

UC Berkeley

Berkeley Undergraduate Journal

Title

The fin-de-siècle Marian Fetish: Women and French society within the work of Maurice Denis

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2sd6b70h>

Journal

Berkeley Undergraduate Journal, 25(1)

Author

McKee, Cameron

Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/B3251012070

Copyright Information

Copyright 2012 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

The fin-de-siècle Marian Fetish: Women and French society within the work of Maurice Denis

Cameron McKee

History of Art '12

Abstract

The Nabis were a prominent group of avant-garde artists from the *Académie Julien* who pushed the boundaries of representational art in fin de siècle Paris. Among this group of men who valued esoteric spirituality and the developing symbolist painting and literature was the orthodox Catholic Maurice Denis. In his paper, McKee utilizes often overlooked works in Denis's oeuvre and reinterprets those most cited to analyze the peculiar role of women within the work of this paradoxically (or is it?) orthodox Catholic and avant-garde artist. Utilizing the Positivist psychology of Charcot McKee demonstrates the problematic nature of female religious ecstasy within an increasingly secular culture. Moving onto the four versions of *Mystère Catholique*, McKee closely reads the modifications to the body of the Virgin in Denis's four versions of the painting, interrogating their implications in the larger *Crise Catholique* in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Finally, considering the original viewing context of *Mystère Catholique* and *Soir Trinitaire*, McKee demonstrates Denis's latent sexual anxiety towards the Virginal archetype expressed privately in his journal and laid bare in his religious painting.

Introduction

Exhibited in Denis's home city of Saint-Germain-en-Laye during the summer of 1891, Maurice Denis's *Mystère Catholique* and *Soir Trinitaire* seem unrelated to the strictly religious painting characteristic of his early artistic practice. The former, *Mystère Catholique* (see fig. 1), was the third in a series of works begun in 1888. Often read as an Annunciation in a contemporary setting, each of the four versions of *Mystère Catholique* positions the seated Virgin Mary opposite a short procession consisting of two young altar boys followed by a deacon carrying a bible. Denis's challenge to modern painting is implicit within *Mystère Catholique*. While working within the tradition of religious art and the nineteenth-century trope of clothing biblical scenes in contemporary dress, Denis's use of the pointillist technique associated with the modernity of the neo-Impressionists, such as Seurat, demonstrates his position betwixt and between the religious and the scientific painting of modernity. Painted in the same pointillist style, *Soir Trinitaire* stands in stark visual contrast to the four versions of *Mystère Catholique*. The disparity between the two works is partly formal. Unlike the tonal warmth of the exhibited 1891 *Mystère Catholique*, the palette of *Soir Trinitaire* (fig. 2) is cool and muted. Content also distinguishes the works. Despite the religious connotations of the title, *Soir Trinitaire* is composed of a female triad, two of which are nude save their hats as vestiges of contemporary dress. Placed in an idyllic, pastoral landscape, Denis's women resemble the staid and classicized women of Puvis de Chavannes more than the overtly religious subject of *Mystère Catholique*.

How does one reconcile these two works, if they can be reconciled at all? How is Denis situated in this historical and artistic moment, both personally and by other contemporary artists and critics? What does the juxtaposition of these works at the same exposition, and in the same year, reveal about the social anxieties mapped upon the female body in *fin-de-siècle* France? A comparative reading of Denis's varied works during this formative moment in his artistic career raises questions such as these. Focusing almost exclusively on women during this period, Denis's paintings compel the viewer to consider the role of women within Denis's personal anxieties as well as their role in the social anxieties he shared with contemporaries. In the four versions of *Mystère Catholique*, the female figure of the Virgin Mary mediates between Denis's personal aspiration to revive religious art and his ambition to employ a technique he considered "modern." The female figure in these works calls attention to contemporary anxieties within the debate as to whether Catholicism was a viable institution in an increasingly secularized and industrialized society. Women, for Maurice Denis, stand between orthodox religious tradition, occultism, and Positivist science; between the tradition of the classicized nude and the vulgar nakedness of the female body; and between religious transcendence and hysteria. Yet, the depiction of the female body was problematic in and of itself; Denis's repeated use of the complex Marian pictorial trope reflects the position of women within religious discourse and Denis's personal sexual fantasy.

I. Spiritual transcendence or hysteria: The female body and Denis's lithography

Engraved in the same year the aforementioned paintings were exhibited, Denis's woodblock print *De la vocation* (fig. 3) depicts a woman seen from behind, experiencing what appears to be religious ecstasy. As she turns her head and lifts her right hand skyward, her left hand caresses the bible presented by a priest, who turns his eyes away with an ambiguous

expression that wavers between reverence and skepticism. Denis accentuates the sinuous collapse of the woman's body through the decorative lines that compose her dress. Strong vertical and horizontal geometric patterning emphasizes the contrasting rigidity of the priest. With only ambiguous indications of a wooded background, the figures are pushed to the front of the picture plane, narrowing the viewer's focus to the vision of religious ecstasy. Conspicuously absent, however, is the object of this spiritually transcendent vision. The viewer is situated as an objective spectator, unable to glean any trace of the source of her religious ecstasy. The purported objectivity of our gaze places us in the precarious position of judging the woman's vision. For contemporary nineteenth-century viewers, the two options were belief on the basis of religious faith, or rationalized skepticism on the basis of Positivist science. In *De la vocation*, we witness Denis's own uncertainty towards the relationship between religion and science at the end of the century through his conflicted position in the lithograph. Denis evoked contemporary debates by juxtaposing the dubious priest to the woman whose pose is strikingly similar to the psychological diagrams of hysteria which were available to French audiences in the 1890s (figs. 4-7).

Published in 1888, the psychologist Jean-Marie Charcot's treatise *Les démoniaques dans l'art* represents a Positivist, anti-religious response to the visionary experience captured in Denis's *De la vocation*. Charcot employed Christian art from the Middle Ages to demonstrate the ability of empirical science to retroactively diagnose cases of demonic possession and religious ecstasy as simple cases of psychological neuroses. An influential doctor of the Salpêtrière sanitarium in the 1880s and 1890s, Charcot was a seminal figure in the study of hysteria as a widespread, and primarily feminine, disease. Charcot rooted his practice in the visual documentation of his work by the draughtsman Paul Richer. Women figure prominently throughout his visual exegesis of possession and religious ecstasy in the history of Christian art, as well as in his characterization of hysteria in the second half of the treatise. Despite Charcot's recognition that hysteria among men was on the rise, he implied that the disease remained predominantly feminine by exclusively using the feminine subject pronoun "*elle*" in his schematic description of the hysterical attack.¹ Over the course of the four stages of hysteria, the afflicted woman first experiences frequent visual hallucinations and fits of uncontrolled movement, resembling "an epileptic attack."² This transforms into a "period of clownism" in which the patient engages in "large movements" with muscular force, traditionally considered signs of possession (fig. 4).³ In the third period, the "simple woman" experiences "gay order" hallucinations of erotic love, and "sad order" hallucinations of "war [or] revolutions...[but] always with pouring blood."⁴ The hysterical episode concludes as the woman regains consciousness and bodily control in the "terminal period."⁵ Each of Richer's lithographic line drawings emphasizes the woman's lack of control over her own body. Dressed in a simple frock and laid out on a hospital bed, these "hysterical women" are often depicted in contortions that constrict the woman, manipulating her into potentially sexual positions. Specifically in the diagram "*Contorsion-Variété de l'arc de cercle*" (fig. 4), the woman seems to have constricted her own arms as her frock inches up her leg, threatening to expose her genitalia and inviting the viewer to partake in her sexual hallucination. Charcot's emphasis on the female hysteric's lack of

¹ Charcot, Jean-Marie; *Les Démoniaques dans l'art*; pg. 94

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. 97

⁴ Ibid. 103

⁵ Ibid.

bodily control and Richer's visual sexualization of her subjugate the female body to the purported logic of masculine empirical science. In Charcot's work, religion emerges visually to unify the treatise with the lithographs. In "*Attitude de supplication*" (fig. 5) and "*Attitude d'attente extatique*" (fig. 6), hysterical women appear engaged in prayer or religious ecstasy. Charcot concluded his treatise with "the ecstasies," in which he asserts that "in the representations of ecstasies, [artists] have neglected to draw all the appearance of...convulsive phenomena. For ecstasy is an expressive pose, a purely passionate attitude."⁶ The final diagram, "*Sainte Catherine de Sienna en extase*" (fig. 7), demonstrates Charcot's belief of what artists had overlooked in their representations of religious ecstasy: the simple fact that these purportedly holy women were actually acting out their sexually deviant hallucinations.

These images of the hysteric female in a "purely passionate attitude" recall the sinuous woman of *De la vocation* who collapses in religious ecstasy, demonstrating how easily Denis's woodblock print could be misinterpreted. *Les Démoniaques dans l'art* promulgates an alternate conception of the female body. A diagnosis of hysteria wholly removes independent mental and physical agency from the female body as she moves through Charcot's constructed stages of hysteria. In contrast to the hysteric women in Charcot's lithographs, the lines that compose the woman's dress in *De la vocation* complicate rather than simplify her physical and mental relation to hysteria. Upon closer examination, the sinuous vertical lines that simulate fabric and emphasize the woman's collapse do not end at her neck line as one would expect, but instead extend to the base of her skull and set off the intricate braid of her hair. How then, does one interpret the artist's decision to cover his female subject? Are these lines indicative of the artist's hand imposing morality? Should they be read as an act of possession similar to the sexuality inscribed by Richer on the creeping frock in Charcot's lithographs? If so, we then align Denis with Charcot, Positivist science, and the debunking of religious ecstasy. However, these heavy black verticals, signaling Denis's creative presence, may also be read as a vehement effort to protect the integrity of the female body as a religious agent of God. Unlike the anti-clerical overtones in Charcot's mapping of psychological instability and sexual deviance upon the body of holy women, Denis's positioning of women between religion, science, and sexuality is much more ambiguous.⁷

In her discussion of the phenomena of hysteria, art historian Patricia Matthews asserts that the disease "for many women may have been the result of a failed masquerade – their inability to accept or maintain their public and/or private feminine role."⁸ Because hysteria was understood to be a social disease, it is necessary to consider the role of women in society during the late nineteenth-century, and to consider in what ways they might attempt an escape from their traditional role. The women, who according to Matthews failed in their feminine masquerade, were most likely the *femmes hōnnetes*; "proper" bourgeois women relegated to their role within the domestic sphere as mothers and wives. However, beginning with the women's congresses in 1889, the proto-feminist *femme nouvelle* emerged and catalyzed a controversy regarding the independence of women during this period.⁹ The identity of the *femme nouvelle* was masculinized in the *fin-de-siècle* press, positioning the New Woman as the villainous "homesse" (manish-woman) who smoked cigarettes, wore pants, and was armed with the bicycle to ensure her travel away from the home. Henri Boutet's cover for *La Plume* (fig. 8) caricatures the

⁶ Ibid. 108

⁷ Based on specific writings in his journal between 1885 and 1892, which will be discussed at depth later.

⁸ Matthews, Patricia; *Passionate Discourse*; pg. 78

⁹ Silverman, Deborah; *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*; pg. 63

bloomer-clad *femme nouvelle* as crushing the genitals of cupid on her bicycle. Executed as a loose conjunction of lines, the sketchy quality of the *femme nouvelle* attests to her reckless disregard for convention as opposed to the clearly delineated, self-contained, and corseted demure, bourgeois woman in the background. Contemporary medical science reinforced this juxtaposition, believing the *femme nouvelle* to be pathological in her calculated desire to destroy the family and traditional gender roles.¹⁰ This assertion built upon the already established concept of female biological inferiority. Sabatier, a professor of anatomy and zoology during the this period, argued that women were biologically inferior as a result of the intrinsic passivity of their sex cells, in contrast to the activity of the male sperm.¹¹

Artistically, the independent agency and strong will of the *femme nouvelle* manifested itself in the pictorial type of the *femme fatale*.¹² A lithograph like Franz von Stuck's *Sensuality* (fig. 9) exemplifies the *femme fatale* with little explanation. Overtly and unapologetically erotic, this female personification of sensuality assumes a pose reminiscent of Charcot's lithographs; her arms are restrained behind her back as the unequivocally phallic serpent wraps himself through her groin and around her torso. Unlike the semi-consciousness of Charcot's hysteric women, von Stuck's personification appears mentally lucid and announces her sexual agency as she makes direct eye contact with the viewer, inviting him with her coquettish smile. Her "seductive and transgressive" gaze not only asserts her sexual agency but also challenges Charcot's (and later Freud's) intransigent schema in which a woman's sexual repression, combined with her weak mental constitution, manifests itself in neurotic fits of hysteria. The *femme fatale* as a pictorial type stood diametrically opposed to the second category, termed the "pure woman" by Matthews.

Maurice Denis, according to Matthews, uses "the female body as [a] desexualized vessel to symbolize...the pure, sexually 'innocent' woman in contrast with the *femme fatale*."¹³ While it is defensible to oppose Denis's women to the *femme fatale*, to conceive of them as "sexually innocent" oversimplifies the depicted woman in *De la vocation*. In comparison to the assertive sexual agency of von Stuck's *Sensuality*, Denis's woman assumes a passive role as she collapses in religious ecstasy, enveloped within the linear patterning of her dress. However, the question still stands: do we perceive this woman's religious ecstasy as the idealized "non-threatening, pastoral sexuality rooted in nostalgic images of the Christian past"?¹⁴ Or do we read her as a hysterical woman more akin to Charcot's Salpêtrière than sainthood? Are neurotic, convulsive fits her only outlet to escape the pressure to submit to her prescribed feminine role within the domestic sphere? These unanswerable questions lie at the heart of Denis's art. In *De la vocation*, Denis allows for the interpretive multivalence of the ambiguous woman seen from behind. This figure evokes the problematic status of women at the end of the century by suggesting the disparity between the *femme fatale* and the "pure woman." She can firmly stand for either a pro-Catholic faith in miraculous instances of religious ecstasy, or an anti-clerical attack on church dogma using the empiricism of Positivist science, including medical constructions such as hysteria. Even in this minor woodblock print within Denis's oeuvre, the artist creates a rich work

¹⁰ Matthews, Patricia; *Passionate Discourse*; pg. 66

¹¹ Nye, R; *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*; pg. 83

¹² I use Patricia Matthews's categorization because, in addition to its aptness, she roots her terminology in the terms of the period, avoiding their potential anachronism.

¹³ Matthews, Patricia; *Passionate Discourse*; pg. 114

¹⁴ Ibid.

that speaks to French social anxieties surrounding women and religion during this period, anxieties which pervaded French society and preoccupied Denis himself.

II. Religious conflict, Marian fetishization, and *Mystère Catholique*

Painted six times between 1889 and 1891 in the form of personal studies, for private patrons, and for exhibition at the 1891 *Salon des Indépendants* and in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, *Mystère Catholique* is a frequently discussed work in Denis scholarship. In order to explore the religious conflict of the period, this study will center on the depiction of the Virgin.¹⁵ The subtle pictorial and iconographic modifications made by Denis over the course of the four selected versions narrow the questions posed in the analysis of *De la vocation* to the contemporary debate among Positivist science, orthodox French Catholics, concern over the growing popularity of occult Catholicism at the end of the century, and the position of women within this debate. Additionally, Denis's modifications of the figure of the Virgin help us analyze Denis's piety and his relationship to women. The Lyon Exhibition Catalogue eruditely opens the discussion of the first version of *Mystère Catholique* (fig. 10) with an obscure excerpt from Denis's *Journal Tomes*:

How am I to represent the Queen of Virgins if I can no longer dream of she who I called the Reflection of Mary? How to conceive a head à la [Fra] Angelico, a pose of religious painting, if I can no longer see in all her physiognomy the expression of sainthood?¹⁶

In this private query made public, Denis reveres the Virgin Mary as the ideal of beauty to whom all women are compared. Given the sobriquet "Jeanne la Douce" by Denis, Jeanne Dufour is the "she" whom Denis called the "Reflection of Mary" in this journal entry. Infatuated with her piety, Denis purportedly met Jeanne outside of the cathedral in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in the spring of 1885, a crucial time in Denis's life as he transitioned from puberty to adulthood, and asserted his desire to become an artist.¹⁷ After a period of overwhelming infatuation from March through October of 1885, his idolization of Jeanne as his "muse" who smiled "[from] the soul, not the flesh," quickly dissolved as Denis came to realize that she was not a perfect mirror of the Virgin; rather, she was "thoughtless, in truth, like a child" who "speaks too much, or without thought."¹⁸ Still unable to reconcile his unattainable ideal femininity as a contradictorily chaste woman and fecund mother, "the memory of Jeanne imposed her self on the figure of Mary" in the initial version of *Mystère Catholique*.¹⁹

¹⁵ Kuenzli used the work to position the spirituality of Denis in relation to the Symbolist movement. Di Pasquale utilized the work to explain Denis's reconciliation of religion and spirituality with nature. Driskel positioned *Mystère Catholique* as the culmination of the century's developing notions of naturalism, hierarchy, and Byzantine pictorial forms. While the catalogue from the *Musée des Beaux-Arts à Lyon* recognizes the influence of Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* on Denis's work an in depth study has yet to be performed. To the best of my knowledge, a close study of the Virgin in these works has not been engaged in.

¹⁶ Denis, Maurice; *Journal Tome 1*; pg. 58 12 mai 1885: "Comment me représenter la Reine des Vierges si je ne songe plus à celle que j'ai appelée le Reflet de Marie? Comment concevoir une tête à l'Angelico, une pose de peinture religieuse, si je ne vois plus dans tout sa physionomie l'expression de la sainteté?"

¹⁷ Durey, Philippe; *Maurice Denis: 1870-1943* Exhibition guide; pg. 125

¹⁸ Denis, Maurice; *Journal Tome 1*; 57 4 mai; pg. 62 8 décembre

¹⁹ Durey, Philippe; *Maurice Denis: 1870-1943* Exhibition guide; pg. 125

Denis maps onto the canvas this disparity between the corporeal beauty of actual women and his ideal of a pious beauty encapsulated in the Immaculate Conception and perpetual virginity of Mary. The disparity between the heavenly and earthly in this first iteration of *Mystère Catholique* is not apparent at first glance because the Virgin appears to occupy the same space as the nineteenth-century deacon and altar boys who balance her on the right of the composition. However, Denis subtly separates the Virgin from contemporary reality by first encapsulating her within her white robe. Her trailing veil parallels the contour of her crooked right arm, creating a negative space reminiscent of a Byzantine aureola, further separating her from our reality. However, when considering the composition as a whole, one feels a unification rather than a disjunction between the contemporary reality of the present clergy and the divine apparition of Mary. We alternately see the scene as unified or divided, but our conception of the scene ultimately settles on a separation due to the shadow cast in the foreground. The composition is therefore divided into the physical realm, cast in sunlight coruscating from the robes of the deacon and altar boys at the bottom of the canvas, contrasting with Mary's placement in the shadowy realm of the divine. This oscillation between division and unity is due in part to the token pictorial symbols, astutely placed by Denis. In the flat expanse of drapery, assumed to be her lap, Mary holds a rosary, anachronistically tying her to the material world, while across the composition the haloed deacon echoes the divine halo of the Virgin.²⁰ Similarly, the lily, a long-standing symbol of purity and chastity associated with Mary, is near the center of the painting; in this position, it bridges light and shadow, the material and the divine. Art historian Katherine Kuenzli reads *Mystère Catholique* as an Annunciation in a contemporary setting. She argues that this potential anachronism is "deliberately suggestive of a general spirituality," a "mixture of Catholicism with secular subjectivism" that is reinforced by the title *Mystère Catholique* rather than *Annunciation*.²¹ Kuenzli's assertion is based on Denis's retrospective statement that he "exhibited at the *Indépendents*, an *Annunciation*, which, for fear of seeming banal, [he] called *Catholic Mystery*."²² Denis's callow fear of artistic banality, conjoined with his desire to assert his orthodox Catholic piety, is manifested in the uncertainty of the first version of *Mystère Catholique*. Denis rejected the strict naturalistic illusionism of his academic training, constructing his flattened figures using large patches of unmodulated color and positioning them in strict profile. Additionally, Denis emphasized the materiality of the paint, painting the scene with thick and visible brush strokes. While these pictorial characteristics differ from traditional academic religious painting, Denis nonetheless retains striking illusionism in the depiction of the translucent curtain.

Denis's depiction of a "general spirituality," in which non-academic techniques were brought to bear on the traditional Annunciation scene, attests to his involvement with the Nabis and their desire to create a unique *modern* painting. The Nabis brotherhood was a group of young artists from the *Académie Julian* who collectively dreamed of the "condemnation of the idea of resemblance in painting," favoring a flat, often Gauguin-like, treatment of the painted surface.²³ Modernity for the Nabis centered on the stylistic manipulation of objects based on the "mental image imagined by the artist," most often realized by using the techniques of pictorial

²⁰ Ibid. This is the only mention of the anachronistic rosary I have found in extant literature. It is, in fact, a significant pictorial choice on the part of Denis because even in the contemporary setting of religious scenes it was not common to place the Virgin with her token symbols. (See Driskel for an in depth discussion of the naturalist agenda in religious painting.)

²¹ Kuenzli, Katherine-Marie; *The anti-heroism of modern life*; pg. 149

²² Denis, *Le Symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne*, in *Le Ciel et L'arcadie* as translated by Di Pasquale

²³ Chassé, Charles; *The Nabis & Their Period*, trans. Michael Bullock; pg. 14

flatness, a devotion to “beautiful grays,” and the exaggeration of “broken colors.”²⁴ Paul Sérusier’s highly abstract and coloristic landscape, *Talisman* (fig. 11), was painted during his study with Gauguin in Pont-Aven and stood as a model of modern painting for the Nabis. The influence of Sérusier’s visible brushstroke, unmodulated color, and geometric treatment of form is apparent in the first version of *Mystère Catholique*, in which Denis attempts to articulate his “mental vision” of an Annunciation-like scene. Characterized by their “mystical theosophy,” a majority of the Nabis converted to or intensified their Catholicism, and the execution of sacred artworks was of vital importance to the group. As noted by Charles Chassé, “the presence among the Nabis of the Catholic Maurice Denis was to intensify the group’s interest in sacred art.”²⁵ Denis, who remained devoutly Catholic throughout his involvement with the Nabis, introduced the Thomistic teachings to the group in the early 1890s, as they were advocated by Pope Leo XIII in the 1880s and officially in the 1893 encyclical “*Providentissimus Deus*.”²⁶ While Sérusier and Ranson exposed the Nabis to occult ceremonies and writings, which were increasingly fashionable at the end of the century, Denis organized instruction of the brotherhood in Thomistic philosophy by Dominican priests.²⁷ The conflicting artistic and theological issues confronted by Denis during his interaction with the Nabis makes his traditional position as the bulwark for orthodox Catholicism within the *fin-de-siècle* avant-garde more tenuous. The artistic uncertainty Denis expressed in his first version of *Mystère Catholique* also expresses his personal and religious uncertainty as he negotiated modernity and tradition in his art.

Within the context of *Mystère Catholique*, Denis’s split allegiances to modernity and tradition were inscribed on the body of the Virgin in the second iteration of *Mystère Catholique* in 1889 (fig. 12). The modifications made by Denis between the first and second iterations of the work are striking. In the 1889 version of *Mystère Catholique*, Denis significantly illuminated the foreground, warming the color palette and removing the problematic shadow that created the oscillating perception of the work, simultaneously unifying a contemporary scene, dividing the earthly and divine. By illuminating the entire picture plane, Denis ensured a reading of the scene as entirely within the physical world. Increasing the size of the second painting also emphasizes its existence fully within our world because the viewer’s body is contiguous with the larger figures. Denis clarified the ambiguous position of the altar boys by adding clear halos, which appeared as streaks of pastel yellow in the first version. He thereby further unifies the scene by articulating the divinity of each figure. But what are the implications of depicting an apparently mortal church clergy as divine? With his conscious conflation of divine figures within a contemporary scene, Denis utilizes the figures of the clergy to assert the absolute masculine authority of the church over the Virgin.

²⁴ Ibid. 13

²⁵ Ibid. 83

²⁶ Di Pasquale Maria E.; *The Crise Catholique*; pg. 10, 25; Pope Leo XIII was crucial figure in the reconciliation of faith and science in the 1880s. What Di Pasquale termed the “rhetoric of reconciliation” in her dissertation *The Crise Catholique* began with the encyclical “*Aeterni Patris*” issued by Leo in 1879.²⁵ This involved a revival of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas in which the conflict between faith and reason was reconciled because “both derive from one and the same ultimate source” in which God is both the “author of revelation” and “the creative source of human intellect and of the created universe.” In 1893, with the encyclical “*Providentissimus Deus*,” Leo explicitly sanctioned the scientific and empirical approach to the bible, a process that was seen by anti-clerical positivists to criticize dogma, “as a compliment to traditional methods of exegesis.” Throughout this period, Thomist revival was received with mixed reactions across the spectrum of the French press

²⁷ Ibid. 78

In the figure of Mary, Denis made significant modifications between the first and second versions. Most apparently, he clarified her visage by turning her head towards the viewer and softening her expression, thereby allowing us to read Mary as submissively accepting the asserted divinity of the clergy. The Virgin's submission to the Deacon and altar boys is clarified by the introduction of Mary's bowing pose. Unlike the rigid uprightness of the Virgin in the first iteration of *Mystère Catholique*, she is now bent forward, presumably deferring to the message heralded by her male counterparts. Denis subtly reinforced this deference as he echoed Mary's bow with the newly introduced curve to the lily. Significantly more classicized and illusionistic than any other iteration of the work, the second version of *Mystère Catholique* is most easily read as a contemporary scene of the Annunciation. The 1889 version acknowledges Denis's doubt in his own ability to reconcile the revival of religious art with modern technique. Thus, Denis unravels much of the non-academic, modern technique used in the first version. Where the figures were initially treated as flattened compositions of color, they were given volume through modeling and shading in the second version. While the hand of Denis remains visible in the textured brushstroke, it has been severely suppressed in favor of a more academic treatment of the painted surface. Ultimately, this second version stands as an attempt to overcome the problems posed in the first painting. To depict the "Queen of Virgins," Denis rejected reconciling the earthly and heavenly realms, instead modeling this second version exclusively "à la [Fra] Angelico."²⁸

Denis's reverence towards the art of Fra Angelico did not begin nor end with the aforementioned remark made in 1885. Rather, Denis venerated the religious and artistic piety of Angelico throughout his journal and predicated his own ability and piety on the model of Angelico's art.²⁹ We know that Denis painted a copy of Angelico's *Annunciation* (fig. 13), and when we compare it to the composition of *Mystère Catholique*, the influence is clear.³⁰ Most generally, both establish a shallow recessionary space through the use of background architecture, punctuated by two primary figures related horizontally across the picture plane. Denis's veneration of Fra Angelico was not unique in late nineteenth-century discourse on religious art, preceding proponents situate Denis's place within the debate. Beginning in the 1830s, Fra Angelico was upheld in "unrestrained panegyric[s]" by the conservative Catholic Ultramontanes. A group that developed over the course of the first half of the century, the Ultramontanes' extreme political and religious conservatism emphasized the power of the Pope with a retrograde revival of traditional Roman liturgies and a hierarchical Byzantine-esque mode of representation.³¹ They embellished upon Visari's biographical "claim that Angelico never painted a crucifixion without tears streaming from his eyes."³² For the students of Ingres, Fra Angelico was so fashionable during the 1830s and 40s that artists such as Eugène Amaury-Duval attempted to recreate Angelico's style to suit the contemporary needs of conservative religious

²⁸ Denis, Maurice; *Journal Tome 1*; pg. 58 12 mai 1885 (see the introductory quotation for this section)

²⁹ Denis venerates the art of Fra Angelico repeatedly throughout the early years of his journal. During one of his first excursions to the Louvre in August 1885, Denis enters into his journal a lengthy ekphrasis on Fra Angelico's Coronation of the Virgin, which he calls a "painted prayer." A year later, Denis described the aesthetic of Fra Angelico as "seule et vraiment catholique; qui seule répond aux aspirations des âmes pieuses, mystiques, amant Dieu." (5 janvier 1886)

³⁰ Durey, Philippe; *Maurice Denis: 1870-1943* Exhibition guide; pg. 125 Unfortunately I could not locate a copy of the image in any of the secondary sources on Denis or in any digital image database.

³¹ Driskel, Michael Paul; *Representing Belief*; pg. 82, 93

³² *Ibid.* 68-69

painting.³³ In Amaury-Duval's version of the *Annunciation* (fig. 14), the influence of Fra Angelico can readily be seen in his use of early Renaissance drapery, the deliberate readability of gesture, the utter clarity of figural contour, and the citation of Angelico's Greco-Roman architectural setting.

Denis, by contrast, emulated what he perceived to be the mystical painting process of Angelico when creating *Mystère Catholique*. When comparing the two works, it is clear that Denis has taken up the strong sense of horizontality found in Angelico's *Annunciation* and further emphasized the inextricable material flatness of the painted canvas.³⁴ The physical materiality of paint on canvas echoes Denis's previously discussed insistence on the unity of the physical and spiritual realms in the second version of the work.³⁵ Unlike Angelico, who separates the divine (the archangel Gabriel) and the physical (the Virgin) with the Corinthian columns that rhythmically punctuate the foreground, Denis joins the two by removing the physical demarcation of space (the columns in the case of Angelico), leading the viewer to contemplate the presence of the Virgin in the modern world glimpsed outside the window. When we compare the relationship between the principle figures in Angelico's and Denis's paintings, a striking difference emerges. In Angelico's *Annunciation*, Mary bows her head, her arms crossed at her chest in a pose that Michael Baxandall characterizes as the acceptance of the Virgin to her divine fate.³⁶ Across from her, the angel Gabriel reveres the Holy Mother by reciprocating her bow, physically lowering himself in deference to her divinity. In *Mystère Catholique*, something entirely different takes place. While Denis cited Angelico's figure of the Virgin bowing to the angel, he replaces the Archangel Gabriel with the deacon and altar boys. Moreover, in *Mystère Catholique* the Virgin's bow is not so much a pose of acceptance as a pose of submission. Unlike the deferential bow of Gabriel, the haloed deacon and altar boys remain rigidly upright, eyes closed, engaged in the mystical vision of the Virgin in the sunlight of contemporary life. The lack of mutual deference presented in Angelico, Mary to her fate and Gabriel to her divinity, leads one to read Mary as doubly submissive in the second version of *Mystère Catholique*. If read as an Annunciation scene, the Virgin submits to her fate as mother of the Christ child, as heralded by the clergy. However, her pose can also be read as submitting to the Catholic Church as the sole true religious authority.

By depicting the absolute masculine authority of the Catholic Church in the second version of *Mystère Catholique*, Denis endeavors to artistically assert his theological devotion to orthodox Catholicism, a devotion earlier demonstrated by his introduction of Thomistic teachings to the Nabis. Denis's desire to visually articulate his resolute piety placed him in a precarious position within the *fin-de-siècle* religious debate between orthodox Catholicism and Catholic occultism. In the late nineteenth-century, occultism was growing in fashionability and had been characterized by a fascination with séances, hypnosis, and a spiritualism that advocated transcending one's physical materiality.³⁷ Occultism manifested itself in the French art world

³³ Ibid. 73

³⁴ This leads one to think of the notorious quote from *Définition du néo-traditionnisme*: "Se rappeler qu'un tableau—avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote—est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées." - in *Le Ciel et L'arcadie* pg. 5

³⁵ See the previous page in which the two realms are linked by the token symbols of Mary's purity (the lily) and Catholicism (the anachronistic) rosary.

³⁶ Baxandall, Michael; *Painting and Experience in fifteenth-century Italy*; pg. 55

³⁷ Keshavjee, Serena; "L'art Inconscient: Imaging the Unconscious in Symbolist Art for the Théâtre d'art," and Di Pasquale, Maria E.; "Joséphine Péladin: Occultism, Catholicism, and Science in the Fin-de-Siècle," in *RACAR* XXXIV no. 1 (2009); pgs. 58, 66

with the rise of Joséphin Péladan, who led the *Salon de la Rose+Croix* and revolted against the growing trend of naturalizing biblical subjects within art. Péladan opposed Morot's disturbingly lifelike *Le Martyre de Jésus du Nazareth* (fig. 15), as well as religious subjects made contemporary in paintings such as *Mystère Catholique*.³⁸ He believed that this naturalism would inevitably result in "the end of art," and ultimately "the end of the [French] race."³⁹ His teleological fear of art and, consequently, society's degradation led Péladan to champion a wholesale retrogression to a Catholic art rooted in a hierarchic, anti-naturalistic style driven by symbols. Carlos Schwabe's poster for the first *Salon de la Rose+Croix* in 1892 (fig. 16) visually articulated many goals of the occultist group. Emphasizing "elongated figures, linear design, and floral patterning," the pure women of the upper register triumphantly transcend their own corporeal imperfection into the radiance of spiritual light, and in so doing, "emphasize decoration over imitation of nature."⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the nude woman at the lower right remains in her "mire of physical existence," disintegrating into the water from whence she came.⁴¹ Yet, despite the decorative border pattern of crosses and the repeated depiction of lilies throughout, the image barely signals its position within a trajectory of religious art. Schwabe's depiction of an ambiguous and metaphysically transcendent spirituality situated the artists of Péladan's *Salon* as part of a spiritually "elite status, [an] important element of [Péladan's] aesthetic and philosophical agenda."⁴²

Unlike Péladan, who believed that an occult revelation transcended any spirituality in nature, Denis rooted himself in the belief that "Art is the sanctification of nature" and that "the mission of the aesthete is to erect the beauty within the imperishable icon."⁴³ In the tract *Définition du néo-Traditionnisme*, published in 1890, Denis verbalizes the artistic anxieties present in his first two versions of *Mystère Catholique* as he attempted to revive religious painting through the reconciliation of nature, spirituality, and modern technique within his own painting practice. Creating a "definitive synthesis" of the "painter's definition of the simple word 'nature'" is the ultimate goal for Denis as he attempts to distance himself from Péladan's growing following and the occultism present even among the Nabis. Denis does not explicitly state how this synthesis is achieved, but when he exclaims that, "Art is the sanctification of nature, the nature of all the world which is limited to life," he suggests how his personal experimentation aimed for synthesis.⁴⁴ Given the terms of the essay, "synthesis" more readily defines itself as a negation. It is not found in the work of academicians like Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier, harshly derided by Denis for failing to synthesize due to his "enjoyment [of] technical terms" that result in "déformation" and a "desolate vulgarization of art."⁴⁵ Likewise, an exact facsimile of nature is not a true "synthesis" because "photography more or less conveys the reality of form, and a cast after nature is as much 'nature as possible.'"⁴⁶ The synthesis of nature

³⁸ Driskel, Michael Paul; *Representing Belief*, pg. 228

³⁹ Péladan, Joséphin; *Art ochlocratique*; pg. 212

⁴⁰ Pasquale, Maria E.; "Joséphin Péladin: Occultism, Catholicism, and Science in the Fin-de-Siècle," pg. 58

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Denis, *Définition du néo-traditionnisme* in *Le ciel et l'arcadie*; pg. 20 & Denis, *Journal Janvier 1889*; pg. 73.

This erudite similarity was noted by Bouillon: "L'art et la sanctification de la nature," "la mission de l'esthète d'ériger les choses belles en immarcescibles icônes."

⁴⁴ Denis, *Définition du néo-traditionnisme* in *Le ciel et l'arcadie*; pg. 20; This specific quotation was also used to demonstrate Denis's desire to differentiate from the Salon de la Rose+Croix by rooting himself in the representation of the natural.

⁴⁵ Ibid. pg. 10-11

⁴⁶ Ibid. pg. 9

is also not the naturalism associated with the High Renaissance. Denis explains that, “artists have misunderstood the epithet ‘naturalist’”; he instead points to artists and arts considered “*les primitifs*” by his contemporaries, specifically Fra Angelico. In the first two versions of *Mystère Catholique*, naturalism takes on a *primitif* character; Denis does not attempt a facsimile of nature, but rather works in the vein of Fra Angelico to produce a piece of work that could confidently speak to the uncertainty surrounding the status of orthodox Catholicism at the end of the century. By placing the Virgin in a position submissive to the masculine authority of the Catholic Church, Denis asserts his own support of the Catholic Church over the mystical spirituality often associated with Marian devotion and women during the *fin-de-siècle*.⁴⁷

However, Denis’s use of Angelico and “*les primitifs*” as an alternative “naturalism” would have problematized the reading of *Mystère Catholique* for his contemporaries because Péladan and his occultist art circle *also* responded positively to “the primacy of early Italian Renaissance painters, in particular Fra Angelico.”⁴⁸ In his writing, Denis vehemently expressed his desire to reconcile the disparity between religious art and naturalism, but a reading of *Mystère Catholique* remains unstable. The viewer must question Denis’s success in distancing himself from late nineteenth-century occultism. The divinized clergy of the 1889 *Mystère Catholique* can be interpreted as influenced by their visionary encounter with the Virgin, making them akin to Schwabe’s women climbing the stairs, consequently transcending their physical existence. Within the *fin-de-siècle* debate between orthodoxy and occultism, the multivalence of Denis’s work cannot be clearly resolved. However, it is within the tension of interpretation that one discovers the significance of Denis’s attempt to traverse the social anxieties surrounding the depiction of the female body.

Painted in 1890 and exhibited in 1891 at *Saint-Germain-en-Laye*, the third version of *Mystère Catholique* (fig. 1) positioned Denis and his work within the larger context of the *Crise Catholique* at the end of the century. Undoing the classicizing urge of the second version, Denis unexpectedly applied a stippled technique, constructing the composition with small dots of unmixed, contrasting color (à la Seurat). He thereby reemphasized the materiality of the painted surface that had been repressed in the traditionally academic second version. The color palette retains the tonal warmth of the second version, but Denis employs contrasting colors to create volume, which vivifies the white of Mary’s robe, and distinguishes the ever-increasing bend of her body, once again echoed by the greater curve of the lily. Most scholarly writing on the painting has eagerly assigned the label neo-Impressionist or pointillist to this painting to align Denis with the reformed naturalism of Seurat, the scientific color theory of Charles Henry, and their later adherents. The reasons offered by scholars for Denis’s choice include the fashionability of pointillism during this period, and his use of the technique through which to reconcile “science and idealism.”⁴⁹ However, Denis’s association with neo-Impressionism was ambiguous and is only briefly addressed in his writing. In *Définition du néo-traditionnisme*, Denis stated that the art of Paul Signac provides one example of nature as an “impeccable science” and “chromatic perceptions,” if nature is defined as “the sum of optical sensation.”⁵⁰ Despite his initial praise of the neo-Impressionists, in *Notes sur l’exposition des Indépendants* of

⁴⁷ Silverman, Deborah; *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art*; pg. 109; Silverman provides a detailed study of the role of specifically Breton women in relation to Gauguin’s conception of a mystical spirituality. Denis’s relation to Marian devotion will be discussed in relation to the fourth version of *Mystère Catholique*.

⁴⁸ Di Pasquale Maria E.; *The Crise Catholique*; pg. 119

⁴⁹ Di Pasquale; pg. 90-91

⁵⁰ Denis, *Définition du néo-traditionnisme* in *Le Ciel et L’arcadie*; pg. 6

1892, Denis discusses “mediocre results” from the “disciples of Seurat,” and argues that the art of Signac had become “rather mathematical” with “harsh and disconcertingly cold harmonies.”⁵¹ Denis’s shifting attitudes towards the artists associated with pointillism over this short period indicates his vacillating relationship towards the scientific implications of pointillism. Juxtaposing religious subject matter to the pointillist technique, described by the art critic Felix Féneon as “scientific,” calls into question the century long religious debate between Positivist science and the Catholic Church that came to a head at the end of the century.

The cultural war between church and state began with the First Republic, founded in 1789. For the bulk of the century, there was little or no consideration of reconciliation by either the secular, and often anti-clerical, Republicans or the Church. The 1869 papal “Syllabus of Errors” made clear that modernity, for the Church, was irreconcilable with its dogma.⁵² On the other hand, the new Third Republic government was equally uncompromising in its secularizing agenda in which the function and display of religious art was decisively attacked. In the summer of 1876, the Chamber of Deputies introduced a bill that proposed to divest the church of Saint-Geneviève of its religious occupation. The language used in the bill is strongly anti-clerical in its myopic conception of religious art. According to these republican ministers, both interior and exterior church decoration conspired to “enrapture one’s eye...by the soft bewitching light filtered through multicolored glass, to captivate the ear by suave accents of the organ...to please one’s nostrils by the penetrating odor of incense.”⁵³ To describe these “purely sensual satisfactions” as “bewitching” suggests a superstitious mysticism that threatened to subjugate a potentially enlightened French laity under the authority of the Catholic Church.

Attempts at a “rhetoric of reconciliation” would not occur until the last decades of the century, initiated with the encyclical “*Aeterni Patris*” issued by Leo XIII in 1879.⁵⁴ This entailed the revival of St. Thomas Aquinas’s philosophy in which the conflict between faith and reason were reconciled because “both derive from one and the same ultimate source” in which God is both the “author of revelation” and “the creative source of human intellect and of the created universe.”⁵⁵ Denis’s introduction of Thomistic philosophy to the Nabis aligns him with this orthodox Catholic position and reinforces his belief in the reconciliation of spirituality and scientific inquiry. The political debate engendered by Denis’s juxtaposition of pointillism with religious subject matter also manifests itself in the artistic debate at the *fin-de-siècle*.

In 1891, the pointillist technique carried with it associations of secular, specifically anarchist, politics that did not necessarily concern Denis in this work.⁵⁶ T.J. Clark describes Pissarro’s complex relation to the point in *Two Young Peasant Women* (fig. 17) as an enactment of his materialist commitments through the vehicle of his burgeoning anarchist political sentiments.⁵⁷ But Denis’s relation to the “dot” was not Seurat’s anarchist “bomb in the middle of the bourgeois idea of freedom”; Denis used the explosive technique in an attempt to elucidate his

⁵¹ Denis, *Notes sur l’exposition des Indépendants*; pg. 23 “Quant aux disciples de Seurat...résultats médiocres, c’est vrai... “Les esprits plutôt mathématiques...des combinaisons d’harmonie dont la sécheresse et la froideur déconcertent.”

⁵² Di Pasquale Maria E.; *The Crise Catholique*; pg. 10

⁵³ Driskel, Michael Paul; *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France*; pg. 52

⁵⁴ Di Pasquale Maria E.; *The Crise Catholique*; pg. 29

⁵⁵ Wippel, John F., “Metaphysics”; *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*; pg. 86

⁵⁶ Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*; describes Seurat’s use of the dot as a “bomb” pg. 107

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

theoretical reconciliation of the material and physical realm with that of the transcendent and religious.⁵⁸

Thus, the pointillist “dot” in the third iteration of *Mystère Catholique* may have been intended to serve a spiritual function for Denis, who believed wholeheartedly that the decorative and hierarchical style of Byzantine art could contribute significantly to his desired reconciliation of secular naturalism and religious tradition in his art.⁵⁹ In *Définition du néo-traditionnisme*, Denis asserts that “a Byzantine Christ is a symbol, the Jesus of the modern painter.”⁶⁰ In addition to supporting an alternative naturalism, Denis’s statement suggests the tradition of religious art in which Denis positioned his own work. He rejected the purported anatomical and historical correctness of artists like Morot (fig. 14), supporting instead the aforementioned synthesis of nature achieved by the *Primitifs*, like Angelico or Byzantine artists. In his later *Notes sur la peinture religieuse*, Denis affirms his position by asserting that “Byzantine painting is assuredly the most perfect type of Christian painting.”⁶¹ This provides textual evidence for an alternate reading of the third version of *Mystère Catholique*: for Denis, the modern pointillist “dot” could stand for the tile of a Byzantine mosaic, reviving the sense of a purified Christian art he so ardently sought. Denis’s Byzantine intentions were made manifest in other details of the third iteration of *Mystère Catholique*. In the upper right hand corner of the painting, Denis used the Greek language of the Byzantine Empire to inscribe “ΑΣΠΙΑΣΜΟΣ,” translated as “salutations.”⁶² The “dot” in the 1890 version of *Mystère Catholique* thus vacillates between potential interpretations as anarchist or Byzantine. Michael Paul Driskel traces the paradoxical desire of Catholic painters in the second half of the century to be “modern” while also embracing the Byzantine hieratic mode of representation, a tradition with which Denis aligned himself.⁶³ Denis’s artistic negotiation within both the modernist tradition and the nineteenth-century trajectory of religious art is made manifest in the body of the Virgin in the 1890 version of *Mystère Catholique*. Politically, this version challenges the Positivist attack on orthodox Catholicism and represents Denis’s attempt to engage in the “rhetoric of reconciliation,” but is also haunted by potentially contradictory interpretations.⁶⁴ The issue of the “dot” takes center stage, calling into question Denis’s success in materializing his theoretical revival of a religious painting that could reconcile science and religion. But underlying the obfuscating layer of painted points remains the uncertain reading of Denis’s orthodox position within the debate. When the first three versions of *Mystère Catholique* are examined, the result is a painting enmeshed in the complex spiritual politics of *fin-de-siècle* France and the contentious position of Denis within this debate.

Painted for the actor Coquelin Cadet in 1891, Denis again made substantial changes to the technique of the final version of *Mystère Catholique* (fig. 18) while retaining the same basic composition. Compared to the third version, Denis drastically lightened the color palette, creating fluorescent highlights that border on acidity. The dramatic light flooding the foreground and lightening the color palette emphasizes Denis’s concrete reintroduction of the disjunction between the secular and spiritual spaces by re-imposing the shadow that separates

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Di Pasquale; pg. 88

⁶⁰ Denis, *Définition du néo-traditionnisme* in *Le Ciel et L’arcadie*; pg. 17

⁶¹ Denis, *Notes sur la peinture religieuse* in *Le Ciel et L’arcadie*; pg. 41

⁶² Bouillon, Jean-Paul; *Maurice Denis*; pg. 30 Bouillon provides an interpretive translation of the Greek as “angelic salutation” but the word itself simply means “salutation”

⁶³ Driskel provides an excellent study of this phenomena in the chapter entitled “Genealogy of the Hieratic Mode”

⁶⁴ Di Pasquale Maria E.; *The Crise Catholique*; pg. 7

Mary from the earthly clergy, absent in the second and third versions. In this version, Denis breaks down the legibility of the painting, loosening the stippled technique and allowing more visible strokes of paint to represent a greater amount of sensory information. These visible strokes clearly divide the material realm from the divine, creating a linear, diagonal shadow. The horizontal windowsill and the vertical altar boys form a geometric right triangle that further flattens the composition. Furthermore, Denis returned to the small scale of his first 1888 version for the fourth rendition, nearly half the size of the 1890 *Mystère Catholique* exhibited later that year. The smaller scale affords the viewer a more intimate relationship with the depicted Virgin and clergy, reflecting the painting's position as an owned object intended for private viewership.

The issue of a perceived visual ownership and dominance also plays a significant role within the painting in the figure of the Virgin. Like the progressively wilted foreground lily, Mary continues to bend and threatens to collapse beneath the masculine church authority. Mary's fragility is reinforced by the slender elongation of her hands and face, as well as Denis's decorporealization of her body underneath decorative brush strokes (à la Byzantine mosaic). This is most noticeable when one examines her crooked right arm between the third (fig. 1) and fourth version (fig. 18). In the third iteration of *Mystère Catholique*, Denis sets this arm off from her robe with strong contour lines and gives volume to the arm by shading. However, in the final version this strong delineation is absent, leaving only a wrist and hand to emerge from the shadow cast by her robe, flattening and diminishing the Virgin's body against the similarly colored background wall. This pictorial technique functions to tie the Virgin indelibly to the materiality of the paint on canvas despite her opposing position in the divine realm within the painting's narrative. The combination of Denis's melding the Virgin into her background with her bow of deference suggests the viewer's masculine position of ownership over this resigned Virgin.

Scholars often discuss masculine visual possession, but rarely in relation to purportedly religious images of the Virgin. Instead, the issue of visual ownership is usually applied to the traditional academic Venus. Take, for example, Cabanel, who, in her semi-conscious state, opens her exaggeratedly voluptuous body to the sexually objectifying gaze of the viewer (see fig. 19). The relationship between female unconsciousness and her visual consumption by the male viewer is wholly present in the fourth version of *Mystère Catholique*. The most distinctive change made by Denis in the 1891 *Mystère Catholique* is the shift in the Virgin's facial expression. She no longer has the directed gaze of the first version, or the alert and resigned expression of serenity in the second and third. Now, with her eyes nearly closed and face barely visible, she appears semi-conscious, a blind vessel upon which the viewer directs his gaze. Mary's impending blindness removes all the independence she retained as a conscious presence in the other versions of the work. She herself is made a token symbol, transforming this scene from a miraculous Annunciation to a decorative Virgin to be optically devoured. We now read the femininity of the Virgin as subordinate to the male authority of both the Catholic Church, as symbolized by the clergy, and the assumedly male viewer, specifically Denis and the buyer, Cadet.

The previous paragraph alludes to a sexual gaze imposed upon the body of the Virgin. While this seems abhorrently sacrilegious in the twenty-first century, the sexualization of the Virgin was not uncommon in the personal journal of Denis, or in nineteenth-century French society. Denis's sexual relationship to women was inextricably tied to his devout religious faith. Even in his pubescence he asserted his preference for "the virgins who go to high mass and

vespers, do not know much, work modestly, and feign—as one said—prudery.”⁶⁵ This sexual fascination with *virginal* women transformed over the course of Denis’s late adolescence, and culminated in a truly bizarre articulation of his own struggle to reconcile the academic study of the nude with his developing sexuality and opposing dogmatic religious devotion. In March of 1888, Denis questions why it is that, with regard to models, an artist cannot be chaste, and why “aesthetic joys necessitate impurities.”⁶⁶ He continues that “these are the girls who, to my ideal of the Virgin cloaked in white, have added this other ideal of the nude Virgin.”⁶⁷ This “bizarre transformation” entailed Denis’s shift from sexual attraction to a virginal purity to a fetishization of the virginal archetype, the Virgin Mary.⁶⁸ To make the Virgin a fetish acknowledges the underlying threat that a mere fantasy of the Holy Mother’s competing virginal and maternal femininity provides sexual gratification. This internal sexual struggle coincided with Denis’s initial grappings with the subject matter of *Mystère Catholique* in 1888; the final, privately owned, small-scale, decorporealized, and submissive articulation of the Virgin represents Denis’s personal reconciliation of his unattainable fetishization of the simultaneously pure virgin and fecund mother.

It is important to note that Denis was not alone in his sexual objectification of the Virgin as a fetish. Cults devoted to the Virgin had been growing in France even before the final promulgation of Immaculate Conception by Pious IX in 1854. Increasing devotional practices around the Virgin also assist in contextualizing Denis’s own sexualized infatuation with Mary. French religious writing of the period remained rooted in the philosophies of the *ancien regime* that “emphasized the physical maternity of Mary and the sense of obligation that Christ felt towards his mother...to achieve a mystical rather than a sentimental experiment.”⁶⁹ In turn, emphasizing the physicality of the Virgin positioned her as the impossible duality of chaste woman and fecund mother. This fetishization of the Virgin went so far as to imply marital union with her, particularly for the clergy. When describing the trials of his seminary education, Denis’s contemporary Monseigneur Duperray exclaimed:

How fortunate that the Virgin was there! Was she not able to furnish me with the feminine influence I needed so badly? Yes! She offered me even more than the affection of a wife. Because she is the ideal, the most womanly woman.⁷⁰

Although Denis did not enter the clergy, he had wished to do so in his adolescence. Duperray’s experience offers a glimpse of how Denis may have imagined the Virgin in his writing and in *Mystère Catholique*. In fact, as described by a pamphlet of 1873, Denis’s relation to the Virgin was characteristic of the nineteenth-century, in which men could “escape the multitude of fallen

⁶⁵ Denis, Maurice; *Journal Tome 1*; pg. 38 9 août: “Pour moi, j’aime mieux les vierges qui vont à la grande messe et à vêpres, ne savent pas grand-choses, travaillent modestement, et affectent—à ce qu’on dit—la pruderie.”

⁶⁶ Ibid. pg. 68-69 18 mars

⁶⁷ Ibid. 18 mars 1888 “Pourquoi faut-il qu’il ne soit point chaste en effet, et que les joies esthétiques nécessitent des impudeurs? ... Et ce sont les filles qui, à mon idéal de Vierge en robe blanche, ont ajouté cet autre idéal de la Vierge nue.”

⁶⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary defines fetish as “an object...which abnormally serves as the stimulus, or the end in itself of, sexual desire.” In making the Virgin Mary a fetish, Denis (and a number of other men in France) sexually venerate her paradoxical identity as perpetual virgin and simultaneously fecund mother as the unattainable ideal of femininity imposed upon the body of women who could never hope to attain this ideal.

⁶⁹ Kselman, Thomas A.; *Miracles & Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France*; pg. 96

⁷⁰ Ibid. pg. 99

women by contemplating the celestial Virgin,” for “Mary is feminine beauty with no mixture of accursed seductiveness.”⁷¹ Gauguin, the herald of the Nabis, visually depicts this masculine escape in *The Loss of Virginity* (fig. 20). The vibrant color palette and expanses of unmodulated fluorescent color are akin to the palette of the 1891 *Mystère Catholique*. Here, the nude is again represented as semi-conscious, allowing the viewer to indulge in the young girl’s body and the scene without the threat of a reciprocated, confrontational gaze. The viewer’s position is suggested by the fox, “a symbol of sexual perversion,” which possessively places a paw on the breast of the woman, acknowledging the viewer without timidity.⁷² The wilted flower she holds is, in this instance, analogous to the lily as a symbol of Mary’s perpetual virginity. The now absent plucked petals represent the distance of this “fallen” woman from the purity of the Virgin. While Gauguin’s female figure is sexualized, it is not a sexuality of desire, like the voluptuous and presumably pure Venus of Cabanel. In minimizing the genitalia and laying her prostrate with feet crossed, Gauguin depicts a perverted sexuality in which woman “submits to suffering at the hands of lustful men in order to regenerate life.”⁷³ Unlike Gauguin’s acknowledgement of the impossibility of a Marian femininity in *Loss of Virginity*, in *Mystère Catholique* Denis invites the viewer to consider what an actualization of that contradiction would mean. What would be entailed in the optical, and consequently sexual, consumption of a woman wholly pure and wholly fecund? Denis abandons the dignity given to the figure of the Virgin in the previous iterations renditions of the work, indulging in his own private desires in a painting not intended for public view. Of course, the promulgation of a Marian femininity was not revolutionary in the nineteenth-century; purity and chastity were long held feminine ideals within Christianity. The positioning of these seemingly archaic religious virtues against the rise of the *femme nouvelle* in secular society made them new. Because femininity within Catholicism was deemed synonymous with virginity, women played a limited role within this discourse.

III. Relational Viewing: *Mystère Catholique*, *Soir Trinitaire*, and the Symbolist influence

Twice the size of the 1890 version of *Mystère Catholique* (fig. 1), Denis’s *Soir Trinitaire* (fig. 2) accompanied the work at the 1891 exhibition in Saint-Germain-en-Laye.⁷⁴ I introduced *Soir Trinitaire* as a painting that appeared starkly unrelated to Denis’s predominately religious work of the period. However, *Soir Trinitaire* subtly reinforces the concept of the Marian fetish when contextualized as the companion of *Mystère Catholique*. Composed using the same pointillist paint handling, *Soir Trinitaire* is formally linked to the exhibited version of *Mystère Catholique*, which introduced the technique. When one considers that these two works were exhibited in close proximity, if not next to one another, the pointillist technique allows the two works to be congruent within Denis’s oeuvre; the proximity reconciles, to a degree, their starkly contrasted subjects and color palettes. Centering the composition on a triad of women, Denis

⁷¹ Ibid. pg. 101

⁷² Matthews, Patricia; *Passionate Discourse*; 164

⁷³ Ibid. pg. 165

⁷⁴ There are differing translations of *Soir Trinitaire* in English with significant implications. The work is often translated as *Trinitarian Evening*, implying that it is the specifically depicted evening has the quality of being Trinitarian. However the alternative translation, *Evening Trinitarians*, implies that the depicted women are Trinitarian with the specification that it is the evening. The shifting emphases between the two translations is indicative of the emphasis placed by literary Symbolism on esotericism. I will not subscribe to a particular translation, using the original French with the goal of elucidating how the title refers to the female subjects in the analysis of Retté’s poem and Denis’s painting.

removes the masculine authority of the clergy in *Soir Trinitaire*, creating an exclusively feminine pastoral fantasy. The presence of the nude female bodies is an anomaly within Denis's early painting practice and signals his brief involvement with the artistic Symbolist movement. *Soir Trinitaire* represents a second attempt at the synthesis between the natural and the spiritual he so ardently sought.⁷⁵

One of the few artists praised by Denis was Puvis de Chavannes, whose painting relied on "the suggestiveness of its visual form" rather than depicting "the real."⁷⁶ Suggestiveness in opposition to reality emerges in Puvis's oil sketch for *L'été* (fig. 21). Painted and exhibited the same year as *Soir Trinitaire*, the two works are strikingly similar in composition. The triad of nudes positioned on the far right of *L'été* are posed similarly to Denis's women: arranged pyramidally, one has her back to us, a second woman turns towards the viewer at the waist, and a third figure seated upright and above the other figures completes the triangular grouping. While Denis's opinion of Puvis was mixed, to align oneself with Puvis (as Denis does in *Définition du néo-traditionnisme*) was to make an important assertion about one's art.⁷⁷ Claimed by both academicians and Symbolist artists alike, Puvis's unique brand of classicism was described by critics as responding to "a need, a very current modern feeling." However, Puvis remained "a healthy and eloquent Frenchmen who followed in...tradition."⁷⁸ What the Symbolist circle saw in Puvis was clearly articulated by the critic Alphonse Germain in his article "*Puvis de Chavannes et son esthétique*," published in April 1891 in the Symbolist journal *L'Ermitage*. In this unreserved panegyric, Germain describes the art of Puvis as "the revived passion of Beauty...the revival of the Christian God with a recrudescence fervor...the most high manifestation of art in this age." While Angelico embodied the "naive piety" of primitive art, Puvis represented "the hermeneutic" aspects of Symbolist primitivism.⁷⁹ Exhibited at the *Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts* in the same year as Germain's article, Puvis's controversial mural for the Hôtel de Ville, *L'été* (fig. 21), may have inspired the intense praise of Germain. Because *L'été* embodies the fecund plentitude of the idyllic pastoral, it is difficult to concretely locate the Christian revival that Germain believed Puvis's work to represent. Perhaps with *Soir Trinitaire*'s employment of nudes within a pastoral landscape, Denis took to heart Germain's belief that an idyllic space of the nude, à la Puvis, could stand for a Christian revival.

But when considered closely, there are distinct differences that change our perception of Denis's figures in relation to Puvis's figures as nudes. In *L'été*, the triad of women are devoid of any marker of nineteenth-century society. Minimally draped in diaphanous cloth, Puvis's nudes are removed from potential visual conflation with a contemporary woman. The women of *Soir Trinitaire*, on the other hand, problematically engender a contrary reading. If we focus first on the two nudes most proximate to us in the foreground, we realize that we are much less certain that these women are the so-called "sexually innocent," *pure women* who exist, removed from

⁷⁵ The artists who called themselves Symbolists varied drastically in their painting subjects and style. When referring to Denis's involvement with "Symbolism" I will rely on a reflective comment by Denis in which he characterized his own "Symbolist" agenda as "the reaction against Naturalism." Di Pasqual; *Crise Catholique*, pg. 73

⁷⁶ Shaw, Jennifer; *Dream States*; pg. 4

⁷⁷ While Denis praises Puvis in *Définition du néo-traditionnisme*, he expressed a differing opinion of him in a journal entry from December 1887. While at an exhibition of Puvis's work Denis exclaims that he would "give voluntarily all the work of Puvis for one of Flandrin." (Denis, *Journal* 18 décembre 1887; pg. 67)

⁷⁸ Ibid. pgs. 26, 163

⁷⁹ Germain, Alphonse; *Puvis de Chavannes et son esthétique*; pgs. 140, 144

reality “in non-threatening, pastoral sexuality rooted in nostalgic images of the Christian past.”⁸⁰ Unlike the translucent, classicized drapery of Puvis’s nudes, the two women of *Soir Trinitaire* are inextricably tied to *fin-de-siècle* France through their hats, vestigial organs of contemporary fashion in the idyllic pastoral. Unlike Puvis, who commits to painting the nude across the composition of *L’été*, Denis foregrounds the presence of these women as nude by juxtaposing them to the third clothed woman who disallows any visual, or sexual, access. Painted in a dark, unmodulated black, Denis makes the body of this third woman opaque. Densely painted black points obfuscate any indication of volume or form. She acts as the respectable counterpoint to the nudes, indicative of Denis’s moral uncertainty about painting the nude female body. His insistence on this third woman’s clothing extends even to her hands and feet, which disappear into the abyss of her dour black dress. The juxtaposition of this moralizing force within a traditionally sexual pastoral scene transforms our reading of the two foreground women from a beautiful and classicized nudity to a vulgar and amoral nakedness.

In this early instance, the female nude signifies Denis’s experimental involvement with the literary Symbolist movement—specifically with the writing of Adolphe Retté, a family friend of Denis, whose poem “*Soir Trinitaire*” provided the basis for Denis’s painting. Broken into six parts of varying lengths, the poem has a loose rhyme scheme. The structure of the poem reinforces the Symbolist trope of the unconscious dream with which it opens as the narrator addresses a mysterious subject while he “dreamed to doze under [his or her] young [olive trees].”⁸¹ Emphasis on the narrator’s altered state of consciousness is reinforced by the recurring motif of drunkenness throughout the poem. For example, the subject of the narrator’s address “arrived amongst the drunkenness of summer,” which is subsequently degraded as “profane drunkenness.”⁸² The single subject of the narrator’s paean suddenly becomes the trinity painted by Denis as the narrator realizes that “when she approached, [he] saw that she was triple.”⁸³

From this introduction to the “trinitarian” aspect of the poem, Retté ushers in an interaction between the narrator and the three women, rich in metaphors of the natural and astral world and profuse with tropes of mysticism and the classicized pastoral. The first woman is described as “hyacinth or the diaphanous frost,” subtly classicizing her by using the Greek root to relate her to the Greek goddesses Hyacinth and Diana. Thus, she is “primitivized” in a way seemingly akin to the pre-Raphaelites, or *les Primitifs*, who had been popular in France during the latter part of the century.⁸⁴ This pagan classicism is subsequently related to language that invokes Byzantine homilies to the Virgin. In his *First Homily on the Virgin*, Proclus describes the Holy Mother as a master of earth, “the untarnished vessel of virginity; the spiritual paradise of the second Adam,” and as the natural force of “a swift wind.”⁸⁵ Utilizing similar imagery of a royal woman within nature, Retté’s narrator describes the three-in-one woman as, “Queens of my silence, Sisters who make bearable the instant in which the trellis of eternity matures.” Retté also describes her as herself a part of nature, “a garden haunted by dead dreams, languid herbs that stimulate the night.”⁸⁶ Similar to the problematic multivalence of Denis’s painting, Retté’s

⁸⁰ Matthews, Patricia; *Passionate Discourse*; pg. 80 (see the first discussion of this category on pg. 7)

⁸¹ Retté, Adolphe; *Oeuvres complètes*; pg. 137 “Rêvait de sommeiller sous tes jeunes troènes”

⁸² Ibid. pg. 139 “Elle arriva parimi l’ivress de l’été” and pg. 140 “l’ivresse profane.”

⁸³ Ibid. pg. 139 “Or quand elle approcha, je vis qu’elle était triple.”

⁸⁴ Ibid. pg. 140 “O première! – hyacinthe où le gel diaphane...” See Driskel for a discussion of the rise of the Pre-Raphaelites or *les Primitifs* in France during this period.

⁸⁵ Constat, Nicholas; *Proclus of Constantinople...*; pg. 138-39

⁸⁶ Ibid. pg. 141 “Reines de mon silence, ô soeurs que pérennise L’instant qui mûrit aux treilles d’éternité” pg. 142 “Puis elle est un jardin hanté de songes morts, Aromates trop lents que stimule le soir”

ethereal and abstruse imagery allows for contrasting readings. It can certainly be asserted that Retté was working within the pastoral utopianism growing at the end of the century as a means to express “an imagery of freedom and harmony, of alternatives to contemporary society—whether spatial or temporal—or of society’s rootedness in a more primary or primal world.”⁸⁷ However, this ignores a second possibility in which the metaphorization of nature stands for a Byzantine-esque praise of the Virgin. Therefore, Retté may have been working within the context of the Byzantine *primitif* revival, just as Denis was, but from the perspective of the literary Symbolist movement.

In *Soir Trinitaire*, Denis maintains Retté’s luxuriously described femininity, which is tied to both a classicized nature and a potentially Byzantine Marian homily. Denis visually articulates Retté’s repeated metaphor of the women as a part of nature by decorporealizing the three women, indelibly tying them to the pastoral landscape. Denis’s achieved this decorporealization by compressing pictorial space, using the same stippled technique in both the fore and background of *Soir Trinitaire*.⁸⁸ Symbolically, Denis reinforces the existence of these women with a ribbon, which runs down the back of the nude woman turned away from us and trails into the horizontal cream-colored structure upon which she sits. Denis uses this ornament of contemporary fashion to lead our gaze, expressing his own leeriness towards the nude while entreating the viewer to question the implications of the insistent relation of these nudes to their landscape. Are they read as nudes within tradition that one can sexualize as “pure women,” thus, making their tie to nature indicative of a Marian idealization and fetishization? Or do we read them as merely naked women, subversive *femme fatales* unable to transcend their debased sexuality as indicated by the material and physical world to which they are wed? This vacillating reading between a pure, Byzantine-esque Marian sexuality and a sexuality rooted in the physical, corporeal, and the carnal is analogous to the multilayered and multivalent readings of the third and fourth versions of *Mystère Catholique*.

Conclusion

When relationally viewed as companion pieces, *Soir Trinitaire* accentuates the sexuality underlying the layers of social and political debate, which is augmented in each successive iteration of *Mystère Catholique*. Questioning our own sexual relationship to the nudes of *Soir Trinitaire* serves as a conduit through which we come to understand the latent sexuality embedded in the esoteric figure of the Holy Virgin, whose highly volatile political role within the *Crise Catholique* was often the focal point of the debate. The questions raised throughout this discourse cannot be answered with unequivocal certainty. Problematic throughout French society at the *fin-de-siècle*, the role of religion within an increasingly secular and industrialized society was of particular importance to Denis as a result of his orthodox piety. It was through the female figure that Denis so vehemently sought to revive religious painting within a *modern* painting practice, framed by Denis as a redefinition of naturalism in which the artist relies on a mystical painting process to paint his mental conception rather than produce a facsimile.

⁸⁷ Werth, Margaret; *The Joy of Life*; pg. 5

⁸⁸ Keshavjee, Serena; “*L’art Inconscient*: Imaging the Unconscious in Symbolist Art for the Théâtre d’art,” in RACAR XXXIV no. 1 (2009): 68. Keshavjee introduces this concept in which Denis “decorporealizes his figures by melding them into their surroundings” in her article. Rather than attributing to the Symbolist desire to “create a theatrical dream-space where audiences’ perceptions are obscured,” in *Soir Trinitaire* this decorporealizing stippled technique significantly locks the three women into their background surrounding.

However, the female figure as an artistic trope was problematic in and of itself during this period. As a proper bourgeois *femme h nnete* was confined to the role of wife and mother within the domestic sphere, deviating from this ordained path was considered a failure to perform her duties. This could then entail her sexually seditious transformation into the masculinized *femme nouvelle*, determined to subvert the traditional conception of femininity. After the dissemination of Charcot’s psychological theories in the 1880s, hysteria became a second option for the failed *femme h nnete*. Stripped of her individual agency, the hysteric woman was relegated to the hospital bed, exchanging the confines of the home for erotically convulsive fits. As demonstrated in Denis’s *De la vocation* (fig. 3), these constructed typologies were far from fixed, engendering uncertainty for the viewer as he tries to distinguish religious ecstasy from hysteric fantasy, casting doubt on Denis’s own position within the debate.

With the *Mystère Catholique* series, Denis endeavored to position the Virgin Mary as the female figure through which his “synthesis” of a modern revival of religious art could be achieved. As we have discovered, the figure of the Holy Mother only complicated our reading of the paintings further. Compositionally, the shifting conflation of the Virgin and the corresponding clergy over the course of the four versions of *Mystère Catholique* makes even a clear reading of the scene at hand tenuous. Denis’s fluctuating technique and iconography surrounding the Virgin raises questions of his own position within the *fin-de-siècle* religious debates, and, consequently, the questions surrounding the triadic dialogue between orthodox Catholicism, occultism, and Positivist science. Posing unanswerable questions, the essential value of Denis’s iterations of *Mystère Catholique* lies in our conscious uncertainty when reading his works. Concealed beneath the paintings’ uncertain political position and instigated by the obfuscating pointillist technique, the issue of the male understanding of feminine sexuality lies in wait. Denis’s personal writings reveal his views of the impossible Marian conception of femininity as both eternally virginal and maternally fecund. Fraught sexuality reveals itself as a theme implicit in Denis’s work when *Soir Trinitaire* and *Mystère Catholique* (specifically the third and fourth iterations) are considered companion pieces. Our own experience of visual and psychological uncertainty when viewing these works is the crux of Denis’s significance as a painter during the *fin-de-siècle*. In the process of painting his own anxieties, Denis elucidated the anxieties plaguing French society during this period of political and religious transformation. Perhaps unintentionally, Denis allowed the contradictions of his art and life to coexist in the atelier, finding a “home,” provided that one “take away the cigarettes and add an altar to the Virgin.”⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Denis, Maurice; *Journal Tome 1*; pg. 34 15 juillet

Works Cited

- Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Bouillon, Jean-Paul. *Le Ciel et l'Arcadie*. Paris: Hermann, 1993.
- Bouillon, Jean-Pau. *Maurice Denis*. Zurich: Skira 1993.
- Charcot, Jean-Marie. *Les Démoniaques dans l'art*. Paris: Place de l'école-de-medicine, 1887.
- Chassé, Charles. *The Nabis & Their Period*. trans. Michael Bullock. London: Lund Humphries, 1969.
- Clement, Russell T. *Four French Symbolists*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Constas, Nicholas. *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity*. Leiden, Boston Brill, 2003.
- Denis, Maurice. *Journal Tomes 1-3*. Paris: La Colombe, 1953.
- Driskel, Michael Paul. *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.
- Di Pasquale, Maria E. *The Crise Catholique: Avant-Garde Religious Painting in France, 1890—1912*. Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1999.
- Di Pasquale, Maria E. "Joséphin Péladin: Occultism, Catholicism, and Science in the Fin-de-Siècle," in RACAR XXXIV no. 1 (2009): 53-61.
- Durey, Philippe, Ekkehard Mai, Julian Treuherz, and Andreas Blühm. *Maurice Denis: 1870-1943* Exhibition guide. Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1994.
- Germain, Alphonse. *Puvis de Chavannes et son esthétique*. Paris: *L'Ermitage avril 1891*: 140-44.
- Herbert, Robert. *Seurat and the Making of La Grande Jatte*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2004.
- Keshavjee, Serena. "L'art Inconscient: Imaging the Unconscious in Symbolist Art for the Théâtre d'art." in RACAR XXXIV no. 1 (2009): 62-76.
- Kselman, Thomas A. *Miracles & Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983.
- Kuenzli, Katherine-Marie. *The Anti-Heroism of Modern Life: Symbolist Decoration and the Problem of Privacy in Fin-de-Siècle Modernist Painting*. Ph.D. diss., University of

California Berkeley, 2002.

Matthews, Patricia. *Passionate Discourse*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Morehead, Alison. *Creative Pathologies: French Experimental Psychology and Symbolist Avant Gardes, 1889-1900*. Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2007.

Péladin, Joséphin. *Art ochlocratique*. Paris: C. Dalou, 1888.

Retté, Adolphe. *Oeuvres complètes de Adolphe Retté Poésie I*. Paris: Bibliothèque artistique & Littéraire, 1898.

Shaw, Jennifer. *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Sidlauskas, Susan. *Contesting Femininity: Vuillard's Family Pictures; The Art Bulletin*. vol. 79, no. 1, Mar. 1997. College Art Association: Pgs. 85-111.

Silverman, Deborah. *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Silverman, Deborah. *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000.

Werth, Margaret. *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Fig. 1 Maurice Denis; *Mystère Catholique* version 3 (1890) Source: ArtStor.org



Fig. 2 Maurice Denis; *Soir Trinitaire* (1891) Source: ArtStor.org



Fig. 3 Maurice Denis; *De la vocation* (1891) Source: Personal Scan



1891

Fig. 4 Charcot & Richer; *Période de clownisme: Contorsion—Variété de l'arc de cercle* (1887)
Source: Personal Scan

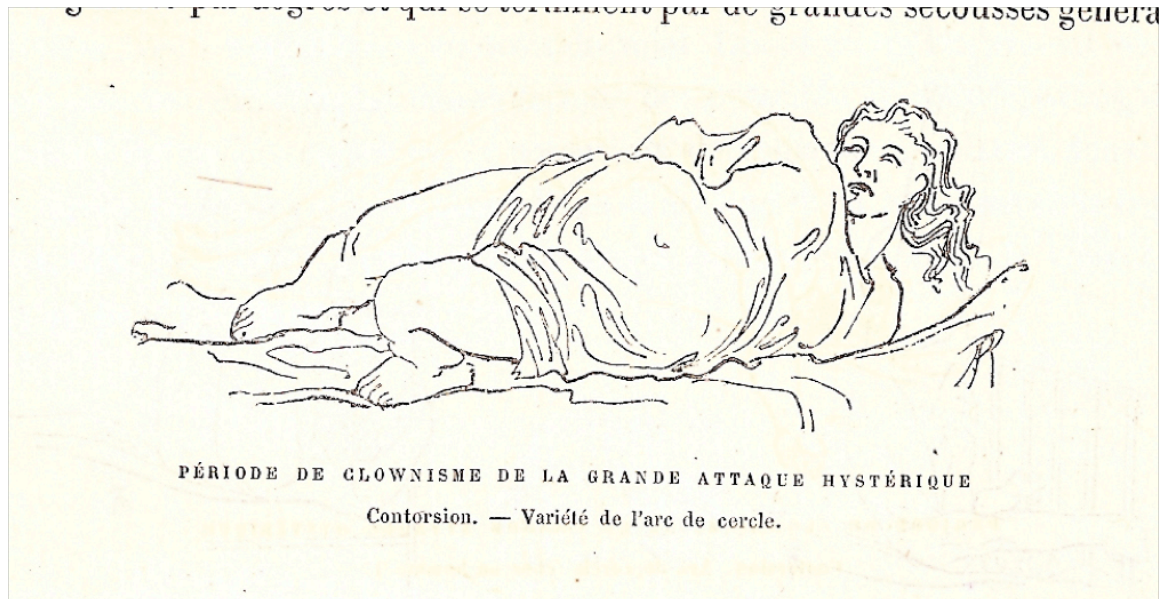


Fig. 5 Charcot & Richer; *Période des attitudes passionnelles: Attitude de supplication* (1887)
Source: Personal Scan



Fig. 6 Charcot & Richer; *Période des attitudes passionnelles: Attitude d'attente exotique* (1887)
Source: Personal Scan



Fig. 7 Charcot & Richer; *Sainte Catherine de Sienne en extase...*(1887)
Source: Personal Scan

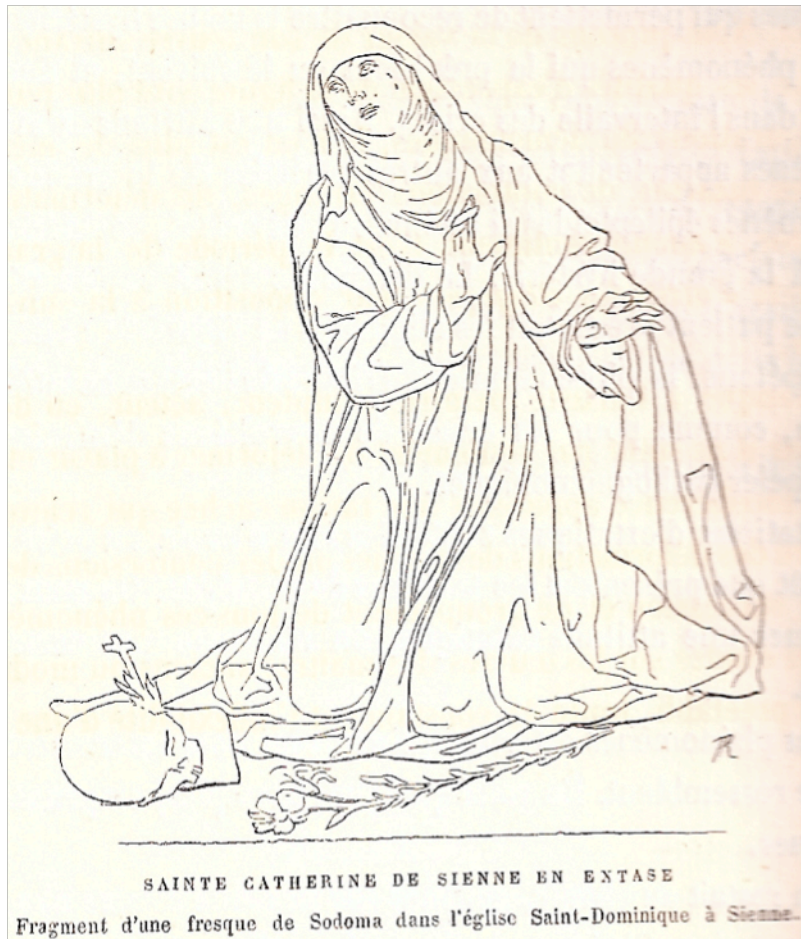


Fig. 8 Henri Boutet Cover for *La Plume* (1896) Source: Personal Scan



Fig. 9 Franz von Stuck; *Sensuality* (1891) Source: ArtStor.org

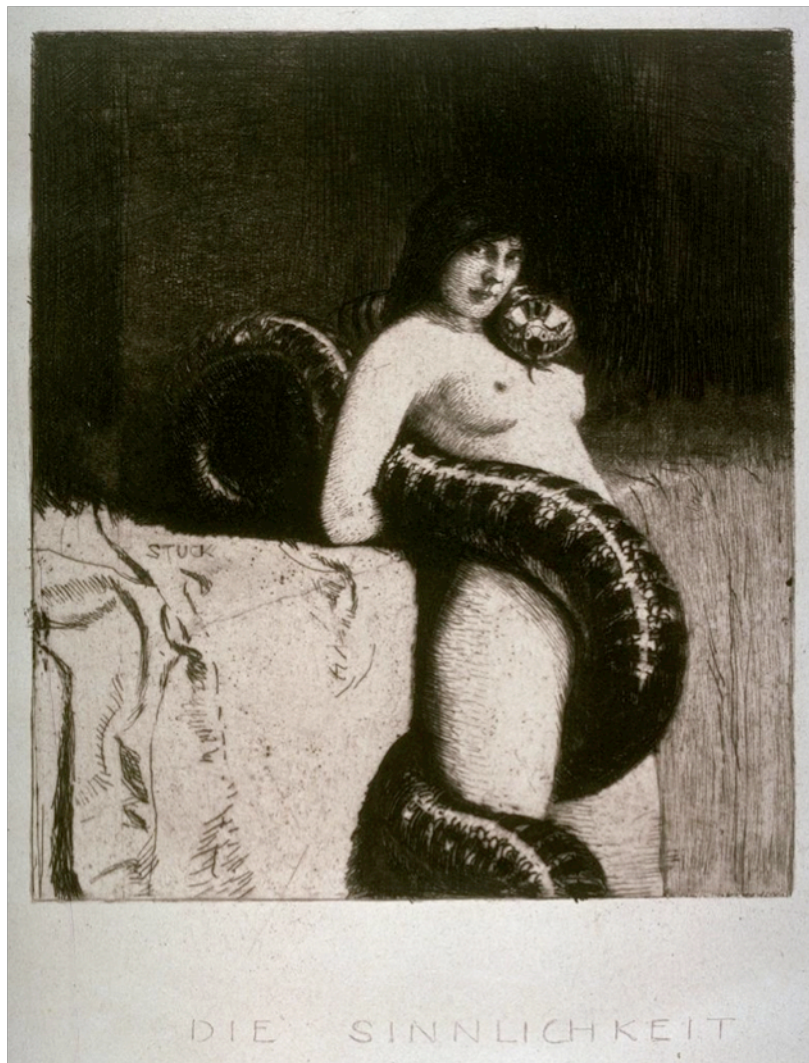


Fig. 10 Maurice Denis, *Mystère Catholique* version 1 (1889) Source: ArtStor.org

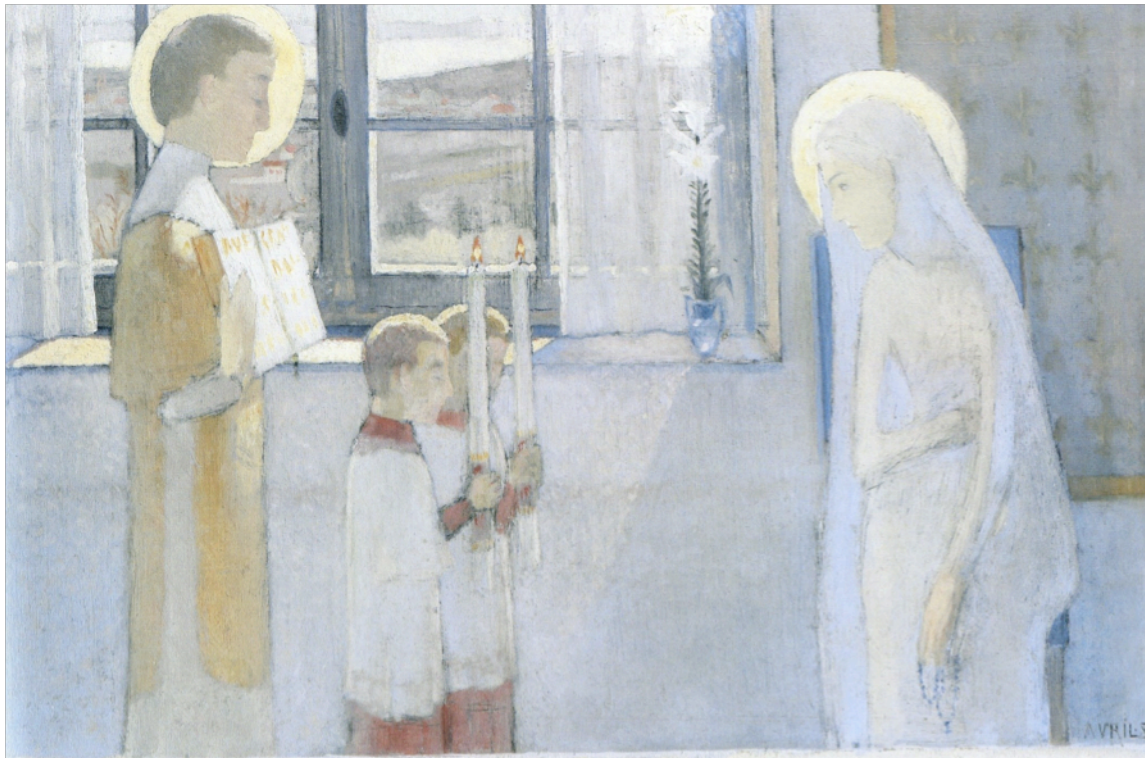


Fig. 11 Paul Sérusier; *Talisman* (1888) Source: ArtStor.org

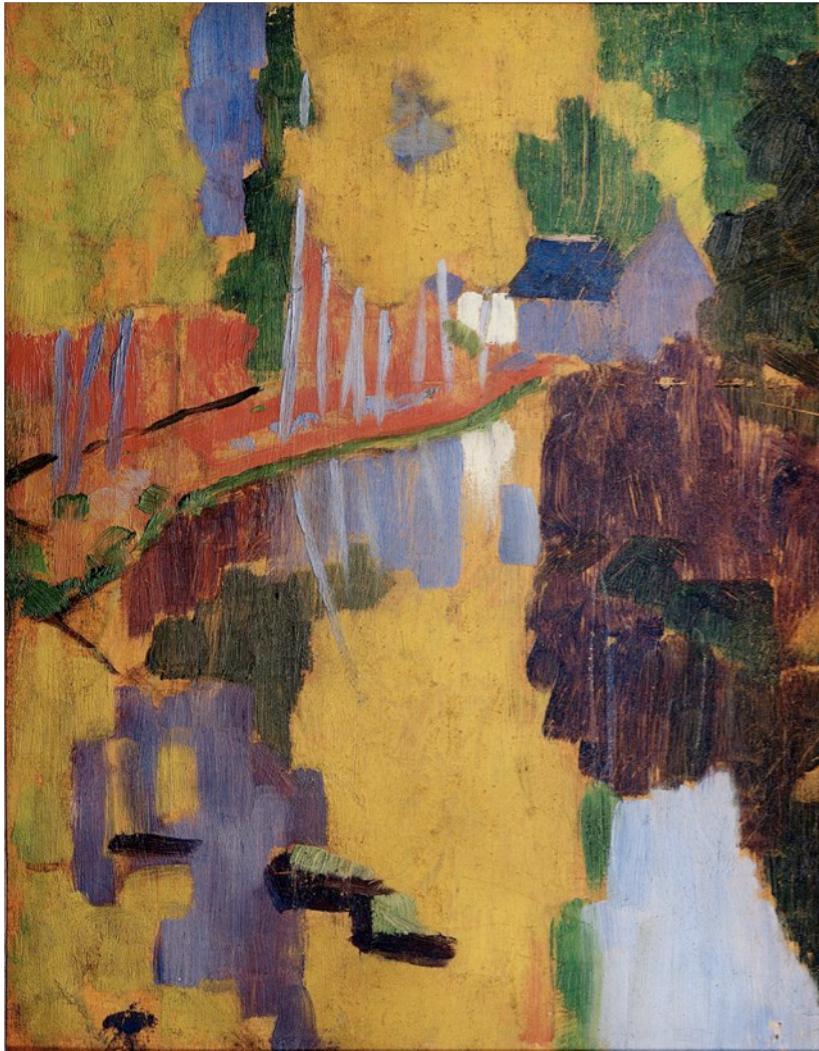


Fig. 12 Maurice Denis; *Mystère Catholique* version 2 (1889) Source: Personal Scan



Fig. 13 Fra Angelico; *Annunciation* (1440-45) Source: ArtStor.org



Fig. 14 Armaury-Duval; *Annunciation* (1844) Source: ArtStor.org



Fig. 15 Aimé Morot; *Le Martyre de Jésus de Nazareth* (1883) Source: ArtStor.org



Fig. 16 Carlos Schwabe; Poster for the first *Salon de la Rose+Croix* (1892) Source: ArtStor.org



Fig. 17 Camille Pissarro; *Two Young Peasant Women* (1892) Source: ArtStor.org



Fig. 18 Maurice Denis; *Mystère Catholique* version 4 (1891) Source: Personal Scan

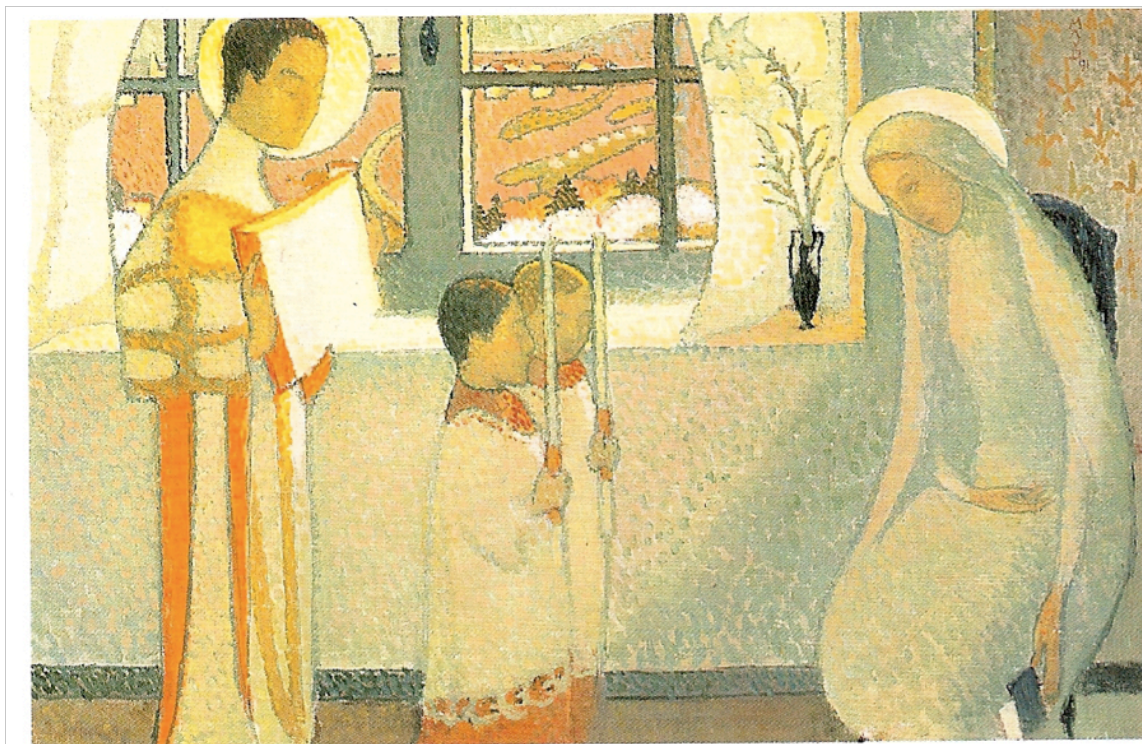


Fig. 19 Cabanel, Alexandre; *Birth of Venus* (1865) Source: ArtStor.org



Fig. 20 Paul Gauguin; The Loss of Virginity (1890-91) Source: ArtStor.org

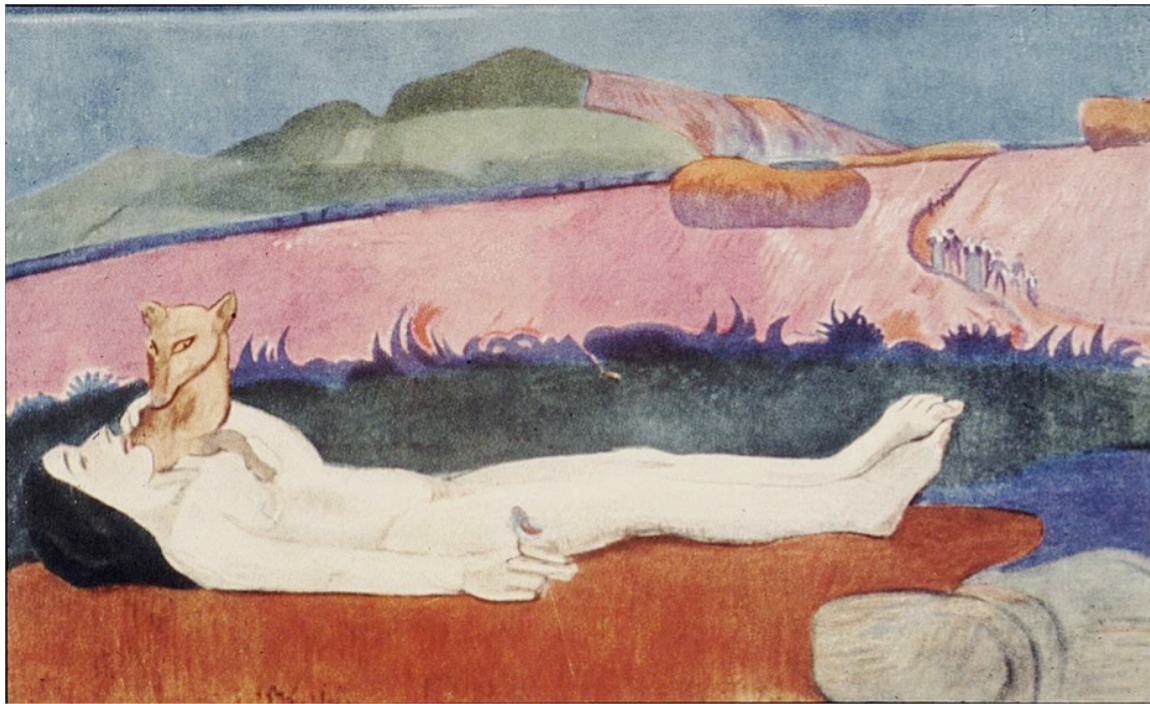


Fig. 21 Puvis de Chavannes; L'été [sketch] (1891) Source: ArtStor.org

