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http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/12814

http://dx.doi.org/10.24382/569
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UNIVERSITY OF
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UNE CERTAIN ÉQUIVOQUE?
A STUDY OF VINCENT VAN GOGH'S AMBIVALENT ENGAGEMENT WITH PROSTITUTION, HIGHLIGHTED BY THE 1888 *COURRIER FRANÇAIS* CENSORSHIP CONTROVERSY.

by

Fiona B. Saint-Davis

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

RESEARCH MASTERS

School of Humanities and Performing Arts

September 2018

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my tutors for their professional guidance and personal inspiration throughout this project. Professor Gemma Blackshaw, as my Director of Studies, has always been there for me with just the right word of advice and reassurance, often suggesting new avenues to explore, and encouraging me to own my research and situate it within current scholarship. The patient advice of my second supervisor, Dr. Péter Bokody, has enabled me to negotiate methodological minefields, to formulate coherent research questions, and to keep my feet on the ground. I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Jody Patterson and Dr. Jenny Graham for their support and encouragement over the last four years.

I am grateful to the University of Plymouth for Humanities and Performing Arts Postgraduate funding, which enabled me to travel to the Courtauld Institute in April to attend the Annual Conference of Art Historians in April, which enabled me to see my research in new contexts. My thanks also to Ian Rayment and the information specialists at the University who have dealt promptly and patiently with my many queries and requests for books.

Outside the University, I would like to express my appreciation of Dr. Allison Morehead for her interest in my project and reading suggestions. Outside academia, I am grateful to Bernadette Murphy, David Brooks, and Jared Baxter, who have generously shared with me their wealth of knowledge on Van Gogh. My appreciation also to Nicci Wakeham and Anthony King for their practical and moral support, without which I certainly would not have completed the year.

Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Research Masters has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

This study was financed with the aid of government funding. A programme of advanced study was undertaken, which included the taught modules MARE700 (17/AY/AU/M) and MARE703 (17/AY/AU/M) in Research in the Arts and Humanities.

Word count of main body of thesis: 23,963

I confirm that early hand in (10 month as opposed to 12 month) did not disadvantage me in any way, and I understand that it will not be sufficient ground for appeal.

Signed

Date 24/07/2018

Abstract

Fiona Belle Saint-Davis

Une certain équivoque? A Study of Vincent van Gogh's ambivalent engagement with prostitution, highlighted by the 1888 *Courrier Français* censorship controversy.

Discussions of prostitution are commonplace in the history of nineteenth-century French art, but this paper proposes that discourses specific to 1888 concerning the visual representations of prostitution have been insufficiently analysed with regard to Vincent van Gogh's paintings of 1888. Focusing on the artist's responses to brothel sketches sent to him by Émile Bernard in 1888, it is my contention that their contingency has been overlooked with regard to a censorship controversy that attended the publication of Louis Legrand's full-page lithograph, *Prostitution*, first published in *Le Courrier Français* in June 1888.

Expanding on my Undergraduate thesis, which addressed Bernard's brothel drawings, this paper focuses on Van Gogh's productions from the same period in relation to this controversy, and to theories concerning the emergence of a 'caricatural mentalité' in the French post-Impressionist avant-garde, proposed by Richard Thomson. My initial task will be to identify the visual productions from Van Gogh's output of that year that can be associated with prostitution, and to establish them as a distinct and related group. This is something that surprisingly has never been done, despite the prominence afforded prostitution in biographical narratives of the artist for that year.

It is not however my intention to perpetuate canonical master narratives, or generalized life- and work-studies. Although implicit in my methodology are

questions about the embedded structures of modernism and of modernist art histories, by adhering to the principles of micro-history - in other words, by addressing the well-trodden centre from the perspective of the neglected margins, and by attending to the minutiae of material history - I hope to tease out a more authentic sense of the conditions that attended these paintings' production, and point to some of the complexities associated with their recent reception.

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It's the same everywhere, in the country as well as in the city - one must take women into account if one wants to keep up with the times.

Vincent van Gogh, 1885[1]

[1] "...'t is overal zelfde, buiten zoowel als in stad - men moet met de vrouwen rekening houden wil men van zijn tijd zijn." Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, 28 December 1885, Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker eds., *Vincent van Gogh: The Letters. The Complete Illustrated and Annotated Edition*, 6 vols (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2009), letter no. 550. English translations here and henceforth are sourced from http://vangoghletters.org/vg/ [accessed 17.07.18].

Introduction

At the recent exhibition *Splendour and Misery: Images of Prostitution in France 1850-1910*, three paintings by Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) were exhibited that had not previously been connected with the sexual economy.[2] These images from the artist's sojourns in Antwerp and Paris between 1885-87 depict women whose social and sexual status is not immediately legible, at least to twenty-first-century eyes. *Portrait of a Woman in Blue* has been renamed *Portrait of a Prostitute* on the grounds that the eye makeup and low-cut dress would have signified to contemporary viewers a woman of "easy virtue" [fig. 1].[3] From the same period, *Portrait of a Woman with her Hair Loose* has been renamed *Head of a Prostitute*, with the rationale that "loose hair was

[2] The exhibition *Splendours et Misères: Images of Prostitution in France, 1850-1910*, ran at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, from 22 September 2015 until 17 January 2016; and and at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, from 19 February-19 June, 2016 under the title *Easy Virtue: Prostitution in French Art, 1850-1920*. Curators were Nienke Bakker (Curator of Paintings, Van Gogh Museum), Richard Thomson (Watson Gordon Professor of Fine Art, Edinburgh University), Isolde Pludermacher (Curator of Paintings, Musée d'Orsay), and Marie Robert (Curator of Photography, Musée d'Orsay). There were two exhibition catalogues: Margaret Garlake, ed., *Splendours and Miseries: Images of Prostitution in France 1850 - 1910* (Paris: Flammarion, 2015); and Nienke Bakker, Isolde Pludermacher, Marie Robert, and Richard Thomson eds., *Easy Virtue: Prostitution in French Art 1850-1910* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2015). Essays were contributed by Nienke Bakker, Guy Cogeval, Mireille Dottin-Orsini, Daniel Grojnowski, Gabrielle Houbre, Isolde Pludermacher, Marie Robert and Richard Thomson.

[3] https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0143V1962 [accessed 07/05/18]. While the crucifix at the figure's throat might seem to negate this identification, prostitutes were characterized as being sentimentally religious in Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet's influential *De la Prostitution dans la ville de* Paris, 2 vols (Paris: J.-B. Ballière et Fils,1837).

a sign of loose morals" [fig. 2].[4] With regard to the third painting of Agostina Segatori, proprietor of the Café Tambourin painted in Paris around 1886-7 [fig. 3], attention is drawn to the two saucers beneath the glass, indicating this was not the sitter's first beer, and remarking that "[d]rinking and smoking in a café" were habits associated with "artistic types and prostitutes."[5] Despite these reassessments, there has been no systemic analysis of prostitution as a theme in the *œuvre* of Vincent van Gogh, a surprising neglect given the prominence accorded to the profession in the many biographical narratives of the artist.[6]

My interest in prostitution as a motif does not, however, originate in the artist's biography, but in the sketches sent to him in 1888 by Émile Bernard (1868 - 1941) on the theme of prostitution, to which Van Gogh replied in words and pictures. These exchanges were made during months that saw an escalation in public debates on prostitution - or rather, its representation - with the censorship of the illustrated journal, *Le Courrier Français* (1884-1908).[7] A full-page lithograph titled *Prostitution* published in June 1888 depicted a young, unclothed woman in the clutches of a monstrous allegorical figure swooning on a canopied bed, implying governmental complicity in prostitution [fig. 4].[8]

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[4] https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0059V1962 [accessed 07/05/18]. In view of Anthea Callen observation of the painting's "slurred" and "vigorous" application of paint, worked wet in wet, one might be tempted to associate this with sexual availability. Anthea Callen, *Techniques of the Impressionists* (London: Quarto, 1993), 151.

[5] https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0017V1962 [accessed 20/03/18]. In addition to the beer and cigarette, Carol Zemel notes the proximity of an image of a geisha, again suggesting sexual availability. Carol Zemel, *Van Gogh's Progress: Utopia, Modernity, and Late-Nineteenth-Century Art* (Berkely, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), 111-114.

[6] In The Hague from 1881-83 Van Gogh attempted to 'rescue' a streetwalker, 'Clasina' Hoornik (1840-1904), and in 1888, famously delivered his severed ear to a woman employed at an Arles brothel, thus initiating the veneration of the artist as a social misfit for generations to come. Nathalie Heinich argues that this appraisal resulted in a paradigmatic shift in the assessment of artistic identity *per se*, engendering the myth of *l'artist maudit*, the accursed artist. Nathalie Heinich, *The Glory of Van Gogh: An Anthropology of Admiration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1996), 140.

[7] For the dates on which the drawings were sent to Van Gogh see Mark Roskill, 'Van Gogh's Exchanges of Work with Émile Bernard in 1888,' *Oud Holland* 86 2 no. 3: 142-179.

[8] The French state not only regulated brothels but also profited from them. Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the work of Degas* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995), 40.

Copies of the issue were seized, and its illustrator, Louis Legrand (1863-1951), along with its editor and printer were charged with obscenity, prompting widespread condemnation in the press.[9] Much of this defended the prerogative of the (invariably male) artist to represent the (invariably female) nude. As Linda Nochlin has remarked, the gendered and "originary power of the artist" was inseparable from, and founded on, the representation of the nude; it is surprising therefore that this episode has been overlooked by feminist art history.[10] Although the accusation of obscenity was not proven - the phrase "*une certain équivoque*" (a certain ambiguity) was successfully employed by the defending counsel to distinguish the image from commercial pornography - a hastily convened appeal in September overturned the verdict and resulted in custodial sentences for all involved.[11] As noted by Gabriel Weisberg, it is unlikely the furore escaped attention in artistic circles.[12]

Activating this context enables new perspectives on Van Gogh's artworks from 1888. Although Bernard's letters to Van Gogh are now lost, it is apparent that Van Gogh's interest in prostitution was stimulated by Bernard's letters, poems and drawings, since he referred to prostitution in no fewer than fifteen out of his nineteen replies [see Appendix]. Nonetheless, an important scholarly 2007 volume devoted to Van Gogh's letters to Bernard, gives slight attention to

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[9] Five pages are devoted to the controversy in Gabriel P. Weisberg, 'Louis Legrand's Battle over Prostitution: The Uneasy Censoring of Le Courrier Français,' *Art Journal* 51 no.4 (1992): 45-50; while two pages are given over to it in Robert Justin Goldstein, *Censorship of Political Caricature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989), 244-5.

[10] Linda Nochlin, 'Women, Art and Power,' Women, Art and Power and Other Essays (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 17.

[11] The accused were Jules Roques, editor, M. Lantier, printer, and illustrators Louis Legrand and Edouard François Zier, whose illustration *Parques* was also considered offensive. Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Dossier Jules Hippolyte Roques, B a. 905. The phrase was reported on page 2 of *l'Intransigeant,* one of Van Gogh's two regular newspapers, on 9 August 1888. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7776578/f2.item. zoom [accessed15/07/18]. "*Attendu que bien que l'attitude des personnages comporte une certain equivoque, il n'est cependant pas établi que l'auteur ait cherché à suggèrer l'idée d'une acte débauche.*" [Whereas although the attitude of the figures involves a certain ambiguity, it is not established however that the author has sought to suggest the idea of an act of debauchery.]

[12] Weisberg comments that due to "the intensity and prolonged nature of the debate, few in Parisian artistic circles could have been unaware of it." Weisberg, 'Legrand's Battle' (1992): 50.

prostitution.[13] In a representative example, referring to a poem of Bernard's that stimulated their discussion of prostitutes' social status, the sole observation passed by the editors is that the poem was not strictly a sonnet.[14] Such omissions give the impression prostitution was of little importance in these artists' correspondence, whereas I would counter that it was central to it, and was in many ways its *raison d'etre*.

It is the contention of this paper that at least six artworks produced by Van Gogh in 1888 can be associated with the sexual economy; Chapters Two, Three and Four present contextual and iconographical analysis in support of this assertion. In doing so, it engages with theories advanced by Thomson that a "caricatural *mentalité*" evolved within avant-garde art in the last decade of the century, derived in large measure from lewd representations of "unsavoury topical themes," often with "an oppositional agenda," that proliferated in the French press, following the relaxation of censorship in 1881.[15] The new mentality, it is argued, led to the genesis of a visual language of modernity in the twentieth century, often associated with prostitution, the best-known

[13] Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker, eds., *Vincent van Gogh, Painted with words: The letters to Emile Bernard* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007).

[14] Ibid., 209. The letter in question is Van Gogh to Bernard, 27 June 1888, letter no. 633. Similar oversights apply to the editors' discussions of letter 649 of July 29 (three drawings of prostitutes are referred to as "nude women"); letter 655 of Aug 5 (Van Gogh's important comparison of artists with prostitutes is overlooked); letter 677 of 9 September (referring to *The Night Café*, no mention is made of its designation by the artist as a "maison de passe"); letter 690 circa 27 September - 1 October (no further comment is made of having received Bernard's first annotated drawings of prostitutes), and letter 698 of 5 October (no further discussion is offered of the *Au Bordel* suite that Van Gogh had just received).

[15] See Thomson, 'Splendours and Miseries' (2015), and Richard Thomson, *Art of the Actual: Naturalism and Style in Early Third Republic France, 1880-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012); esp. Chapter Four, *The Caricatural Mentalité*.

example being *Demoiselles d'Avignon* by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973).[16] Whereas Bernard's 1888 brothel drawings are accorded a place in this teleology - as indeed are Van Gogh's works from Antwerp and Paris, which are discussed for their "frankness" - none of Van Gogh's paintings from the 1888 Arles sojourn are mentioned.

In arguing for their inclusion, I am aware that Thomson's approach is invested in a linear progression from the dominant naturalism[17] of mid nineteenth-century France, via the experimental, anti-naturalist[18] currents of the late 1880s collectively known as 'post-Impressionism' (itself a temporal term), through to the Fauvist, Expressionist and Cubist experiments of the early twentieth-century. By engaging with Thomson's thesis my aim is not, however, to endorse such teleology, rather to interrupt its untrammelled progression.

The study of prostitution has in recent decades moved from the margins to the centre of historical scholarship.[19] What was once considered a 'niche'

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[16] 'Modernism' is used here in the sense of the articulation of a critical consciousness that is self-referential, negational, confrontational, progressive and anti-traditional. Valuable discussions on modernism can be found in Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1995); Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2004); Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York and London: Verso, 1983); Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Timothy J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (London: Yale University Press, 1999); Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut and David Solkin (eds.), *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2004), and Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012).

[17] The term 'naturalism' as used by Richard Thomson refers to a descriptive aesthetic in the visual arts, which was immediately legible and therefore accessible to audiences using only vernacular common sense, but which was denigrated for being 'photographic' and hence, false. See Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012) especially Chapters One, Two and Three.

[18] Thomson's exegesis of 'anti-naturalism' extends beyond the use of formal distortion and exaggeration, to embrace a faddish, brash aesthetic, careless of causing offence. Ibid., 144-5.

[19] Timothy Gilfoyle has remarked, "few subjects have moved so dramatically from the margins to the centre of historical study as prostitution." Timothy J. Gilfoyle, 'Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity,' *The American History Review* 104: 1 (Feb 1999): 140. One of the earliest studies of prostitution in relation to systems of power in nineteenth-century France was Alain Corbin's *Les filles de noce, Misère sexuelle et prostitution aux 19e et 20e siècles.* Paris: 1978, translated by Alan Sheridan as *Women for Hire, Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990). Other important studies include Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in nineteenth century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Alain Corbin, 'Commercial Sexuality' in Nineteenth-Century France: A System of Images and Regulations,' *Representations* 14 (1986): 209-219.

subject is now considered a valuable historical tool for studying broader themes. Art history has played a part in this realignment - one thinks of Timothy Clark's seminal analysis of Edouard Manet's (1832 - 1883) *Olympia* - and for several decades, prostitution has been a prominent, albeit ideologically fraught topic in nineteenth-century art-historical studies.[20]

By studying such a limited time period - the latter half of 1888 - my approach will pose a synchronic analysis to Thomson's diachronic one. My aim is to attend to the messy, swirling, social, political and cultural ambiance of this period in greater detail than is usually found in art-historical accounts of months so often portrayed as a 'breakthrough' period for the artist. As such, this study shares affinities with what Charles Joyner has termed 'micro-history,' which entails "exploring large questions in small places."[21] Although my concern is to examine the historical specificities of a topic hitherto considered of slight importance in Van Gogh's *œuvre*, implicit in my study are questions about the embedded structures of modernism. My methods may be open to a charge of 'totalizing' - merely grouping artworks under the category 'prostitution' invites such criticism - nevertheless, writers from Gabriel-Albert Aurier to Carol Zemel and Tsukasa Kōdera have emphasized the importance of thematic unities within Van Gogh's works, hence I feel confident in asserting their validity as a

[20] Key art historical texts on images of prostitution include Timothy J. Clark, 'Olympia's Choice,' *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); W. Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996); Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Duke University Press), 1997; Gilfoyle, 'Prostitutes in History' (1999); William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others: Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, (London: Routledge, 2004); and Christopher E. Forth and Elinor Accampo eds., *Confronting Modernity in fin-de-siècle France: Bodies, Mind and Gender* (New York: Pallgrave MacMillan, 2010).

[21] Micro-histories oppose sweeping teleological historical accounts with finely detailed studies of marginalised people and events, in which larger historical questions may be demonstrated. See Charles W. Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1999), 1. The wording here is borrowed from Joyner's 'Exploring Large Questions in Small Places: *Down by the Riverside* and *In my Father's House Are Many Mansions* as New Directions in Southern History,' Southern Historical Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 1987.

discrete group.[22] Before addressing the theme of prostitution in Van Gogh's 1888 practice, there follows a brief overview of the social, cultural and political climates and protocols that contributed to the conditions of their production.[23]

[22] Thematic motifs are emphasized in Gabriel-Albert Aurier, 'Les Isolés: Vincent van Gogh,' *Mercure de France*, January 1890: 24-29; Carol Zemel, *Van Gogh's Progress: Utopia, Modernity, and Late-Nineteenth-Century Art* (Berkely, LA. and London: University of California Press,1997); and Tsukasa Kōdera, *Christianity Versus Nature* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1990). Ronald Pickvance considered 1888 to be "*la plus brilliante et la plus féconde*" of his career. Ronald Pickvance and Jean-Maurice Rouquette eds., *Van Gogh et Arles, Exposition du Centenaire*, exhib. cat. (Arles: Ancien Hôpital van Gogh, 1989), 7.

[23] Timothy J. Clark, 'On the Social History of Art,' *Images of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1973), 249.

Chapter One

Context

As Timothy Clark remarks, in the nineteenth century, art and politics could not escape each other; thus in order to appreciate the furore that ensued from the prosecution of the *Courrier Français* for offending public morality, it is necessary to grasp something of the complex relationships that existed between art, censorship, prostitution and politics at that time.[24] As emphasized in Thomson's analysis, around 1880 the Third Republic entered a progressive era. This followed a decade of repression during which political caricature, pornography and unregistered prostitution were actively repressed; policies that, as Thomson observes, had repercussions in caricature and art.[25] Following the overthrow of Napoleon III's dictatorship in 1871, the Second Empire's ban on political caricature had fallen into neglect, resulting in an outpouring of caricature ridiculing the corruption of the outgoing regime, much of it aimed at the sexual exploits of the former Empress Eugénie.[26] During the Paris Commune of 1871 prostitutes had joined the barricades, which resulted in their brutal extermination and, following the Commune's fall, the tightening of

[24] Timothy J. Clark, *Images of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1973), 9.
[25] Thomson, 'Splendours and Miseries' (2015), 15.
[26] On the censorship of political caricature during the Second Empire, its subsequent relaxation and reinstatement, see Robert J. Goldstein, *Censorship of Political Caricature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989), 197-199.

regulations governing brothels.[27] A Press Law of 1871 that reinstated the lapsed censorship of caricature and the press had been administered with "extraordinary harshness and arbitrariness."[28] Measures were also taken to curtail the trade in pornography, much of which involved photographs of prostitutes.[29] The Second Empire's enchantment with the courtesan and *deluxe* brothel were parodied in the young Paul Cézanne's (1839 - 1906) three versions of *Modern Olympia*; their caricatural approach, Thomson observes, eminently suited the motif [fig. 5].[30]

The spectacle of clandestine prostitution first became visible at the 1878 World's Fair in Paris, where large numbers of prostitutes worked the crowds. Anxieties over the sexual status of women in public were reflected in Salon art; as Thomson notes, "[o]ne reads a painting like Degas's *Absinthe* like a page in a naturalist novel, gradually decoding body language, accessories, human interplay" [fig. 6].[31] Two scandals marked the artworld in the final years of *l'ordre morale*. Lacking any clear moral message, Manet's *Nana* was rejected by the 1877 Salon jury [fig. 7].[32] Equally scandalous was Henri Gervex's (1852 - 1929) *Rolla*, forcibly removed from the 1878 Salon by government order [fig.

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[27] On prostitutes' roles in the Paris Commune, see Edith Thomas, *The Women Incendiaries* (New York: Braziller, 1966), 90. On the tightening of regulations governing brothels, see Corbin, *Women for Hire* (1990), 18. See also Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute* (1997), 209.

[28] Goldstein, *Censorship* (1989), 203. Goldstein notes that in 1874 a lithograph by Edouard Manet of his friend Edmund André was banned because it too closely resembled President MacMahon. Ibid., 205.

[29] See Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 1987).

[30] Thomson remarks that Cézanne's paintings ridicule "both male infatuation and female commodification." Thomson, 'Ambiguity, Allure,' (2015), 96. On the "fabled allure" of the Parisian brothel, and the anxious reaction of its bourgeois clientele depicted in this series, see Clayson, *Painted Love* (1991), 19. See also Isolde Pludermacher, 'The Beauty in the Horrible' Prostitution and Modernity,' *Splendours and Miseries* (2015), 244.

[31] Thomson, 'Ambiguity, Allure' (2015), 84.

[32] Clayson, *Painted Love* (1991), 67-69. The model, Henriette Hauser, was a royal mistress, hence the painting transgressed class boundaries. A liberal journal commented on the scandal: "Our censors have strict morals ... morals in the plural because they have two sets." 'Le Sphinx,' 'Echo de Paris,' *L'Evénement* 20 April 1878, in Clayson, *Painted Love* (1991), 177 n. 115. See also Thomson, 'Splendours and Miseries,' (2015), 24.

8].[33] Although this painting showed negative consequences of prostitution (the male character is about to commit suicide), "the real problem," Thomson observes, was that both *Nana* and *Rolla* undermined government policy by representing unregulated prostitution.[34] Both paintings were eventually exhibited outside the Salon, a policy Thomson compares to the operation of clandestine prostitution itself.[35]

Critics exercised caution; when Edgar Degas (1834 - 1917) showed *Women on a Café Terrace* at the 1877 Impressionist Exhibition, only one (anonymous) critic dared acknowledge its subject [fig. 9].[36] Around the same time, Degas and Félicien Rops (1833 - 1898) separately produced a number of works for private consumption. Degas's brothel monotypes have been assiduously debated and contended by feminist writers [fig. 10].[37] But what is germane to my argument is that they were viewed by Degas's close associates among the avant-garde, stimulating interest in Degas's less *outré* pastels of bathers. Degas thus negotiated a fine line between ironically observed representations of prostitution privately circulated amongst an elite male coterie, and frankly observed depictions of women in the more acceptable role of nude artist's model.[38]

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[33] The painting had initially been exhibited because Gervex, as a former medallist, could not be refused.
[34] Ibid., 18-20.
[35] Ibid., 20.
[36] The exception was the anonymous 'A.P' (Alfred Paulet) in *Le Petit Parisien*, 7 April 1877. Thomson, 'Ambiguity, Allure' (2015), 86.
[37] See for example, Norma Broude, 'Degas' "Misogyny,"' *The Art Bulletin* 59 no.1 (1977): 95-107; Callen, *The Spectacular Body* (1995); Hollis Clayson, 'The Sexual Politics of Impressionist Illegibility,' Phillip Kendall and Griselda Pollock eds., *Dealing with Degas, Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision* (New York: Universe, 1992); Richard Thomson, *Edgar Degas: Waiting* (Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1995); and Norma Broude, 'Edgar Degas and French Feminism, ca. 1880: "The Young Spartans," The Brothel Monotypes, and the Bathers Revisited,' *The Art Bulletin* 70 no. 4 (1988): 640 - 659.
[38] Pollock asserts that repeated discussions on the ambiguity of Degas's representations of women have resulted in ambiguity being "to an extent, fetishized." Griselda Pollock, 'What Difference does Feminism make to Art History?' *Dealing with Degas* (1992), 25.

Rops's privately circulated depictions of sexually available women often possessed a satirical edge [fig. 11].[39] As noted by Nienke Bakker, in the opinion of Rops the prostitute was the modern equivalent of the classical nude.[40] Of equal significance to my inquiry however is Rops's mediating role in the *Courrier*/Legrand controversy between the fields of journalism and artistic circles, since his close friend, the eminent lawyer Eugène Rodrigues, represented Legrand at the trial, arguing successfully that Legrand's depiction was not pornography, but art.[41]

The case against the *Courrier Français* was brought to court under an 1882 law designed to curtail pornography, which had bourgeoned as a result of a landmark law of 1881 intended to relax the censorship laws of the Moral Order governments.[42] The new Press Law introduced in July 1881 was an integral part of a general liberalization that included the granting of amnesty for exiled Communards and the symbolic return to Paris of the legislative seat from Versailles.[43] Nevertheless, the new Press Law did not lead, as many expected, to increased ferocity of political caricature, but to the proliferation of louche and erotic subjects in the many illustrated journals that appeared in response to the

[39] Rops' cynical approach is evident in his sardonic title: *One Hundred Frivolous, Unpretentious Sketches for the Amusement of Respectable People*, c. 1878-81. For an assessment of Rops's depictions, see Bakker, 'Maisons Closes' (2015), 93 - 97.
[40] Nienke Bakker, 'Maisons Closes: The Brothel as a Modern Subject,' *Splendours and Miseries* (2015), 122. Bakker remarks that Rops "sought to modernize the traditional view of the nude with his drawings."
[41] Thomson, 'Fantasies and Allegories' (2015), 206.
[42] The Law to Suppress Insults Against Good Morals of 1882 forbade the sale and public display of printed obscenity. See Goldstein, *Censorship* (1989), 239, also Forth and Accampo eds., *Confronting Modernity* (2010) 140.
[43] Other reforms included the adoption of 14 July as Bastille Day and the reinstatement of the Marseillaise as the national anthem, banned in France since the Second Empire. See Goldstein, *Censorship* (1989), 230. Liberalization continued in 1884 with the legalization of trade unions. Ibid., 239. See also Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012), 148.

new freedoms.[44] Thus '*la charge politique*' in caricature was replaced by '*la charge moderne*.'[45]

Thomson's thesis accords considerable significance to the liberalization of the press following the relaxation of censorship in 1881. As Thomson notes, the situation was acknowledged at the time; in 1892 Arsène Alexandre (1859-1937) remarked that, in 1881, "all things were made possible, all was said that could be said, and all restraint was removed from satire."[46] Tracing the historical conditions surrounding the emergence of the caricatural idiom, from the amateur visual puns at the 1882 'Salon des Incohérents,' to the first exhibition of caricatural art at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1888, Thomson remarks that the latter gave caricature "its official *entrée* into the artistic tradition."[47]

In response to these and other new currents, including demographic and medical problems, clandestine prostitution in the 1880s assumed what Thomson asserts was a "much more present identity" in the bourgeois imagination.[48] As a result, representations of prostitution became increasingly ambiguous and yet simultaneously "spectacular." Manet's 1882 *Bar aux Folies-Bergère* is perhaps the best known of such paintings associated with the "does-she/doesn't-she" mentality [fig. 12].[49] Jean le Forain's (1852 - 1931) *Dans le Jardin* de Paris, 1884 [fig. 13] and Auguste Renoir's (1840 - 1926) *Les*

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[44] Goldstein, *Censorship* (1989), 232-5.
[45] Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012), 148. Founded in 1884, the illustrated journal *Le Courrier Français* was part of this trend, and quickly established a reputation for high quality illustrations that often resorted to depictions of naked women in the critique of government.
[46] "...la liberté introduisit de nouvelles moeurs caricaturales. Tout peut être dit, et tout fut dit; cela ôta tout force à la satire." Arsène Alexandre, *L'Art du rire et de la caricature* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1892), 292. Quoted in Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012), 144-5.
[47] Thomson, *The Art of the Actual* (2012), 151.
[48] Thomson, 'Ambiguity and Allure,' *Splendours and Miseries* (2015), 91.
[49] Subtending this mentality was the spectre of syphilis, which remained incurable and reached near-epidemic proportions in the 1880s, and supplemented an ironic twist to the "does-she/doesn't-she" dilemma. Manet himself was in the terminal stages of the disease as he painted this painting, his final statement on the modern condition.

Parapluies, continued the preoccupation with ambiguity into the mid 1880s [fig. 14].

Van Gogh's portraits of Antwerp prostitutes were produced in late 1885; around the same time the seventeen-year-old Émile Bernard was producing his Paris brothel studies [figs. 15]. Thomson documents three reclining nude studies from Van Gogh's Paris period of 1886-87, representing a *pierreuse* (streetwalker), two of which Bernard came to own [figs. 16, 17 & 18]. Claiming only a naturalist "frankness" for these paintings, Thomson nevertheless observes in these studies caricatural tendencies associated with prostitution.[50] Moving on to 1888, Thomson discusses Bernard's *Au Bordel* series in support of his thesis on the evolution of the caricatural idiom [figs. 19 & 20].[51] Describing their simplified drawing, crude physiognomies, and louche subjects as "schematic and caricatural," Thomson remarks on the addition of captions to these drawings, which in his opinion, enabled Bernard to "claim for himself a particular status, that of the new generation attuned to the comic in the everyday."[52]

There is a hiatus in Thomson's taxonomy between this point and 1890, a watershed year after which, Thomson argues, representations of prostitution took on a new, confrontational stance. By the 1890s, a congruence of social factors - escalating clandestine prostitution, libertarian reform, anxieties over national physical, mental and moral degeneration, and increased awareness of medical and psychological advances - stimulated a new appreciation of the

[50] "This anonymous woman served Vincent for the documentary observation of a Parisian type, either her face or her body standing for the characteristics of a low category of *fille insoumise*." Ibid., 94. Bernard confirmed that the model had been a streetwalker who agreed to pose for Van Gogh. On Bernard as first owner, see Leo Jansen et al (eds.), *Painted with Words* (2007), 366. On the identity of the sitter, see Paul Gachet, 'Souvenirs de Cézanne et Van Gogh à Auvers, Paris,' *Les Beaux Arts* (1953), n.p., cited in Nienke Bakker, 'Maisons Closes: The Brothel as a Modern Subject,' *Splendours & Miseries* (2015), 128, n. 25.

[51] Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012), 155-157. Bakker discusses Bernard's *The Hour of the Flesh* and 1888 brothel drawings in 'Maisons Closes' (2015), 124-5.

[52] Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012), 157.

'caricatural idiom.'[53] This was the moment that the caricatural meshed with vanguard art, infusing it with a caricatural aesthetic manifested in grotesque distortions, lurid colouring and unusual, close-up angles, often combined with a confrontational stance.

Among the earliest of these instances proposed by Thomson are Louis Anquetin's (1861 - 1932) depictions of streetwalkers from 1890-91 such as the macabre *Woman at the Champs-Elysées at Night* depicted clicking her lips to attract passers-by or in coded communication with other streetwalkers [fig. 21]. It is however Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's (1864 - 1901) celebrated images of brothel life from 1893 onwards that have come to epitomize the new idiom, their abbreviated forms, oblique angles, *déformation* of figures and other "stylistic barbarisms" perceived as signifiers of artistic sincerity [fig. 22].[54] Anquetin and Toulouse-Lautrec's new approach, Thomson argues, provided vanguard artists with an exit strategy from the dominant naturalism. From this point on, avant-garde art became synonymous with the caricatural idiom, and, crucially, with prostitution, as evidenced in the work of Picasso, Maurice de Vlaminck (1876 - 1958), Kees van Dongen (1877 - 1968), Henri Matisse (1869 - 1954), Wassily Kandinsky (1866 - 1944), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880 - 1938), André Derain (1850 - 1954), Georges Rouault (1871 - 1958) and other twentieth-century modernists [figs. 23 & 24].

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[53] Thomson's thesis is advanced over a number of texts: *Art of the Actual* (2012), 174-6; 'Ambiguity, Allure' (2015), 97; and *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France 1889-1890* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 7. For Thomson's definition of the 'caricatural mentality' see *Art of the Actual* (2012), 144.

[54] Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technque and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1984), 38. *Déformation* - exaggeration and distortion of form and colour - was perceived by commentators such as Maurice Denis as evidence of emotional sincerity and authenticity, the obverse of naturalism's "pathological" attention to false, *tromp l'oeil* memesis. See Allison Morehead, *Defending Deformation: Maurice Denis's Positivist Modernism*, Art History 38, no. 5 (2015): 890-915.

This brief overview of correlations between art, politics and censorship in the first two decades of the Third French Republic demonstrates a dichotomy between artworks produced for public exhibition that fell foul of institutional authority, and hence helped define the parameters of public morality (or hypocrisy); and privately circulated works, which shaped the boundaries of acceptability within the communities of artists themselves. Van Gogh's paintings of prostitution from 1888 are conspicuous by their absence from Thomson's accounts. Although a new "documentary frankness" is noted in Van Gogh's representations of prostitution prior to 1888, these are treated merely as part of the outmoded naturalist paradigm.

Also lacking from this narrative is any discussion of the repressive attitude adopted by the Republican government in 1888, evidenced by its aggressive censorship of the *Courrier Français*. Although Thomson documents the controversy briefly in the Musée d'Orsay exhibition catalogue, it is not pursued as a factor contributing to the attraction of prostitution as a subject for vanguard art.[55] Writing in *Art of the Actual* about the proliferation of *risqué* images unleashed by the 1881 Press Law, Thomson concedes that, "[a]lthough the government retained some powers - it could ban images deemed obscene, or offensive to the army or President of the Republic - the cat was out of the bag."[56] A footnote references discussions of censorship in Robert Goldstein's

[55] Thomson's ten-line entry is contained in his essay 'Fantasies of Allegories and Vice,' in the Musée d'Orsay 2015 exhibition catalogue *Splendours and Miseries, Images of Prostitution in France,* 1885-1910. It offers a brief outline of the salient events, but does not address their scale and significance, noting only that the illustration was described in *Le Figaro* as "allegorical," and that it "might have been read as condemning the exploitation of women." Thomson does not associate the episode with Bernard's brothel drawings; although he does link it with Félicien Rops, Legrand's mentor. Thomson, 'Fantasies and Allegories' (2015), 205.

[56] Thomson continues, "The Republic's liberal legislation gave rise to a caricatural culture, a culture embracing different kinds of the comic from the satirical to the bawdy, the disrespectful to the absurd, and it deepened the hold of the caricatural on the wider public *mentalité*." Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012), 144.

Censorship of Political Caricature (1998).[57] Yet no mention is made of Goldstein's two-page narration of the *Courrier* furore.[58] The inconvenient fact of this historical event complicates the perception of a smooth process of continuous liberalization in French print culture throughout the 1880s. It might indeed be argued that it was not increased liberty but increased repression that provided the impetus for the adoption of a confrontational stance by the avant-garde, in much the same way that, in the 1870s, the most biting political caricatures were produced in opposition to repressive government, but lost their invective charge after the lifting of censorship in 1881.

I turn now to the handful of paintings produced by Van Gogh in 1888 that I propose invite dialogue with these overlooked debates. How might these paintings align with, complicate, or disrupt Thomson's teleological narrative?

[57] Thomson references Goldstein in *Censorship* (1989), 219-20; 230-32; and 238.
[58] Goldstein, *Censorship* (1989), 244-5.

Chapter Two

Zouave

Despite having promised to do so since his arrival in February, Van Gogh had not painted a brothel by the time Bernard's *Brothel Scene* arrived on 23 June [fig. 25]. In return, Van Gogh offered a watercolour study of a *Zouave*, with the suggestion it might serve as a template for a "*type*" (a "john," client), in a future brothel project [fig. 26].[59] The motif would no doubt have been of interest to the twenty-year-old Bernard, whom Van Gogh had just learned was due to do national service in Algeria later in the year.[60] Van Gogh produced two further paintings of the same sitter [figs. 27 & 28]. These studies inaugurated a group of portraits defined by the artist as 'modern' representations of character types rather than individual likenesses; a contemporary renovation of the Dutch Golden Age tradition of portraiture, described by Van Gogh as "a whole republic" in portraits.[61]

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[59] For the proposed exchange, see Van Gogh to Émile Bernard June 27 1888, ibid., no. 633.

[60] Van Gogh wrote, "*Cela m'a énormément intéressé que tu aies l'intention de passer ton temps en Algérie. C'est parfait et rudement loin d'être un malheur. Vraiment je t'en félicite*." [It interested me enormously that you intend spending your time in Algeria. That's perfect, and a hell of a long way from being a misfortune. Truly, I congratulate you on it]. Van Gogh to Bernard 19 April 1888, ibid., letter no. 599. That Bernard admired the image is evident in a letter to his parents: "Il-y-a une tête de Zouave qui m'a éttonné." [There's a head of a Zouave that amazes me]. Laure Harscoët-Maire ed., 'Lettres d'Emile Bernard (1888): à Saint-Briac', in *Le Pays de Dinan* 17 (1997): 177-8. Dedicated to Bernard, the study can be perceived as part of Van Gogh's campaign to entice Bernard to join him in Arles.

[61] Van Gogh was referring to the portraits of Hals and Rembrandt. Van Gogh to Bernard, 30 July 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 651.

As Philip Nord comments, Republicans in late 1880s France "conceived of ... the red-pantalooned Zouave, as a vestige of barbarian times, as 'the final manifestation of a savage aesthetic.'"[62] Van Gogh identified his unnamed model as "a lad with a small face, the neck of a bull and the eye of a tiger," thus emphasizing his masculine stud-like virility and scopic acuity.[63] In the two oil paintings, the figure's inelegantly spread legs provocatively stretch the material of his pantaloons, while his strategically placed hand simultaneously draws attention to, and conceals his genitals, the facture appropriately brusque and the palette without nuance or subtlety. Indeed in Nord's analysis, the Zouave infantryman was the male equivalent in the symbolic imagination of "the red-painted woman."[64]

Scholars have remarked that the tone Van Gogh adopted in his letters varied considerably according to their intended recipient; nowhere is this more apparent than in his letters to Bernard of 1888, passages of which are couched in the language of masculinist bravado and sexual innuendo.[65] Van Gogh's advice was often conflicted. On the one hand he declared that "painting and fucking a lot aren't compatible,"[66] recommending Bernard limit his sexual activity so that his visual productions would become all the more "spermatic" ("spunkier;" *plus couillard*).[67] On the other hand he admired artists such as

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[62] Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-century France* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 222, n. 19.
[63] Van Gogh to Theo, 21 June 1888, ibid., letter no. 629. Note 7 explains that the Arabesque uniform identifies the sitter as a bugler of the third Zouave regiment, garrisoned at the Caserne Calvin barracks at boulevard des Lices, near l'Alyscamps.
[64] Nord, *The Republican Moment* (1995), 222, n. 19.
[65] For *Van Gogh as a letter writer*, see Jansen et al., *The Letters* (2009), 4.3: 'Stylistic Register and Tone.'
[66] "*Faire la peinture et baiser beaucoup est pas compatible.*" Van Gogh to Bernard 12 June 1888, ibid., letter no. 628.
[67] Van Gogh to Bernard circa 5 August 1888, ibid., no. 655.

Rubens and Courbet whose "health allowed them to eat, drink, fuck."[68] He also wrote of having seen bullfights at the Roman arena in Arles, and referred to Paulus Potter's depiction of a horse neighing in a thunderstorm, which he described as having an erection [fig. 29].[69]

Of further contextual relevance, rarely mentioned in connection to Van Gogh's machismo, was the intensification of jingoistic military bluster that continued throughout 1888, with the rise of *Boulangisme*.[70] Adored by swathes of the French public after his intervention in the Sino-French war, which led to the annexation of Tonkin (now Northern Vietnam), General Boulanger's (1837 - 1891) continued support was grounded on his promise of *revanche* (revenge) for humiliation at the hands of the Prussians in 1870 and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine.[71] Despite lacking military training, Van Gogh offered advice to Bernard on preparing for military service, recommending that he should eat well to "build his blood up," and wait until he was in uniform, so that he could sketch free of charge in brothels.[72]

In September, Van Gogh painted a portrait of a Zouave of higher rank, second lieutenant Paul-Eugène Milliet (1863 - 1943) [fig 30].[73] Although Ronald Pickvance does not think this portrait can be associated with the symbolic

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[68] Ibid. Van Gogh's advice reflects phallocentric myths concerning masculine sexual appetites perpetuated by Honoré Balzac about painters such as Eugène Delacroix, who in his opinion "fucked only a little and had only casual love affairs" so as not to detract from their artistic purpose, and Edgar Degas, who "doesn't make such great claims about getting a hard-on."

[69] Van Gogh to Bernard 12 April 1888, ibid., letter no. 596. The editors comment that Potter's horse does not appear to be in a state of arousal. See Van Gogh to Bernard, 26 June 1888, ibid., letter no. 632, n. 26.

[70] A situation that had begun in 1887, escalated throughout 1888 to such an extent that by early 1889, the former General, Georges Ernest Boulanger, seemed to be on the brink of a coup.

[71] For a discussion of *revanche*, see Chapter Four, Thomson, *Troubled Republic* (2004).

[72] Van Gogh suggested introducing Bernard to Milliet, to whom he had given drawing instruction, with a view to joining his regiment. Van Gogh to Bernard 19 June 1888, Jansen et al., *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 628. See also Van Gogh to Bernard June 26 1888, ibid., letter no. 632. In the event, Bernard did not do military service.

[73] Paul Eugène Milliet was second lieutenant in the same regiment as the anonymous bugler. He had returned from almost eighteen months' duty in Tonkin (now Northern Vietnam) in August 1887. Van Gogh to Theo, ibid., letter no. 623, note 9. For the circumstances of their meeting, see Van Gogh to Theo, 13 July 1999, ibid., letter no. 639.

typecasting associated with other portraits of 1888, considering the pre-eminence of Boulangism at this time, an argument can be constructed for symbolic attribution.[74] Like Boulanger, Milliet was a career soldier, as his proudly worn medal and regimental insignia testify.[75] Moreover, both enjoyed reputations as daring lovers. Boulanger was infatuated with his mistress, on whose grave he would commit suicide in 1891, while Van Gogh related admiringly that Milliet had passed an examination with flying colours having spent the previous night in a brothel.[76] Intriguing symmetries might be observed with Boulanger's many publicity photographs, in which the General's heroic gaze seems fixated on distant lands or higher purposes, as in the portrait of Milliet [fig. 31].

It is interesting to draw comparisons of class between the two Zouaves; while the bugler's sexuality is focused in his pantaloons, the officer is characterized as a heroic "lover." Although it is not known whether Van Gogh sympathized with Boulangism; *L'Intransigeant*, one of his regular daily newspapers, did,[77] as did Van Gogh's friend and drinking companion, the railway postal worker Joseph Roulin (1841 - 1903). Indeed Roulin was such a passionate Boulangist that he and his wife Augustine (1851 - 1930) named their

[74] Pickvance reasons, "... there is no concerted attempt at symbolic overtones. The star and crescent moon are simply the coat of arms of the regiment; the background colour is not therefore to be read as sky; and Milliet's decoration is the commemoration medal of the expedition to Tonkin. Nor does van Gogh exaggerate the decorative elements of the uniform." Ronald Pickvance, *Van Gogh in Arles* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 172.

[75] Milliet would eventually rise to the rank of lieutenant-corporal and be awarded the Legion d'honneur. In 1930 Milliet gave an interview to Pierre Weiller in which he remarked of Van Gogh's painting technique that he "raped" the canvas. Susan Alyson Stein, *Van Gogh: A Retrospective* (Westport CT.: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1986), 110.

[76] Van Gogh to Theo, circa 12 August 1888, Jansen et al., *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 659. Van Gogh recommended Milliet read Maupassant's *Bel Ami*, about a former soldier who ruthlessly applies military tactics to sleep his way to the top of society. Van Gogh to Theo, 25 September 1888, ibid., letter no. 687. Van Gogh's letters reveal that the artist toyed with the idea of including Milliet's portrait in a depiction of a pair of "lovers," with the consequence that the painting bears the name *'The Lover'* on display at the Kröller-Müller Museum.

[77] Ernest Granger, a former Blanquist turned Boulangist, wrote for "*L'Intran*" in the late 1880s, steering its formerly socialist editorial towards an increasingly reactionary and nationalist position. Van Gogh to Willemien van Gogh, circa 21 or 22 August 1888, ibid., letter no. 667.

newborn child Marcelle, after the General's daughter [fig. 32].[78] Intriguingly, Goldstein speculates on the possibility of a connection between the Republic's "disquiet" over Boulangism and its persecution of the *Courrier Français*.[79]

When in July Van Gogh dedicated his *Zouave* study to Bernard, with the recommendation that it might provide the template for a future brothel customer, he was undoubtedly responding to Bernard's *Brothel Sketch* [fig. 25], which he had recently received, hence the brothel role may have been retrospectively assigned. What has not been noted is that at the same moment the newspapers were bristling with indignant comment on the imminent trial of the *Courrier Français*. On July 15 when Van Gogh finally sent the *Zouave* sketch to Bernard, the *Courrier* printed eleven excerpts from eight journals, pouring derision on the government's attempted censorship.[80] Hence it would seem that Van Gogh waited three weeks - until the topic of prostitution dominated the news - before acting on his earlier promise to send Bernard the *Zouave* sketch.

Given their topicality it is puzzling that the *Zouave* portraits have not been accorded a place in Thomson's modernist narrative. Their exaggerated virility, grotesque body language, and - especially - their association with prostitution, are characteristic of the caricatural *mentalité*, according to Thomson's thesis. That a lusty Zouave was depicted in colonial uniform in a naïve style during a period of heightened jingoism and militarism is one thing; that the image was also identified as a brothel customer, as debates swirled in the national press concerning the representation of prostitution, opens it to further nuanced exegesis.

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[78] Marcelle Roulin (1888 - 1980) was born on 31 July 1888.

[79] Goldstein writes, "The general nervousness of the government as a result of the Boulanger affair may have contributed to some otherwise almost inexplicable harassment inflicted upon *Le Courrier Français* (1884-1913) during the 1887-91 period." Goldstein, *Censorship* (1989), 244.

[80] 'Le "Courrier Français" Poursuivi,' *Courrier Français,* 15 July 1888, 2. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1069330s/f2.item.zoom [accessed 20/07/18].

The Night Café

The second of Van Gogh's 1888 paintings in the proposed prostitution group is *The Night Café*, produced over the course of three nights *in situ* at the Café de la Gare in the first week of September 1888 [fig. 33]. The artist considered the painting "ugly," a term he also applied to the seated *Zouave* portrait.[81] Situated near the Arles mainline station, the café stayed open all night, affording a well-lit refuge for railway workers and what Van Gogh termed "night prowlers," men with nowhere else to spend the night.[82] The artist rented a room there for six months before moving into the Yellow House in September, and was acquainted with its proprietors, Joseph and Marie Ginoux; Joseph is represented in the painting standing beside the billiard table.[83] Van Gogh insisted to Bernard that his painting did not depict a brothel "as such," but a "*maison de passe*."[84] Despite this, and his description of the couple seated at the back as a "*putain*" and "*son type*," rarely has this painting been assessed specifically in terms of prostitution.[85]

Van Gogh's slang terminology suits the low status of the establishment; in Alain Corbin's taxonomy of brothels, the "cheap wineshop with its cabinet noir

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[81] Van Gogh to Theo, 11 September 1888, Jansen et al., *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 680. For his description of the *Zouave* portrait as "ugly," see Van Gogh to Theo 23 June 1888, ibid., letter no. 630, and to Bernard 26 June, ibid., letter no. 632.

[82] Van Gogh to Theo, 6 August 1878, ibid. (2009), letter no. 656.

[83] Edwards writes it was "likely there was a room upstairs, where his own lodging was located, used by prostitutes and their clients." Edwards reasons the artist's touchy denial could be connected to the possibility the establishment might be closed down, had its status as an illegal brothel been advertised. Cliff Edwards, *The Mystery of The Night Café: Hidden Key to the Spirituality of Van Gogh* (New York: State University of New York Press, 209), 44.

[84] "Maison de passe" has been translated as "a house of assignation." Van Gogh to Bernard circa 19 - 25 September 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 684. Alan Sheridan defines a *maison de passe* as "an unregistered establishment to which women took their clients for a *passe*, a short time." Translator's note, Corbin, *Women for Hire* (1990), n.p.

[85] Van Gogh to Theo, 6 August 1878, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 656.

or private room" is located at the very bottom.[86] Douglas Druick and Kort Peter Zegers identify the café as a *cafeton* (coffee-house), against which the authorities in Provence waged an ongoing war in the 1880s.[87] The *cafeton* (Provençal *cafetoun*) had flourished as a result of another liberalization of 1881, a change in the law on drinking establishments, which resulted in their reputation for providing illegal sex.[88] This connotation is clearly legible in Gauguin's cynical reprise of Van Gogh's *The Night Café* [fig 34]. Painted in November 1888, Van Gogh's male friends are depicted drinking with prostitutes, identifiable by the curling papers in their hair.[89] The scene is presided over by Marie Ginoux, who is represented with a cat, symbol of licentiousness, and glass of absinthe; attributes which, in Druick and Zegers' opinion, represent Mme. Roulin as "a madam indeed."[90]

Van Gogh's use of the derogatory term *putain* (literally 'putrid woman') appears to have been encouraged by Bernard's use of the word in a poem accompanying *Brothel Scene*, sent to Van Gogh in June.[91] Corbin has analysed the term's centrality to the symbolic representation of prostitution in nineteenth-century discourses, constructed under the influence of "pre-Pasteurian mythologies" of putrefaction, infection, and elimination of bodily

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[86] Corbin, *Women for Hire* (1990), 16.

[87] Druick and Zegers identify reports of crackdowns on *cafetons* in *Le Forum républicain* of 1 January 1888; 4 March 1888; 21 April 1889; and in *L'Homme du bronze*, on 5 August 1888 and 10 February 1889. Douglas Druick and Kort Peter Zegers, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South*, exhib. cat (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 188-189.

[88] René Garagnon, 'Le quartier réservé d'Arles au temps de Van Gogh,' *A.V.A. Bulletin des Amis du Vieil Arles* no. 134 (September 2007), 7.

[89] Druick and Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001), 189.

[90] Ibid. For research into the consumption of absinthe in Arles, see Bernadette Murphy, *Van Gogh's Ear: The True Story* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2016), 126-8. Murphy's exhaustive research was unable to discover any record of absinthe being stocked in any establishment in Arles or Marseilles, suggesting it was served illegally, or not at all.

[91] The stanza reads: "Society behold your crime / Man cast a lenient glance / Upon the whore, this victim." Van Gogh to Theo, 23 June 1888, Jansen et al., *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 630, n. 6. Van Gogh employed the term '*putain*' in letters to Bernard of 27 June 1888, ibid., letter no. 633; of 5 August 1888, ibid., letter no. 655; and of 5 October 1888, ibid., letter no. 698. Interestingly, Van Gogh did not use the term in letters to any other recipient.

fluids from the social body.[92] In his explication of the caricatural sensibility, Thomson comments that "by the 1890s, there was active debate about deeply entrenched social problems," prominent among which were the spread of alcoholism and sexually transmitted diseases.[93]

Despite its associations with precisely these social anxieties, *The Night Café* is often treated as evidence of the artist's imminent pathological decline. In 1909 Maurice Denis (1870 - 1943) remarked on the discrepancies between Gauguin's version of the night café and Van Gogh's, "bright and all askew, but so full of feeling and life that the Gauguin seems academic."[94] The painting was however, hardly the work of an impassioned moment, having been conceived a month previously, placing the timing of its intellectual genesis two days into the August *Courrier Français* trial.[95] Moreover, it took three sittings to achieve effects that were clearly pre-meditated, as demonstrated by the repetition of the phrase "I've tried" in Van Gogh's often-quoted accounts of the painting:

> *In my painting of the night café I've tried to express the idea that the café is a place where you can ruin yourself, go mad, commit crimes. Anyway I tried with contrasts of delicate pink and blood-red and wine-red, soft Louis XV and Veronese green contrasting with yellow greens and hard blue greens, all of that in a hellish furnace, in pale sulphur, to express something of the power of the dark corners of a grog-shop. And yet with the appearance of Japanese gaiety and Tartarin's good nature.*[96]

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[92] Corbin, 'Commercial Sexuality' (1986): 215.
[93] Thomson, 'Ambiguity, Allure' (2015), 97.
[94] "… *celui de Gauguin avec l'Arlésienne, la bouteille et la fumée – sombre et bien establi; l'autre de Vincent, brillant et tout de travers, mais si senti, si vécu, que le Gauguin paraît académique*." Maurice Denis, January 1909, *Journal* II, 101, in Morehead, 'Defending Deformation' (2015): 915, n. 85.
[95] The *Courrier*/Legrand trial began on the 4 August and ended on 8 August 1888.
[96] "*Dans mon tableau du café de nuit j'ai chercher à exprimer que le café est un endroit où l'on peut se ruiner, devenir fou, commettre des crimes. Enfin d'ai cherché par des contrastes de rose tendre et de rouge sang et lie de vin. De doux vert Louis XV et Veronèse contrastant avec les verts jaunes et les verts bleus durs. Tout cela dans une atmosphere de fournaise infernale de Souffre pale. Expimier comme la puissance des ténèbres d'un assommoir. Et toutefois sous une appearance de gaité japonaise et la bonhomie du Tartarin*." Van Gogh to Theo, 9 September 1888, Jansen et al., *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 677. See also the near-identical description in Van Gogh to Theo, 8 September 1888, ibid., letter no. 676. In this passage, the artist identifies the figure in white beside the billiard table as the owner of the establishment.

The penultimate phrase "*la puissance des ténèbres d'un assommoir*" suggests two literary associations."[97] Léon Tolstoy's 1886 drama *La Puissance de Ténèbres* (The Power of Darkness), and Èmile Zola's 1876 novel *L'Assommoir* both involve reprehensible crimes commeasurate with "terrible human passions."[98] The eponymous '*assommoir*' literally means 'to bludgeon' or 'to stun,' and provides an apposite metaphor for a depiction of comatose figures slumped at tables surrounded by empty glasses. Flame-like visual passages in the painting have been associated with the "hellish furnace" of Zola's fictional drinking den.[99] Despite its adherence to such carefully constructed effects, *The Night Café* is typically perceived as a manifestation of Van Gogh's precarious mental state, producing the type of circulatory analysis in which, as Griselda Pollock observes, the artist inevitably "becomes the subject of his own work."[100] Even the Marxist critic Meyer Schapiro could not resist the rhetoric of madness, describing as an "impulsive rush," the distorted perspective that "draws us headlong" into the scene.[101]

One aspect of the painting that has lacked attention is the billiard table. Despite its foregrounded magnitude, this item, staple of mess rooms and bar rooms, has remained paradoxically invisible in art historical literature, a point that has not escaped the notice of Allison Morehead. In a paper linking billiards with masculinist competition and sexual impropriety, Morehead remarks that baize (*tapis vert*) was designed to produce muting and decelerating effects,

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[97] Van Gogh to Theo 9 September 1888, ibid., letter no. 677, n. 13.
[98] As noted by Edwards, a child is murdered in both Edwards, *Mystery* (2009), 32.
[99] Van Gogh to Theo 9 September 1888, ibid., letter no. 677, note 13.
[100] Griselda Pollock, 'Artists, Mythologies and Media: Genius, Madness and Art History,' *Screen* 221, no 3 (1980): 57-96.
[101] "In his account van Gogh says nothing of one of the most powerful effects: the absorbing perspective which draws us headlong past empty chairs and tables into the hidden depths behind a distant doorway - an opening like the silhouette of the standing figure." Meyer Schapiro, Vincent van Gogh (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1950), 70.

making it appropriate to the torpid inertia of *The Night Café*.[102] While the expressive, emotive properties of red juxtaposed with green in this painting have often been discussed, Morehead raises an interesting phenomenological issue connected with the optical contrast achieved by staring intently at the green expanse of a billiard tabletop, then looking away.[103] The oppositions of red and green in this painting thus replicate the experience of passively staring fixedly at the green baize, and the obverse: literally, seeing red.

Semiotic allusions to visibility and invisibility are also pertinent to anxieties over clandestine prostitution, since the basic premise of *reglémentation* had been the removal of prostitution from public view.[104] As Corbin observes, many areas of French society in the first half of the nineteenth century were similarly concealed: the dissection of human and animal carcasses, like bordellos, had to be shuttered from public view, while laws forbade the transportation of cadavers and prostitutes in open carriages.[105] In the second half of the century, in contrast, symbolized by the scientific discovery of microbes, a new mantra deemed that "nothing subterranean must remain obscure," and "everything that swarms in obscurity becomes dangerous and needs to be brought into light."[106] Gas lighting was still a relatively recent addition (Van Gogh paid to have gas installed at the Yellow House in 1888), and in Morehead's opinion it is "difficult to overstate the modernity" achieved by

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[102] Allison Morehead, 'Modernism and the Green Baize,' unpublished paper based on conference given at the symposium *Munch*, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (2015): 14.
[103] Edvard Munch, *Sketchbook*, 1891–92, MM T2760, fol. 16r, quoted in Morehead, 'Green Baize' (2015): 12. On the appeal of Van Gogh's use of red and green for the Expressionists, see Jill Lloyd, *Vincent van Gogh and Expressionism*, exhib. cat. (Amsterdam and New York: Ostfildern, 2006), 97.
[104] This was the assertion of Parent-Duchâtelet's *De la Prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (1837), on which the system of regulation was predicated.
[105] Likewise excrement and lovemaking were confined indoors, and excessive demonstrations of grief at funerals fell from fashion. Corbin, 'Commercial Sexuality' (1986): 214.
[106] Ibid., 215.

the combination of green baize glowing under artificial light.[107] The gas lamps in *The Night Café*, reminiscent of eyes, give the impression of not only illuminating but of perceiving what had previously been concealed in darkness, including, perhaps, crimes committed under the influence of its metaphorical power.[108]

Yet the oppressive effects of the painting were mitigated, in the artist's estimation, by its "appearance" or guise "of Japanese gaiety and Tartarin's good nature."[109] This remark may seem puzzling; where precisely is the viewer to apprehend gaiety in such a foreboding representation? Possible explanations might be sought in Van Gogh's assertion that he associated *The Night Café* with another 'ugly' painting, *The Potato Eaters* of 1885 [fig. 35].[110] The first of Van Gogh's night paintings, *The Potato Eaters* similarly represented members of a low social class, illuminated in their 'natural habitat' by gaslight.[111]

In both *The Potato Eaters* and *The Night Café*, grim circumstances are recuperated from total abjection, if not by "gaiety" exactly, then by touches of banality that verge on the comedic. A group of agricultural workers brutalized by poverty partake in a frugal meal using the conventions of bourgeois dining:

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[107] Morehead, 'Green Baize' (2015): 8. Morehead notes that the dye of the baize itself had been produced artificially using arsenic to withstand the effect of artificial light.

[108] Associations might even be drawn here with the panoptic surveillance of society, which derived in France from the surveillance of brothels, asylums and prisons. See Michel Foucault's explication of 'bio-power' in 'The Eye of Power,' C. Gordon (ed.), *Power, Knowledge and Other Essays 1972-77* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

[109] Tartarin, the eponymous anti-hero of Alphonse Daudet's comedic novellas, is a self-seeking, bombastic adventurer who inevitably over-reaches himself, and is in many ways reminiscent of the *Boulangiste* temperament. Alphonse Daudet, *Aventures prodigieuses de Tartarin de Tarascon* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1872), and by the same author, *Tartarin sur les Alpes* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1885). Van Gogh knew both books; see Van Gogh to Theo, 9 March 1888, Jansen et al., *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 583; and Van Gogh to Theo, 12 May 1888, ibid., letter no. 609.

[110] "...the painting is one of the ugliest I've done. It's the equivalent, though different, of the potato eaters." [... *le tableau est un des plus laids que j'aie faits. Il est équivalent quoique différent aux mangeurs de pomme de terre*.] Van Gogh to Theo, 8 September 1888, ibid., letter no. 676.

[111] The essential difference between the two images, Van Gogh explained, was that the "farmhouses and cheap grog shops" of Provence were "less gloomy, less tragic than in the north, because the heat etc. makes poverty less hard and melancholy." [*Mais ici ferme et cabaret assommoirs sont moins lugubres, mon dramatiques que dans le nord puisque le chaleur &c. rend la pauverté moins dure et mélancolique*]. Van Gogh to Theo, 8 August 1888, ibid., no. 657.

the coffee is meticulously poured and the cutlery is elegantly held, but the food itself is sorely lacking. In *The Night Café* discordant oppositions of reds and greens are juxtaposed to the delicate "Louis XV green" of the overloaded drinks cabinet, testimony to the café's purpose to stun its customers, topped off by a lush bouquet, as incongruous as gilding applied to a syphilis chancre. The woeful discrepancy between things as they are and things as they should be, introduces a sense of pathos that distinguishes caricature.[112] A passage in Van Gogh's letter to his sister demonstrates the artist's awareness of the emerging caricatural idiom as a valid approach for contemporary art.

> *Furthermore the people here are picturesque too, and whereas at home a beggar looks much like a spectre, here he becomes a caricature. Since, as you'll see when you read Zola and Guy de Maupassant, people definitely want - in art - something very rich and something very cheerful - even though that same Zola and Maupassant have said the most heart-rending things that have perhaps ever been said - the same movement is also beginning to become the rule in painting.*[113]

A rare emphasis on the contrast between "richness and gaiety" and "the most poignantly tragic things" in this painting can be found in Edwards' *The Mystery of the Night Café*.[114] Edwards does not however make the connection with the caricatural. Thomson, on the other hand, addresses the caricatural, but does not make any association with *The Night Café*.

In the intervening weeks between Van Gogh's production of the *Zouave* paintings and *The Night Café*, Bernard sent a further five lewd sketches, three

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[112] In 1885 Van Gogh asked Theo to present a lithograph of *The Potato Eaters* to his contacts at *Le Chat Noir*, the satirical journal associated with the subversive Montmartre nightclub of the same name. Van Gogh to Theo 9 April 1885, ibid., letter no. 492. This request has not been adequately addressed, and indeed has baffled recent biographers Stephen Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, who dismiss his request as "absurd." Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Van Gogh: The Life* (New York: Random House, 2011), 440. It is however a request that makes a great deal of sense if a satirical agenda is perceived.

[113] Van Gogh to Willemenia circa 30 March 1888, ibid., no. 590.

[114] Edwards, *Mystery* (2009), 17.

of which contained iconography relating to prostitution, such as *couvettes* (washing bowls) and draped beds [figs. 36; 37; 38; 39 and 40]. Some of these drawings offended Van Gogh's sensibility, the sketch that most rankled being *Lubricité*; Fred Leeman comments that Bernard's "experiments" went beyond even what Van Gogh could accept.[115] Referring to Bernard's drawings, Thomson asserts that the young artist wished to identify with the new generation "attuned to the comic in the everyday."

> *... Bernard wanted to claim for himself a particular status, that of the new generation attuned to the comic in the everyday, capable of working across the avant-garde and illustrative idioms, aware that facets of the comic such as the ridiculous and the cruel had a tellingly modern character.* [116]

If Bernard, why not Van Gogh? While the age difference might account for the older artist's rejection of *Lubricité*, the depiction of "the comic in the everyday" is an apt assessment of *The Night Café*. Arsène Alexandre, whose comments on new caricatural license have previously been noted, described Toulouse-Lautrec's depictions of 'La Goulue' and Aristide Bruant as "*peintures de moeurs*:" paintings of morals or manners.[117] Thomson notes that by this he meant they were paintings of everyday life, which revealed the moral fabric of society. The term is eminently applicable to *The Night Café*, with its atmosphere stretched wire-taught between banality and tragedy.

Thomson observes a "sinister undertow beneath the surface jollity" in Toulouse-Lautrec's *Au Cirque Fernando* - also of 1888 - perceiving tensions in

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[115] "Bernard's experiments exceeded the taste and perhaps even the understanding of what Van Gogh could accept." Fred Leeman, *Emile Bernard: 1868-1941* (Paris, Wildenstein Institute, 2013), 219.

[116] Thomson, *Art of the Actual*, (2012), 157.

[117] "*Mais les grands tableaux que M. Toulouse-Lautrec arrangea pour la grande gloire de la Goulue et d'Aristide Bruant sont ceux qui ont les plus vigoureusement frappé le publique et les artistes par les trés neuf caractère synthetique. C'étaient le véritables peintures de moeurs agrandies et jetées sur le mur, à l'usage du premier venu*." Arsène Alexandre, *L'Art du rire et de la caricature* (Paris: Quantin, 1892), 346. Quoted in Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012), 167.

the relationship between the rider and ringmaster [fig. 41].[118] The contemporaneous *Night Café* would have provided an exemplary case study in support of Thomson's thesis. It employs several of Thomson's caricatural criteria: distortion, lurid colour combinations, juxtaposition of banality and violence, synthesis or economy of detail, and it addresses topical themes of clandestine prostitution and alcoholism. These latter were precisely the social problems symptomatic of degeneration that, as Thomson observes, encouraged the transition from descriptive naturalism to the analytical caricatural mentality.[119] It is not so much the figures that are caricatured by distortion in this painting, but the space they inhabit. As such *The Night Café* offers an intriguing alternative to the feigned ambiguity characteristic of depictions of sexually available women in the 1880s. By distorting the spatial perspective it signifies something very modern indeed: prostitution's emergence from the sequestered brothel into the public space. I argue therefore that the aesthetic terms of the caricatural sensibility were themselves extended, deepened, and defined in *The Night Café*. The paradoxical invisibility of clandestine prostitution in this painting articulates visually what still apparently could not at that moment be expressed verbally: that prostitution might be considered a product, rather than a cause, of society's ills.

[118] Ibid., 164.
[119] For Thomson's caricatural criteria, see *Art of the Actual* (2012), 182-182. On society's ills in relation to the caricatural mentality, see ibid., 176.

Chapter Three

Les Alsycamps

The four paintings of the *Alsycamps* series were produced at the beginning of November 1888; the first two being painted *in situ* in the Allée des Tombeaux, an ancient sarcophagus-lined avenue that in Van Gogh's day enjoyed a reputation as a lovers' lane [figs. 42 & 43]. The second two paintings were either finished or produced in the studio later the same week [figs. 44 & 45]. Because they were painted alongside - and in competition with - Paul Gauguin (1848 - 1903), it is reasonable to assume he was their primary audience.

Druick and Zegers have written at some length about the series in *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South*.[120] As these scholars observe, the practice of painting from memory in the studio was a departure for Van Gogh, undertaken in accordance with Gauguin's exhortation to seek an anti-naturalist approach.[121] Unlike the first two studies which were naturalist in style, the second two *Alyscamps* paintings demonstrate varying degrees of formal experimentation; the oblique angles, abbreviated forms and non-local colours of the final, most schematic, work signalling debts to Honoré Daumier (1808 -

[120] Druick and Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001), 170-181.
[121] Ibid., 180. See Van Gogh to Theo circa 7 September 1888, Jansen et al., (2009), letter no. 717.

1879) and Japanese *ukio-e* woodcut prints.[122] The figure in regional dress sketched holding a red parasol in the second painting [detail, fig. 43], for example, reappears in the final version in abbreviated form reminiscent of a Japanese print.

As several feminist writers have demonstrated, men's anxieties about unregulated prostitution often turned on the illegibility of *filles insoumises* in public spaces, and was closely linked with bourgeois masculine fears of women's sexual promiscuity.[123] Each of Van Gogh's four images of les Alyscamps includes a male figure encountering a local woman (identifiable by regional costume); Druick and Zegers remark on the "transitory nature" of the encounter in the first painting, in which the striding male figure is recognizable as a soldier by his red trousers and *kepi* headgear [fig. 42].[124] The nearby barracks housed troops in transit between colonial outposts, underscoring the fleeting nature of assignations between the Zouaves and local women. Although it is uncertain whether the encounters depicted in Van Gogh's paintings were spontaneous or commercial, ambiguity might be said to be the point.[125]

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[122] Druick and Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001), 181. The Van Gogh brothers owned some 350 Japanese prints, many of which represented courtesans and bordellos. Chris Stolwijk, Sjraar van Heugten, Leo Jansen, Andreas Blühm and Nienke Bakker, *Vincent's Choice: Van Gogh's Musée Imaginaire* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 110.

[123] There is a wealth of scholarship on ambiguity in clandestine prostitution. For a selection of interesting essays on these themes, see Section I of Griselda Pollock and Phillip Kendal eds., *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision* (New York: Universe, 1992), 43-132.

[124] Druick and Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001), 176.

[125] One of the attractions unregistered prostitution offered at this time was the opportunity it afforded men to indulge in the illusion of seduction. Corbin, *Women for Hire* (1990),128-32. See also Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute* (1977), 163; and Clayson, *Painted Love* (1991), 41. Indeed Gauguin commented around this time to Bernard that streetwalkers in Arles were indistinguishable from respectable women, "The girl who walks the street is as much a lady as any other and as virginal as Juno." "*La fille qui passe dans la rue est aussi dame que n'importe quelle autre et d'une apparence aussi vierge que la Junon*." Paul Gauguin to Émile Bernard November 1888, Maurice Malingue ed., Paul Gauguin: Lettres à sa femme et à ses amis (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2003),169.

Few places were more suited to such encounters than the Allé des Tombeaux, which by the nineteenth century had become practically a metaphor of decayed standards; moral, aesthetic and civic.[126] Arles had once been known as 'the Rome of southern France,' but by Van Gogh's day the ancient sarcophagi had been pillaged and defiled, and the avenue itself marooned between the PLM railway workshops (clearly visible in the first painting), the Craponne Canal where unmarried mothers threw their unwanted babies, and the Caserne Calvin barracks where Zouave troops were stationed.[127] The famed classical beauty of its female citizens functioned symbolically in the national imagination as a reminder of the region's former glory.[128] In an attempt to lure Gauguin to Provence, Van Gogh emphasized the area's attractions for a contemporary artist, imagining a new artistic Renaissance.[129]

> *These parts of the world have already seen the cult of Venus - essentially artistic, in Greece - and the poets and artists of the Renaissance. Where these things have been able to flower, Impressionism can do so too.* [130]

The Venus cult to which the artist refers was founded on the marble *Aphrodite* attributed to the Greek sculptor Praxiteles (395 BC - 330 BC), excavated at Arles in 1651. Known as the *Vénus d'Arles*, the statue had undergone extensive restorations at the behest of Louis XIV, including the addition of arms,

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[126] Druick and Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001), 172.
[127] Ibid., 294. The PLM line ran from Paris though Lyons to Marseilles.
[128] On the legendary beauty of the women of Arles, see Van Gogh to Theo March 24 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 578, n. 14. See also Van Gogh to Theo circa 23 or 24 September, ibid., letter no. 686.
[129] As Druick and Zegers have remarked, the objectification of Arlésiennes as living statues by the Occitan poet Frédéric Mistral had encouraged the identification of their fabled beauty with the tradition of the goddess Venus, or Aphrodite. Druick and Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001), 172.
[130] Van Gogh to Theo 3 October 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 695. The word 'Impressionism' had different connotations in Van Gogh's day, signifying experimental, avant-garde art.

before its relocation to the Louvre in 1792 [figs. 47 & 48].[131] An early nineteenth-century plaster copy of a seventeenth-century marble version, itself an 'improvement' of the ancient original, rather than reifying the noble classical ideal, the plaster Venus of Arles embodied its debasement, and therefore had affinities with the discourse of degeneration.[132]

Anxieties concerning the physical and moral degeneration of the nation held considerable currency in France at the time, and have been ineluctably associated with the *Alyscamps* paintings.[133] While the breakdown of regulated prostitution was widely interpreted as a sign of social deterioration, another aspect of the degeneration discourse is relevant here; problems of alcohol abuse, contagion, and declining birth rates were considered hereditary, the result of a progressively 'tainted' patrimony. Such ideas subtended Émile Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* novels, which Van Gogh knew and admired. During the years following the Franco-Prussian defeat, "degenerative heredity became *the* language through which concerns about individual and cultural health were

[131] See Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway, 'The Aphrodite of Arles,' *American Journal of Archeology* 80 (1976): 147-154. The marble copy and renovations were made by François Gidaron (1628-1715).

[132] In the seventeenth century a marble copy was made of the original and installed at Versailles, whereupon the arms and apple were added on the instruction of Louis XIV. See K. Baedeker, *Le Midi de la France depuis Auvergne et y compris les Alpes. Manuel de voyager,* 3rd ed. (Leipzig and Paris: 1889), 211. Cited in Jansen et al. *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 683, n. 21.

[133] Shortly after his arrival in the Spring, Van Gogh wrote, "The women really are beautiful here, it's no joke - on the other hand, the Arles museum is dreadful and a joke, and fit to be in Tarascon - there's also a museum of antiquities, they're genuine." [*Les femmes sont bien belles ici, c'est pas une blague - par contraire le musée d'Arles est atroce et une blague et digne d'etre à Tarascon - il y a aussi un musée d'antiquités, vraies celles-là*]. Van Gogh to Theo, March 24 1888, ibid., letter no. 578. The reference to Tarascon invoked Daudet's *Adventures Prodigieuses de Tartarin de Tarascon*, while the "dreadful" museum was the Musée Réattu, whose collection consisted mostly of copied genre paintings, and the "genuine" collection of the Musée Lapidaire d'Arles comprised mainly of ancient Christian and Pagan funerary monuments, much like the ones that lined the Allé des Tombeaux.

expressed."[134] These discourses were not without implications for art. In addition to providing justification for the anatomists' debates, the Greek ideal of beauty epitomized by the *Medici Venus* provided the normative values on which much mid-nineteenth-century *pompier* art was predicated.

The reception of Manet's *Olympia* as understood by Timothy Clark may illuminate the situation in relation to the caricatural turn. The impact of this foundational modernist work - the original confrontational depiction of a prostitute - left many contemporary critics at a loss for words, unable to articulate its transgressive charge for contemporary audiences. The situation was only correctly assessed, in Clark's view, by a handful of caricaturists who intuitively grasped the significance of Manet's debasement of the classical Venus [fig. 49].[135] "The past was travestied in *Olympia*," Clark wrote, "it was subjected to a kind of degenerate simian imitation, in which the nude was stripped of its last feminine qualities.'[136] Yet, "If the revisions of Venus could be seen at all," such revisions could not be discussed directly, but could only be indirectly referred to using the language of caricature.[137] Similarly Legrand's illustration challenged the government's involvement in prostitution in a way that

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[134] Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminine Aesthetics* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), 78 n. 42. Influential nineteenth-century texts promoting atavistic ideas included Cesare Lombroso's *The Criminal, in Relation to Anthropology, Jurisprudence and Psychiatry* (London: 1876); Paul Broca's *Memoires d'anthropologie* (Paris: 1836) and the art critic Théophile Thoré's *Dictionnaire de Phrenologie et de Physionomie* (Paris: 1836). See also Callen, *Spectacular Body* (1995), and Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: a European Disorder, c. 1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[135] T.J. Clark, 'Olympia's Choice,' *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 79-146.

[136] Ibid., 75. See also T.J. Clark, 'Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of Olympia in 1865,' *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, 21 no. 1 (1982): 18-41.

[137] Clark, *Modern Life* (2015), 75. "Because of the presence of class" Schiff observes critics regarded the painting as "comic, obscene, or incompletely painted, thus Manet's art was reduced to being a caricature of a proper class of art." Richard Shiff, 'Art History and the Nineteenth Century: Realism and Resistance,' *Art Bulletin* I.XX (1988): 47. However, Norma Broude has pointed out the overlooked feminist argument regarding Clark's Marxist view that nakedness and prostitution were signifiers of class. As Broude asserts, late nineteenth-century feminism subscribed to the concept that all French women, including 'respectable' married women, constituted a single, subaltern class. Broude, 'The Young Spartans,' (1988): 649.

could not have been directly articulated, while caricatures in the press responded in kind.[138]

Although Druick and Zegers have demonstrated a relationship between the *Alyscamps* paintings and the degeneration of the classical ideal, this is not something that has been considered particularly topical in 1888. Nevertheless, debased statues of Venus were newsworthy that year. Much of the comment in the press on the *Courrier Français* controversy focused on the artist's 'right' to depict the female nude. A running joke that sustained this masculinist debate, elaborated upon by *L'Intransigeant*, one of Van Gogh's regular newspapers, was that the statues of the Louvre would soon be made to wear vine leaves (the French equivalent of the fig leaf).[139] Vine leaves were as a result deployed in caricatures lampooning minister Jean-Baptiste Ferrouillat's prudish modesty [figs. 50 & 51]. Thus a caricatural mentality was marshalled against the state, and the metaphor of national degeneration - symbolized by the debasement of the Louvre's classical statues by the addition of vine leaves and underpants - was wedded to the discourse about representations of prostitution, in the

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[138] What has not been noted is that a hand placed on the wrist traditionally signified rape. This gesture is discussed throughout Diane Wolfthal's '"A Hue and Cry": Medieval Rape Imagery and its Transformation,' *The Art Bulletin* 75 no. 1 (1993): 39-64.

[139] "*On se demande comment ces paragons de vertu osent aller au Salon. Ils doivent, quand ils pasent devant quelque naïade pas - assez 'vêtue; abaisser leurs chastes' paupières. S'ils allient au Musée du Louvre, nul doute, qu'ils exiguineat à bref délai qu'on mît, non pas une leuille de vigne à chaque statue, car la feuille de vigne a'un caractère égrillard, mais un caleçon.*" [One wonders how these paragons of virtue dare to go to the Salon. They must, when they pass in front of some scantily-dressed naiad; lower their chaste eyelids. If they went to the Louvre Museum, there is no doubt that they would soon require not that every vine leaf be given a vine leaf, for the vine leaf has a ruddy character, but a pair of underpants]. *L'Intransigeant*, 3 July 1888, reprinted in *Le Courrier Français,* 15 July 1888. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1069330s/f2.item.zoom [accessed 25/03/18]. *Editorial in Gil Blas, another periodical read by Van Gogh, responded by imagining department stores selling "Huntress Diana bodices," "pink surah Squatting Aphrodite jerseys," Hercules Farnese trousers," and "Dying Gladiator overcoats."* [*A la Pudeur. Grande maison de nouveautés, spécialement à l'usage des marbres ou bronzes dont le déshabillé a été déclaré contraire aux mœurs. On trouvera dans nos magasins un assortiment complet de pantalons pour Hercules Farnèses et de paletots pour Gladiateurs mourants. Les salons réservés aux dames contiennent également des corsages à la dernière mode pour Dianes chasseresses et des maillots roses en surahpour Vénus accroupies. Nous offrons, en même temps, à notre honorable clientèle des musées nationaux des bas de soie d'une solidité à toute épreuve et montant jusqu'à mi-cuisses pour nymphes, naïades et faunesses.*] *Gil Blas*, 8 July 1888. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7522613g/f1.item.r=courrier [accessed 03/05/18].

process of making political points that could not be spoken of directly.[140] The *Alyscamps* paintings produced by Van Gogh resonate with sensibilities of cultural decline, and by bracketing depictions of clandestine prostitution with the Venus tradition, offer an ironic - hence modern - response to the conditions of contemporary life. In the final, most schematic painting of the series [fig. 45], the PLM workshops have been elided, but rather than producing an idealized version of the scene, the degeneration signified by the workshops remains, indeed is amplified, by the use of grotesque caricature.

A rotund, female figure in regional dress - a comically debased version of fabled Arlésienne beauty, perhaps - is approached by a decrepit male figure, as tall and scrawny as she is short and corpulent.[141] The inclusion of such a deliberately comical pairing is unusual in Van Gogh's *œuvre*, and it has been observed that the man seems to have been conceived "in the spirit" of Honoré Daumier's character 'Ratapoil' [fig. 52].[142] This shady character was associated with Napoleon III's opportunistic agitation for absolute power in 1850-51.[143] Considering Gauguin's newfound appreciation of Daumier, political

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[140] Miriam Levin comments that Victor Hugo endorsed humour as a powerful tool in shaping public opinion. Miriam R. Levin, *Republican Art and Ideology in Late Nineteenth Century France* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986), 31.

[141] Van Gogh described the incongruous couple as "an old man and a woman as fat and round as a ball" [*un vieux bonhomme et une femme grosse et ronde comme un boule*]. Van Gogh to Theo van Gogh circa 3 Nov 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 717.

[142] Druick and Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001), 181. This association is repeated in the catalogue of the Kröller-Müller Museum where the painting is kept. Jos ten Berge, Toos van Kooten and Mieke Rijnders eds., *The Paintings of Vincent van Gogh in the collection of the Kröller-Müller Museum* (Otterlo, Netherlands: The Kröller-Müller Museum, 2003), 254. It is possible that Van Gogh was appealing to Gauguin with this figure; Druick and Zegers note Gauguin's keen interest in Van Gogh's collection of Daumier prints, to which Gauguin's notebooks from the period "amply testify." Druick and Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001), 238.

[143] As Judith Wechsler has observed, "the prominent anti-Bonapartist historian, Jules Michelet, remarked that Daumier did more for Republicanism with Ratapoil than all the politicians put together." Jules Michelet to Honoré Daumier 30 March 1851, cited in Judith Wechsler, *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth-century Paris* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 91 n. 50. Bonapartist agitation would have struck a chord with Gauguin whose father, an outspoken journalist, had fled the Napoleonic regime in 1850, taking his young family with him on a precipitous sea voyage to Peru; Gauguin's father lost his life during the voyage.

connotations cannot be discounted from this comical scene of seduction.[144] The juxtaposition of such a politically charged character with a woman dressed in regional costume accords with the opportunistic strategies of Boulanger, regarded by opponents as a dangerous, proto-Napoleonic dictator.

Neither can Ratapoil be disassociated from the degeneration discourse: historian Daniel Pick emphasizes correspondences between the declining biological capital of the French nation and France's failing military power.[145] Whilst not wishing to advance over-determined interpretations of Van Gogh's paintings, what I do want to signal is the permeability of these paintings to overlooked discourses and contexts at the moment of their production, the point in this case being that solicitation and opportunistic prostitution provided the model for encounters in all walks of contemporary life.

Brothel Scene (*Le Lupanar*)

Brothel Scene (*Le Lupanar*), has the distinction of being the only depiction of a brothel Van Gogh is known to have produced [fig. 53]. With his newfound willingness to paint *de tête*, this oil sketch was executed from memory, apparently following "excursions in the brothels" with Gauguin whilst painting at the Alyscamps.[146] Van Gogh considered this a '*pochade*,' less even

[144] Intended or not, there are intriguing similarities between Van Gogh's ill-matched couple and an iconographical tradition that flourished in France following the Prussian invasion of 1870 which represented the French nation as a homely provincial woman depicted as "a victim of aggression or rape" in an encounter with a German soldier. Robert A. Nye: *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 79.
[145] Pick, *Faces of Degeneration* (1989), 52. See also Thomson, *Troubled Republic* (2004), 7.
[146] Van Gogh to Gauguin and Bernard, circa 1 or 2 November 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 716; and Van Gogh to Theo, 10 November 1888, Ibid., letter no. 718.

than an *étude*, from which he planned to produce a finished *tableau*.[147] The title *Lupanar* signifies a designated brothel.[148] The title was not however given by the artist (who referred to the scene as a "*bordel*"), but by Jacob Baart de la Faille, who added the coda in his 1928 catalogue raisonné, along with the conflicting description, 'coffee room.'[149] This has led to some confusion, complicated by Hulsker's retitling of the same work as *Visitors in the Night Café*.[150]

More confusing still, in early October 1888 Van Gogh mentioned a brothel study he had begun, which he promised to send Bernard; for a long time this study was thought to be the brothel scene under current discussion. It has now been determined for reasons of chronology and size that the October study is unknown, and that *Brothel Scene (Le Lupanar)* must have been the sketch painted in November. What is remarkable about this confusion is that a

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[147] Van Gogh wrote "*j'ai fait une pochade de bordel et je compte bien faire un tableau de bordel*." [I've done a quick sketch of a brothel and I'm in fact planning to do a brothel painting]. Ibid. See also Druick & Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001),195. '*Pochade*' was a term the artist had used for the first time in August to describe his full-length self-portrait on the road to Tarascon laden with painting paraphernalia. See Van Gogh to Theo 13 August 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 660. On the artist's finely-tuned painting categories see Evert van Uitert, Louis van Tilborgh, Sjraar van Heugten, *Vincent van Gogh: Paintings* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1990), 199.

[148] The neologism '*lupanar*' (Latin 'den of she-wolves') was coined circa 1863 or 1864 following the excavation at Pompeii in 1861 of the *'gran lupanar'* or brothel - identified partly by its explicit depictions of sexual activities (thought to be a menu of services on offer). See Thomas A.J. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (University of Michigan Press, 2004), esp. chapter seven, 'The Great Pompeiian Brothel Gap.' McGinn comments that 'gran lupanar' was mentioned throughout the 1860s and 1870s in both specialist and popular literature on Pompeii. Thus it cannot have escaped the attention of Parisian artists interested in depictions of prostitution. The notoriety of Pompeii's *lupanar* gained mythical status with the inauguration in 1878 of the legendary brothel Le Charbonais (located near the Louvre) with its themed rooms, one of which is reputed to have replicated the Pompeii *lupanar*. The title therefore seems at odds with the tenor of the scene depicted in Van Gogh's painting, in which figures are fully clothed, and with the exception of the dancing couple, sit demurely on chairs. Although there is no specific mention of Pompeii in his letters, Van Gogh writes from Arles in March 1888 that he is glad not to have lived at the time of Nero - which era ended 11 years before Pompeii's destruction. In the next sentence Van Gogh mentions seeing the funny side of brothels (also Zouaves, absinthe drinkers, first communions and priests) in Arles. Van Gogh to Theo, Jansen et al., *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 588.

[149] Van Gogh to Bernard circa 5 October, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 698, note 6. Confirmation of *'Lupanar's'* first use in 1928: Robin Craren, Assistant Curator The Barnes Foundation, private email 10/04/18. See Jacob-Baart de la Faille, *L'Œuvre de Vincent van Gogh* Vol. I (Paris and Brussels: G. Van Oest, 1928), 136.

[150] Jan Hulsker, *The Complete Van Gogh: Paintings, Drawings, Sketches* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), 368.

depiction of a registered brothel could for so long be mistaken for a scene in a coffee house. As Charles Bernheimer has pointed out, the ambiguity dilemma usually *disappears* in representations of brothels.[151] The reverse is the case here; although we know the scene was supposed to represent a '*bordel*' there is very little that identifies it as such - or indeed, the figures as prostitutes, pimps and clients. The furniture is basic, and the prints on the wall not readily legible, although the one on the right appropriately suggests Titian's *Vénus d'Urbino*. Two men are identifiable from their caps as Zouave soldiers; however two *kepis* do not necessarily make a bordello. The dancing couple is depicted in intimate embrace, and the man seems to be inebriated, but a similar scene might be found in a dancehall. The tall glasses suggest the serving of absinthe and are comparable to the glass in Gauguin's night café [fig. 34]. One reliable sign, not immediately apparent, is that the third female figure from the left appears to be wearing long black gloves.[152]

If not the same venue as *The Night Café*, what type of establishment might be depicted in *Brothel Scene* (*Le Lupanar*)? Bakker has commented on its resonance with the description the artist gave of a brothel attended by some fifty Zouaves and civilians, which in his opinion resembled a village school.[153] Van Gogh's usual *habitué* was Maison de Tolérance number 1, situated in rue

[151] Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute* (1997), 166.
[152] Garagnon, 'Le quartier réservé,' (2007), 11.
[153] Van Gogh to Bernard April 19 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 599. Nienke Bakker, 'Maisons Closes' (2015), 128. On the conditions that existed in military brothels in the provinces, see Corbin, *Women for Hire* (1990), 59. Corbin remarks that establishments expecting large numbers of soldiers would issue numbered tickets and make the men line up. For a fictional account of military brothel life, see Edmund de Goncort's novel, *La Fille Elisa*, with which Van Gogh was familiar. Indeed Gauguin recollected that Van Gogh gave his last five francs to a passing prostitute because she reminded him of the fictional Elisa. Paul Gauguin, *Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin* (London and New York: Routledge, [1923] 2009), 24-25.

Bout d'Arles, a few moments' walk from Place Lamartine [fig. 54].[154] As he wrote to Theo, the proximity of the gardens of Place Lamartine to "the street of the good ladies" heightened the appeal of both.[155] Van Gogh associated the public gardens with Italian Renaissance poets such as Petrarch, who had lived in nearby Avignon, and Boccaccio, about whose dissolute life the artist had read. Thus the faded Renaissance ideal, in the artist's estimation, lent an appealingly romantic aura to the brothels of the Bout d'Arles. "But you realize," he wrote to Theo, "it is just this that gives a *je ne sais quoi* of Boccaccio to the place."[156] What then made such a brothel a modern subject?

Brothel Scene (*Le Lupanar*) has an air of propriety about it that one might not expect to find in a brothel; there is precious little flesh on display, no lascivious gestures; no exotic furniture. The red and green palette echoes the dissonant oppositions of *The Night Café*, but the combination is offset by the gay pastels of the women's dresses. In comparison with Bernard's brothel sketches sent in October, Van Gogh's offering seems exceedingly tame; even Bernard's less explicit sketches of communal salon areas remain legible as brothels [figs. 25 & 55]. As has been observed of Degas' brothel monotypes, the fact that they do not allow for sexual stimulation edges them towards

[154] The streets of the red light district in 1888 were, to the left of the gates: rue des Glacières; Impasse du Lampourda or the Gratte-Cul, Terrin Street; rue du Petit Puits; rue des Récollets (today rue d'Alembert); rue du Bout d'Arles (today rue des Ecoles) and rue du Rempart (today rue Paul Bert). To the right of the gates: rue Saint-Isidore and rue Vert. Garagnon, 'Le quartier réservé,' (2007), 7. Bernadette Murphy's research has shown that the brothels of Arles each housed on average five prostitutes, coincidentally the number of women shown in *Brothel Scene (Lupanar)*; and that the women's ages averaged a surprisingly old thirty years. Murphy, *Van Gogh's Ear* (2016), 59. We know from the artist's letters that his conjugal visits cost between 2 and 3 francs, equivalent to the tariff for a night in a basic hotel. It is not known what determined the discrepancy in price; pleasure and eroticism were not the objects of such establishments. In the opinion of contemporary journalist, Léo Taxil, in contrast to the specialist houses of Paris, "1 - 3 franc women knew only plain sex." Léo Taxil, *La Prostitution Contemporaine* (Paris: Libraire Populaire, 1884), quoted in Clayson, 'Avant-Garde and Pompier Images' (1983), 58.

[155] *'Mais tu comprends que juste cela donne un je ne sais quoi de Boccace à l'endroit*.' Van Gogh to Theo, 18 September 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 683.

[156] Ibid.

parody.[157] Linda Nochlin observes that the inversion of bourgeois family values was a particular obsession of late-nineteenth century culture, and was often treated with humour, as in Degas's *The Name Day of the Madam* [fig. 56].[158] Van Gogh's *pochade* might be considered among this sub-genre; the cheery brothel looks ironically less like a den of iniquity than the doom-laden night café.

Another view might be that the artist's Protestant upbringing precluded his entering into the spirit of Bernard's offerings; he certainly baulked at Bernard's most explicit sketch, *Lubricité* [fig. 36]. Anthea Callen has written on the substitution of vision for touch, and the synthesis of both in the artist's *touche*.[159] Such observations resonate with Van Gogh's heightened sensitivity to Bernard's explicit sketches, evidenced by his reticence to paint a brothel, and the fact that when he did so, he produced only a hastily painted *pochade*, the abbreviated facture of which corresponds to the brevity of sexual contact on offer in such an establishment.

To adopt such a perspective would however be to privilege the artist and his temperament as the sole cause of the artwork. While this has been a common enough orientation in Van Gogh studies, such a view would not only be retrograde but ahistorical, considering the explicitness of earlier depictions by the same artist from his earlier Paris period [figs 16; 17 & 18]. The artist observed that the brothels in Arles "lacked the spleen" of Parisian counterparts, and I propose it was the discrepancy between the north and the south that was emphasized here. *Brothel Scene* (*Le Lupanar*) can be perceived as a corrective to Bernard's imagined brothels; if Bernard paid homage to

[157] Norma Broude argues that Degas's monotypes offer an indictment of state regulation, since they parody the male clients as well as the women; and by extension, the whole of French society. Broude, 'The Young Spartans,' (1988): 651. See also Clayson, 'Avant-Garde and Pompier' (1983), 60-61.
[158] Nochlin also mentions the *Cardinal Family* stories by Degas's friend, Ludovic Halévy, for which Degas provided illustrations. Linda Nochlin, 'A House is Not a Home,' Kendall and Pollock, *Dealing with Degas* (1992), 43-65.
[159] Callen, *The Spectacular Body* (1995).

Maupassant's Normandy, this was a riposte from a Daudet novel, emphasizing the uniquely quotidian atmosphere of a Provençal military *maison*.

Such a perspective accords with the regulationist programme instigated in the 1870s to 'domesticate' sexual behaviour. Whereas Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet (1790 - 1836) had sought only to 'canalize' and sequester prostitution from mainstream society, regulationists sought to repress and 'tame' boisterous sexuality in the wake of the Commune, in an effort to curb unruly conduct.[160] The suppression of the pleasure principle, in Clayson's estimation, had led to much of "the panic over clandestine prostitution" from neo-regulationists fearful that indulgence in venal pleasures would undermine societal decorum.[161] Echoing a similar mentality, Van Gogh referred to his regular visits to the brothel as "hygienic;" whether with irony or not, is debatable, although he produced a parody himself in September in which he presented himself as a Japanese initiate, a "monk who visits the brothel once a fortnight" [fig. 57].[162]

My concern, however, is to steer analysis away from the biographical. By eliding the differences between the sequestered environment of the brothel and the provincial schoolroom, the mundane emphasis of *Brothel Scene (Le Lupanar)* underlines the inevitability of prostitution as prospective employment for working-class women at the time. A critique of this scene from both feminist and Marxist consciousness might observe that the banality of the situation reflected the prevailing sexual economy, and was commensurate with the social

[160] Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute* (1997), 209. For the canalization of prostitution, see Corbin, *Women for Hire*, pp.15, 28-9.
[161] Clayson, 'Avant-Garde and Pompier' (1983), pp. 45, 60.
[162] Van Gogh to Bernard, 26 June 1888, Jansen et al., *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 632. Van Gogh admitted to Theo he had "*slightly* slanted the eyes in the Japanese manner." *[...j'ai obliqué* un peu *les yeux à la japonaise*]. Van Gogh to Theo, 4 or 5 October 1888, ibid., letter no. 697.

production - or subversion, depending on whether one senses parody - of contemporary institutionalized ideologies.

How might this representation of prostitution relate to the *Courrier*/Legrand episode? As with Bernard's *Bordello* suite, the fact that it was a representation of prostitution in itself might be considered a statement of defiance - albeit necessarily an oblique one - made in opposition to an administration intent on repressing such images. This may have been the case had the sketch been developed, as the artist intended, into a full-blown *tableau* intended for public exhibition. As it stands, the undeveloped *pochade* might be perceived as a private response to Bernard's initiative; an act of solidarity with an imagined community of artists concerned to protect their artistic freedoms.

Chapter Four

Portrait of a Man (*M. Ginoux*)

The final painting previously associated with prostitution is *Portrait of a Man* (*M. Ginoux*) [fig. 58]. The identity of the sitter is not certain; prior to 1912 it was known as *Portrait of a Man*.[163] On acquiring the painting in 1912, Helene Kröller-Müller, who had made the purchase on the advice of art critic Bernard Berenson, described it "as example of his kind," the type characterized being "an actor, dramatic, large, fully participating in life, as imagined by Shakespeare, only more modern."[164] Hence the painting became known as *Portrait of an Actor*.[165] In 1989 Ronald Pickvance identified the sitter as Joseph-Michel Ginoux, proprietor of the Café de la Gare.[166] Although he gave no supporting evidence, this identification has been adopted by the Kröller-Müller Museum. If we accept this attribution, and the identification of the Café de la Gare as a *maison de passe*, then the sitter could legitimately be described as the keeper of an illegal brothel. Martin Gayford has however argued that the model bears little resemblance to the grey-haired figure standing beside the billiard table in *The Night Café*, and tentatively suggests a more likely candidate

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[163] "The stretcher bears a pre-1912 label from the Druet Gallery, which reads *Portrait d'homme*." Van Kooten et al., *Kröller-Müller Museum* (2003), 260.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Helene Kröller-Müller to Van Deventer, 1956, ibid.
[166] Pickvance writes, "*Il semble que le modéle soit Joseph-Michel Ginoux (1836-1902), le marie de l'Arlésienne que Gauguin et Van Gogh aient invité à poser à même temps*." [It seems that the model is Joseph-Michel Ginoux (1836-1902), the husband of l'Arlesienne that Gauguin and Van Gogh invited to pose at the same time]. Pickvance and Rouquette eds., *Van Gogh et Arles* (1989), 70.

for the portrait might be Arles brothel owner, Louis Farce, whose establishment was the subject of appraisal by Gauguin.[167]

As a symbolic portrait, it is not of course necessary to know the model's identity, only the type represented, but this, too, is disputed. In her survey of Van Gogh's symbolic portraits, Carol Zemel perceives a "troubled and troubling" representation of masculinity in this portrait.[168] The sitter's "haughty stare," marked by "distain and derision [is] all tenacious pride of place," and his "posturing [is] faintly ridiculous."[169] Enlisting support from Balzac's 1830 *Psychologie de la toilette*, Zemel asserts that the character of the sitter is revealed through the "dandified" wide lapelled suit and extravagantly knotted cravat. Identifying the knot from a contemporary fashion manual as "Byronic," Zemel argues that it functions in the picture like a displaced phallus to proclaim the model's "masculine success to the point of caricature."[170]

Although the Kröller-Müller Museum scholars concur that the sitter "appears to looks down his nose" at the artist (and presumably, at the viewer) in a "somewhat arrogant manner," they stop short of analysing the figure's character from his outfit, describing the black suit as "Sunday attire," and the cravat as "suavely-knotted."[171] There is clearly room for discussion here.

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[167] Gayford cites a semi-fictional story related by Gauguin in his 1896-8 manuscript, *Diverses Choses*, loosely based on factual events from his Arles sojourn, in which a brothel-owner referred to as 'Monsieur Louis' sat for a portrait. In support of this conclusion Gayford points to the reality of other events in Gauguin's narrative such as the arrival of a circus in Arles. Martin Gayford, 'Gauguin and a Brothel in Arles,' *Apollo* (2006): n.p. https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Gauguin+and+a+brothel+in+Arles%3A+Gauguin%27s+stay+in+Arles+with+Van+Gogh...-a0143337429 [accessed 28/05/18]. See also Martin Gayford, *The Yellow House: Van Gogh, Gauguin and Nine Turbulent Weeks in Arles*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 87. See also Victor Merlhès, *Paul Gauguin et Vincent van Gogh, 1887-1888. Lettres retrouvées, sources ignorées* (Paris: ARTE-Adrien Maeght, 1989), 205. See also Paul Gauguin, *The Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin* (London: Routledge, 1985),126. See also Murphy, *Van Gogh's Ear* (2016), 68.

[168] Zemel, (1997), 107.

[169] Ibid., 108.

[170] Ibid., 107.

[171] Toos van Kooten and Mieke Rijnders eds., *The Paintings of Vincent van Gogh in the collection of the Kröller-Müller Museum* (Otterlo, Netherlands: Kröller-Müller Museum, 2003), 260.

According to Corbin's research, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Parisian *souteneur* or brothel pimp, characterized as a "would-be lower-class dandy, or skillfull rogue," began to give up his notoriously flashy clothes and "dressed like anyone else."[172] The registered male brothel keeper on the other hand, "the very antithesis of procurers and pimps," typically sent his children to the best schools, and held a respectable position in society.[173] Zemel's analysis would cast the man in Van Gogh's portrait as a provincial *souteneur*, lagging somewhat behind the Parisian style, while the Kröller-Müller's analysis might place the model as a respectable registered brothel owner, of the type run, or at least aspired to, by Louis Farce.

Writing in 1970, Mark Roskill refrained from diagnosing the model's character from either the posture or costume, noting only a "stiff-necked" quality to the pose, which, allied to the painting's "angular, crackling contours," in Roskill's view distinguished this work as "the most formally capricious" of Van Gogh's symbolic portraits.[174] Druick and Zegers also concur that the figure looks "down his nose" at the artist, but in addition remark on the model's "thuggish appearance."[175] It should be noted that the "stiff-necked" trait was not an idiosyncratic invention of the artist; Gauguin also produced a portrait of the same model, presumably at the same sitting, which repeated "the peculiar angle of the head" [fig. 59].[176]

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[172] Corbin, *Women for Hire* (1990), 158.
[173] Ibid., 11.
[174] Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin, and the Impressionist Circle* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1970), 155.
[175] Druick and Zegers, *Studio of the South* (2001), 244.
[176] Ibid. A possible explanation for the awkward pose not hitherto considered, is suggested by a humorous remark made by Van Gogh in September 1888 about *locomotor ataxia*, a medical condition associated with tertiary syphilis. One of the symptoms of this affliction is drooping upper eyelids (*partial ptsosis*) which causes sufferers to hold their head back at a compensatory angle and wrinkle their foreheads, a disorder known as the *tabetic facies*. That Van Gogh was aware of *locomotor ataxia* and joked about it, might suggest he knew somebody with it. The symptoms were known and described in the nineteenth century. See Van Gogh to Theo 26 September 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 689.

If Van Gogh's painting can be read as a portrait of an illegal brothel owner, the artist's interest in the figure of the male procurer was not an isolated event. Writing to Bernard in October, Van Gogh mentioned a couple in "the night café" that had caught his attention: a prostitute and a pimp in the aftermath of a row, the pimp attempting to cajole the woman, who remained "superbly indifferent" to his advances.[177] Although it is not thought the artist depicted this incident, Roskill has remarked that his intention to do so was probably a response to "the challenge of Bernard's brothel subjects," and was "related to the drawing of figures around a table which Bernard had sent down."[178] Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov has convincingly identified this as a reference to Bernard's *Sketches of Prostitutes* [fig. 60].[179]

Hastily sketched on the back of a page depicting a streetwalker, these two drawings were Bernard's first to be annotated with satirical captions. Van Gogh admired these sketches because they contained "an idea;" given that he criticized their rough execution, it might be assumed that what he liked had something to do with their subversive stance and humorous juxtaposition of caption and image.[180] These drawings were received by 27-30 September, just days after the shocking conclusion of the *Courrier*/Legrand appeal. Their haste and topicality might therefore have contributed to their favourable reception by Van Gogh. The subsequent eleven sketches of Bernard's *Au Bordel* suite, received on 5 October, similarly contained combinations of conceptual drawing

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[177] "*Mais y venant une nuit j'ai surpris un petit groupe d'un maquereau et d'une putain qui se raccomodaient après une brouille. La femme faisait l'indifférente et la superbe, l'homme était calin*." Van Gogh to Bernard 5 October 1888, ibid., letter no. 698.

[178] Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin* (1970), 127

[179] Phillip Dennis Cate and Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, *Emile Bernard: Bordellos and Prostitutes in Turn-of-the Century French Art*, exhib. cat. (Rutgers, New Jersey: The Jane Vorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1988), 15.

[180] "... I find them done in a bit too much of a rush, and I like the two drawings of whores the most, but there's an idea in all of them." [*...je les trouve un peu trop faits à la hâte et j'aime le mieux les deux dessins du putains, d'ailleurs il y a une idee dans tous*]. Van Gogh to Bernard between 27 September and 1 October 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 690.

and comedic annotation, which, as noted by Welsh-Ovcharov, "borders on the caricatural."[181]

It should be noted that the motif of an argumentative pimp and prostitute had been tackled by Bernard in his 1887 'apprentice piece,' *The Hour of the Flesh*, in which the foregrounded protagonists square up to each other on seemingly equal terms [fig. 15].[182] Although not a representation of a couple arguing, the woman with red upswept red hair in Van Gogh's *Brothel Scene* (*Lupanar*) in my opinion conveys something of the *hauteur* of the prostitute in the artist's anecdote [fig. 61]. A figure with similar posture and upswept red hair can be found in *Arena at Arles*, an oil sketch produced around the same time as *Brothel Scene* (*Lupanar*) of the crowd gathered for a bullfight at the Roman amphitheatre [fig. 62]. Since the bullfighting season was long over by early December, it is thought that this experimental sketch was probably painted in response to Gauguin's encouragement to paint *de tête,* from memory and imagination. What is relevant here is that it contains several characters recognizable from other artworks connected with prostitution by Van Gogh, Bernard and Gauguin.

Roskill has identified the figure bottom left as a reprise of Bernard's sketch of a Parisian streetwalker, sent to Van Gogh in April [figs 63 and 64].[183] Pickvance, Druick and Zegers have noted that the standing female figure centre left (next to the woman under a red parasol) resembles Marie Ginoux, whilst immediately to her right, the seated figure of Augustine Roulin cradles baby Marcelle. Behind them the bearded silhouette of Joseph Roulin is "uncannily

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[181] Cate and Welsh-Ovcharov, *Bordellos and Prostitutes* (1988), 18.

[182] The main couple in the foreground does not represent a seduction, but "*une confrontation aux allures de défi entre un proxénète et une prostituée*" [a challenging confrontation between a pimp and a prostitute]. Dorothée Hansen, Fred Leeman, Rodolphe Rapetti, Valérie Sueur-Hermel and Marie-Paule Viale eds., *Émile Bernard 1868-1941*, exhib. cat. (Paris: Flammarion, 2015), 50.

[183] Roskill, (1970), 125. This sketch inaugurated Bernard's brothel series of 1888.

close," in Pickvance's estimation, to Gauguin's representation of the postmaster in his satirical version of *The Night Café*" [figs. 65 & 66].[184]

What has not been remarked is that the woman with red upswept hair in *Arena at Arles* resembles a figure in Van Gogh's *Brothel Scene (Lupanar*), or that the male figure holding her arm resembles the "peculiar" profile of Gauguin's portrait, *M. Ginoux* [figs. 59 & 67]. That the male figure profiled in the arena is portrayed in the company of a woman from the brothel scene, supports the association of Van Gogh's *Portrait of a Man* (*M. Ginoux*) with prostitution. It might further be observed that the model in the latter painting shares a distinctive facial feature with the male figure seated at the table in *Brothel Scene* [fig. 68]. Both have markedly crooked noses, albeit they incline in different directions.

The idiosyncratic twisting of the facial features in Van Gogh's *Portrait of a Man* (*M. Ginoux*) practically approaches Cubist distortion; combined with the jagged outline and searing expanse of green-yellow background of this picture, these formal attributes align with Roskill's term 'capricious.' Similar characteristics have been noted in one of Van Gogh's portraits of *Joseph Roulin*, also thought to be from early December [fig. 69]. The most schematic portrait painting of the Roulin series, this painting has been the focus of Thomson's detailed analysis of the transition to the caricatural idiom.[185] Observing formal affinities between this portrait and chromolithographic posters, which often gained their impact from simplified, lively outlines on backgrounds of unified colour, Thomson notes that the mass-produced poster was

[184] Pickvance, *Van Gogh in Arles* (1984), 139.
[185] Thomson, *Art of the Actual*, 199.

particularly suited to a representation of a man of the people, and bar room philosopher, in a style identified at the time as *l'art populaire*.[186]

The values of nineteenth-century poster culture might similarly be applied to an analysis of Van Gogh's *Portrait of a Man* (*M. Ginoux*). Mass-produced posters frequently portrayed female figures in a state of *dishabillé* and abandon, hence were associated with 'low life,' both in terms of content and audiences [fig. 70]. The critic Félix Fénéon memorably commented in 1888 that the poster artist Jules Chéret produced "masterpieces for rag-pickers."[187] The following year Joris Karl Huysmans wrote an essay on Chéret highlighting the mass-produced poster's 'low' and erotic appeal.[188] The appropriation of such 'street' values would be germane to *Portrait of a Man* (*M. Ginoux*), a depiction of a masculine type exuding crass sexuality and vulgarity, associated in a professional capacity with either legal or illegal brothels in Arles.

Portrait of a Man (*M. Ginoux*) aligns with the caricatural idiom not only in formal and iconological terms, but also in terms of parodic sensibility. This is a study of a man who looks imperiously down his nose at the viewer, but who clearly has little reason to do so. Neither young, nor attractive, nor amiable, nor kind, his twisted smirk, supercilious gaze and exaggerated cravat call attention to the sitter's misplaced masculine pride. In the style of a vulgar poster, the model advertises the insecurity of his sexuality, the hubris of his superiority, and his lack of ironic self-awareness of both; in short, he is depicted as the "faintly ridiculous" butt of a joke that he presumes himself to be the author of, and thus confirms this painting's status as a caricature *par excellence*. Considering the mass-produced poster's reputation as a morally corrupting influence in French

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[186] Ibid.
[187] Félix Fénéon, 'Calendrier d'octobre,' Revue indépendante, November 1888, in Fénéon, 1970 vol. 1, 122-3. Quoted in Thomson, *Art of the Actual*, 145.
[188] See Karen L. Carter, Joris Karl Huysmans, 'A Dénicheur of Jules Chéret's Posters,' *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 41 no. 1 and 2 (2012-13): 122 - 141.

society, by employing its values for a portrait of a dubious character decked out in his Sunday best, this painting lampoons not only the personality of the sitter, but also, by implication, the bankruptcy and inauthenticity of the Salon portrait.

This practically concludes the group of paintings from 1888 that have been connected by scholars with prostitution. It seems appropriate that *Arena at Arles* should be considered for inclusion in the group, given that prostitutes and pimps are known to have worked the crowds at public gatherings. Similar arguments might be extended to another painting produced *de tête* around the same time, *Dancehall at Arles*, which depicts the crowded Christmas dance at the Folies Arlésiennes [fig. 71].[189] In the absence of any recognizable characters connected with prostitution (only Augustine Roulin is identifiable) associations with prostitution might seem a stretch. However, just such an association does enjoy scholarly support: a footnote in Charles Bernheimer's study of nineteenth-century prostitution contends that both *Brothel Scene* (*Lupanar*) and *Dancehall at Arles* were produced in response to Bernard's *Au Bordel* series.[190]

Starry Night, Arles

One further candidate for inclusion that has not, to my knowledge, been connected with prostitution, is *Starry Night, Arles* [fig. 72]. Painted in September before Gauguin's arrival, it belongs to a group of nocturnes, which

[189] René Garagnon, 'Odeon, Van Gogh et Les Folies Arlésiennes,' *Bulletin des Amis du Vieil Arles* no. 90 (1995): 14-15. This venue was situated on the boulevard des Lices.
[190] Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute* (1997), 195 n. 62.

includes *The Café Terrace* and *The Poet* of 1888, and the iconic *Starry Night* of 1889. The subject of a starry sky had first been mooted to Bernard in April 1888, as a concept that might of necessity be worked from the imagination.[191] Ultimately *Starry Night, Arles* was painted *en plein air* beneath a gas street lamp, as a letter to his brother testifies.[192] Nonetheless, the myth has evolved that it was painted by the light of candles stuck on the artist's hat, testifying to the romantic allure of this work. Shortly after its production, the artist admitted that whenever he felt "a tremendous need for, shall I say the word - for religion" he went outside at night and painted the stars.[193] Hence this painting is often treated as a paean to the awe and transcendence of nature, and an expression of the artist's longing for the solace of companionship and spiritual consolation.

Much has been written of the artist's need for 'religion,' his changing concepts of it, and relationships to it. Art historians such as Pollock, Zemel and Kōdera have addressed the significance of nature as a substitute for religion - "the great book of nature" - and the potential and potency of art's "consolatory" function. What I am concerned with here is to elucidate the type of consolation that might be offered in this painting. In particular, I am interested in the

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[191] "A starry sky, for example - well that's a thing that I'd like to try to do, just as in the daytime I'll try to paint a green meadow studied with dandelions. But how to arrive at that unless I decide to work at home and from imagination?" [*Un ciel etoilé par example, tiens - c'est une chôse que je voudrais essayer à faire de même que le jour j'essayerai à peindre une verte prairie etoilée de pissenlits. Comment pourtant y arriver à moins de me résoudre à travailler chez moi et d'imagination*?']. Van Gogh to Bernard circa 12 April 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 596. See also Evert van Uitert, Louis van Tilborgh, Sjraar van Heugten, *Vincent van Gogh: Paintings*, exhib. cat. (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, 1990), 214.

[192] "Included herewith little croquis of a square no. 30 canvas - the starry sky at last, actually painted at night, under a gas-lamp." [*Ci inclus petit croquis d'une toile de 30 carrée - enfin le ciel etoilée peint la nuit même, sous un bec de gaz*]. Van Gogh to Theo circa 29 September 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 691.

[193] "That doesn't stop me from having a tremendous need for, shall I say the word - for religion - so I go outside at night and paint the stars, and I always dream of a painting like that, with a group of lively figures of friends." [*Cela n'empêche que j'ai un besoin terrible de, dirai je le mot - de religion - alors je vais la nuit dehors pour peindre les étoiles et je rêve toujours un tableau comme cela avec un groupe de figures vivantes des copains*]. Van Gogh to Theo circa 29 September 1888), ibid., letter no. 691.

diminutive figures in the foreground, described by Van Gogh as "lovers."[194] These are typically seen as a foil for the celestial spectacle, a humbling reminder of the insignificance of human existence relative to the boundless abstraction of the cosmos. The analysis of Naomi Margolis Maurer exemplifies such an assessment:

> *Starry Night, Arles conveys not only van Gogh's [...] belief in the transcendent power of love to solace us, but his conviction that our longing for love relates to our yearning for the eternal. The dark, melancholy expanses of water and night sky, with their haunting intimations of a vast, impersonal universe, are relieved and mitigated by the linked figures of the lovers, by the closely clustering boats with their implications of shared human enterprise, by the warmly gleaming lights that suggest the intimacy of home life, and, finally, by the constellation of the Great Bear itself.* [195]

The diminutive figures serve to "relieve" and "mitigate" the eternal and "impersonal" universe, and are interpreted in terms of the artist's own biographical situation. *Starry Night, Arles* undoubtedly reflects the yearning for the solace of friendship; Van Gogh sent a sketch of the painting to the artist Eugène Boch (1855 - 1941), with whom he had spent a several happy days in Arles at the beginning of September, and indeed painted Boch as *The Poet* with a starry sky behind his head [figs. 73 & 74]. In the sketch, the 'lovers' are given increased prominence in comparison with the figures in the finished painting.

What has not been sufficiently drawn out, in my opinion, is the discrepancy between natural and artificial sources of light in the painting. Indeed it was the light of the gas street lamps that the artist first mentioned when recommending this scene to Boch, as "... a study of the Rhône, of the

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[194] Van Gogh to Theo circa 29 September 1889, ibid., letter no. 691.
[195] Naomi Margolis Maurer, *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom: The thought and art of Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin* (London and New York: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 74.

town under gaslight and reflected in the blue river."[196] The letter describes the "harsh" reflections of the lamps' artificial light, repeated in a letter to Theo.[197] There may be an association to be made here with Frederik van Eeden's 1887 novel *Die Kleine Johannes*, which the artist had read by February 1888, predicated on a distinction between the true light of love and the false light of religion.[198] On an iconographical level, the motif of the street lamp was understood in the nineteenth century to signify prostitution, and the fact that the artist positioned himself beneath one whilst painting this picture, might suggest comparisons - and kinship - with late night "prowlers" and streetwalkers, rather than "the intimacy of home life," as Maurer supposes.

Neither has the iconology of the river itself been sufficiently addressed. On a personal level, such a riverside *milieu* had connotations with friendship. Immediately prior to describing the painting to Theo, Van Gogh mentioned "a corner of the quai de la Villette," from the opening lines of Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. In this story, a long-lasting, idiosyncratic friendship between the novel's male protagonists begins with a chance meeting by the "inky water of the Saint Martin canal."[199] Interestingly, the contemporary critic Félix Fénéon (1861 - 1944) did not subscribe to the romantic view so common today, but considered the figures in Van Gogh's painting "strangely sinister,"

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[196] "And lastly, a study of the Rhône, of the town under gaslight and reflected in the blue river. With the starry sky above - with the Great Bear - with a pink and green sparkle on the cobalt blue field of the night sky, while the light of the town and its harsh reflections are of red gold and a green tinged with bronze. Painted at night." [*Puis enfin une etude du Rhône, de la ville eclairée au gaz et se reflectant dans la rivière bleue. Avec le ciel etoilée dessus - avec le Grande Ourse - à scintillement rose et vert sur le champ blue de cobalt du ciel nocturne tandis que la lumiere de la ville et ses reflets brutals sont d'un or rouge et d'un vert bronzé. Peint la nuit*]. Letter to Eugène Boch 2 October 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 693.

[197] See Van Gogh to Theo, circa 29 September, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 691.

[198] For scholarly observations relating to Frederik van Eeden's book in 1888, see ibid., letter no. 579 n. 4; letter no. 626 n. 16, and letter no. 740 n. 5.

[199] "Lower down, the inky water of the Saint-Martin canal, closed between its two locks, lay spread out in a straight line." [*Plus bas, le canal Saint-Martin, fermé par les deux écluses, étalait en ligne droite son eau couleur d'encre*]. Gustave Flaubert, *Œuvres. L'education sentimentale. Trois contes. Bouvard et Pécuchet,* A Thibaudet and R. Dumesnil (Paris: 1952), 713. Quoted in Jansen et al, *The Letters*, letter no. 691 n. 8.

when reviewing its exposition at the Salon de la Société des indépendants in 1889:

> *Mr Van Gogh is a diverting colourist even in eccentricities like his Starry Night: on the sky, criss-crossed in coarse basketwork with a flat brush, cones of white, pink, and yellow stars have been applied straight from the tube, orange triangles are being swept away into the river, and near some moored boats some strangely sinister beings hasten by.*[200]

Such an assessment may depend on the male figure's face being significantly blank, while the woman's seems set grimly in the opposite direction from the celestial spectacle [fig. 75]. But it also refers to the sense of place; their proximity to the moored boats in such insalubrious surroundings begs the question what might their purpose be. Pleasure cruises now moor at the quay where *Starry Night, Arles* was painted [fig. 76]. But in 1888 this was a working quay where sand, coal and other materials essential for railway production were unloaded; two mounds of heaped material at the water's edge serve as reminders of the quay's daytime function. A depiction of the same quayside (sent to Bernard) of men unloading sand demonstrates how unprepossessing this location must have been [fig. 77].

A further sense of the characters that frequented this waterside can be gleaned from the artist's description of onlookers that gathered a short distance downriver near the Trinquetaille Bridge [fig. 78].

> *This afternoon I had a select audience..... of 4 or 5 pimps and a dozen kids who found it particularly*

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[200] "*M. Van Gogh est un amusant coloriste même dans des extravagances comme sa Nuit etoilée; sur le ciel, quadrillé un grossière sparterie par le brosse plate, les tubes ont directement posé des cônes de blanc, de rose, de jaune étoiles; des triangles d'orange s'engloutissent dans le fleuve, et, près de bateaux amarrés, des êtres baroquement sinistres se hâtent*." Félix Fénéon, *La Vogue*, September 1889, in *Fénéon, Œuvres plus que complètes* vol. I, Joan U. Halperin ed. (Geneva and Paris: Droz, 1970), 168.

> *interesting to watch the colours come out of the tubes. Ah, well, that sort of audience — that's fame, or rather, I have the firm intention of thumbing my nose at ambition and fame, like these kids and these ruffians from the banks of the Rhône and rue du Bout d'Arles.*[201]

If "pimps" and "ruffians" frequented the riverbank during daylight hours, the situation is unlikely to have been very much different a few hundred meters upstream, closer still to the brothel district at Porte de la Cavalarie. Pickvance has observed that a sketch of the Trinquetaille painting sent to Bernard "must have reminded Bernard of the quays, bridges and yachts of the Seine at Asnières and Clichy, where he and van Gogh had spent time together in 1887."[202] While Impressionist painters at these locations had been drawn to images of bourgeois leisure, Bernard had preferred to paint unprepossessing couples in distinctly un-picturesque waterside settings [figs. 79 & 80]. Imagine *Starry Night, Arles* without the stars, and the effect would not be dissimilar.

The "lovers" in *Starry Night, Arles* have a counterpart in a fragment of a painting from 1888 of a couple walking alongside the Arles-Bouc canal [fig. 81]. Produced soon after the artist's arrival at Arles, the painting portrayed "sailors" and their "lovers" ('*amoureuses*') returning to town by the canal at sunset.[203] Rendered in glowing colours that the artist likened to stained glass, the vivid red dress complemented by aqua blue-green water, suggests the dual carnal and

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[201] "*Cet après midi j'ai eu un public choisi..... de 4 ou 5 maquereaux et une douzaine de gamins qui trouvaient surtout interessant de voir la couleur sortir des tubes. Eh bien ce public-là – c'est la gloire ou plutôt j'ai la ferme intention de me moquer de l'ambition et de la gloire comme de ces gamins-là et de ces voyous des bords du Rhône et de la Rue du Bout d'Arles*." Van Gogh to Theo, 18 Sept 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 683.

[202] Pickvance, *Van Gogh in Arles* (1984), 137.

[203] '*Amoureuses*' has been translated as the somewhat anodyne 'sweethearts. "... *des matelots qui remontent avec leurs amoureuses vers la ville...*" Van Gogh to Bernard, 18 March 1888, ibid., letter no. 587.

spiritual nature of their coupling.[204] Had it survived, the painting would certainly have warranted inclusion in the proposed 1888 prostitution group. Although the painting was "worked to death" in the studio and destroyed by the artist, this fragment was saved, and a sketch of the painting was sent to Bernard, perhaps signifying the artist's continued interest in the theme of unregulated prostitution [fig. 82].[205]

There is a further iconological association that has been overlooked regarding this image, equally applicable to *Starry Night, Arles.* Depictions of riverbanks and bridges were associated in the Victorian consciousness with the shame of sexual promiscuity; throwing oneself into the river being the standard end for 'the fallen woman' in the naturalist art of the period. Popular examples of this genre were *Found Drowned*, 1850, by George Frederick Watts' (1817 - 1904), and *Found*, 1854, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882), based on Thomas Hood's 1844 poem, *The Bridge of Sighs* [figs. 83 & 84]. Foreboding bridges feature in the backgrounds of both paintings. Although this tradition was associated with English rather than French art, as a former gallery assistant in London, and an avid collector of English prints, Van Gogh would have been familiar with the genre, and as a former pastor, well versed in its moralistic themes.

The woman depicted in *Starry Night, Arles* may be flouting respectability by strolling after dark with a (significantly faceless) man in insalubrious surroundings, and may have been hiring out her body as an instrument of commercial exchange within the capitalist economy, in much the same way that

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[204] Van Gogh wrote, " *Je voulais arriver à y mettre des couleurs comme dans les vitraux et un dessin à lignes fermes."* [My aim was to give it colours like stained glass, and a design of solid outlines]. Van Gogh to Theo circa 21 March 1888, ibid., letter no. 588.

[205] Letter to Theo circa 25 March 1888, Ibid., letter no. 589. The fragment sold for over $7m in 2013. Sotheby's, New York, 7 May 2013, lot 59 (F544). Martin Bailey, *Studio of the South: Van Gogh in Provence* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2016), 74.

male labourers shovel sand at the same spot during daylight hours. Yet this woman has evidently reached middle age without feeling compelled to throw herself in the river. By reversing popular expectations of 'the fallen woman,' set in a location traditionally associated with shameful suicide, I propose this painting would have functioned at the time as a corrective to the pictorial convention of the suicidal prostitute. Whereas the miniscule star high in the sky above the body in *Found Drowned* might offer the pious hope of posthumous redemption, the riotous constellation emblazoned above Van Gogh's "lovers" - very much alive, with their backs resolutely turned to the inky water and the distant bridge - evoke a more tolerant and forgiving sense of morality. This experimental painting in my view reworks "the image of the prostitute as a wretched outcast, ravaged by feelings of remorse and shame,"[206] and offers instead a positive image of the casual prostitute as an ordinary working woman, blessed rather than condemned by the heavens above.

Such a reframing aligns this image with ideas of *l'art consolante* and of nature as a substitute for religion, as scholars have discussed it in relation to Van Gogh's *œuvre*. Similar observations might be made of the now-destroyed painting of lovers walking by the canal, a painting that appropriates the vivid, glowing colours of stained glass for a 'harlot's' attire, and substitutes a huge, benevolent, radiant sun as a signifier of divinity. It could be concluded that this painting provided the germ of the idea for *Starry Night, Arles*. If this painting imagined a bold alternative to outworn moralities concerning feminine sexuality, it does not seem irrelevant that its production, some five months after first being envisaged, coincided at the end of September with the fact of the

[206] Lynn Nead, 'The Magdalen in Modern times: The mythology of the fallen woman in Pre-Raphaelite painting,' *Oxford Art Journal*, 7, no. 1 (1984): 32.

Courrier/Legrand retrial, which revivified debates concerning the place of prostitution in society, and the status of its visual representations in art.[207]

The Appeal

If Van Gogh's paintings on the theme of prostitution in 1888 were, as I have argued, responses to Bernard's interventions, it follows that Van Gogh's engagement with the topic was at least indirectly motivated by the controversy. But a case might also be made for a more direct response. In a letter to Bernard of mid-September, Van Gogh re-stated his intention to paint a brothel, and imagined that he and Bernard might one day enjoy a beer whilst painting in the brothels of Arles.[208] This was written during the week following the announcement of the appeal, at a time when consternation was being registered in the press.[209] It ought to be of no small consequence to Van Gogh scholarship that the artist enthused about painting in brothels at the very moment the government controversially renewed its intent to censor such images.

The following week, three days after the verdicts were overturned and custodial sentences announced, Van Gogh admired the first two drawings sent

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[207] *Starry Night, Arles* was painted by 29 September. Van Gogh to Theo 29 September 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 691.

[208] Van Gogh to Bernard circa 19 - 25 September 1888, ibid., letter no. 684.

[209] The appeal was announced on 17 September 1888 for 24 September. In a letter written to Bernard between 19 September and 25 September 1888, Van Gogh wrote, "... I myself, I say, haven't yet been able to do a brothel as such, *precisely because it would cost me more money than I'm forced to have, to do it reasonably well and seriously*." Italics in original. [*.... mois dit je - je n'ai pas encore pu faire un bordel proprement dit justement à cause de ce que cela me coûterait plus d'argent que je n'en aie nécessairement pour le faire un peu bien et sériousement*]. Letter to Bernard circa 19 - 25 September, 1888, ibid., letter no. 684.

by Bernard annotated in the manner of satirical caricatures.[210] By then, the tone of press comment had lost much of its earlier light-hearted banter.[211] "Stop!" began a 1300 word polemic in *Gil Blas* on 27 September, "The laughing is over." Ferrouillat no longer appeared risible, but "culpable."[212] Legrand, conversely, was "an honest man"[213] who had been falsely made out to be a pornographer.[214] Summoning the rhetoric of Don Quixote, the article ended with a rallying cry to artists of all stripes, to "resurrect Cabrion" - Eugène Sue's well-known character, an insolent art student - and to "challenge a 'rapin' to Ferrouillat" - a *rapin* denoting an amateur 'dauber' or art student.

> *Come, let us experience joyful French cheer, painters of histories or of buildings, daubers of both banks, who will resurrect Cabrion, who will play the most beautiful prank on the minister, who will challenge a 'rapin' to Ferrouillat?* [215]

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[210] The retrial took place on 24 September 1888. Bernard sent the two sketches between 27 September and October 1. See Van Gogh to Bernard circa 27 September - 1 October, Ibid., letter no. 690. See also letter of 19 - 25 September, ibid., letter no. 684, in which Van Gogh announced he had painted *Night Café*, which he insisted did not depict a brothel.

[211] A condemnation of the appeal was published on the front page of Van Gogh's daily newspaper, *L'Intransigeant*, on 28 September 1888. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k777707v/f1.item.r=Courrier.zoom [accessed 20/07/18].

[212] "*Halte-là! C'est fini de rire. On ne blague plus un vieux qui porte la main sur une robe de vierge, et M. Ferrouillat, arrachant à la Pensée ses voiles pour l'accuser ensuite d'obscénité, ne nous paraît plus comique, mais coupable, plus ridicule, mais odieux*." 'Conspuons Ferrouillat,' *Gil Blas*, 27 September 1888: 1. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7522694x.item [accessed 20/07/18]

[213] "*... tout ce que j'en sais c'est que c'est un honnête homme et un merveilleux artiste. Cela me suffit; je n'ai pas besoin d'en connaître davantage*." [...all I know is that he is an honest man and a wonderful artist; it's enough for me, I do not need to know more]. Ibid.

[214] "*Comment, de cet honnête garçon, vous faites un pornographe; de cet artiste consciencieux, en faiseur d'imagerie obscène*!" [How of this honest boy, you make a pornographer; from this conscientious artist, an obscene image maker!]. Ibid. The phrase *'honnête homme'* was not without political connotations, denoting the secular, progressive principles of the French Constitution, and hence aligning with the original spirit of Republicanism. Jules Michelet had used the phrase in his *Histoire de la Révolution française,* vol 1, when referring to the compilers of the French Constitution; Van Gogh knew the phrase well and had cited Michelet's use of it ten years previously, when agonizing over his religious calling. Van Gogh to Theo, 3 April 1878, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 143.

[215] "*Allons, la belle gaité français, les peintres en histoires ou en baîtement, les barbouillers de deux rives, qui va ressusciter Carbion, qui va faire la plus belle niche au ministre, qui va poser un "rapin" à Ferrouillat?*" *Gil Blas*, 27 September 1888: 1.

This appeal ended a selection of editorial comment from thirteen national newspapers, reprinted in the 30 September issue of the *Courrier Français*.[216] The neologism '*rapin*' suited the marginalized status of the vanguard artist; it was a characterization Gauguin certainly identified with, since he later wrote his memoires under the title *Racontars de Rapin*.[217]

Less than a week later, Van Gogh received Bernard's *Au Bordel* drawings, hastily drawn and satirically annotated in the manner of press caricatures, which pleased Van Gogh because they contained "an idea."[218] What this idea may have concerned may now be speculated upon with some justification, given that this was the moment that Van Gogh related to Bernard the anecdote of the haughty prostitute and the cajoling pimp, and - six months after having promised to do so - produced his first study of a brothel, which he offered Bernard.[219] Enthused by Bernard's confrontational depictions of brothel life annotated with captions couched in street slang, it seems that Van Gogh embraced the challenge to depict what had been proscribed.

Thomson's thesis neglects to pursue the censorship of Legrand's *Prostitution* as a factor contributing to the attraction of prostitution for vanguard art, despite the fact that such "moments of modernist negation,"[220] harmonize

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[216] Editorial comment was reprinted from *L'Intransigeant, Gil Blas, La Paix, La Liberté, Paris, La Cocarde, Cri du Peuple, Petit République, Le Voltaire, Petit Moniteur, Petit Caporal, La Lanterne*, and *La Justice.* 'L'Opinion de la Press,' *Le Courrier Français*, 30 September 1888: pp. 2, 3, 4. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1069352c/f2.item [accessed 20/07/18].

[217] Paul Gauguin, 'Racontars de Rapin' was published posthumously in *Avant et Après*, in 1951.

[218] The verdicts, announced on 25 September, were widely reported in the press by 28 September; Van Gogh received the *Au Bordel* suite by 4 or 5 October. See letter from Van Gogh to Theo of 4 or 5 October, Ibid., letter no. 697. Nienke Bakker remarks that Bernard's captions in *Au Bordel* are "analogous to the prints in illustrated papers." Bakker, 'Maisons Closes,' (2015), 109.

[219] This study is now lost. Letter to Bernard circa 5 October 1888, Jansen et al, *The Letters* (2009), letter no. 698.

[220] Crow, 'Modernism and Mass Culture,' *The Vancouver Conference Papers* (2004), 244. On negation as a principle of modernism see also Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984).

with the thesis advanced by Thomson himself in *Art of the Actual*.[221] The transition of the caricatural idiom from press to vanguard art undoubtedly owes much to the social and cultural conditions outlined by Thomson; what I propose was new in 1888 was the urgency for marginalized artists to adopt a confrontational mentality, emphasized from within the press itself. Also implicit in such a call to arms was the allure of contemporaneity: the eliding of old, outmoded boundaries between art and life.

[221] See Thomson, *Art of the Actual* (2012), esp. 143-184, 185-208, and 239-274. Although three of Gabriel Weisberg's publications are included in the bibliography of Thomson's volume, Weisberg's paper on the Legrand trial is conspicuously absent.

Conclusion

I have argued that prostitution can be perceived as a distinct and topical thematic unity in Van Gogh's output of 1888. Each artwork addresses a different facet of the contemporary sex trade, conditioned by the lived experience of a bourgeois Dutch national encountering working-class prostitution in a faded southern French provincial town, at a specific historical moment. What unifies these images in terms of subject transcends their simple identification with prostitution, be it regulated or clandestine; their hegemony resides rather in the sense of banality associated with the persons and the locations represented. Prostitute or pimp, brothel or *maison de passe*, lovers' lane or towpath, it is the sheer normativity and ubiquity of prostitution that unifies these paintings, defines them as a small but distinct group - and has paradoxically prevented their recognition as depictions of prostitution.

The group has expanded in proportion to my appreciation of clandestine and regulated prostitution as it was practiced in late nineteenth-century Provence. A maximum of fourteen artworks from 1888 can be associated with prostitution. In chronological order, these are: the destroyed *Bridge at Langlois*; the two *Zouave* portraits; *The Night Café*; *Starry Night, Arles*; *The Lover* (*Lt. Milliet*); the four *Alyscamps* paintings; *Brothel Scene* (*Lupanar*); *Portrait of a Man* (*M. Ginoux*); *Arena at Arles*, and *Dancehall at Arles*.

These artworks represent nine per cent of the artist's total output produced in Arles in 1888; a modest, but not insignificant proportion of this exceptionally productive year.[222] Some of these attributions are more tentative than others, but if a conservative taxonomy of only six works can be securely identified with prostitution, either from the artist's letters or in the scholarship - the two *Zouave* portraits; *The Night Café*; the later two *Alyscamps* paintings and *Brothel Scene (Lupanar)* - these paintings still evidence a significant level of engagement with prostitution at this time, something that hitherto has not been specifically addressed in the Van Gogh scholarship. Whatever interpretation might be afforded these paintings is intensified by the fact they also represent the termination of the artist's interest in prostitution as a topic for art, since he would not return to the theme again after December 1888.[223]

It is the contention of this paper that the watershed year of 1890 should be revised. Thomson himself concedes that the anti-naturalist ideas announced by Maurice Denis in his 1890 *Definition du Néo-Traditionnisme* were by that date "by no means as revolutionary as one might think."[224] I propose an earlier date of 1888, not only because of the type of art produced in that year by Van Gogh and his compatriots, but also because the government's persecution of the *Courrier Français* provided the necessary stonewall against which artists of the avant-garde were able to react. The overlooked aspect is that prostitution was proscribed as a subject for visual representation in 1888,

[222] The percentage is based on a total of 155 paintings produced at Arles between February and December 1888. For the total number of paintings in 1888, see http://www.vggallery.com/painting/by_period /arles.htm [accessed 27/05/18].
[223] That Van Gogh did not return to the topic has been noted by Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, who clearly associates this fact with the artist's presentation of his severed ear to a woman working at brothel No. 1. Cate and Welsh-Ovcharov, *Bordellos and Prostitutes* (1988), 20.
[224] Richard and Belinda Thomson, 'Maurice Denis's "Definition du Néo-Traditionnisme," and Anti-Naturalism,' (1890), *Burlington Magazine* 154 (2012): 263. The text continues, "In fact, by 1890, they were quite commonplace in art criticism." The anti-naturalist practices referred to by Denis focus on distortion (*déformation*) and synthesis (*synthèse*).

making it an attractive motif for vanguard artists seeking to explore or emphasize their marginalized status.

Whether one agrees with the proposed finessing and nuancing of Thomson's timeline, these explorations at the margins of Van Gogh studies have produced some unexpected results, including the making strange of some extremely familiar paintings. In the case of *Starry Night, Arles*, for example, activating the contexts of prostitution allows new sense to be made of Fénéon's otherwise perplexing comment about the figures. *The Night Café*, also, assumes a more marginalized aspect in light of the controversy, than has hitherto been allowed. *Arena at Arles*, *Bridge at Langlois* and *Brothel Scene* (*Le Lupanar*) would have made significant interventions on the topical theme of prostitution, had these been realized as finished '*tableaux*.' There is, I believe, sufficient material for a more comprehensive study to be made of prostitution as a motif within Van Gogh's practice from 1882 to 1888, something that might profitably be approached from classed and gendered perspectives.

APPENDIX

Of the 19 letters Van Gogh sent to Bernard in 1888, the following mention prostitution or brothels:

Letter no. 587, 18 March:
Mentions *Bridge at Langlois* as a depiction of sailors with their lovers [destroyed]

[Letter no. 596, 12 April - no mention]

Letter no. 599, 19 April:
Comments favourably on Bernard's sonnets about prostitution.
Describes a brothel he saw with fifty soldiers and civilians, 'like a village school.'

Letter no. 612, May 22:
Writes that 'the women of our boulevard — le petit — usually sleep *alone* at night.'
Comments favourably on the drawing of a streetwalker in the letter before last.

[Letter no. 622, June 7 - no mention]

Letter no. 626, June 19:
Expresses a desire to see the study Bernard did at the brothel.
Has been reading Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*, about a commodified relationship between a Frenchman and a geisha.

Letter no. 632, June 26:
Has been painting the *Zouave* portrait.
Advises Bernard to practice sexual continence: to 'live like a monk who goes to the brothel once a fortnight'
Comments favourably on Bernard's latest poems but observes that the 'moral purpose isn't clear.'

Letter no. 633, June 27:
Has sent Bernard's *Brothel Scene* to Theo, and offers *Head of Zouave* in exchange.
Proposes *Zouave* 'as a character type' in a hypothetical collaborative brothel project.
Responds to Bernard's brothel studies and sonnets on prostitution.
Criticizes Bernard's moralizing; advises analyzing society instead of moralizing.
Discusses the metaphor of a prostitute as meat for sale.

Letter no. 641, July 15:
Sends *Head of a Zouave.*

[Letter no. 643, July 20 - no mention]

Letter no. 649, July 29:
Bernard has sent ten drawings.

Comments favourably on one in which a prostitute is depicted washing her genitals.

Letter no. 651, 30 July:
Criticizes one of Bernard's drawings, *Lubricity*, which depicts a naked woman upside down beneath a tree.

Letter no. 655, August 5:
Compares artists to prostitutes.
'Being exiled, a social outcast, as you and I as artists surely are, 'outcasts' too, she is surely therefore our friend and sister.'
[The preceding and following paragraphs also mention prostitution]
Advises that if Bernard practiced sexual continence his paintings would be all the more 'spermatic.'

[Letter no. 665, 21 August - no mention]

Letter no. 684 circa 19 - 25 September:
Advises Bernard to wait until he is in uniform so he can paint in the brothels free of charge.
Informs Bernard he has just done a study of a night café.
Encourages Bernard to come to Arles with the express purpose of painting in the brothels free of charge.

Letter no. 690, circa 27 September -1 October:
Has received the first annotated drawings from Bernard; finds an 'idea in all of them' despite 'being done in a bit too much of a rush.'
Particularly likes 'the two drawings of whores the most.'
Admonishes Bernard for wanting to go to the brothel, without giving 'a damn about all the rest' [ie. building up his blood and saving himself for art].

Letter no. 696, 3 October:
Bernard has apparently asked for a repetition of *The Night Café*, but Van Gogh says he can’t send one yet because it hasn’t even been started, but is very willing to do one. [No repetition was ever made.]

Letter no. 698, 5 October:
Congratulates Bernard enthusiastically on the *Au Bordel* suite as "something altogether new and interesting."
Especially likes the depiction of a prostitute washing, and another who boasts about dealing with men's sexual requirements.
Criticizes the rest for lack of proper form, and prefers the accompanying poem to some of the figures.
Discusses again working in brothels free of charge.
Denies vehemently that *The Night Café* represents a brothel, claims it is a place where prowlers spend the night and a prostitute might go with her fellow.
Relates the anecdote about the haughty prostitute and cajoling pimp.
Has started to paint the scene from memory and will send it to Bernard when dry.

Letter no. 716, 1 or 2 November [written with Gauguin]:

He and Gauguin have 'made some excursions in the brothels, and it’s likely that we’ll eventually go there often to work.'
Briefly describes Gauguin's *Night Café* as a reprise of his own painting, but 'with figures seen in the brothels.'
Expresses the hope that he will 'soon get down to doing brothels.'

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1
Vincent van Gogh
Portrait of a Prostitute F 207a/JH 1204
Antwerp December 1885
oil on canvas
46 x 38 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig. 2
Vincent van Gogh
Head of a Prostitute F 206/JH 972
Antwerp December 1885
oil on canvas
35.2 x 24.4cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig. 3
Vincent van Gogh
In the Café: Agostina Segatori in Le Tambourin
Paris January - March 1887
oil on canvas
55.5. x 47 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Artstor

Fig. 4
Louis Legrand
Prostitution
Le Courrier Français, June 24 1888
Source: Gallica.bnf.fr Bibliothéque Nationale de France Bibliothéque Nationale de France

Fig. 5
Paul Cézanne
A Modern Olympia
1873-1874
oil on canvas
46 x 55 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Source: Artstor

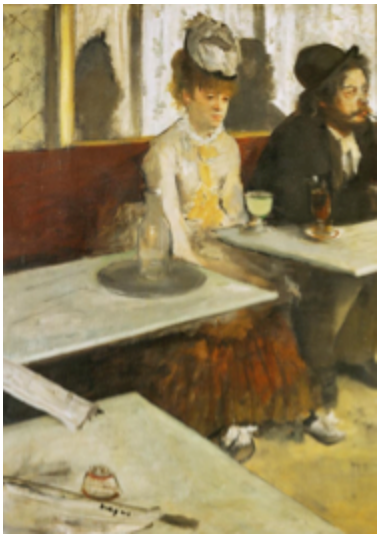

Fig. 6
Edgar Degas
L'Absinthe
1876
oil on canvas
92 x 68.5 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Source: Artstor

Fig. 7
Edouard Manet
Nana
1877
oil on canvas
154 x 115 cm
Kunsthalle, Hamburg
Source: Artstor

Fig. 8
Henri Gervex
Rolla
1878
oil on canvas
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Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Source: d'Orsay

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Edgar Degas
Women on a café terrace
1877
pastel over monotype in black ink on heavy cream-coloured laid paper
41 x 60 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Source: Artstor

Fig. 10
Edgar Degas
The Client
1879
monotype print on white paper
22 x 16.4 cm
Musée Picasso, Paris
Source: Artstor

Fig. 11
Félicien Rops
Le Douche Perineale
c. 1878-81
gouache on tempera, pencil and chalk
21.5 x 14.6 cm
Musée Provincial Félicien Rops, Namur, Belgium
Source: Musée Provincial Félicien Rops

Fig. 12
Eduoard Manet
A Bar at the Folies Bergère
1882
oil on canvas
96 x 134.1 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London
Source: Artstor

Fig. 13
Jean le Forain
The Public Garden
c.1884
oil on canvas
54.9 x 45.7 cm
private collection
Source: Wikimedia

Fig. 14
Auguste Renoir
Les Parapluies
c. 1882-3
oil on canvas
178 x 113 cm
The National Gallery, London
Source: Artstor

Fig. 15
Émile Bernard
The Hour of the Flesh
1885-86
pastel and gouache on wrapping paper mounted on linen
125 x 170 cm
private collection
Source: Dorothée Hansen et al., *Emile Bernard, Am Pulse der Moderne, Kunsthalle Bremen,* exhib. cat. (Bremen: Hauschild, 1998), 51.

Fig. 16
Vincent van Gogh
Study for Reclining Nude
Paris January - June 1887
pencil on wove paper
24.0 x 31.6 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig: 17
Vincent van Gogh
Reclining Nude
Paris January - March 1887
oil on canvas
59.7 x 73.7 cm
Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania
Source: Barnes Foundation; Image © 2018 The Barnes Foundation

Fig 18
Vincent van Gogh
Reclining Female Nude
Paris 1887
oil on canvas
9.5 x 16.5 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo
Source: Artsor

Fig. 19
Émile Bernard
Two Prostitutes at a Table
1888
brush and ink and watercolour on paper
40.5 x 26.4 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Annotated: *'Y en a pas deux comme mois pour travailler un homme'* [There's no two like me who can work a man]
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig. 20
Émile Bernard
A Prostitute Washing Herself
1888
reed pen and ink and watercolour on paper
40.5 x 26.4 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Annotated *'Y faut finir par où l'on commence'* [You have to finish where you begin]
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig. 21
Louis Anquetin
Woman at the Champs-Elysées by Night
1890-91
oil on canvas
83.2 x 100 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
Source: Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Fig. 22
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
Rue des Moulins
1894
oil on cardboard on wood
83.5 x 61.4
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Source: Artstor

Fig. 23
Pablo Picasso
Les Demoiselles d'Avignon
1906-7
oil on canvas
244 x 234 cm
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Source: France Archives Portail National des Archives

Fig. 24
Maurice de Vlaminck
Sur le zinc (*At the Bar*)
1900
40 x 32 cm
oil on canvas
Musée Calvet, Avignon
Source: Musée Calvet, Avignon

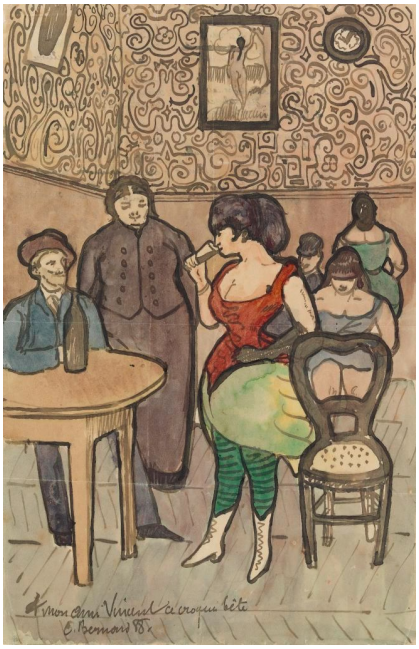


Fig. 25
Émile Bernard
Brothel Scene
1888
reed pen and brush, ink and watercolour on paper
30.8 x 20 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum.

Fig. 26
Vincent van Gogh
The Zouave F 1482 /JH 1487
June 1888
reed pen and brown ink, wax crayon and watercolour over graphite, wove paper
31.5 x 23.6 cm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 27
Vincent van Gogh
Zouave F 423/JH 1486
June 1888
oil on canvas
64.5 x 53.34 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Artstor

Fig. 28
Vincent van Gogh
Zouave F 424/JH 1488
September 1888
oil on canvas
80 x 60 cm
private collection, Argentina
Source: Artstor

Fig. 29
Paulus Potter
The Piebald Horse
1653
oil on wood
30.5 x 41 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris
Source: Artstor

Fig. 30
Vincent van Gogh
The Lover (Portrait of Lieutenant Milliet)
September - October 1888
oil on canvas
60 x 49 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands
Source: Kröller-Müller Museum

Fig. 31
Atelier Nadar
19th century
Général Boulanger
demo print on albumen paper, after negative on glass
14.5 x 10.5 cm
Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, FT 4-NA-238 (15). Album de référence de l'Atelier Nadar. Vol. 29.
Source: Gallica.bnf.fr

Fig. 32
Vincent van Gogh
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
July 1888
oil on canvas
81.3 x 65.4 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Source: Artstor

Fig. 33
Vincent van Gogh
Café de Nuit (The Night Café)
Arles September 1888
oil on canvas
72.4 x 92.1 cm
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven
Source: Artstor

Fig. 34
Paul Gauguin
Night Café at Arles Mme. Ginoux
Arles mid October - December 1888
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Pushkin Museum, Moscow
Source: Artstor

Fig. 35
Vincent van Gogh
The Potato Eaters
1885
oil on canvas
82 x 114cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Artstor

Fig. 36
Émile Bernard
Lubricité,
1888
pen and ink on paper
30.9 x 20.3
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig. 37
Émile Bernard
Women Bathing
1888
reed pen and ink and watercolour on paper
30.9 x 20.6 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig. 38
Émile Bernard
Female Nude Seated on a Bed
1888
reed pen and ink on paper
31 x 20 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Artstor

Fig. 39
Émile Bernard
Woman Washing Herself
1888
reed pen and ink and watercolour on paper
31 x 20 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig. 40
Émile Bernard
Female Nude Reclining on a Bed
1888
reed pen and brush, ink and watercolour on paper
20.2 x 31 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Artstor

Fig. 41
Henri de Toulouse Lautrec
Au Cirque Fernando
1888
oil on canvas
99 cm x 198 cm
Art Institute, Chicago
Source: Artstor

Fig. 42
Vincent van Gogh
Allée des Tombeaux (Les Alyscamps) F 569/JH 1622
Arles November - December 1888
oil on canvas
89 x 72 cm
Collection Basil P. and Elise Goulandris, Laussane, Switzerland
Source: Artstor

Fig. 43
Vincent van Gogh
Les Alyscamps F 569/JH 1623
1888
oil on canvas
92 x 73.5cm
private collection
Source: Sotheby's, New York

Fig. 44
Vincent van Gogh
Falling Autumn Leaves F 487/JH 1621
1888
oil on jute
72 x 91 cm
private collection
Source: Wikipedia

Fig. 45
Vincent van Gogh
Falling Autumn Leaves, Les Alsycamps F 486/JH 1620
1888
oil on jute
72 x 92 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands
Source: Artstor

Fig. 46 (detail of fig. 43)
Vincent van Gogh
Les Alyscamps F 569/JH 1623

Fig. 47
Jean Peru
Vénus d'Arles after Praxiteles
Plaster cast of first restoration
17th century
Source: http://liviaaugustae.eklablog.fr/la-venus-d-arles-a102308327 [accessed 05/03/18]

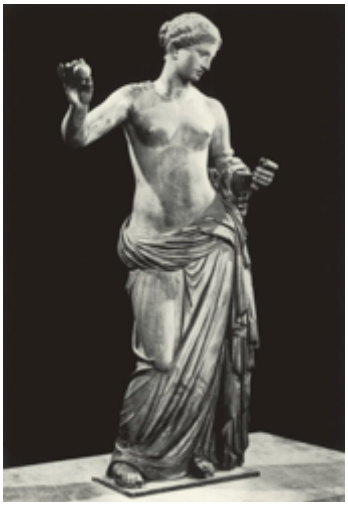


Fig. 48
After François Girardon
Venus of Arles, after Praxiteles
Plaster cast of second restoration
Early 19th century
Musée d'Arles Antiques, Arles
Source: Leo Jansen; Hans Luijten; Isolde Pludermacher and Mary Roberts eds., *Vincent van Gogh: The Letters* (London, Thames & Hudson, 2009), letter no. 683 n. 21. http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/ [accessed 22.02.18]

Fig. 49
'Bertall' (Charles Albert d'Arnoux)
Le Journal Amusant 27 May 1865
Wood engraving
Caption: *Mannette, ou la Femme d'Ébéniste par Manet*
Source: T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the art of Manet and his followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 97

Fig. 50
Oswald Heidbrinck
Le Courrier Français 29 July 1888, page 3
Caption: *Projet de Couronnement de la Tour Eiffel: A Monsieur Ferrouillat, Ministre de la Justice*
Lithographic print
Source: gallica.bnf.fr Bibliothéque Nationale de France

Fig. 51
Jean-Louis Forain
Le Courrier Français 9 September 1888, front page
Caption: *Ferrouillat le Chaste*
Lithographic print
Source: gallica.bnf.fr Bibliothéque Nationale de France

Fig: 52
Honoré Daumier
Actualité
Lithographic print
1851
26 x 19.8 cm
Source: gallica bnf.fr Bibliothéque Nationale de France
Annotated: '*Ratapoil fesant [sic] de la propagande'* [Ratapoil doing propaganda]

Fig. 53
Vincent van Gogh
The Brothel (Le Lupanar)
Mid November 1888
oil on canvas
33 x 41 cm
Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania
Source: Barnes Foundation; Image © 2018 The Barnes Foundation

Fig. 54
Rue des Ecôles [formerly *rue Bout d'Arles*]
Source: Google Maps [accessed 23/05/18]

Fig. 55
Émile Bernard
A Disillusioned Young Prostitute
1888
brush and ink watercolour on paper
40.5 x 26.5 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Annotated: *'A quinze ans je dois degouter de la vie parceque j'avais perdu toutes mes illusions.*' [At fifteen I'm sick of life because I've lost all my illusions]
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig. 56
Edgar Degas
The Name Day of the Madam (aka *The Patron's Party*)
1878-9
Monotype in black ink heightened with pastel
26 x 29cm
Musée Picasso, Paris
Source: Artstor

Fig. 57
Vincent van Gogh
Bonze Self Portrait (aka *Worshipper of the Eternal Buddha*)
1888
oil on canvas
61 x 51 cm
Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge M.A.
Source: Artstor

Fig. 58
Vincent van Gogh
Portrait of a Man [*M. Ginoux*] F 533/JH 1649
1888
oil on canvas
65 x 54.5 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands
Source: Kröller-Müller Museum

Fig. 59
Paul Gauguin
Monsieur Ginoux
1888
oil on canvas
40.5 x 32 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Fig. 60
Émile Bernard
Sketches of Prostitutes
1888, pen and ink on paper
18 x 10.2 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Annotated: 'Une fille qui s'branle c'est une pucelle et une fille qui baise c'est une putain' [A girl who wavers is a virgin, a girl who kisses is a whore]
Source: Van Gogh Museum

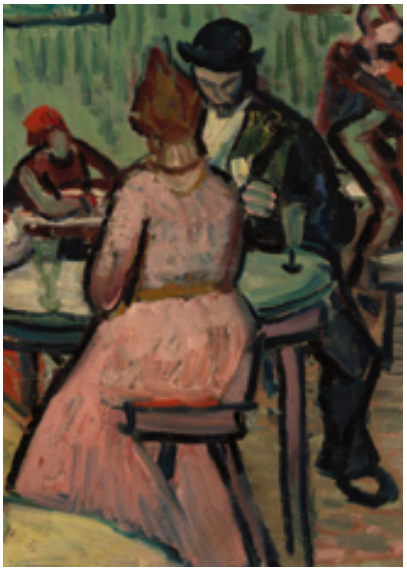
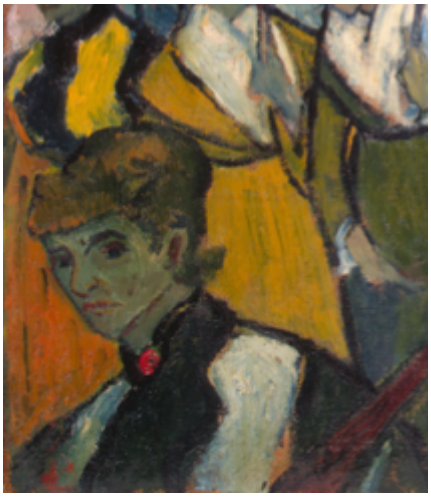


Fig. 61
Vincent van Gogh
Brothel Scene (*Lupanar*) [detail of 53]

Fig. 62
Vincent van Gogh
Arena at Arles F 548/JH 556
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 92cm
The Hermitage Museum, Leningrad
Source: The Hermitage Museum

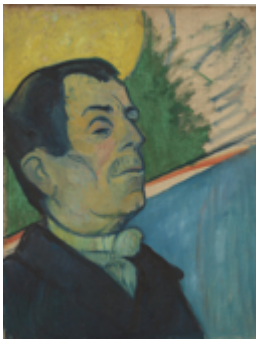


Left: Fig. 63
Émile Bernard
Girl in a Paris Street
1888
pen, ink and watercolour on paper
31 x 19.9 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Right: Fig. 64
Vincent van Gogh
Arena at Arles [detail of 61]

Left Fig. 65
Vincent van Gogh
Arena at Arles [detail of 61]

Right: Fig. 66
Paul Gauguin
Night Café at Arles Mme. Ginoux [detail of 34]



Left: Fig. 59
Paul Gauguin
Monsieur Ginoux
1888
oil on canvas
40.5 x 32 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: Van Gogh Museum

Right: Fig. 67
Vincent van Gogh
Arena at Arles [detail of 61]

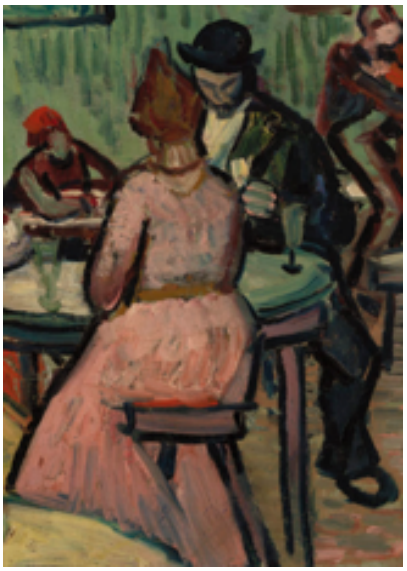


Fig. 68
Vincent van Gogh
Brothel Scene (*Lupanar*) [detail of 53]

Fig. 69
Vincent van Gogh
Joseph Roulin F 434/JH 1647
1888
oil on canvas
65 x 54 cm
Kunst Museum, Winterthur
Source: Kunst Museum, Winterthur

Fig. 70
Jules Chéret
L'Amant des Danseuses
1888
Lithographic print
Source: Gallica.bnf.fr Bibliothèque de France

Fig 71
Vincent van Gogh
Dancehall at Arles
1888
oil on canvas
65 x 81cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Source: Musée d'Orsay

Fig. 72
Vincent van Gogh
Starry Night, Arles
1888
oil on canvas
72.5 x 92 cm
Musée d'Orsay
Source: Artstor

Fig. 73
Vincent van Gogh
Starry Night, Arles F - /JH 1594
1888
pen and black ink on verso letter no. 693
9.5 x 13.5cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let693/letter.html

Fig. 74
Vincent van Gogh
The Poet (*Eugène Boch*)
1888
oil on canvas
60 x 45 cm
Musée d'Orsay
Source: Artstor

Fig. 75
Vincent van Gogh
Starry Night, Arles [detail of 71]

Fig. 76
Location of *Starry Night, Arles*
2012
Source: Google

Fig. 77
Vincent van Gogh
Quay with Sandbarges F 499/JH 1558
1888
oil on canvas
55 x 65 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen
Source: http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let634/letter.html [accessed 10/05/18]

Fig. 78
Vincent van Gogh
The Trinquetaille Bridge F 426/JH 1468
1888
oil on canvas
65 x 81 cm
private collection
Source: http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let634/letter.html

Fig. 79
Émile Bernard
Chiffonnières - Clichy
1887
oil on canvas
38 x 46 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Brest
Source: Museum of Fine Arts, Brest

Fig. 80
Émile Bernard
Iron Bridges at Asnières
1887
oil on canvas
46 x 54 cm
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Source: Artstor

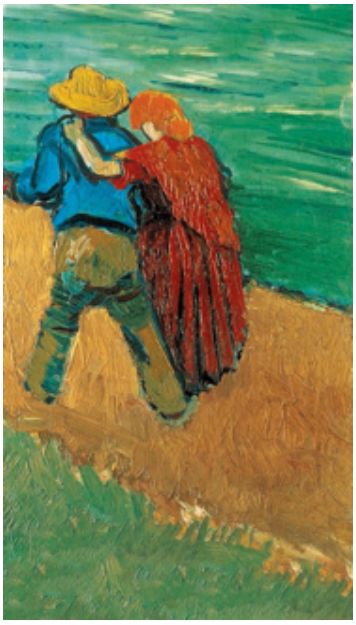


Fig. 81
Vincent van Gogh
Walking couple (fragment) F 544/JH 1369
1888
oil on canvas
32.5 x 23 cm
private collection
Source: http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let634/letter.html

Fig. 82
Vincent van Gogh
The Langlois Bridge
1888
sketch in letter to Emile Bernard, 25 March 1888
The Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Source: http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let634/letter.html

Fig. 83
George Frederic Watts
Found Drowned
1867
oil on canvas
119.4 x 213.4 cm
The Watts Gallery, Compton, UK
Source: Artuk.org

Fig. 84
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Found
1856
oil on canvas
91.4 x 80 cm
Delaware Art Museum
Source: Walker Art Museum