MANET'S JESUS

A Thesis

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To my family, friends, and teammates—thank you for love and support.
To Kimberly Chou—thank you for patience with my first drafts.
To Howard—thank you for guidance.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Dead Christ with Angels, Edouard Manet, 1864

Christ in the Garden of Olives, Eugène Delacroix, 1829

Descent into the Tomb, Eugène Delacroix, 1859

La Résurrection, Alphonse Esquiros, 1849

Jesus in the Arms of Mary, Chartres Cathedral, 1830

Mademoiselle Victorine as an Espada, Edouard Manet, 1863

The Incident at the Bull Ring, Edouard Manet, 1864

Dead Toreador, Edouard Manet, 1864

Portrait of Francesco I D'Este, Diego Rodríguez de Silvia y Velàzquez, 1638

Ernest Renan, par Gill, Andres Gill, 1867

How strange it must have been, in 1863, to find the glaring pallor of a dead Christ drying in Edouard Manet's studio. In a career that spanned a quarter of a century, only twice did the artist visit biblical texts in his painting. The first of these, *Dead Christ with Angels* (Fig. 1), is eccentric indeed.[1] Deep streaks of color congeal in Jesus' face. Near the top of his forehead, smudges of maroon give the appearance of dried, scabby blood. Harsh yellow tones highlight the tip of his nose, the apples of his cheeks, and the contours just beneath his eyebrows, while the bridge of his nose and his sunken-in eye sockets are rendered in darker hues. His eyes and mouth are left half-open. The play of shadow across his face causes his head to recede into the background. The whites that make up his torso fairly dominate the entire composition. On either side of this imposing corpse two women, costumed in colorful fabrics and outlandish angels' wings, attend to the deceased. But their good looks fail to outweigh the body's overwhelming grisliness. Out of this conflation of beauty and repugnance, of color and pallor, an entirely comfortless Christ emerged.

Manet's is an effusive palette, but there's no mistaking the pathos of the scene. Jesus has been taken down from the cross and laid in a makeshift tomb, on top of someone else's linens. Dense folds of cloth are gathered around the body—the white sheet, the golden-brown dress of the angel on the right, and the burgundy gown of the angel on the left—yet despite the vibrant energy of sheets and dresses, a sense of harshness emerges. He is in between death and resurrection, but he looks rather closer to death. This unapologetic realism, and Manet's curious construction of it, is crucial to the way *Dead Christ* was received by the French public in the 1860s.

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[1] The other notable religious work (besides a few early, small studies) is *Christ Mocked*, displayed at the Salon of 1865 next to Manet's infamous *Olympia*.

For a painter of costumes, of "modernity" and little else, religion seems a strange space indeed for the artistry of Manet. The manner in which he composed his Christ and angels—with painstaking attention to the replication of costumes, stage, and models—is perhaps related, in formulation, to the rest of his oeuvre, and definitely measures up to something other than reverence. Consequently, reviews written by art critics and by the general public were not exactly glowing. It is difficult, even today, to look at *Dead Christ* without asking if a caustic aftertaste was, in fact, Manet's goal. Authorial intent, however, will remain a matter of speculation. What I will address is the social and political context *Dead Christ* arose from and responded to. The way Louis Napoleon managed the defense of papal temporal power during the unification of Italy shaped an ambiguous and often strained relationship between the Second Empire and the Catholic Church. This tension was deeply rooted in the conflict between an increasingly secular society and the demands of religious dogma.

After attending to the world outside the canvas, I will attempt to tackle the worlds within. Among the many questions Manet's ghoulish rendering of the body invites is one of narrative authority: how does this scene correspond to its rehearsal in the New Testament? Manet references a Bible verse in the lower right-hand corner of the painting. His inscription reads, "évangile Sel st. Jean / Chapitre Vingt vers douze," which points to the Book of John, chapter 20, verse 12: "and [Mary Magdalene] seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body

of Jesus had lain."[2] These are painted words, and the shadowing of their letters upon the surface of the stone seems to anchor the text to its New Testament referent.

The last episodes in the life of Jesus, as described by the Gospels, were the Passion (when he was captured and crucified), the Resurrection (his re-awakening), and the Ascension (during which he finally joined God in Heaven). After Jesus expired on the cross, he was taken down by a few of the disciples, covered with burial clothes, and placed in a tomb near the site of the crucifixion. Days later, Mary Magdalene visited the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away. She entered the tomb, but found no body; instead, she met two angels who told her to stop crying. Surely we can assume that this Jesus and these angels—the ones that Manet has represented in paint—are the principle players in the story of the Entombment. But an exact account involving the dead Jesus attended by angels exists neither in the book of John nor any of the other Gospels. Manet's, in other words, is an unwritten image. That is not to say that painted representations of the dead Jesus attended by angels were uncommon in the visual tradition of Christianity, but the vagueness of scripture, as it is here combined with an intensely macabre treatment of theme, raises pressing questions of both authorial intent and interpretive method.

Aside from addressing elements of literary theory, salient artistic tastes, and political environments, a discussion of *Dead Christ* requires mention of scholar Ernest Renan. His book, *Vie de Jesus* published in 1862 was so provocative that Manet would surely have been acquainted with the ideas therein—in particular, the treatment of Jesus

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[2] Jennifer M. Sheppard offers a detailed explanation (and translation) of this text in her article, "The Inscription in Manet's The Dead Christ, with Angels," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 16 (1981), 199-200.

as a historical figure and not the Son of God.[3] In the nineteenth century, critical, scientific eyes were turned upon canonical text previously considered beyond reproach. And Manet's *Dead Christ* certainly feeds off the friction between a revered history and a modern objective lens.

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[3]David Lee addresses the absence of the definite article "Here it becomes pertinent to make an initial incursion into the subject of Renan's chosen title. For the omission of the definite article—'Vie de Jesus,' not 'La Vie de Jesus' as it is commonly mis-styled—itself suggests an emphasis on the generic rather than the particular, the organic rather than the individualist…To apply to the life and the events whose uniqueness is the basis of all Christian teaching, if not the entire culture of the West, what, in these terms, is 'vie' is to aim indeed at calculated symmetry: what is mortality most mediocre on one side is the name of all aspirations to individuality and transcendence on the other." See *Ernest Renan: In the Shadow of Faith* (London: Duckworth, 1996), 196.

ONE

The manner in which Bible characters and their stories were transformed from text into image played a central role in the dissemination of Christian doctrine in the mid-nineteenth century. Representations of Biblical narratives were not only instrumental in contributing to what people *knew of* the religion, but also in framing the way people *thought about* God and the Church.[4] In France, Catholicism was dominant, of course, as well as quasi-state supported, and the representations that it encouraged were those that engender reverence and faith. Paintings hung in churches and/or at the Salon were important vehicles for the acceptance and veneration of Christian subjects and the religion as a whole. But Manet's *Dead Christ* interrupted the persuasiveness of such imagery.

Many parties were involved in the display and judgment of religious images in the 1860s. My project, however, will focus on institutions that affected Manet's working conditions—particularly those that served to monitor the public display of his work. I'm referring in particular to the Academy and the government, because both were active agents in the Salon jury after 1863. For a number of reasons, relations between the Academy and the Second Empire had soured in the early 1860s, which led to tighter government control of the Salon admissions Jury.[5] Part of the intent of such close

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[4] I am indebted to Ruti Talmor and her lecture on colonial Ghanaian politics for this understanding of images as pedagogical units, by nature of *what* (in terms of subject) they represent, and tools that encourage ideology to sink, by nature of *how* (in terms of tone) they represent.

[5] For a more detailed description than I will go into here, see Patricia Mainardi's *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 123-8.

monitoring was to ease the strictness of Salon criteria.[6] Patricia Mainardi has observed

that the tastes of the Academy ceased to correspond with those of the art world, a trend

that, in turn, enabled the government to implement changes in the Salon's system.[7]

Louis Napoleon, upon his visit to the Salon in 1863, decided all the pieces that had not

been accepted should be displayed at the Palais de l'Industrie, thus creating the famous

Salon des Refusés.[8] But this was only the beginning of the government's intervention.

Before the fall of 1863, the Jury was populated by Academicians, and afterwards, these

individuals comprised only three-fourths of the Jury, and were required to be voted into

power by Salon artists who had previously received honors. The other one-fourth of the

Jury was appointed by the state. (The success of this intervention, in the long-term, is

debatable.)[9] Between the Salon of 1863 and that of 1864, the percentage of submitted

work actually accepted into the Salon rose from thirty to seventy.[10]

Exerting a less measurable, but equally important, influence on the visual texture

of the Salon and the conventions of taste was, of course, the Church. This institution is

relevant in a discussion of the Salon because, as a powerful social force, its interaction

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[6] The Second Empire took a great interest in artistic production, spending vast sums on architectural programs (such as the rebuilding of Paris by Baron von Haussmann), museums, monuments, sculptures, and paintings. And it is logical that the state would seek out more influence over the art world if its purse strings were so tightly tied to it. For more information, see Kathryn B Hiesinger and Joseph Rishel's "Art and Its Critics: A Crisis of Principle," from *The Second Empire: Art in France under Napoleon III* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 29-34.

[7] See Mainardi, *Art and Politics,* 124.

[8] See Hiesinger and Kishel, "Art and Its Critics," 34.

[9] The be-medaled artists were exempt from the Jury's judgment (they could exhibit without having to solicit the Jury's approval) and they were, according to critic Louis Auvray, "avid for new awards, [and] voted in the same manner to flatter both the gentlemen of the Institute and the gentlemen who were decorated." The Jury remained, in many ways, the same old boys' club it always was. See Mainardi, *Art and Politics*, 124-5.

[10] Ibid., 125.

with the state did come to bear on the artistic outputs of nineteenth century regimes. As far as monarchial (Bourbon) governments were concerned, religious themes were "in"— no doubt a function of a purportedly horizontal power relationship between the state and the Church, maintained (at least superficially) by the divine right of kings paradigm. Napoleonic regimes, on the other hand, were characterized by a decidedly vertical structuring of authority, where the government played fiddle and the pope (reluctantly) danced. But in Louis Napoleon's Second Empire, even if the state of affairs with Rome or the French clergy were tenuous (as was often the case), the mythologies of Catholicism were held in esteem.[11]

Institutions, be they the Academy, the government, or the Church, established the parameters for proper representations of religious themes, parameters to which Manet, for one, did not adhere. The very specific treatment of biblical subjects, available on the Salon walls and beneath the cathedral ceilings, established a discursive context that gave Manet something to bounce off. And while there were many different stylistic handlings of religious imagery in the nineteenth century, the great majority was respectful of Church doctrine. A painterly treatment of religious themes can be seen in Delacroix's *Christ in the Garden of Olives* (1827) and *Descent to the Tomb* (1859) (Fig. 2 &3). Though Delacroix certainly would be impossible to classify as "conventional," or at all representative of "traditional" Academic painting (no matter his stature in the world of the Salon during the Second Empire), for the purposes of this thesis, I will consider his reverence of religious subject matter to have a notion of "normativeness" for the

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[11] For more detailed information, see Norman Ravitch's *The Catholic Church and the French Nation, 1589-1989* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 28-59.

nineteenth century. He represents the usual cast of saints and martyrs in a dignified fashion—and particularly those from the story of Jesus.

In 1827, Delacroix exhibited *Christ in the Garden of Olives* at the Paris Salon, and it was later hung in the Church of Saint-Paul-Saint-Louis.[12] This scene depicts a moment from the Passion when Jesus was in the garden, on the Mount of Olives with his disciples (who can be found sleeping in the lower left-hand corner). These forms, as well as the trees, rocks, and finer details of background, are painted in shadow, thus much darker than the central figures. Set off from the deep greens of the background is a triad of angels. They look mournfully at Jesus, and one appears to weep. The compassion of their expressions is believably rendered—if Delacroix had individuals pose for this figural group, the transformation from models to otherworldly creatures is convincing. On the other end of the angels' gaze, at the center of the composition, Jesus holds himself up with one arm. His bright orange and white robes (in contrast to the duller, earthier hues of the angels' garments) underscore the drama of his gesture: eyes downcast, he extends a hand towards the angels and towards heaven, pleading, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."[13] With reverence of characters and narrative content, the agony of this moment is unquestionably communicated.

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[12] *Christ in the Garden of Olives* was one of thirteen works by Delacroix displayed at the Salon, of which the most important was considered to be *The Death of Sardanopolis*.

[13] Book of Matthew, 26:39, "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Augmented Third Edition, New Revised Standard Version, Indexed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)). This desire to renounce his fate is considered a moment of weakness, which Catholics believe was caused by the presence of Satan, and it is one of the "sorrowful mysteries" represented on the prayer beads of the Rosary.

In terms of critical review, Delacroix's *Christ in the Garden of Olives* received a tip-of-the-hat to his angels, but a wag-of-the-finger at his Jesus. The remarks made were, without a doubt, colored by the context of the Bourbon monarchy, in which biblical narrative was a popular choice of subject, and Delacroix was seen as "radical."[14] Critics were displeased with his rendering of Christ: they found fault in the "ochreish flesh modeling" of the body.[15] But the unfavorable reception of this Christ was balanced by the critics' praise of the three angels, the diagonal arrangement of figures, and the tone in which narrative was illustrated.[16] Ultimately, the re-location of *Christ in the Garden of Olives* to the Church of Saint-Paul-Saint-Louis proves that this Jesus and these angels were palatable for a mid-nineteenth century audience—they reflected, and reinforced, widely held conceptions of Jesus (as the Son of God, "the most beautiful of men"). Despite minor formal criticisms (reflective of the socio-cultural circumstances of 1827), Delacroix's presentation of subject matter did not invite the level of reproach that Manet's did in *Dead Christ*, because Delacroix's had reverence. Entirely outside considerations of painterly or linear approaches to form, Manet applies his brand of French realism to a subject that was considered, by many, to be far above the real—to treat "Him" as an everyday, worldly subject was profane indeed.

To open up a discussion of the successes of Manet's *Dead Christ*, it is necessary to understand the ways in which it was considered a failure, and by whom. Some critics

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[14] The free, "unfinished" way of Delacroix's forms was quite different than the linear approach taken by the other emerging star of French painting, Ingres. These diverging treatments of form represent a dichotomy in painting which dates back to the Italian renaissance, back to Reubens versus Poussin, back to Venice versus Florence—the painterly and the articulate have long been at odds.

[15] See Lee Johnson's *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix: A Critical Catalogue* (Vol. I-IV) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[16] See Johnson's *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix* (Vol. I), 166.

recognized Manet's talent, but the great majority of them did not approve of his treatment of religious themes. George Hamilton mentions the commentary of Gautier (a critic for *Presse*), de Callais (a critic for *L'Artiste* and *Fiargo*), and Thoré (a critic who was published in *L'independence belge*, among other journals) were more positive than most reviews of Manet's work. Thoré, most notably, was understanding and complementary of the painting. He has this to say of the angels:

> And the public has no right to laugh at them since it has never seen any angels, any more than it has seen a sphinx…I maintain, however, that this formidable Christ and these angels with Prussian blue wings seem to be making fun of a world which says, "Who would have thought of such a thing! It's an aberration"… That doesn't prevent the whites of the shroud and the flesh tones from being very true.[17]

Thoré understands the outlandishness of the angels and peculiarity of Christ to be some sort of joke made by Manet, but what Thoré interprets as strange (maybe even tactless) humor does not cloud his appreciation of Manet's technical skill. The popular press, however, saw little merit in the painting and was outraged at Manet's effrontery. One writer, for the *Gazette des Étrangers,* exclaimed:

> We have never seen such audaciously bad taste, the negation of scientific anatomy, spoiled color, lampblack abused and applied to the face of the most beautiful of men, carried so far as by Manet in the *Dead Christ*.[18]

The mass-print journals and newspapers of Paris (like the *Gazette*), for the most part, addressed Manet's blasphemy and condemned the painting.[19] One incisive interpretation of the *Dead Christ*, however, came from an anonymous reviewer, writing for *La Vie parisienne*: "and do not neglect Manet's *Christ*, or the *Poor Miner Rescued from a Coal Mine*,

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[17] See George Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics* (Binghamton: Yale University Press, 1954), 61.
[18] Novelist Eugénie-Caroline Saffray (under the pseudonym "Raoul de Navery"), on June 7, 1864, in the *Gazette des Etrangers*. See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics*, 60.
[19] See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics*, 59-65.

executed for Renan."[20] This individual took into account the publication of Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jesus* (a text I will tackle later, in greater detail) and this text's possible influence on the appearance of Manet's Jesus. From this comment one might begin to understand this as a body pulled at random from the morgue. Emile Zola, too, states,

> On a dit que ce Christ n'était pas un Christ, et j'avoue que cela peut être; pour moi, c'est un cadavre peint en pleine lumière, avec franchise et vigueur. [In English: "One said that this Christ is not a Christ, and I confess that this could be; for me, it's a dead body painted in full light, with frankness and force."] [21]

Zola and the writer for *La Vie parisienne* did not necessarily consider the painting as in "audaciously bad taste" (as many members of Manet's audience would), but they did recognize Manet's realism as deliberate.

Zola points out, "c'est un cadavre," and I would argue that the effect of *Dead Christ* hinges on its severe realism. It is in this area that I believe the *Dead Christ* to be successful. The dead weight of Manet's Jesus must be propped up by the angel on the right: one of her arms grasps his body and the other holds his head in a way that allows us a full view of his macabre face. The imaginary support of the angel facilitates an uncomfortably frontal Jesus; the body is tipped in a strange showcase of dead flesh. Because of the forward angle at which Jesus displayed, his deathly pallor is made prominent and inescapable. The divinity of his pasty, dirty body has not been treated with the respect afforded it by other painters. An alternative agenda, and perhaps one along the same lines as Renan's, is certainly a possibility.

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[20] See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics*, 60.

[21] See Emile Zola's *Salons* (Paris: Sociète de Publications Romanes et Françaises, 1959), 97 [Translation mine]. Zola also states: "Moi, je déclare préférer de beaucoup le Christ au tombeau; je retrouve là Edouard Manet tout entier, avec les partis-pris de son oeil et les audaces de sa main….et même j'aime les anges du fond, ces enfants aux grandes ailes bleues qui ont une étrangeté si douce et si élégante," 97-8.

Though the text inscribed in the lower left-hand corner of the painting references the moment after resurrection, Manet's inert Jesus bears a greater resemblance to paintings of the entombment—the episode after the Passion, when Jesus is taken down from the cross and placed in a stone grave. Take, for example, Delacroix's *Descent into the Tomb*.[22] Exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1859, this painting depicts several figures, including disciples carrying the body of Christ. Presumably, they have just brought him down from the cross to his tomb. Here, just as in Manet's *Dead Christ*, one can see the lifelessness in the limbs of Jesus; the body has a limp, leaden appearance, but Delacroix's Christ seems to be peacefully asleep, maintaining a dignified bearing despite a battered nakedness.[23]

But Manet, with his grisly Christ, makes resurrection seem distant, if at all possible. Not only because of the unquestionable lifelessness of Jesus' body, but also because of the scene's "constructed" appearance. What I want to suggest is that the realism of this painting does not stop with the body of Jesus; it is faithful, too, to the models and studio scene—their poses, their expressions, and their staginess, are evident. The practice of transforming individuals into characters, this idealizing process, was disregarded. Whether Manet sought to offend the religiously devout with this *Dead Christ* will remain an area for further exploration; what is clear is that the conventions of representing religious subjects have been upended.

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[22] 1859 was the last year Delacroix exhibited at the Paris Salon, and *Descent into the Tomb* was one of eight paintings he displayed there. See Johnson's *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix* (Vol. III), xxiv.

[23] *Descent into the Tomb* was widely praised at the Salon, perhaps, in part, because trends of taste in the Second Empire heralded Delacroix as a "grand master," in many cases. Yet, since critics at the Salon of 1859 were much less complementary of Delacroix's other entries, the undivided approval of Descent into the Tomb, even with a characteristic "lack of finish," is worthy of note. See Johnson's *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix* (Vol. III), 248.

TWO

This next segment will explore the political and social circumstances that compelled Manet to represent Jesus in such a vastly different way than the majority of painters in the nineteenth century, and particular events that may have inspired him to consider the painting of religious subject matter in the first place. In the 1860s, the Church was at a crossroads, trying to find a way to serve its function in an increasingly modern and secular society.[24] Pope Pius IX, for one, was completely unwilling to reconcile the ideals of Catholicism with modern thought—if these two frameworks for interpreting the world ever came into conflict, according to Pius IX, modern thought had to be blasphemously in the wrong. The "Syllabus of Errors," issued in December of 1864 (which I will address in greater detail later), makes clear Pius IX's attitude towards modernity. If any of these "errors," in a list of eighty, were made, eternal damnation was promised as punishment. The eightieth error declares, "The Roman pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization," indicating that Pius IX, and practitioners of Catholicism, should not accept new ways of organizing society.

Progression towards more liberal governmental forms (in the 1860s, the unification of Italy was a particularly troublesome transition for the Vatican) had come into conflict with the constructs of papal power. In France, Catholics of the Ultramontane persuasion considered the pope to be the final authority on all matters

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[24] For much more detail than I will go into here, see C.S. Phillips, *The Church and France: 1848- 1907* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967). This text is, however, overtly sympathetic to the Ultramontane point of view.

secular and spiritual. The lower clergy tended to favor this Ultramontane position, while government officials and members of the upper clergy often subscribed to the Gallican philosophy, which upheld the power of the government over that of the pope. Distinct from these two extremes were the Liberal Catholics. These individuals, though conservative in their interpretation of Church dogma, exercised more flexibility in the way they applied Catholicism to society at large: Liberal Catholics tended to lean leftwards in terms of political ideology. They sought (among other things) a compromise, a harmony, between ecclesiastical tradition and the achievements of the modern age.

Another way of analyzing the state of the Catholic faith in the nineteenth century, investigated by Norman Ravitch, dismisses altogether the labels "conservative," "liberal," "Ultramontane," "Gallican"—categories which underscore the internal frictions between sectors—and instead divides them into two categories: those that wanted Catholicism to effect change in society, and those that wanted Catholicism to be an explanatory, stabilizing force in a modern world that had been increasingly disaffected with Church doctrine (or, more to the point, wanted the people currently in power to stay in power). [25] This alternative staging might be a more pragmatic version for us, as we attempt to comprehend Manet, his viewers, and their understanding of Jesus. It is uncertain which brand of Catholicism Manet subscribed to, if any. Because of his bourgeois origins, and by nature of living in a predominantly Catholic country, it is probable that he was familiar with the stories of the Bible and the way the Church operated in society. But *Dead Christ* introduced doubt with Manet's strange rendering of

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[25] See Ravitch's, *The Catholic Church and the French Nation: 1848-1989* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

biblical characters, and thus threw into question the explanatory authority of the New Testament. In this way, Manet, potentially, compromised the ability of the New Testament (and its believers) to affect change—clearly a disruptive action for our second, progressive type of Catholics. Discordance between religious doctrine and the *Dead Christ* was clearly felt by viewers; Manet's irreverence was odious to those who worshipped Jesus, denomination or intensity of adherence to dogma notwithstanding. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the aesthetics of Catholicism in the nineteenth century, it might be helpful to look at mass-produced representations of Jesus from the Catholics that wanted keep the world as-is and from those that wanted to transform it.

On a daily basis, French citizens were exposed to any number of woodblock prints—sold on the street, given out at first communion celebrations, or seen on the insides of hymn books—that, one way or another, taught the stories of Christianity. Take, for instance, a colored woodblock print from the devotional materials of Chartres Cathedral, circa 1830 (Fig. 4). It depicts a deposition scene; the Virgin Mary holds the dead Jesus in her lap. The text at the bottom reads "Notre Dame des sept douleurs," and refers to Mary's suffering, as a worried mother, during the seven stages of the passion and the resurrection.[26] Here, ideas of suffering and redemption claim to be "eternal." The seven swords piercing Mary's chest, the crown of thorns, the four nails, and the pitiable dead Christ, are all uncomplicated devotional symbols. They embody myths that attain an aura of truth through repetition. The figures appear clearly situated a in pictorial space that tried to connect the people who see the image to the characters

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[26] "Our mother of seven pains" [Translation mine].

within it. Yet this image, and many like it, does not contain direct references to modern life in France.

The progressive sector of Catholicism, which wanted the Church (its teachings, its mythology) to change the world, and change *with* the world, went to great lengths to insist on the relevance of Jesus to a modern, and even a Republican, society. At times, the themes of the Christ story were molded into thinly disguised metaphors for the situation of the French working class.[27] Cartoons of a "Republican Jesus" circulated in mass-print journals or pamphlets, mainly during the great revolution of 1789-1799 and then again after the revolution of the 1830s. These images, somewhat divorced from the hierarchical concept of Christ propagated by the Church, tended to align the sufferings of Christ with the plight of the workers.[28] The success of a democratic government was analogous to the resurrection of the people, to their ascent to power.

This conflation is evident in *La Résurrection*, a lithograph created by Alphonse Esquiros and published in 1849 (Fig. 5).[29] Jesus floats over his proletarian counterparts; his eyes look upwards. An elegant contrapposto stance and billowing robes, in contrast to the active gestures and contemporary clothing of the figures below, ties him to the realm of the divine. Esquiros' shading, too, helps create this division between earthly and heavenly. Where Jesus hovers, the background is completely white, directly above

[27] See Michael Paul Driskel's, *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth Century France* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 33-41.

[28] In fact, "Republican Jesus," after the June Revolution of 1848, came to embody the delta between lessons taught by Christ and "institutional religion" (which was considered to be tied to the upper classes), according to Driskel's *Representing Belief*, 35-8.

[29] Driskel, in an article entitled "Manet, Naturalism, and the Politics of Christian Art," describes Esquiros as a "prolific art critic and utopian socialist" who, in 1840, published his own version of the New Testament (*Evangile du Peuple*) that forcefully equated the sufferings of the proletariat and those of Christ. It is the illustrated version of this text, re-published in 1849, in which *La Résurrection* appears. *Arts Magazine* 60 (1985): 49-50.

the dark values used in the lower register. In fact, this darkness seems to part at his feet, as if repelled backwards by his body. Against the shaded backdrop, bayonets, broken shackles, and flag of the Republic (among other forms) allude to the resurrection of the people. Near the ground, at the very center of the lithograph, a man lies in anguish, and, next to him, another reaches up towards the "Republican Christ." The standing figures in the foreground brandish swords, bayonets, flags, and broken shackles, while nearly trampling underfoot a crown and plush pillow—emblems of monarchial rule. Instead of enforcing the divine right of kings, Jesus encourages workers to overturn such an authoritarian political structure, to rise and claim their right to power. These types of images overtly re-appropriated the power of Christian iconography to activate the convictions of the people.

The incorporation of nineteenth-century characters into biblical narrative indicates a version of Catholicism that was willing to absorb parts of modern thought in order to stay relevant. This order of iconography wanted Catholicism to have a fighting chance, as modern reasoning began to overtake its instructive role. But Pius IX fought tooth and nail against this usurpation, to preserve the integrity of what he posited as a constant truth uncontaminated by modern thought. Needless to say, the pedagogical programming of the Church existed, in some part, to keep him in a position of power. Accordingly, his "Syllabus of Errors," issued in 1864, denounced the modern world entirely.[30] Perhaps it was this document, an aggressive listing of "heretical" actions, that captured Manet's attention—because it insisted that people disregard the advances of science or other new ideas that were corrosive to the constructs of faith. I wonder if Pius

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[30] See Pope Pius IX, "Syllabus of Errors," Papal Encyclical Database, http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm.

IX encouraged faith by addressing and condemning these eighty "sacrilegious" notions, such as socialism or communism, or if, instead, he encouraged the willing suspension of disbelief. Regardless, he threatened with hellfire those who would choose new, modern rationality over the "eternal" truths offered by a Catholic understanding of the universe. Pius IX tried to maintain the Church's unquestioned conception of the world and man's place in it.

In order to better understand the environment that so threatened Pius IX, we must take a closer look at the events leading up to the publication of the "Syllabus." After Louis Napoleon came into power in 1848, he increased France's military presence in Italy, allegedly to protect the territory of Pius IX. But considering the weakness of Italy after the revolution of 1848, the insertion of French influence into the Italian peninsula looks slightly more like opportunism than the devoted defense of papal power. (Using Catholicism as an excuse to flex the muscles of empire was nothing new, but it is an important part of our story, just the same.)

Unsurprisingly, Louis Napoleon was not the only one with his eye on Italy. The rulers of Piedmont-Sardinia, a country along the northwestern border of Italy, were keen on annexing a few of the central Italian states, including papal territorial holdings. And in 1860, King Victor Emmanuel and his Prime Minister, the Count di Cavour, signed a treaty with Louis Napoleon, in which the Emperor promised to support Piedmont. In exchange, Piedmont promised to give the provinces of Nice and Savoy to France. The French troops protecting Pius IX, however, remained in Rome

Much further south, Garibaldi (a passionate Italian nationalist) began a campaign to unite all of Italy. Throughout the spring and summer of 1860, he gathered a volunteer

army and began to march towards Rome, gaining support and momentum as he traveled northwards from Sicily, deeper into the peninsula. In September of 1860, while Garibaldi conducted the unification crusade, Victor Emmanuel led the army of Piedmont into the Papal States. And before Garibaldi reached Rome, he was intercepted by the Piedmontese, who convinced him to surrender control of southern Italy. Consequently, Victor Emmanuel became the king of a unified Italy, save for the now-considerably-shrunken papal territories, which remained protected by the French military. The removal of these troops was not negotiated until the September Convention of 1864, where Louis Napoleon was persuaded to bring home his soldiers, with the guarantee that Victor Emmanuel would protect Pius IX if Rome, the only area left to papal jurisdiction, was attacked. The incorporation of the Papal States into a larger Italian nation caused a major shift in the nature of Pius IX's power. It was after this September Convention that he issued the "Syllabus of Errors," in a brazen attempt to solidify his spiritual authority in the fresh absence of his temporal power. This was, at best, breast beating.

Louis Napoleon's ambiguous attitude towards Pius IX—defending papal sovereignty one minute and enabling Italian unification the next—is paradigmatic of two conflicting traditions of French government in the nineteenth century: that of the monarchy and that of the Napoleonic Empire. And Louis Napoleon often seemed to vacillate between these political extremes. In a small way, the placement of French soldiers in Rome seemed to recall a monarchial impulse to protect a source of power (God, and, by extension, the pope—the crowner of kings and Bonapartes). But supporting the Italian unification, against the reign of Pius IX over his Papal States, was

consistent with the political sympathies of the first Napoleonic regime. (Under the Napoleon I, the Empire was encouraging of big, powerful, centralized nation-states.) For the most part, however, the manipulation of Italian unification to obtain the provinces of Nice and Savoy was an act of empire. Justifying ideologies involving God or the nation-state fell short, in the end. The appeal of imperial expansion did not.

One is left to wonder how the power plays of empire appeared to Manet, be they Napoleonic or (less traceably) those of the pope attempting reclaim the hearts and minds of an increasingly secular society. Given the context of the 1860s, it is difficult to imagine that the blurred line between professed spiritual aims and (sometimes) covertly secular ones did not come to bear on Manet's interpretation of religious subject matter.

THREE

Manet's corpselike rendering of Jesus was only one part of the rhetorical programming that caused *Dead Christ* to leave an irreverent aftertaste. Other factors, including his attention to costume and his borrowings from the Spanish masters, are present in *Dead Christ*, and were equally important causes of its disruptiveness. Because Louis Napoleon wed Eugenie de Montijo in 1853, the French public gained an enthusiasm for Spanish culture.[31] Manet, ever attentive to the pageantry of modern

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[31] Eugenie's Spanishness, among other cross-cultural flows, had instilled in the French public a passion for all things Spanish.

leisure, turned to Spanish-inspired costume pieces, as well as the robust manner with which Spanish masters applied paint to canvas. By "going Spanish," he brought something unexpected to the often-conservative Salon jury. But such innovative strategies were not always appreciated in official circles. In Manet's case, these methods were negatively received.

Due to the rigidity of Salon admissions criteria in 1863, his three entries were denied, and displayed instead at the Salon des Refusés. Two out of the three paintings submitted to this Jury were costume pieces in the Spanish vein (*Young Man as a Majo* and *Mademoiselle Victorine as an Espada*) and the other was *Dejeuner sur L'Herbe*, which, out of the three pieces, was far and away the most harassed by critics. More likely than not, it was the morally provocative presentation of the female nude in *Dejeuner sur L'Herbe* that earned derisive reviews. But the *Dejeuner* was also subject to the same compositionally and stylistically reproachful comments levied against all three paintings. Castignary, in particular, pointed out some of the perplexing qualities of Manet's 1863 entries: technical abnormalities (attributed to an apathetic handling of paint) unhinge any possible understanding of actual forms.[32] In *Espada* (Fig. 6), for the cape that Victorine (dressed as a toreador) waves at an imaginary bull, shades of pink bend and warp the illusion of fabric, but with little logic or "feeling of anatomical structure," as Castignary put it.[33] The cape has a shape, yes, and volume, too. But viewed up close, any argument

See Genevieve Lacambre and Gary Tinterow's catalogue *Manet/Velazquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), 203-258.

[32] Castignary, a lawyer and art critic, was (according to Hamilton) a "serious apologist for the realist movement." See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics*, 47.

[33] This is Castignary writing in 1863: "The *Bath*, the *Majo*, the *Espada* are good sketches, I will grant you. There is a certain verve in the colors, a certain freedom of touch which are in no way commonplace. But then what? Is this drawing? Is this painting?

for its three-dimensionality evaporates into random veins of color. The physical presence of the paint itself is made manifest. Still, the vivacity of hue, as well as the intermittent revelation and disappearance of line are reminiscent of Velazquez, notoriously Manet's favorite Spanish painter. But unlike Velazquez's handling of paint, the way Manet manipulates brush and oils also contributes to the depth of costume in his paintings—the two-dimensional canvas wears the costume of three-dimensions, but it shows its seams. The hooks and clasps, its layers of spatial recession, are prominent: the pictorial space appears fractured.

As Victorine poses, fancy dress and the tradition of bullfighting take center stage. But she doesn't look like a part of the scene in which she supposedly participates, because the normative laws of perspective have been dismissed. Perhaps Manet draws from his memory of Japanese prints, in which disruptions in scale produce figures in the foreground that are unexpectedly larger than those in the background.[34] The ground upon which Victorine stands looks more like the brooding brown backdrop of Manet's studio than the dirt of a bull ring. The action behind her, in the upper register of the canvas, is neither a proportionate distance away from Victorine nor a logical size in comparison to her. She is posed somewhat awkwardly and, given her prominence in the

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Manet thinks himself resolute and powerful. He is only hard. And the amazing thing is that he is as soft as he is hard. That's because he is uncertain about some things and leaves them to chance. Not one detail has attained its exact and final form. I see garments without feeling the anatomical structure which supports them and explains their movements. I see boneless fingers and heads without skulls. I see side whiskers made of two strips of black cloth that could have been glued to the cheeks. What else do I see? The artist's lack of convictions and sincerity." See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics*, 47-8.

[34] Hamilton states, "In each work [*Espada* and *The Incident*] Manet may have looked to the Japanese print for his composition, attempting in a similar way to arrange realistic figures in a decorative pattern freed from the limitations of conventional perspective space." See *Manet and His Critics*, 52.

overall composition, her gesture's self consciousness is unavoidable. Her size overshadows the drama of the bullfight and the small group of onlookers.

The applications of paint that presumably describe these groups are composed with such imprecise denseness that the details—faces, garments, gestures—are, up close, incomprehensible. The man on horseback, for instance, dissolves into patchy reds and browns as one approaches the canvas, while at a distance, this form seemed more meticulously rendered. This pairing of figures, the horse and his rider, hover strangely beside Victorine, not projecting into her space but not completely behind here, either. The pieces, in other words, don't quite fit together as they should. In terms of composition, the foreground and background relate so uncomfortably to one another that illusionary space appears doubtful at best. I wonder if it's safe to say, here, that Manet traffics in fraudulence. Because the way "Spanishness" is revealed in *Espada*, and in his 1864 Salon submissions, is in the self-conscious staging of gesture and the complicated use of costume (not only the donned garments of the models, but also the three-dimensional tricks of painting as a costume for the two-dimensional canvas).

Manet's 1864 entries, *Dead Christ with Angels* and *The Incident at the Bull Ring*, were accepted into the official Paris Salon (in part, perhaps, because the admissions board had been re-configured to allow for a more diverse showing of artists). In terms of subject and perspective, *The Incident in the Bull Ring* is closer to *Espada*, and more overtly tied to Spanish culture, than our *Dead Christ*. So I would like to pause and look at *The Incident* in more depth (Fig. 7 & 8).

A toreador lies in the immediate foreground, a hand on his chest. Blood pools near his left shoulder; the left arm, outstretched, still clutches a pink flag. The warm

peach tones of his skin, dramatically juxtaposed with the cool whites and blacks of his costume, suggests to the viewer that the toreador's demise is perhaps more aesthetic than it is horrifying. He looks gallant, even in death. The serenity of his face and neatness of his hair add dignity and poise to what can only have been a violent, unsavory event. His death is further complicated by the uncomfortable truth that people have paid to watch it. Bullfight enthusiasts crowd the upper register of the painting, gawking. Three other figures occupy the middle register, and the bright hues of their costumes—strong blues, reds, yellows, whites—pop out against the mauve wall of the ring. A bull paces between these vibrant toreadors and the body lying on the ground.

But the relationship between the onlookers, the figures who fill the upper and middle registers (spectators, toreadors, and bull), and the dead toreador is comparable to that of Victorine and her background in *Espada*. The disproportionate largeness of the principal figure in relation to the rest of the scene's participants (especially the bull) provoked such a hailstorm of abuse from critics that Manet responded by cutting off the top half of the canvas, painting over the offending bull, and leaving only the fallen toreador.[35] Accordingly, the name of the painting has been changed to *Dead Toreador*.

An unconventional treatment of perspective, however, made up only part of the critics' disparaging remarks. Passages of *The Incident* were accused of imitating a painting, at the time attributed to Velazquez, in the Pourtalès collection.[36] Manet may or

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[35] Critics Théophile Gautier (writing for the *Monde illustré*) and Hector de Callias (writing for *L'Artiste*) both call the bull "microscopic" in comparison to the dead toreador and the rest of the arena. See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics*, 52-3.

[36] The authorship of *Orlando Muerto* has since been the subject of much debate. Now called *Dead Soldier*, this painting found a new home at the National Gallery of London in 1865.

may not have been acquainted with this piece, *Orlando Muerto*, [37] but he certainly drew inspiration, stylistically and compositionally, from the Spanish masters. In fact, Baudelaire passionately defended his friend's fascination with the styles of Velazquez, Goya, and El Greco—justifying and applauding the way Manet had re-appropriated elements of their styles and themes.[38] Manet takes the brushwork, costume, and color to be found in Spanish painting and applies them to his subjects.

But the Spanish influence manifests itself differently in *Dead Christ* than in *Espada* and *The Incident*. There are no distinctive elements of Spanish culture in *Dead Christ*, so its relationship to the Spanish masters is a much more subtle one. Thoré, in his critique of Manet's 1864 Salon paintings, suggested El Greco as a possible source of inspiration

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They have identified it as a product of the 17th century Italian school ("The school and date of the painting are much debated, but it is likely to be a Neapolitan work of the 1630s"). But, according to Hamilton, both Italian and Spanish origins have been suggested (52).
A Dead Solder, Italian, 17th Century (artist unknown), The National Gallery Online Collection,http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgibin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa /wa/work?workNumber=NG741 (accessed February 24, 2009).
[37] Thoré's suggestion (in *L'Independence belge*, on June 26, 1864) that Manet saw *Orlando Muerto* through a secondary source seems to be the most probable conclusion, based on the striking resemblance between the principal figures. Anne Coffin Hanson proposes another possible resource Manet may have been exposed to—photographs of the Pourtalès collection, released in 1863 to advertise for its upcoming auction. Yet another probable explanation has been offered, separately and at different times in history, by scholars Bates Lowry, Ackerman, and Dumesnil: they have each noticed the similarities between *Orlando Muerto* and Gerome's *Death of Caesar*, displayed at the Salon of 1859, and offered this as an intermediary, one Manet would surely have been familiar with. See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics* (62) and Ann Coffin Hanson, *Manet and the Modern Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 84-5.
[38] Baudelaire writes a letter in response to one critic's response to *The Incident* that exclaims, without evidence, Manet had never seen the Pourtalès collection. But the rest of the letter explains Manet's interest in a way that "thus absolves him of the charge of merely plagiarizing the earlier masters." See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics*, 62.

for the subject matter and composition of figures in the pictorial space.[39] But the presentation of the garments surely reflects Manet's interest in Velazquez. The very use of costumes points to Velazquez, because he often depicted members of the Spanish court in fancy dress, or with tastefully allegorical props, as a means of idealizing or adding to the grandeur of their portraits.[40]

The way Manet has conflated the costume and history genres in *Dead Christ*, I believe, is a strong component of its disruptiveness. Of course it could be argued that all history paintings contain elements of costume. How, after all, could artists conjure up the drama of historical narrative without the help of fancy dress and stage? Yet Manet has made these costumes and props so obvious that his *Dead Christ* threatens to falsify the same illusion it presumably exists to create. Manet's angels are strange looking indeed, as they frame this gruesome Christ. They seem sad, but only in a disconnected, posed way. Take, for instance, the angel on the right. She looks tired, as if she has been sitting there, holding up the head of Jesus, for quite some time. The angel on the left leans her head against her hand, her eyes downcast. Her expression is hard to read, especially since her eye makeup seems to be running. She might even be crying. Or, maybe, it's just hot in Manet's studio and the perspiration on her face has caused her makeup to smear. Either way, this unapologetic allusion to the making of the picture is only half the story. The many layers of costume, as I have already noted, are equally

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[39] Thoré states, "In [Manet's] second painting, the *Dead Christ*, he has imitated another Spanish master, El Greco, with equal intensity, no doubt as a sort of gibe at the bashful admirers of discreet and tidy painting." See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics*, 60.

[40] Despite the overwhelmingly restrained nature of Spanish court portraiture at the time of Velazquez's career, he introduced idealizing techniques, including "decorous representations" of garment and props, into the current system of copious verisimilitude. See John F. Moffitt's "The Theoretical Basis of Velazquez's Court Portraiture," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 53 (1990), 216-225.

important—the construction of fabric merits a closer look, and a short return to Velazquez.

  In Velazquez's portrait of Francesco I D'Este, the handling of the sitter's sash is reminiscent of the way Manet has depicted his angels' dresses (Fig. 9, 10, & 11). Take, for instance, the angel to the right. The deep golden color of her garment ripples and bends as darker tones meet lighter ones. Paint is laid on, for the most part, in thick strokes. The dress, accordingly, seems to possess both weight and volume, even as an imaginary wind blows into it. The sash tied around Francesco I's shoulders shares a similar plasticity, and the workup of pigment—between whitish pinks, more intense mauves, and maroons—allows for a looseness of actual dimension, a fluctuation between convincing illusion and palpable strokes of paint. This indistinctness is especially apparent towards the back of Francesco I's shoulder, as the gathered cloth dissolves into patches of color. The sash is molded with such broad brushwork that if any logical bunching or knot structure is implied, it has not been firmly established. Equally elusive is the passage of a wing on the far left of Manet's *Dead Christ*, and I count this as a garment because both pairs of wings are so extravagant that they suggest to the spectator their function as costume. The blue wings on the right appear particularly flamboyant, because their bright color is discordant with the morbidity of the rest of the scene. On the left-hand side of the composition, the other angel's wings are a moody grey. Beside the hand of this angel, detail on the backside of her wing is hinted at but not made completely clear. Its shape and volume appear to be nothing more than cleverly placed shades of grey that could, at a distance, be feathers. These small, abbreviated passages are a foil to the believability of the painting's illusionary

program. Like *Espada* and *The Incident*, the interrupted illusionism of the paint strips the canvas of its three-dimensional authority.

This teasing, duplicitous way of laying paint on canvas prevents an uncomplicated acceptance of artifice. From brazenly colored angel's wings to shamelessly smeared makeup, it is nearly impossible to ignore the blunt theatricality of this painting. We are painfully aware of the costumes and the stage. The result of such faithful portrayal of his models' defining characteristics—makeup, boredom, and deadness—is profoundly discomforting, as his audience finds itself at an increasing remove from biblical narrative. These theatrical elements (stages and costumes) that should try to coerce us into illusionary space are too palpable and too nakedly painted to elicit the suspense of disbelief. We feel their edges; we see their true colors. This is a painting that is aware of its own artifice. Because Manet has presented painting's slights of hand with such flare, and because he is so provocative in his rendering of subject, could his *Dead Christ* be insinuating that its narrative is just that—a story?

FOUR

> "and [Mary Magdalene] seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain."[41]
> –Book of John, chapter 20, verse 12

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[41] Jennifer M. Sheppard, "The Inscription in Manet's The Dead Christ, with Angels," 199-200.

Manet refers to this verse in the lower right-hand corner of *Dead Christ*; he paints the words "évangile Sel st. Jean / Chapitre Vingt vers douze" onto the face of a rock, which is part of a grouping of forms that includes another large rock and a serpent (Fig 12, 13, & 14). Towards the left-hand side of the bottom register, Manet has painted a few small snails. The text and these seemingly arbitrary groups both allude to the Bible. The serpent is representative of Satan, but position of this creature has been the subject of some debate—certain individuals think the rocks are crushing serpent, and others maintain that it slithers between them.[42] The rocks themselves have been said to have a relationship to the Garden of Eden, as have the snails, but, partially due to the ambiguity of the serpent, the exact metaphoric significance of these passages is unclear. A more precise Biblical reference is made by the text on the rock (in English: "Gospel of John / chapter twenty verse twelve"), which points directly to John 20:12 (the verse I have cited as the epigraph for this section).[43]

The beginning of chapter 20 in the book of John describes the scene in which Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb of Jesus, several days after he had been carried down from the cross. The stone had been rolled away, revealing an empty chamber, in which only white burial clothes remained. Mary began to weep, when she looked again into the tomb and saw two angels. John 20:12 describes these creatures as sitting where Christ had formerly lain, one at the head and one at the feet of where the body would

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[42] Hanson explains the possible allegorical function of the snake in greater detail: "A crushed snake might have been intended to show triumph over evil as a part of the long tradition of Virtues crushing the symbols of Vice. The connection of the serpent, with Adam, and therefore with the need for the sacrifice of the new Adam, Christ, is so pervasive that it would have had some meaning. In any case, the symbol of man's fall, though present, is overshadowed both literally and figuratively by the almost heraldic presentation of the body of Christ." See *Manet and the Modern Tradition*, 108.

[43] Sheppard, "The Inscription in Manet's The Dead Christ, with Angels," 199-200.

have been. The angels asked Mary why she was crying. "They have taken my Lord away," she replies, "and I don't know where they have put him." Mary then turned around to see the risen Jesus.

The book of John is not unique in its treatment of the events before and after the resurrection; all four gospels describe the discovery of the empty tomb, but none describe the moment of Jesus' re-awakening. At no point in the New Testament is it explicitly stated that the angels and dead Christ ever shared a moment together in the tomb. In any case, this was a story nearly everyone knew. The interpretation of the Church was disseminated in the form of sermons, hymns, mass-produced prints, and a myriad of other instructional tools, and ensured a very specific understanding of Christ for the majority of the French populace. We can be relatively certain that virtually all viewers of Manet's painting could have identified his models as angels and the cadaver as Jesus himself. If nothing else, the predominantly negative response in the 1860s toward *Dead Christ* suggests the persuasiveness of the church's power as storyteller, because most critics and spectators were completely unprepared for Manet's particular rendition of the narrative. So one is lead to wonder if sets of meaning are to be gleaned from this painting that may, somehow, diverge from Church doctrine.

To open up the *Dead Christ* to an alternative reading, I will focus on the relationship between storytelling (diegesis) and imitation (mimesis) as presented by Manet. The textual reference (the script on the rock) ties *Dead Christ* to the narrative (diegetic) act of John in the New Testament. And, as one of the disciples, John participates in the story of Jesus as he tells it—a role H. Porter Abbott calls

"homodiegetic."[44] Manet, on the other hand, is supposed to play the ultimate "heterodiegetic" role (a narrator completely outside the story), that is, the role of illustrator. This role suggests that the painting should serve, first and foremost, to illustrate biblical text—and not perform any sort of narrative function of its own. But what seems to be happening in *Dead Christ* is that Manet, rather than illustrating the story, usurps the diegetic role of the Gospel authors by introducing changes that make his narrative seem disjointed from that of the New Testament.

Because Manet focuses on the mechanics of illusionism rather than the illusion itself (with blatant costumes and staging, as I have already discussed in the previous section), the diegetic act in *Dead Christ* is at odds with that of the Bible. The realistic rendering of the figures in the painting inhibits us from seeing only a biblical narrative here. Use of the word "mimesis" with any of Manet's paintings is complicated because the illusions he constructs are always botched illusions—blobs of paint and visible brushstrokes that dare to denote forms. But, given all the idiosyncrasies with which Manet lays paint on canvas, if there is verisimilitude in the rendering of these angels and this Jesus, it points to their appearance as models and a corpse, not the characters they presumably play in the book of John, chapter 20. The mimetic function of the painting is not one that produces an irrefutable illusion of biblical narrative, but, rather, one that shows us models with wings and a cadaver from the morgue. The role of this gross realism is two-fold. It delivers an unsettlingly dead Christ accompanied by garishly done-up angels, yes, but it also makes apparent a deliberate presentation, a staging of

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[44] In a segment explaining narrative distance, H Porter Abbott defines a "homodiegetic narrator" as "a character who narrates and plays a role" and a "heterodiegetic narrator" as "a voice outside the action it narrates." See *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 68.

moments from the Bible—or, in other words, storytelling that reveals itself as storytelling. Manet makes evident that what we are witnessing is not an imitation or illustration of an event, but an act of diegesis.

A different, but related, way to conceptualize the interaction between stories and tellers in the *Dead Christ* is to consider a possible layering of narratives. As an illustrator, Manet allows props and garments to show through so that they may tell a story of their own from within the narrative they have been assigned. Thus conflated, the stories-within-stories (metanarratives) compete for the attention of the spectator and cause doubt to seep in.[45] Because, in its particular construction and communication of mimesis, painting engages the physical eyes and not the minds' eye (as text does), Manet is able to create an illusionary space in which mimesis itself becomes a pressing issue. He encourages us to think about models, stage, and cadaver instead of angels and Christ, which in turn has the effect of eroding the reliability of the original story. Manet's manipulation of the conventions of painting allows him to present the story of Jesus in a way that strays radically from biblical narrative. He enables us to *see through* different levels of narrative, and ultimately to identify storytelling as such.

We can recognize that this particular account of the biblical text, this particular *Dead Christ*, has been diegetically usurped (and perhaps even subverted) and therefore points toward the fact that the narrative from which it is drawn is a story to begin with. And when spectators re-read a story they already know, complications arise—precisely because Manet has disrupted their expectations as readers. Because the diegetic act is

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[45] Gérard Genette describes metanarrative as "a narrative within the narrative," or "narrative in the second degree…which designate[s], not individuals, but relative situations and functions." See *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 228-9.

emphasized, what remains is the question of trust: if Manet can so handily alter the appearance and mood of these scenes, and point to them as stories being told, to what extent is the historical authenticity of the Gospel authors to be trusted? Can one take their words as an accurate representation of historical fact?

FIVE

Ernest Renan did not think so. His book, *Vie de Jesus* (1862), shook the foundations of Christian belief, by turning a critical, scientific eye upon the New Testament. Renan tried his hand at re-writing this story: he added to the ancient rhetoric of biblical authors, a set of linear, scientifically respectable facts that acted in opposition to the assertions made by its presumed authors. The life of Christ is thus presented in a newly objective light. Because this narrative had previously not been subject to pointedly non-religious analysis, Renan received a great deal of attention in France and throughout Europe. I hesitate to call *Vie de Jesus* popular, because it was unquestionably a controversial text, but 60,000 copies were sold within the first six months of publication and, shortly afterwards, the text was translated into several other languages.[46] The ready availability and pervasively disruptive nature of this book ensured that even if Manet had not read *Vie de Jesus* himself, he would have been familiar with the ideas therein.

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[46] Hanson, *Manet and the Modern Tradition*, 106.

For a general understanding of how Renan and his writings were received by the public at large (as a predominantly Catholic body), one need only consult the many caricatures that placed devilish characteristics on his person.[47] Among them (and now displayed at the Maison Renan in his hometown of Tréguier, Brittany), a front page from an issue of *La Lune* in 1867 depicts a large-headed Renan holding a broomstick before a background of flames (Fig. 14).[48] A long, hairy tail emerges from his backside. The leg furthest from the viewer is satyr-like, ending in a sinister hoof instead of a shoe. Thus elided with demons and hellfire in the popular press, Renan was probably not considered the most pious of men—indeed, he may have been called a heretic. Nevertheless, his ideas were as exciting as they were troublesome. The explosive influence of Renan's *Vie de Jesus* is evident in Manet's painting—indeed, the macabre realism of the *Dead Christ* may have been impossible without Renan's historicizing text. Recalling the anonymous comment written in *La Vie parisienne*— "do not neglect Manet's *Christ*, or the *Poor Miner Rescued from a Coal Mine*, executed for Renan"—it is clear that Manet's painting references the version of Christ that Renan describes.[49] And as an embodiment of this provocative concept, the derision with which *Dead Christ* was met is part and parcel of the popular response to Renan, and an increasingly complex notion of Jesus in the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1863, the character of Jesus was, in a sense, re-cast by Renan in *Vie de Jesus*. By "re-cast," I mean that Renan portrays him as a pivotal historical figure, but not the Son

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[47] I am indebted to Robert Priest (Doctorate of Philosophy student at New College, Oxford) for passing along his wisdom on caricatures of Renan, as well as many jpegs of them.

[48] During the Second Empire, *La Lune* was a weekly newspaper which featured, among other comic critiques, caricatures of France's movers and shakers, drawn by Andres Gill and other contributors.

[49] See Hamilton's *Manet and His Critics*, 60.

of God. Jesus' divinity is attributed to the "hysterical" Mary and the disciples, as Renan situates the events of Jesus' life within a factually sound context, removing it from the framework of Christian bias. Renan historicizes and "humanizes" Jesus; or, in the words of Richard Chadbourne, "Renan is essentially attempting in this work no more and no less than what any good historian attempts: to create an image of the past in which he can believe."[50] The application of scientific methods onto purportedly historical documentation seemed to be an instinctual, natural act, like clearing the throat. New rules for measuring factuality became problematic when placed upon ancient texts like the Bible. Thus Renan's *Vie de Jesus* takes on one of the biggest challenges of his age—to explore the chasm between Christian mythologies and an analytical, scientifically sound history.

In the first chapter of the book, I came across a statement that is particularly fitting for *Dead Christ*. Renan says:

> This confused mixture of clear views and dreams, this alternation of deceptions and hopes, these ceaseless aspirations, driven back by an odious reality, found at last their interpretation in the incomparable man, to whom the universal conscience has decreed the title of Son of God.[51]

The endless interaction between "ceaseless aspirations" and "odious reality," as it is concentrated in the body of Jesus, defies resolution. Both Manet's and Renan's forcefully realistic renditions of Christ aggravate the constructs of a suspended disbelief. The convictions of religious dogma and the results of scientific evaluation are continually at odds: faith and the "cult of reason" are in constant opposition. By opening up a new level of discourse surrounding the figure of Jesus—that of historical

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[50] See Richard Chadbourne's *Ernest Renan* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1968), 68.
[51] Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jesus* (London: Watts & Co., 1935), 34.

accuracy—Renan brought to light the problems of reconciling a modern analytical eye with the tradition of trusting Catholic doctrine. And if *Vie de Jesus* interrupted the authorial prowess of the gospel authors, then Manet's *Dead Christ* (if parts of it can be said to visually interpret themes from *Vie de Jesus*) disrupted the persuasive effects of normative religious imagery. The questioning spirit of these works, I believe, typifies the inertia of modern thought.

CODA

By introducing Ernest Renan into this discussion of Manet and Jesus, I do not mean to imply that *Dead Christ* functioned as an elaborate illustration of *Vie de Jesus*. Manet seems to have been up to something far more complex. His reference-making to long-standing conventions of religious representation in the painting is as systematic as his pictorial idiosyncrasies are disruptive. By many accounts, *Dead Christ* failed to perform the basic tasks of religious painting precisely because it refused to deliver the proper quotients of reverence and faith. What it *did* deliver was a discernable and, I argue, purposeful discordance. Because, ultimately, the dynamic play between the usual expectations of large-scale religious painting and a transparent enthusiasm for costumes and slipshod illusions points towards the only cultural practice that, for Manet, wanted the fervor of religious worship: the art of painting itself.

The collision in the picture of a traditional Christian narrative with heightened artifice served two related purposes. The first was to strain the belief systems on which Christian faith rests to the breaking point; hence the success of the paintings' many failures. The second was to render legible the mechanics of representation, and in so doing to underscore both the powers and the liabilities of narrative authority. What resulted was a vacuum of signification or, more to the point, an endless unfolding of significative possibilities, none of which could quite cohere to the shaky illusionism and bald trickery that Manet faithfully deployed to make faith a matter of interminable speculation.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Edouard Manet, *Dead Christ with Angels*, 1864

Figure 2: Eugène Delacroix, *Christ in the Garden of Olives*, 1827

Figure 3: Eugène Delacroix, *Descent into the Tomb*, 1859

Figure 4: Chartres Cathedral, *Jesus in the Arms of Mary*, 1830
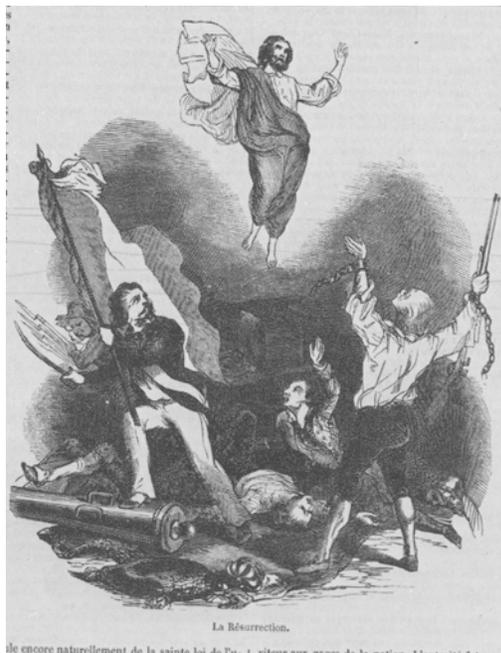

Figure 5: Alphonse Esquiros, *La Résurrection* from *Evangile du Peuple*, 1849

Figure 6: Edouard Manet, *Mademoiselle Victorine as an Espada,* 1863

Figure 7: Detail, Manet's *The Incident at the Bull Ring*, 1864

Figure 8: Edouard Manet, *Dead Toreador*, 1864

Figure 9: Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, *Portrait of Francesco I D'Este*, 1638
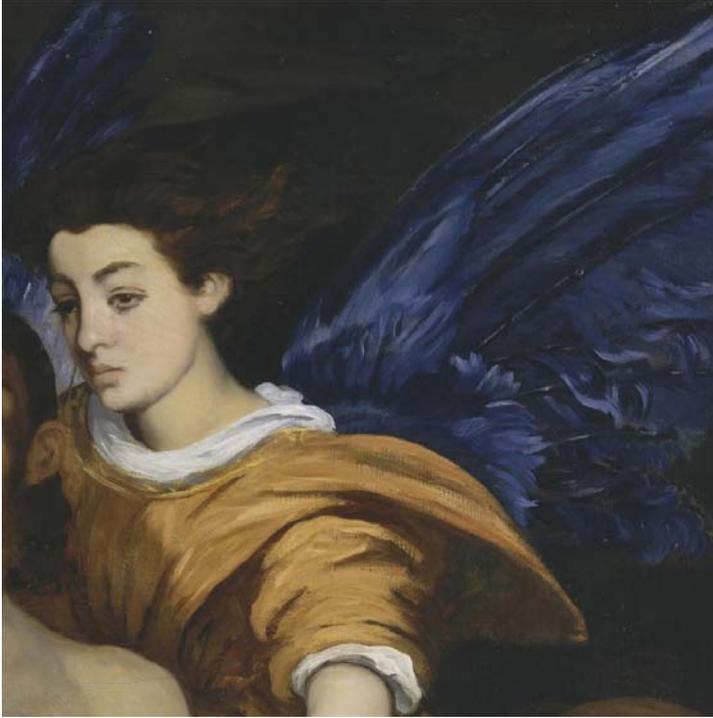
Figure 10: Detail, Manet's *Dead Christ with Angels,* 1864

Figure 11: Detail, Manet's *Dead Christ with Angels*, 1864
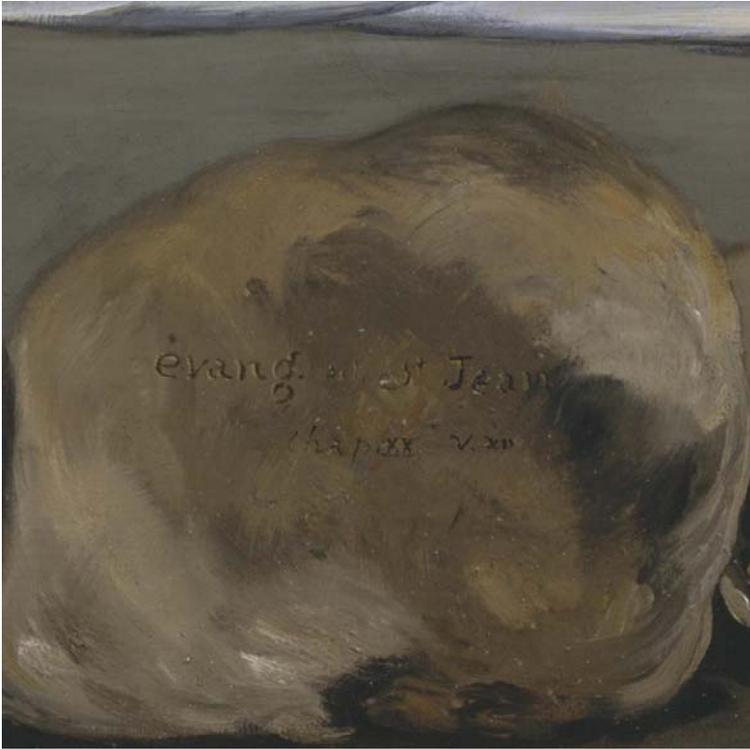
Figure 12: Detail, Manet's *Dead Christ with Angels*, 1864

Figure 13: Detail, Manet's *Dead Christ with Angels,* 1864

Figure 14: Detail, Manet's *Dead Christ with Angels*, 1864

Figure 15: Andres Gill, *Ernest Renan, par Gill* from *La Lune*, 1867

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