acquaintances.   They began regular meetings and correspondence,[58] and after a

tumultuous courtship, eventually married on 12 June 1889 in the town hall of Paris's

Latin Quarter.   Six months later, Rachilde gave birth to their only child, Gabrielle, and

the couple started what would become part of their life's work together, the arts journal

Mercure de France.   By 1896, the journal was also a publishing house, and Rachilde and

Vallette made their new home on the premises of the *Mercure*. In addition to her novels

and plays, Rachilde was now the fiction reviewer at the journal, and began hosting

weekly salons for writers and other Parisian intellectuals of the *fin de siècle*.   From a

struggling bohemian and "Queen of the Decadents," Rachilde was now a bourgeoise and

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[55] Holmes, *Rachilde*, 41. Rachilde and many of her biographers recount the curious story of her brief
attraction to celebrated poet and novelist Catulle Mendès, which left her torn between her self-respect and
her desire. The conflict left her very ill, and temporarily paralysed her legs for two months. As she
jokingly described the event – "…the doctor Lassègue had to come (an act of charity) in order to study the
amazing problem of hysteria brought about by extreme chastity in a licentious milieu." Rachilde, "Préface,"
À mort, 169.
[56] Holmes, 41.
[57] Lively, 8.
[58] Some of Vallette's correspondence to Rachilde is collected in Alfred Vallette, *Le Roman d'un homme
sérieux. Alfred Vallette à Rachilde (1885-1889)* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1994).

the "patronne du *Mercure*."[59] Some contemporaries noted the unusual nature of this

traditional lifestyle for a woman who had previously been known for her scandalous and

provocative persona and writings: "…the legend of the Amazon died away on the

threshold of the hearth. The story of Rachilde became no more than the history of her

books."[60]

However, Rachilde did not conform to the conventional role of a bourgeois wife

and mother – she did not become Madame Vallette, and did not abandon her career.

Some scholars have noted that Rachilde did not become particularly attached to her role

as a mother, and "never manifested a deep attachment to her own daughter. As a 'femme

supérieure,' Rachilde never devoted much time to motherhood."[61] Part of the explanation

for this lack of interest, according to Maryline Lukacher, was the absence of maternal

love in Rachilde's own childhood. This neglect not only carried itself into her personal

experience with motherhood, but also emerged as a key theme in Rachilde's fiction,

which included negative depictions of mother-daughter relationships, and mothers who

were "abusive and tyrannical, but also utterly indestructible."[62] Motherhood was not the

only traditionally feminine issue that Rachilde avoided; her opinions of the feminist

movement were also highly critical, and eventually prompted her to write a tract later in

life entitled *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* (*Why I am not a feminist*).[63] As a vocal,

active, and unorthodox woman writer, Rachilde was constantly solicited by the press and

critics for her thoughts on feminism, particularly in France, and was naturally aligned

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[59] Holmes, 45.
[60] Gaubert, *Rachilde*, 17.
[61] Lukacher, *Maternal Fictions*, 111. See also Holmes, 214, and Lively, who notes that Rachilde disliked
motherhood, and instead, "…lavished her affection on the rats, mice, and cats she kept as pets." Lively, 9.
[62] Lukacher, 12; 111-112.
[63] Rachilde, *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* (Paris: Editions de France, 1928).

with the movement, as one of its most successful examples.[64] However, Rachilde herself did not welcome or enjoy these comparisons, and regularly criticized women writers as a group, and feminism in general. As she wrote to her *Mercure* colleague Paul Morisse in 1895, "the French feminist movement is quite pathetic, you know," "it's just the result of progress … but women's basic nature remains eternally the same."[65] And later, in *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe*, Rachilde wrote, "Women are men's inferior brothers, simply because they have physical weaknesses that prevent them from putting ideas into a logical sequence, as even the least intelligent of men can do."[66] These comments indicate Rachilde's desire to separate herself from the blue-stockings of her era, but biographers have also argued that her hostility towards feminism was, in part, another part of her public image, part of her professional persona, just as cross-dressing and writing under a pseudonym. Holmes has noted that Rachilde's relationship and attitude towards feminism was more complex and less rigid, often hidden "beneath the mask of the misogynist 'man' of letters" – in her daily life, for example, she supported individual women writers in her reviews for *Mercure de France*, and upheld the feminine tradition of the *salonnière*.[67]

All of these factors demonstrate the complexities involved with Rachilde's public and professional image, and the ways in which she successfully portrayed herself as a unique and unusual talent in the Parisian literary world. By the 1890s, she had

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[64] Contemporary articles on Rachilde and her attitude towards women and feminism include Louise Martial, "Rachilde et la femme," *Point et Virgule*, (1920?) and Jean Melene, "'Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe' par Rachilde," *Le Petit Provençal*, 1928, both in Dossier Rachilde, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris.

[65] Rachilde to Morisse, letter dated 22.10.1895, in Holmes, 73.

[66] Rachilde, *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe*, 10, in Holmes, 73.

[67] Holmes, 86-87. Rita Felski, by contrast, has persuasively argued that scholars need to "take [Rachilde] at her word" when considering her rejection of organized feminism, and should avoid "forcing" her writing into a "feminist straitjacket." She has argued that scholars need to understand Rachilde's literary and political contributions without "either pathologizing or deifying her." See Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 179-180.

positioned herself as an influential writer, publisher, and patron of the arts, one with important contacts among Paris's decadent writers and intellectuals. She was simultaneously seen as a misogynist, an elitist, a sexual deviant, and a hysteric, as well as a bourgeoise, a professional, a feminist, and a mother – all of these characteristics informed her complex sense of identity, and presented the public with an ambiguous idea about the nature of her "true" self. Rachilde also incorporated this theme of conflicted selfhood into her early fiction from the *fin de siècle*, particularly in her notorious heroines Raoule de Vénérande and Eliante Donalger. What is compelling about these representations of female subjectivity is not that they embody outrageous qualities of sexual licentiousness, androgynous behaviour, and even male aggression, but that Rachilde imbues both Raoule and Eliante with ambiguous characteristics that confuse our clear understanding of their intentions, and eventually culminate in their undoing. In this way, they represent the competing images of womanhood that dominated the cultural landscape at the end of the nineteenth century, one that presented women, and Rachilde herself, with a new array of choices and options in the midst of ongoing on traditional restrictions and limitations.

Raoule de Vénérande, *Monsieur Vénus* (1884)

Rachilde shocked the literary world with the publication of *Monsieur Vénus* in 1884. This was not her first novel, but was the first one to bring her celebrity and notoriety.[68] The novel was, in part, the result of her conversation with the Belgian who

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[68] Hawthorne and others have noted that *Monsieur Vénus* originally appeared as co-authored by Rachilde and "Francis Talman," whose identity remains a mystery. Rachilde claimed that she had met him while taking fencing lessons, but scholars are unsure whether this is true, or just a ruse. Most subsequent editions

had publishing contacts in Brussels, and who encouraged her to write something outrageous, as a way of providing the struggling writer with some well-needed income.[69] Another source of inspiration for *Monsieur Vénus*, according to Rachilde, was her infatuation with Catulle Mendès, which had prompted a hysterical fit of leg paralysis. It was during her period of convalescence, she alleged, that she wrote the novel over the span of two weeks.[70] This account, although compelling, seems mostly driven by the desire to sell more volumes by appealing to readers' expectations about the scandalous and hysterical nature of the book's author.[71] When the novel appeared in Belgium in 1884, it did indeed cause a scandal. The Belgian authorities judged the book to be pornographic, and seized the published copies as well as the manuscript from the publisher. They also fined Rachilde two thousand francs and sentenced her to prison, which the author avoided by remaining in France.[72] The novel's titillating content had achieved the desired effect – as Patricia Ferlin has noted, it exploded like a "bomb" on the "literary paving stones" of Brussels and later, Paris.[73] Although certain salons would no longer receive Rachilde, and considered her to be a pornographer, she caught the attention and approval of certain literary figures, particularly those from the decadent movement – as the writer Barbey d'Aurevilly noted, "A pornographer, she is! But so distinguished!";[74] and Jean Lorrain wrote that *Monsieur Vénus* had "launched" Rachilde's career.[75]

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of the novel include only Rachilde's name as the sole author. See Hawthorne, "Introduction," *Monsieur Vénus*, xviii, xxxi n10.
[69] See pages 12-13 above.
[70] Hawthorne, xviii-xix. Also see above, p. 240 n55.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Hawthorne, *Rachilde*, 90; Ferlin, *Femmes d'encrier*, 88.
[73] Ferlin, *Femmes d'encrier*, 88.
[74] André David, *Soixante-quinze années de jeunesse du vivant de Marcel Proust*, in Ferlin, 89.
[75] Jean Lorrain, "Mademoiselle Salamandre," *Le Courrier Français*, 12 December, 1886, in *Organographes du Cymbalum Pataphysicum*, no.19-20, Courtaumont, 1983.

Monsieur Vénus tells the story of Raoule de Vénérande, a wealthy young aristocrat, who was orphaned as a young child and lives with her pious old aunt in the family's Paris mansion on the Champs-Elysées. Her surname connotes terms such as hunting (*la vénerie*), *vénération*,[76] and even venereal (*vénérien*),[77] which all allude to Raoule's dangerous and powerful character. She has refused the traditional role for a woman of her class and generation – that of chaste virginity followed by marriage to a man of suitable pedigree – and follows her own rules of complete personal, social, and sexual freedom. When Raoule meets Jacques Silvert, an aspiring painter and artist, who lives with his sister Marie in an "unsavory hovel,"[78] she is overcome with desire, and sets him up as her "mistress" in a comfortable apartment. She lavishes Jacques with gifts, dresses him in lovely fabrics, keeps him happily drugged on hashish, and secretly visits him for amorous and often drug-induced encounters. As the story continues, Raoule becomes increasingly dominant and controlling, while Jacques becomes more submissive and feminized. The other two characters, the cavalry officer Raittolbe, who is Raoule's suitor, and Jacques's sister Marie, Raoule's flower-maker and some time prostitute, become entangled in their scandalous affair. Raittolbe, who is initially repulsed by Raoule's affection for Jacques, begins to have his own desirous feelings for the young artist. Marie constantly tries to manipulate Raoule for money and financial security, with little success. Raoule eventually marries Jacques, exclaiming to Raittolbe that she is "…*a man in love* with a man, not with a woman!"[79]; but she becomes jealous of Jacques's attempted infidelity with Raittolbe, and engineers a duel between the two men in which

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[76] Holmes, 116.
[77] Hawthorne, xxiii.
[78] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Madeleine Boyd (New York: Covici, Friede Publishers, 1929), 33.
[79] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Melanie Hawthorne after the 1929 translation by Madeleine Boyd (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2004), 73.

Jacques is killed. The novel ends with Raoule, now a widow, devoting herself to a wax, mechanical mannequin she has made in the likeness of Jacques, complete with hair, teeth, and nails taken from his corpse. She visits, embraces, and kisses her dead husband, and keeps him hidden for her pleasure in a secret room.

The sexual tensions, rivalries, and dynamics of *Monsieur Vénus* revolve around homosexual and heterosexual passions, and include scenes of cross-dressing, sadomasochism, and allusions to necrophilia. Raoule is at the centre of this array of pleasure and vice, and slowly leads the other characters into her web. At the outset, upon meeting Jacques in the garret he shares with his sister, Raoule is sickened and overwhelmed by the atmosphere, while she also feels an intense attraction to the young artist. After catching herself gazing upon Jacques's smooth and clear skin, she "…snapped her head away, her eyelids closed and not daring to look again."[80] Raoule is caught in an attack of nerves: "Her voice was faltering; her head felt very heavy. […] Raoule rose, a nervous tremor shook her all over. Had she caught a fever among these poor wretches!"[81] And later, "A dull pain ran through Mlle de Vénérande's neck. Her nerves were becoming overstimulated by the redolent atmosphere of the garret. A kind of dizziness drew her to this nakedness. She wanted to step back, to tear herself away from the obsession, to flee…".[82] Once Raoule retreats to the comfort of her carriage, her "entire, delicately nervous being"[83] gradually relaxes, and she is able to ponder her experience in the garret: "The woman who vibrated within her saw nothing in [Jacques] Silvert but a beautiful instrument of pleasure that she coveted and, in a latent state, that

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[80] Ibid, 14.
[81] Ibid, 15.
[82] Ibid, 17.
[83] Ibid, 18.

she already held fast in her imagination."[84]   Thus, at the start of the novel, Rachilde

presents us with a woman who is at odds with herself – she is at once attracted to and

repulsed by Jacques, the poor, aspiring artist – and although this conflict results in an

attack of nervous hysteria, Raoule claims to ultimately know what she desires and is

determined to secure its possession.[85]   However, there are early signs that Raoule is not

entirely in control of her actions and feelings, and is a potential victim of manipulation at

the hands of Jacques's sister Marie, whom Rachilde portrays as a young woman with a

"hideous face, from which two sinister greenish glints were shining."[86]   Marie refers to

Raoule as "the madwoman,"[87] and believes that the relationship between Raoule and

Jacques, if played correctly, will improve their financial plight significantly: " 'I think,'

Marie answered, with a sneer […] 'I think that if you're not an idiot, we're all set. She's

hooked, my pretty boy!';"[88] and later, ""…it seems the fish is biting… Everything will

go like clockwork, I'll be damned!"[89]

Raoule is a woman caught between various depictions of female identity and

subjectivity. She is a nervous hysteric, an aging single woman, a sexual predator, and

even a hapless elite, one easily exploited for her money and social position.   Rachilde

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[84] Ibid, 19.
[85] Rachilde sets up the personal history of Raoule's condition with a description of nervous attacks that began at the onset of adolescence, or "the moment of sexual awakening." Raoule begins to speak in short, brief sentences, "her eyes became feverish, she laughed and cried at the same time." When her aunt seeks the counsel of a doctor, he prescribes marriage, and a family friend notes that, "that pretty creature […] will, without ever loving them, have known as many men as there are beads on her aunt's rosary. No happy medium! Either a nun or a monster! […] It would, perhaps be better to put her in a convent, since we put hysterical women in the Salpetrière!" Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Boyd, 48-49. Rachilde links Raoule's hysteria with her overt sexuality and refusal to abide by societal norms and conventions, and suggests that it motivates many of Raoule's actions and behaviour. Mesch, Beizer, and Kingcaid have all assessed the role of hysteria in Rachilde's writing, and the ways in which it is used as a way to articulate prohibited desires and wishes.
[86] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Hawthorne, 18.
[87] Ibid, 44.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid, 44.

also portrays Raoule as sexually ambiguous – she is "Monsieur Vénus," and Jacques refers to her as "*Monsieur* de Vénérande."[90] Her demeanour and clothing alternate between delicately feminine and decidedly masculine. Raoule's aunt refers to her as her "nephew" when she takes lessons in fencing or painting, two activities that for women of Aunt Ermengarde's generation, are only carried out by men.[91] Raoule is, "Neither beautiful nor pretty in the accepted sense of those words […] tall, well formed, with a supple neck. She had, like all true girls of good breeding, a delicate figure, slender wrists and ankles, a rather haughty carriage with that undulation which, under a woman's veil, reveals the feline coils…".[92] Raoule is also severe, however; her face carries a "hard expression," and show signs of her "uncompromising will."[93] During one of her first visits to Jacques, whom she has installed in a comfortable apartment in the city, Raoule wears not a provocatively feminine outfit, but a "black sheath with a long twisted train:"

> Not a single jewel brightened her almost masculine costume with a sparkle
> this time. Only on the ring finger of her left hand did she wear a signet ring of
> a cameo mounted on two lions' claws. When she caught hold of Jacques's
> hand again, he got scratched. In spite of himself, a feeling of terror ran
> through him. This creature was the devil.[94]

Raoule undoubtedly controls and manipulates Jacques – she dictates the terms of their affair, how he should dress, and the ways in which their lovemaking will be carried out. She also introduces drugs into their relationship, and Jacques becomes prone to using hashish.[95] But, Raoule is not a typical *femme fatale*, one who indulges and gratifies a man's desire to be dominated; Jacques senses early on that there is something horrifying

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[90] Ibid, 38.
[91] Ibid, 28-29.
[92] Ibid, 19.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid, 36.
[95] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Boyd, 78-79.

and unsettling about Raoule, this woman he calls "the devil:" "When he kissed her, it seemed to him that a body made of marble had slid between the sheets; he had the disagreeable sensation that a dead animal was brushing against his own warm limbs."[96] She is not only unfeminine, but appears inhuman. There are scenes of physical abuse and brutality at Raoule's hands. When she suspects that Jacques has behaved inappropriately with her friend Raittolbe, Raoule flies into a rage and beats Jacques: "Jacques was writhing in agony, bleeding from the real cuts which Raoule was reopening with a sadistic pleasure. All human cruelty which she had tried to suppress in her metamorphosed being, reawoke, and now the thirst for blood which flowed from the convulsed limbs replaced all pleasure of her ferocious love…".[97]

Thus, Rachilde successfully inverts the character of Raoule from a traditional female love-interest, to the male aggressor and suitor, who controls the terms of the relationship, and who believes that Jacques is her property. Beatings and abuse are not out of the question for a woman living and loving as a man. Over dinner with Raittolbe, Raoule confesses her belief that she has created a "new depravity,"[98] and in the process, is marking a new path for women:

> I represent here […] the elite of the women of our time. An example of the artistic feminine and the grand lady, one of those creatures who revolt at the idea of perpetuating a weakened race or of giving a pleasure they don't share. Well! I come to your tribunal, sent by my sisters, to declare that we all want the impossible, because you love us so badly.[99]

Raoule argues here for agency, for something better for women in love, and for some kind of equality in relationships, and favours extreme control and domination if

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[96] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Hawthorne, 88.
[97] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Boyd, 142-3.
[98] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Hawthorne, 72, 81.
[99] Ibid, 81.

necessary, in order to fulfil these goals. In a chapter that was removed from the novel's early editions, Raoule ponders the freedom of sexuality enjoyed during "pagan antiquity" – "What passion today described as vice or monstrosity was not then celebrated, consecrated with incense, deified?"[100] She argues that:

> Modern civilization, a worthy offspring of the one that gave birth to it, in the midst of silence and solitude, repeats the hymn of the saturnalia. […] In the radiance of a vengeful dawn, woman shall glimpse the possibility of a fabulous fall for man. She will invent caresses, she will find new proofs in the new transports of a new love, and Raoule de Vénérande will possess Jacques Silvert…[101]

In this way, Raoule marks the decline of society at the *fin de siècle* – as the century draws to its conclusion, women will increase their power over men, and create new dynamics within their traditional romantic relationships. Raittolbe senses this malaise as well: "Although [he] had always been a gentleman till then, the *century weighed on him*, an infirmity impossible to analyze other than by this phrase alone."[102] Passages such as these mark *Monsieur Vénus* as a classic decadent novel – the sense of illness and nervous exhaustion that came from the over-indulgence and extravagant lifestyle enjoyed by many, particularly the elites of French society.[103] In this case, Rachilde also presents the reader with the possibility of a new age for women, and a new sexuality based on freedom, choice, and true sexual liberation.

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[100] Ibid, 91.
[101] Ibid, 92.
[102] Ibid, 81.
[103] Scholars note the similarities between Rachilde's novels and those of other famous decadent writers of the time, particularly Huymans and Wilde. The setting of Raoule's mansion in *Monsieur Vénus* is very much like that of des Esseintes in *A Rébours*, with its voluptuous interiors of exotic origin and allusions to classical antiquity: "Raoule's room was hung with red damask and panelled around the openings with rare woods. A soft couch was placed across the mink carpet spread under the chandelier; and the bed, of carved ebony, had cushions whose feathers had been impregnated by an Oriental perfume which filled the whole room." The effect of the decadent setting, as in *A Rebours*, is a close and almost suffocating atmosphere, which emphasizes artificiality and strangeness. As Raittolbe notes, "The setting of this monstrous idyll was so thoroughly oriental…". Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Boyd, 45-46; trans. Hawthorne, 81.

However, Raoule's character is not so straight-forward. She is not simply inverted and behaving as a man would in love, or creating a new vision for female identity and sexuality. There are many instances in *Monsieur Vénus* where Raoule is far less certain of her position within her relationship with Jacques, where she appears confused, upset, and conflicted, even as she espouses her liberated and emancipated theories of love and sex. At the end of her glorious speech to Raittolbe over dinner, for example, Raoule exclaims: " 'I wanted the *impossible* … It's mine … That's to say, no, really … it'll never be mine! …' A tear whose wet brightness seemed to have stolen its light from Eden of long ago rolled down Raoule's cheek."[104] At the same moment as Raoule hopes for a new kind of love, a new form of sexuality, she also concedes defeat. If Raoule is at times a *femme fatale*, one bent on manipulating Jacques and acting the part of the aggressor and pursuer in love, she is also victim to her emotions, which at times get the better of her, and take control in a stereotypically feminine way: " 'I love him! I love him!' She turned around again: 'Jacques, you are master here […]'. She ran away, crazed by an atrocious joy, more voluptuous that the pleasure of the flesh, more aching than unappeased desire, but more complete than orgasm, crazed by that joy called the emotion of a first love."[105] As their relationship develops, Raoule's conflicted and confused sense of self only deepens, and seems to run counter to all of her theorizing with Raittolbe. Despite herself, she realizes that her love for Jacques is growing uncontrollable:

> I bought him, I belong to him. It is I who am sold. Passion, give me back my heart! Demon of love, you have made me a prisoner, stealing my chains and leaving me freer than my jailer. I thought I would capture him, and he has fascinated me. I laughed at love at first, and now I am its victim…[106]

[104] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Hawthorne, 73.
[105] Ibid, 44.
[106] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Boyd, 62.

One of the clearest examples of Raoule's conflicted sense of selfhood is her odd desire to marry Jacques. She claims it will "reward" him for his fidelity and devotion, and act as a way to "rehabilitate" Jacques to a proper place of decency.[107] In truth, however, Raoule's proposal comes on the heels of a terrible quarrel with Marie, and a subsequent silence from Jacques that lasts for three days. Their argument is prompted by Marie, who goads Raoule by saying that she is now one of them: "we are rabble together…".[108] Raoule flies into a rage at the thought of being compared to a common whore and part of the lower classes, but Raittolbe warns that if Raoule throws Marie out of the apartment, "the whole of Paris will know the story of Jacques Silvert."[109] This realization saddens Raoule, and during her three days apart from Jacques, she reflects on some of the truth in Marie's words: "Raoule saw herself on a level with the ex-prostitute … and, if she had the superiority of beauty, she did not have that of pleasure. She gave pleasure, but she did not have any. All monsters have their fits of depression, and she was tired…".[110] Raoule also witnesses the mundane society in which she lives, where "Wealth is sometimes trying, society very boring, and the world is full of tribulations."[111] Yet, she desires to correct this situation for herself, and hopes "to see in Jacques's bright eyes another corner of her sky, which she could fill with dreams."[112] Thus, for all of her sexual perversions and gendered inversions, part of Raoule still hopes for some form of traditional escape from her loneliness and depression, in the form of a marriage. Jacques, however, is not interested in a formal union, and refuses her request on several occasions:

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[107] Ibid, 123.
[108] Ibid, 119.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, 121.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

"…one doesn't marry one's mistress; that's not done in your drawing rooms!...".[113] Despite Raoule's initial thrill that her lover has risen above the traditional trappings of polite society, she eventually persuades Jacques to marry her, and proceeds to orchestrate the lies and deception necessary to formally introduce him into her world. Upon hearing of the engagement, Raoule's elderly aunt is devastated that her niece would marry so far beneath her class, and pledges to join a convent immediately following the wedding. Raittolbe is also dismayed by the turn of events, and urges Raoule to "…come back to [her] senses … you are beautiful, you are a woman, you are young."[114] But nothing will dissuade Raoule from completing her marriage to Jacques, and becoming "Madame Silvert."

After all of the energy Raoule spends in cultivating a free and unique form of female identity, she ends up adhering to one of the most traditional female roles – that of wife and bride. She remains true to her unusual character by wearing a gown of silver brocade to the public wedding and banquet, but changing into a man's black evening suit in the private quarters of the bridal suite, but the fact remains that Raoule has followed the prescriptions of her social class and gender by taking a husband in the hopes of securing a life of love and happiness for herself.[115] Jacques, the bridegroom, does not appear at the wedding banquet, and remains sequestered in their bedroom, which arouses suspicious gossip from the guests, and adds to a tense and uneasy atmosphere. In fact, "[t]he air in the Vénérande mansion seemed to have become unbearable," and when Marie secretly meets with Raoule's aunt, and tells her the entire truth surrounding the

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[113] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Hawthorne, 154.
[114] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Boyd, 155.
[115] Ibid, 185.

nature of their relationship, the shocked and mortified aunt curses Raoule.[116]   This marks

Raoule's undoing. Despite her attempts to keep up appearances and conduct her love life

secretly, the truth has been discovered – as a wedding guest says, "Let us go, my dear

fellow […] this house has decidedly become a tomb."[117] This statement foreshadows the

end for Raoule.   The newlyweds are shunned by Parisian society, and in a scene of

elaborate cross-dressing, in which Jacques, dressed as Raoule, attempts unsuccessfully to

seduce Raittolbe, Raoule finally realizes that her attempts to win and control Jacques have

failed.   She stages a duel between the two men, in which Raittolbe kills Jacques.

Although Raoule has orchestrated and manipulated one last event in her life, she is now

alone, and a widow. After Jacques's death, Raoule, "armed with silver pincers, a velvet-

covered hammer, and a silver scalpel, devoted herself to a very delicate task…" of

amputating some of the corpse's parts in order to make her "anatomical masterpiece" of

Jacques's body, which will become her new surrogate lover.[118] What she could not fully

achieve in life will be satisfied with death.

In the end, despite all of her extraordinary sexual inversions, cross-dressing, and

flamboyant behaviour, Raoule finds herself at an impasse, a dead end that prohibits her

from moving forward and creating the life she wants for herself.   She is in love with

Jacques, but is afraid of losing control; so she tries to dominate him and engage in sexual

practices where she can be the aggressor, not only as a man, but as a strong woman.

However, Raoule still succumbs to petty jealousy, and opts to have Jacques killed rather

than risk losing him.   This *fin-de-siècle* heroine, who tries with all her heart to escape the

confines of her identity, and who goes a great distance to counter traditional narratives of

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[116] Ibid, 184.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Hawthorne, 208-210.

female subjectivity, in the end, cannot go any further. She is alone, abandoned by everyone, and left with a wax replica of a man she would not allow herself to truly love, except in death, when she could enjoy total control. Indeed, Raoule ends the novel as a prisoner and a widow, forced to conceal her terrible secret affair with her husband's body in a dark corner of her abandoned mansion. Raoule's character challenges some traditional images of womanhood – she is sexually provocative and independent, unmarried, and a cross-dresser – but she also embodies and even embraces other female stereotypes – that of the hysteric, femme fatale, and jealous wife. In some ways, her character is stuck between that of her aunt, and that of Jacques's sister Marie. Raoule's aunt represents the older, staid, moneyed, bourgeoisie of Paris, who relies on religion and pedigree, and avoids the real world. She stays in her rarefied mansion, away from most people; she is a relic of the nineteenth century who abandons her niece out of shame, fear, and disgust, and hides within the walls of the convent. Marie, on the other hand, represents the lower-class girl from the streets of Paris. She is a young, conniving, and manipulative prostitute who uses her body and charms to get what she wants. She ultimately blackmails Raoule's aunt with the truth about her niece's lifestyle, and uses the money to open a brothel. Rachilde notes the alternate paths of womanhood presented by these two characters: "Madame Elizabeth [Raoule's aunt], the good angel who had tolerated it, and Marie Silvert, the base demon who had excited it, were flying at the same time, one to Paradise, the other to hell, from that monstrous love, which, in its pride reached higher than heaven, and in its depravity fell lower than hell."[119] Raoule, in the end, is caught between these two women, and by the conflicting representations of womanhood at the *fin de siècle*. She is left at an impasse from which she cannot escape,

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[119] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, trans. Boyd, 178.

and in her attempts to create a "new" identity for herself, she succeeds merely in reflecting the ambiguous and contested nature of life for women and the turn of the twentieth century, caught between great potential and profound limitation.

Eliante Donalger, *La Jongleuse* (1900)

Rachilde first published *La Jongleuse* (*The Juggler*) in 1900 with *Mercure de France*, and as Melanie Hawthorne has pointed out, it "represents the culmination of the fertile and prolific period of Rachilde's career spanning the years from 1884 to 1900" – it is the "consummation" of the themes that concerned her during the last decades of the nineteenth century.[120] In many ways, the protagonist of *La Jongleuse,* Eliante Donalger, is a fully-formed expression of the trials and conflicts of female subjectivity captured in the character of Raoule de Vénérande sixteen years earlier, and as such, is a compelling point of comparison. If Raoule represents the explosive start to Rachilde's literary career and reputation in Paris and France, Eliante Donalger of *La Jongleuse* represents the point when Rachilde's career was at its "zenith."[121] In terms of narrative structure, the two novels are also quite similar, for they both follow the path of a couple's love affair from start to end, and culminates with the death of one of the lovers.[122] In *La Jongleuse*, however, it is the heroine Eliante who ultimately perishes.

La Jongleuse tells the story of Eliante Donalger, a wealthy widow of Creole descent, who lives in a lavish Parisian mansion with her deceased husband's niece and

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[120] Melanie Hawthorne, "Introduction," in Rachilde, *The Juggler*, trans. Hawthorne (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), xvi-xvii.
[121] Ibid, xviii.
[122] Holmes, *Rachilde*, 137.

aging uncle.[123] Her husband, Monsieur Donalger, was a successful naval officer who married Eliante when she was only seventeen, and took her off to sea with him. Upon his death, Eliante received his entire fortune, and felt it her duty to care for his existing family members in France. At the outset of the novel, Eliante is ardently pursued by the young Léon Reille, a medical student who lives near the Luxembourg Gardens. He is a mere twenty-two years of age to Eliante's thirty-five, and she both welcomes and rejects the romantic advances of her young suitor. She invites him to private dinners and public parties at her home, and slowly begins to introduce Léon to her private world. He sees her decadent and exotic quarters, eats her foreign foods and spices, and learns of her unusual talent for juggling and dancing, which she aquired during her extensive travels with her husband. Eliante also introduces him to what she claims is the only true object of her affection, a large Greek vase, which resembles a human body, and which can bring Eliante sexual pleasure by merely embracing its cool surface. Léon is both disgusted and yet wildly attracted to this unusual older woman, and pursues Eliante with a determined passion through letters and more visits. Eliante tells him of her wish to see him marry her young niece, Missie, who she argues is much closer in age and tastes to Léon. Léon refuses, but Eliante ultimately tricks the two of them into bed together, and then stages her own elaborate suicide at the foot of their bed, piercing her throat with one of the knives used in her juggling routines. The novel ends with Léon and Missie married, enjoying the birth of their newborn daughter, who Léon hopes will "have *her eyes*."[124]

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[123] Eliante shares the same name as a secondary character in Molière's play *The Misanthrope* (1666), who possesses a balanced character of good sense and a good heart with individual expression. Hawthorne notes that this name sets up the contrast between these characteristics and the accusations of coquetry levelled at Eliante in Rachilde's novel. See Rachilde, *The Juggler*, trans. Hawthorne, xix-xxi, 207n3.
[124] Rachilde, *The Juggler*, trans. Hawthorne, 206.

In some ways, Eliante bears marked similarities to Raoule de Vénérande. Both possess an almost "sinister beauty,"[125] with pale skin, dark eyes, and unusual dress. Eliante moves in an "…air of impenetrable mystery that came right up to her neck and clasped it as though to strangle her."[126] Indeed, there is something ominous and foreboding in Eliante's entrance at the start of the novel. She is described as bound in a "funereal envelope" that is very "artificial:"[127]

> …a painted doll's face, decorated with a bonnet of smooth, shining hair with steely glints, hair that stuck to the temples, too twisted, too fine, so fine it seemed like imitation silk, a shred of her black dress, that satiny, almost metallic, sheath. With such a tight hairstyle set above thin red ears that seemed literally to bleed under the weight of a sharp-edged helmet, she was whiter with her makeup than any other made-up woman.[128]

In many ways, Eliante's appearance is that of a well-dressed statue, or even a corpse, with her garish make-up and unnatural movements and clothes. She remains, however, quite beautiful and mysterious, and quickly attracts the attention of young Léon at a party of Parisian elites and intellectuals. Léon's desire for Eliante is described in terms of instincts, primal urges, and indecency: "The man was shaking with rage. He felt such a strong desire to go up to her, such a brutal urge of instinct, that he took several more steps in spite of himself."[129] Léon has a strong impulse to "ravish" Eliante, an overwhelming sensation that leaves him divided between the desire "…*to look at her* again" and "calling himself a fool…".[130] These urgent and violent feelings only grow as the relationship between Léon and Eliante deepens; when she invites him into her carriage and to her home for a late dinner after the party, Léon speaks to Eliante in outrageous terms: "I don't

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[125] Holmes, *Rachilde*, 137-138.
[126] Rachilde, *The Juggler*, trans. Hawthorne, 3.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid, 7.
[130] Ibid.

think I love you […] I want you, that's all. I will have you, that's for sure… as sure as you are an odious flirt…or a madwoman."[131] He claims that she has behaved like a prostitute by picking him up in the street, and should be prepared to be treated as one, even if it means being raped.[132] Indeed, Eliante's actions are a far cry from those befitting a bourgeoise and a widow, and are in keeping with her persona as an eccentric *femme fatale,* one who operates according to her own caprices and desires. Just as Raoule desires to control the company she keeps, Eliante proclaims that she alone has the power to dictate the terms of her own sexuality: "I'm free to choose the time and even to not want to at all."[133]

Along with these characteristics of a dangerous and empowered female predator, Eliante also echoes Raoule's bouts of ill health. While Raoule is plagued with nervous hysteria, Eliante suffers from an intangible melancholy, one that is brought on by the death of her husband, but also founded in boredom, and mimics the ailments of neurasthenia. This is part of Léon's fascination with Eliante – as an aspiring doctor, he wishes to diagnose her malady, and feed his morbid curiosity about the state of her health: "You look like a curious object to me, and I find it amusing to look at you close up … in the shop window. Don't want to touch … nor to buy, I assure you."[134] In fact, Léon believes that Eliante is hiding some kind of malady, like leprosy, under her dress; he admits that he has been "taking exact note of your malady, heart or head…," and after looking at her hands, believes that she suffers either from illness or an addiction to ether

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[131] Ibid, 16.
[132] Ibid, 18.
[133] Ibid, 17.
[134] Ibid, 9.

or morphine.[135] There is something sinister and macabre about Eliante, which Léon also sees in her hands: "By now he was holding her wrists, her thin wrists where fine, little vipers of an almost violet blue, could be seen twisting under her tender, white flesh."[136] Eliante herself admits that she is suffering: "I'm capricious, bored, in enough pain to fear an increased of physical or moral suffering. I seek only peace and oblivion."[137] Much like Raoule and Raittolbe, Eliante appears to suffer from the boredom and ennui of her elite class, a common trope of decadent fiction at the *fin de siècle*; at the same time, she does not hide the fact that she is partly toying and joking with Léon. As he climbs into her carriage, she laughingly tells him: "…I'm punishing you by taking you home to a lady in a sad mood.' […] 'I'm sad, you know, because I suffer."[138] And on another occasion, she declares, partly in jest, that her only illness is boredom: "I'm suffering…from spleen, because of the rain…".[139] Thus, Eliante, like Raoule, seems to move aimlessly through her life, without direction, and is motivated and guided by her own instincts, desires, and wishes. Although Eliante makes jokes about her health and mental stability, in truth, she is suffering deeply, perhaps more than Raoule. While both women are drawn to random men to assuage their loneliness, Raoule's encounters with Jacques bring on attacks of heightened sexual urges, and nervous hysteria, whereas Eliante comes to Léon already suffering and damaged, and sexually disconnected from her young suitor.

Eliante explains this sexual disinterest in Léon by showing him the true object of her affection, a large Greek vase, which she keeps on a pedestal in a special, private room designed for her secret admiration and enjoyment. Like the guarded room that houses the

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[135] Ibid, 17, 10.
[136] Ibid, 17.
[137] Ibid, 17.
[138] Ibid, 8-9.
[139] Ibid, 9.

wax replica of Jacques Silvert, Eliante's private chambers are ornately decorated and established as the location of her forbidden fetish. The vase itself, an amphora, closely resembles a young body: "…an alabaster vase the height of a man, so slim, so slender, so deliciously troubling with its ephebe's hips, with such a human appearance, even though it retained the traditional shape of an amphora, that the viewer remained somewhat speechless."[140] Eliante is proud and enraptured with her treasure, which she loves "for its total innocence."[141] She implores Léon to look upon the amphora as she does: "Isn't it beautiful! Isn't *he* beautiful… You were telling me about pleasure? This is another thing entirely! This is the power of love in an unknown material, the madness of silent delight."[142] She wishes that he could understand how to "…be in ecstasy, the right way and over something immortal," and proceeds to bring herself to orgasm simply by innocently embracing the vase.[143] Eliante tells Léon that she is "disgusted by union, which "destroys" her strength, and brings her no pleasure.[144] Léon is "dazzled, delighted, indignant," but is also horrified at the thought that this woman has just given herself pleasure without his inclusion: "It's scandalous! Right there … in front of me … without me? No, it's horrible!"[145] He vows to destroy and "strangle" the "colorless pot."[146] Just as Raoule finds true pleasure in an inanimate version of her dead lover Jacques, so too does Eliante seek love and sexual comfort in an inanimate object. Literary scholars have noted that these themes suggest Rachilde's desire to explore the possibilities of love on a

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[140] Ibid, 18.
[141] Ibid, 20.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid, 20-23.
[144] Ibid, 22.
[145] Ibid, 23.
[146] Ibid, 31.

woman's own terms, free of a man's involvement.[147] Indeed, their love objects are, in

some ways, declarations of independence and agency, and demonstrate their ability to

separate themselves from the traditional confines of heterosexual love, which often

control and deny true happiness. This was Eliante's experience during the years of her

forced marriage to a much older man, which instilled in her a fear of sexual intimacy and

relationships, and a knowledge of their pitfalls. As she laments to Léon: "I am humiliated

because an intelligent man immediately thinks of … sleeping with me … Tomorrow you

would love me no longer … if you love me as little as that."[148]

However, Eliante does not just love her vase. Later in the novel, she confesses to

Léon that, "I don't only love an oriental vase, I love you too."[149] She compares him to

her beloved amphora, and comments that they could be "brothers:"

> You are not taller than my dear objet d'art, standing next to each other, you
> could be two very white brothers. Only my alabaster vase seems more
> harmonious to me, less savage in its attitude, immobilized in the loveliest
> human position, the sexless position. […] When I say: *sexless*, that doesn't
> mean I want to castrate anyone. My Tunisian urn is by turns a 'he' or a 'she,'
> for that's the way it likes it. She isn't forced to give an opinion, to prolong
> her satisfaction at feeling me caress her or to split with joy when I contemplate
> her. She is chaste, and I leave her chaste. You, I would like you to be a man.[150]

Eliante loves the vase for its neutrality, its sexlessness, and as a safe repository for her

sensual feelings, but this does not preclude her affection and love for Léon. She would

like to have a man in her life as well, and although she does not articulate the same kind

of passion for Léon that she has for the vase, she demonstrates her desire to create an

alternative form of loving, and in that way, find some semblance of happiness for herself.

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[147] Studies that emphasize these themes include Mesch, *The Hysteric's Revenge*; Kelly, *Fictional Genders*;
Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Epoque*; Luckacher, *Maternal Fictions*.
[148] Ibid, 22.
[149] Ibid, 58.
[150] Ibid.

Initially, Léon's response to this is abusive, dismissive, and violent. He accuses Eliante of being an "actress," and exerts his masculinity over her: "…I'll be your lover and that's all there is to it, eh! or I'll teach you what stuff women like you are made of! If I had beaten you that night of our big sport, in front of the pot, you would love me without so much fuss!"[151] He is unable and unwilling to understand Eliante's desires and believes that her flirtation and refusal of sex can only mean one thing: "Do you want to be raped? Killed? I wouldn't feel sorry for you!"[152] It is at this point that Eliante reveals her true identity, her true self; in response to Léon's cruel and humiliating question, she smiles and says, "I'm already dead."[153]

By safely directing her sexual desire toward an inanimate object, Eliante hopes to protect herself from the disgrace and dangers of romantic love with Léon, and thereby maintain her sense of independence and the ability to live her life autonomously. In this way, she truly is a forward-looking and unusual woman, who demonstrates the possibility of a female identity and subjectivity that is not dependent on the existence of a husband or traditional lover. But, at the same time, she is unable to truly live this ideal, for she still hopes to have Léon in her life as someone to love and seeks out his attention and affection. She may flirt and toy with him, but she also desires his understanding and approval, and shares with him, an aspiring doctor, her most intimate secrets. This creates tension and uncertainty for her, as she is trapped between what she truly wants for her life, to be free from the suffering so often associated with love, and her need for male companionship with someone who disrespects and abuses her as much as desires her.

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[151] Ibid, 61, 62.
[152] Ibid, 69-70.
[153] Ibid.

This conflict is fundamental to Eliante's identity as a woman, and leaves her in a dilemma that, as we shall see, she is unable to resolve.

One of the reasons for Eliante's proclamation that she is "already dead" is tied to her "exotic" origins and her troubled past. Eliante is a Creole who was born in Martinique and sent to a Parisian convent when her parents died in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War – "her father of a saber cut, her mother or sorrow."[154] It later comes to light that Eliante is the daughter of an aristocratic family, which alienates and intimidates Léon. During her time in the convent, Eliante was accompanied by Ninaude, her family's Martiniquan servant, who dutifully took care of young Eliante, and provided her with a link to her past. She left the convent when she married Monsieur Donalger, a naval officer, and began a difficult life at sea with her much older husband:

> He was forty years old, I was seventeen. I came out of a convent, out of a
> sad house to enter a sad house: a big black vessel rolling across the most
> dangerous oceans. I saw and heard terrible things in that ship! The window
> of my bedroom, a magnificent nest of fabrics and furs, didn't even have fifty
> centimeters' view of the sea. I never breathed comfortably there, and when
> I set foot on land, the sun hurt me, I would hear guttural accents which terrified
> me.[155]

Eliante reveals to Léon that her husband was an odd and unusual character, with strange erotic tastes, and a physical deformity. He lost part of his nose to a gunshot, and as Léon sees from the sketch Eliante shows him, Monsieur Donalger was not a handsome man. He forced Eliante to engage in all sorts of sexual escapades with him, and memorialized their activities in a series of small wax statues – "obscene little goddesses" as Léon describes them – which depict Eliante in unorthodox sexual positions.[156] Léon gradually

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[154] Ibid, 45. This is reminiscent of Rachilde's own father, who had fought in the Franco-Prussian War and returned home deaf. Hawthorne, "Introduction," *The Juggler,* 210n5.
[155] Rachilde, *The Juggler,* trans. Hawthorne, 45.
[156] Ibid, 83-85, 87.

learns all of these things about Eliante during his visits to her home, in which she reveals her deepest and darkest secrets to him. He notes the intense exoticism and decadence of Eliante's lifestyle and home – her dining room resembles a summer garden with green silk hangings and a carpet thick like grass. It possesses a warm, redolent atmosphere that "dulled his thinking" and made him feel as though he was "sinking down into a comforter."[157] Eliante prepares her foods according to a "Chinese system" of mixing flavoured creams and spices, and she excels at preparing exotic liqueurs of violet and other flower essences.[158] Her private rooms are filled with "crocodiles, snakes, spiders, heaps of fantastic animals," and crates of exotic fabrics and robes.[159] Like Raoule's home, Eliante's bedrooms are "vast and dark," and resemble a temple, with thick red carpet and black furniture.[160]

Eliante is a woman divided between her public, bourgeois self as Madame Donalger, who hosts a "surprisingly bourgeois salon" in "an ordinary house" with "nondescript people," and her private, exotic self.[161] It is only when Léon enters Eliante's house through the private garden entrance, the "côté jardin," that he is led into her world of decadent charms and illicit pleasures.[162] Eliante has many conflicting elements in her life. She is one person in public and another in private, and her background is both French and colonial – indeed, Léon alternately describes her as both "black" and white.[163] Ultimately, Léon believes that this is all "too much exoticism," and it has a powerful

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[157] Ibid, 11.
[158] Ibid, 14-15, 46. Eliante herself, however, only drinks pure water, which was also true of Rachilde. Rachilde, *The Juggler*, 208n7.
[159] Ibid, 47.
[160] Ibid, 73-74.
[161] Ibid, 35.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid, 45.

effect on him.[164]   After Eliante reveals the secrets of her marriage and her past, Léon begins to see her in a new light. He describes her as a "…capricious creole who is always cold, a bird of paradise with feathers painted for other skies,"[165] and felt that "this woman's wit, spicy like a liqueur from the warm islands about which she had dreamed aloud, amused him enormously."[166] These revelations also ease Léon's desire to rape Eliante, and encourage him to "maintain all possible decorum."[167] He begins to see Eliante as a character in a play, and is content to join in on what he sees as an act: "I'm glad about the play you're acting for me. I no longer dread anything except waking up. So I'll try to become more complicated."[168] He says he is tired "of playing the proper gentleman" and wants to lose his head in the smell of "wild animals" and "rice powder" in their "dream about faraway islands!"[169] When Léon tells her of his potential plan to live and practice in the colonies after graduation from medical school, Eliante confesses the same dream: "The colonies! A warm island … lots of flowers and the sea purring around you. Palm trees, big palm trees, and permission to run naked on the island. Leon, that's my dream, my own dream, to go and live in the colonies!"[170]

While this aspect of Eliante's personality and history is a mode of escape and fantasy for Léon, for Eliante, it appears to be a sincere attempt to reveal her true self to her young suitor: "By wanting to know another man…besides my husband […] I owe that man a full confession…".[171] By revealing her fear and yet respect for her dead husband, Eliante hopes to get closer to Léon, and it is after she makes her confession that she is

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[164] Ibid, 87.
[165] Ibid, 45-46.
[166] Ibid, 73.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid, 75.
[169] Ibid, 76.
[170] Ibid, 71.
[171] Ibid, 78.

able to physically embrace him: "Suddenly she was near him, one of her supple arms surrounded him, and, leaning her face towards his, she kissed him on the lips […] he held, pressed against his breast, this woman all fainting with love."[172] Léon, however, is both attracted and repulsed by her past. As she turns to embrace him, and he finally gets what he has waited for, he sees her little more than "…a beautiful phantom […] a vampire with a silvery belly, slipping, swaying…".[173] In a letter he later writes to Eliante, Léon confesses that her kiss has left him with symptoms similar to those associated with a snake bite, or some foreign illness: "…I have a fever, I shiver. I'm too hot or too cold. My lips retain the unusual fruity taste of your mouth, and the bitter taste of your saliva lingers on my tongue, making me find everything I eat bland, sickening since nothing is as good as your love. […] I'm ill. I have …*yellow* fever. I'm jealous, I have nightmares, I have ridiculous visions."[174] Thus, Eliante's exotic past is something both attractive and yet dangerous for Léon. He both desires and fears her. For Eliante, however, her background is something that she needs to confess, and by doing so, hopes to get closer to her love interest. She is a divided woman, displaced in Paris where she feels foreign and out of place, and torn between her sordid and painful past and her futile hope for a better future.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Eliante's character is her talent for juggling, which she learned in Indonesia. In some ways, it builds on her connections to a world and culture outside of Paris and France, and also points to her eccentricity and singularity. Eliante invites Léon to a party at her house for her niece Missie and some of her friends, and when he learns that his "eccentric society woman" is going to juggle, he is shocked

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[172] Ibid, 87.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid, 93.

by her impropriety.[175] She appears on a makeshift stage wearing a tight-fitting leotard, and proceeds to dazzle her audience with a routine in which she juggles heavy knives. She ends the performance with a trick that simulates one of the knives piercing her chest, complete with artificial blood. Léon senses that by juggling, Eliante is able to separate herself from "her family, from society, from the whole world, from all of human society," and that she does this, in some ways, to please only herself.[176] Later, however, Léon comes to see her juggling as a metaphor for her manipulative behaviour, particularly in her attempts to deny him the pleasure of an intimate encounter, and to marry him off to her niece, Missie. Instead of hoping for her own union with Léon, Eliante pushes to see him wed her younger, "modern" niece, who smokes, speaks frankly, and has a teaching degree.[177] Missie represents the rising generation of young women at the turn of the twentieth century who proclaims that, "Today, a girl is no longer at the mercy of her relations, she is free…".[178] Despite Missie's beliefs, Eliante is determined to marry her to Léon, and secure her future. As for herself, she believes that her time for marriage over. It is a "cumbersome" institution,[179] and she is merely a widow who believes she drove her husband to madness and death because of his jealousy and worry: "…I'm afraid of the love of men which is mortal […] My husband is dead because of me."[180] In part, she desires solitude and a state reminiscent of her Greek vase: "I want, yes darling, to be happy all alone, my arms tightly folded across my breast, my thighs hermetically joined, with the smile of communing virgins."[181] As a way of confirming the union she hopes to

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[175] Ibid, 104. Female jugglers, like other actresses, were often presumed to be prostitutes as well; 212n3.
[176] Ibid, 108.
[177] Ibid, 37, 49.
[178] Ibid, 116-117.
[179] Ibid, 50.
[180] Ibid, 112.
[181] Ibid, 128.

see between Léon and Missie, Eliante transforms herself yet again, this time as an aging widow, and visits the young medical student at his home. He is shocked and chastened by her old and unpleasant appearance, and immediately feels his "fever" for her diminishing.[182] Although this is Eliante's intended result, she nevertheless feels an acute sadness over the loss of Léon's affections: "The actress, or the woman, understood that she had played her part too well to cure him or cure herself, and that this time she had lost the game."[183] She believes that in her "*costume*" and with her "affected indifference," she has sacrificed her feelings for what she believes is Léon's own good, and when she leaves his apartment, "she died *a little* crossing the threshold of his door."[184]

Thus, Eliante is, in some ways, a master of disguise, and carefully presents different aspects of herself to Léon. She is at once a widow, a bourgeois *salonnière*, an aunt, a *femme fatale,* an actress and juggler, as well as an exotic and eccentric beauty. Léon is mystified, attracted, and disgusted by these various representations of Eliante's character, and although she contends that these elements of her personality are for her alone, they fail to bring her pleasure or happiness, and she takes great pains to reveal all of her secrets to Léon. In the end, she does not truly use these roles to her advantage, as a strategy for finding agency and selfhood through her various performances; rather, this multitude of identities seems to strangle and paralyse her, and ultimately erases her sense of self altogether. Like Raoule de Vénérande, Eliante is caught at an impasse, and struggles to make sense of her conflicted identities. She wants to find peace and harmony, and in the end, the only avenue through which to achieve this is with death. While Raoule remains tied to death through her dead lover Jacques, Eliante stages her own suicide as a way to

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[182] Ibid, 144-146.
[183] Ibid, 148.
[184] Ibid, 148-149.

bring her corporeal self in line with her already "dead" spirit. When she tricks Léon into bed with her niece, by making him believe it is her, he sees her appear in the bedroom as if she is a ghost, an apparition. It is only when she kills herself with one of her juggling knives that Léon and Missie realize the truth of what has happened. Eliante fulfills her earlier words to Léon, that she is "already dead."

In the character of Eliante Donalger, scholars have noted that Rachilde attempted to create a woman who was concerned with her "self-production" as a "spectacle" or "artist."[185] Holmes has argued that Eliante's isolation in a foreign environment leads her to "channel her creativity into the construction of an impenetrable, elusive, shifting self-identity," which is powerful and liberating, but ultimately a "melancholy victory."[186] In a similar way, Maryline Lukacher sees Eliante's suicide as a "heroic act of defiance," and a "life-affirming act."[187] Although it is clear that in Eliante Donalger, Rachilde created a woman who was a master of her self-representation, and could create any number of images for herself, in the end, I would argue that these conflicted identities leave Eliante empty and with few alternatives. She successfully lives her life as an independent and self-actualized woman, who can find her own outlets for pleasure, but in the end, she also craves traditional love and attention from a man, a love which she feels is beyond her grasp, because of her age, social position, and her past. In "performing" her various personas and identities, I believe that Eliante sincerely hopes to find the one "true" self that will bring her happiness, and when she realizes this cannot happen, she is defeated. Eliante's suicide is not, as Jennifer Birkett has suggested, a simple capitulation to the

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[185] Holmes, *Rachilde*, 141.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Lukacher, *Maternal Fictions*, 154.

patriarchal order of society;[188] rather, it is the inevitable result of the conflicted society in which she lives at the end of the nineteenth century – one that allows her the freedom to create a life and an identity for herself, while also subjecting her to judgement, ridicule, and death.

Conclusion

As the years of the *fin de siècle* and the decadent movement gradually gave way to surrealism and other literary trends of the twentieth century, Rachilde's popularity began to wane and fade. Although she wrote approximately one book every year for the sixty years following the publication of *Monsieur Vénus*, Rachilde became increasingly seen as an "eccentric has-been."[189] Her famous Tuesday salons still attracted young and talented writers, who benefitted from Rachilde's name and connections, but they would ultimately eclipse her in the literary world. One of these writers was a young Colette, who in many ways resembled Rachilde's character Missie from *La Jongleuse* – confident, unashamed, and not preoccupied with the dying customs of the previous century.[190] The female protagonists of her novels were unafraid and unselfconscious of their sexuality, and took their performative selves as a given. They embraced the contradictions of female subjectivity and gendered counter-discourses, and did not hesitate to assert their sense of self and identity, in all its variety and confusion. As Regina Bollhalder Mayer has noted:

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[188] Hawthorne, "Introduction," *The Juggler*, xxi.

[189] Ibid, xxvi. Biographers note that after Vallette's death in 1935, Rachilde had no savings, and became increasingly isolated, lonely, and poor. See Hawthorne, *Rachilde and French Women's Authorship*, 208; Dauphiné, *Rachilde*, 142-157.

[190] The traditional view of the relationship between Rachilde and Colette is that they shared a "rivalry" and "veiled hostility," but Shari Benstock has pointed out that Rachilde was one of the first to give Colette, and not her husband Willy, the credit for writing her early *Claudine* series, and also helped support her emotionally and financially. See Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*, 205; Hawthorne, "Introduction," *The Juggler*, xviii.

"It would be necessary to wait for Colette and Virginia Woolf so that woman could register the presence of their body in the text, so that she could say 'I' as a *woman* and see the other as the affirmation of a right to difference which felt positive. Rachilde could not assume this difference, that of being a woman." [191]   That Colette was able to create heroines who actively embraced their sense of female subjectivity while carefully avoiding any concrete identification or essential classification has made her one of the most celebrated writers of "modern" women in the twentieth century.

For Rachilde, living and writing at the *fin de siècle*, this assertion was not a clear and obvious choice – female subjectivity and identity was something much more inconsistent, complex, and conflicted, and through the characters of Raoule de Vénérande and Eliante Donalger, she commented on the freedoms and also the limitations presented to women in French society at this time.[192]   Both heroines are set against the backdrop of Paris, which is presented as a hostile and foreign environment. They are part of Paris's elite society, but because of their complex lives, they are also separated and sequestered from the lifestyle and habits of their class. Instead, they live in a detached and distant world, sneaking around their mansions and through the streets of Paris at night, in order to lead their secret lives. Interestingly, like the women studied here, they are also both aspiring artists, who are unable, or unwilling, to practice their craft in public. Raoule's interest in painting leads her aunt to call her "nephew," and Eliante's juggling is considered highly inappropriate for a society woman. Both are maligned for these choices, and Rachilde uses them to add to their marginalization from regular gendered

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[191] Bollhalder Mayer, *Éros décadent: Sexe et identité chez Rachilde*, 193.
[192] Scholars of Rachilde, including Melanie Hawthorne, Diana Holmes, and Maryline Lukacher, have all noted the parallels between Rachilde's protagonists, and their search for sexual and individual identity, and her own life.

conventions of Parisian society. Their love interests are randomly chosen, and appear as opposites of one another – Jacques Silvert is the feminine artist, who Raoule sexually dominates and controls even after his death, while Léon Reille is the masculine medical student, who Eliante attempts to conquer by withholding sex and passion. Both women use these men to create elaborate identities for themselves, which grant them incredible powers and allow them to indulge in any number of physical pleasures, but which trap them in conflict. Raoule hopes to create a "new" way of loving, while Léon suggests to Missie that Eliante too is "a decent woman…of a new kind."[193] Ultimately, however, despite the desires of both women to be provocative, liberated, and free in every sense, in the end there does not appear to be much that is new or innovative about either protagonist. Raoule seeks out the comforting disguise of a traditional marriage, while Eliante searches for affection and love from Léon as an escape for her painful and difficult past. In this way, Rachilde's novels masterfully capture the ambiguities and inconsistencies of female selfhood at the turn of the twentieth century, in a world where independence and personal freedom were certainly possible, but fraught with difficulties.

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[193] Rachilde, *The Juggler,* 119.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In 1910, Octave Uzanne described the female artist of Paris as "…a veritable plague, a fearful confusion and a terrifying stream of mediocrity. A perfect army of women painters invades the studios and the salons…".[1] This sentiment reflects the general fear over the rise of women in public and professional life at the turn of the twentieth century, and their increased presence in traditionally male domains. The opportunity and constraint that faced women artists at this time had complex and often conflicting results, as they dealt with their new choices and options in the midst of ongoing restrictions, impediments, and even hostility. Women artists at the *fin de siècle* were in a unique position to capture the inconsistencies of this environment, as professionals who worked in the public male world of art, but who also pursued a craft that allowed them to express their individuality, lived experience, and private sentiments.

In Paris, these complex forces were particularly acute, given the city's vibrant artistic community, which both welcomed and rejected its female artists, and its culture of crisis and splendour. Women, both real and imagined, were often placed at the centre of the city's cultural conflict, as easy targets for its vices and illicit pleasures, but also as the perpetrators of such urban dangers. The image of Parisian womanhood, that of *la Parisienne*, was closely tied to the various and incongruous elements of cultural life in the French capital, and simultaneously blamed for the city's shortcomings – its cultural decadence and prostitution – and praised for their fashion, discerning French taste, and consumer appetites, which had made Paris a world-class centre of modernity by the end

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[1] Octave Uzanne, *Parisiennes de ce temps* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1910), in *Suzanne Valadon*, Fondation Pierre Giannada, 60.

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of the nineteenth century. Parisian women themselves also weighed in on the nature of life in their city, and echoed the worries and concerns while pushing for more freedom and independence. In newspapers like *La Fronde*, Durand and her fellow journalists discussed the trials of life in Paris for it female residents, and the unique struggles they faced, from relationships and work, to crime and suicide.

The five women discussed in this study all, in various ways, experienced the conflicts of late nineteenth-century Paris, as well as the unique challenges of life as an artist. They enjoyed unprecedented opportunities, but dealt with financial difficulty and uncertainty, alienation from family and friends, and personal struggles. Undoubtedly, many men who tried to make their way as artists in Paris faced similar trials; however, men did not have to concern themselves with the larger institutional and professional restrictions that complicated matters for women who pursued the same path. When men made the journey to the bohemian and artistic neighbourhoods of Montmartre and the Latin Quarter, they were able to make important contacts in cafés and ateliers, and became associated with mentors who facilitated their entry into the art world. While Rachilde managed to navigate this world fairly well, most of the other women considered in this study gained access to the Parisian art scene by working as paid models for famous artists, singing, or dancing in cabarets.   These jobs were not taken by choice, but out of necessity, and demonstrates their shifting roles as they tried to make a professional life for themselves in Paris.

This lived experience also had an effect on the art that these women produced during this period, which captured the inconsistencies and conflicts of female identity. Each woman, in her own way, invested her artistic creations with feelings of alienation and dislocation, on the one hand, and, on the other, with a profound sense of self-

possession and self-knowledge. Gwen John's early paintings of her studio apartments in Paris represented the freedom and independence of her life in the city, but also captured the trials and hardships of this experience. In a similar way, Camille Claudel's series of miniature sculptures depicted scenes of female intimacy – women huddled in furtive discussion – but also the loneliness and isolation of the domestic realm. These artists both redressed the nature of interior space at a time when they struggled personally and professionally, and drew inspiration from their urban surroundings. The result was a treatment of intimate, domestic, and feminine space, infused with the conflicts and complexities of their lives as women, and as artists in Paris. In a similar way, Suzanne Valadon and Romaine Brooks invested images of the body with strength and power, but also with pain and suffering. Valadon's images of children were particularly powerful in their ability to communicate the trials and difficulties, as well as the tenderness of motherhood, while Brooks painted portraits of women – debutants, bourgeois ladies, and artists' models – who managed to both embody and defy traditional themes of femininity. Finally, in her novels *Monsieur Vénus* and *La Jongleuse*, Rachilde created female protagonists who possessed multiple and contradictory identities. Raoule de Vénérande and Eliante Donalger are simultaneously widows, spinsters, *femme fatales*, hysterics, and sexual deviants, but are also weak and uncertain women who, in the end, desire marriage and the love of a man above all else. In many ways, Rachilde's fictional heroines represent the culmination of the themes discussed in this study. Her decadent depiction of female subjectivity and selfhood is compelling not for its references to outrageous sexual licentiousness, androgyny, and unusual aggression, but for the ways in which she also infused her protagonists with characteristics of traditional, domestic womanhood, which confuse our understanding of their intentions and hopes, and eventually lead to

their undoing and even death. Taken together, all of these artistic representations of private life and womanhood represent the competing images of female identity that dominated the cultural landscape of Paris at the *fin de siècle*, which presented women with a new array of choices and options in the midst of ongoing impediments and restrictions.

Some historians have argued that to explore the inherent contradictions and conflicts involved in the historical experiences of women is to merely repeat tired stories of unfulfilled dreams and unrealized goals – to tell "those depressing tales," as Margadant has described them.[2] Indeed, we have seen how each of these women managed to create a vision of female identity caught in a struggle that cannot be resolved, or poised at an impasse that appears irreconcilable. However, to emphasize the difficulties and complexities that faced women artists at the turn of the twentieth century is not to deny them agency as historical actors, or suggest that they did not make important gains, but to illuminate their struggles and often unique solutions. I have tried to demonstrate the ways in which John, Claudel, Valadon, Brooks, and Rachilde all found powerful ways to incorporate themes of female conflict into their art, but in the process, they also succeeded in re-articulating the nature of private life and womanhood. The results of their endeavours left the art and literary world with a compelling and enigmatic collection of paintings, sculptures, and novels that did not fit the "traditional" mold of woman's art, and tried to say something new and innovative about female identity at the turn of the twentieth century. Discussions of identity, historical or otherwise, can never, and should never, be relegated to a formula, and each of the women studied here succeeded in articulating and honouring the complexities of a truly lived

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[2] Margadant, *The New Biography,* 10.

experience.   In this way, they were not victims or martyrs, but real people, caught in the

eloquent struggle to define themselves at a moment of profound historical change.

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