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## "Introduction" & "Modernisms and Authority"

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MODERNISM AND  
AUTHORITY

*Picasso and His Milieu around 1900*

Charles Palermo

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# INTRODUCTION

You must change your life.

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

The central theme of this book is *authority*, an old topic in philosophy that is rather newer to art history. In what follows, I explain its application to problems Pablo Picasso and his associates raise. Simply put, my argument is that Picasso and a number of the artists and writers who were important to him by about 1905 were deeply engaged with the problem of authority. They included Paul Gauguin, Paul Verlaine, Eugène Carrière, Santiago Rusiñol, Guillaume Apollinaire, and the symbolist poet and critic Charles Morice. I say more about some than about others, but each has something important to contribute. Ultimately, authority is a problem not only for those I have just mentioned, but for all of us—interpreters, critics, and historians of art and literature—as a ramification of our own methodological problems.

So this is not a book about Picasso (or about Picasso and Apollinaire or about art and literature in Paris or Barcelona around 1900) in a common sense. I do not pretend to outdo or surpass the researchers I mention throughout this work, in my knowledge of either Picasso's or Apollinaire's works or their historical circumstances. I am humbled by the work of those—Anne Baldassari, Laurence Campa, Robert Couffignal, Elizabeth Cowl- ing, Michel Décaudin, Daniel Delbreil, Marilyn McCully, Phoebe Pool, Peter Read, John Richardson, William H. Robinson, William Rubin, and others—who have dedicated their lives to the bodies of work I consider and have made arguments like this one possible. Rather than reveal new information about the fin-de-siècle world in which Picasso and Apollinaire worked, or offer a new set of interpretations—although those are important things to do, and I do some of both—or challenge the thoughtful conclusions of my peers

and predecessors, I am concerned to give a sense of the problem of authority, in its multiple manifestations, in (mid- to) late nineteenth-century culture, mostly in France. Doing so entails explaining the connection of that problem to other problems, not just in art and literature but also (of all things) in theology. Further, I show how closely the theological versions of the problem were connected to the artistic versions and how well represented both versions were in the milieu where the young Picasso came of age.

Although I discuss one major work of Picasso's in this introduction, I return to a sustained discussion of his oeuvre only in my final chapter. Nor do I touch the regular bases of art-historical discussions, such as influence or sources, considered in the usual way. Picasso's debts or responses to El Greco, Toulouse-Lautrec, Steinlen, Puvis de Chavannes, Degas, and so forth, are major themes in the existing Picasso literature, where they are treated admirably. I mention such connections only where they are relevant to my point—partly because they have been discussed elsewhere, but also because the connections with other artists I discuss differ from “sources” in the usual sense. Carrière was not a particularly important source for Picasso—he was certainly less important than, say, El Greco. I argue that Carrière was a historically important figure with connections to people close to Picasso, so that understanding Carrière's achievement as they did means understanding his relation to certain problems (divided or compound selves and the notion of a nondivine *Jésus homme*, to name just two) to which Picasso was also reacting, although that reaction was a critical retort to the sensibilities of Carrière and his ilk. This amounts to saying that both Carrière and, for example, Gauguin were important for Picasso in the years I discuss here, but it is not to say that Carrière's paintings were as important for Picasso as Gauguin's.

Whereas features of Gauguin's paintings were important sources for Picasso's paintings—I point out such things as the floating effect of feet in both painters' works and suggest that Picasso's play with the thickness or thinness of paint mass may have been inspired by Gauguin's—nonetheless, Gauguin's thought and Picasso's interest in the conception of art and the religious feeling it represents are more fundamental matters for my argument.

Finally, my readings of Picasso's paintings aim, ultimately, not to explain what those paintings are “about,” as many readings do, whether one wants to call them iconographic or biographical or political or social-historical. I have no objection to such readings; I just do not have highly developed accounts of what these pictures are of and am skeptical about the prospects for detailed referential readings of the paintings that interest me most. Indeed, my purpose here is to argue that attention to what Picasso's paintings refer to, whether one seeks readings based in iconography, sources, and biography or opposes such procedures, goes only so far. Strange though it may seem to say, we may have more luck understanding these paintings if we think about the problems they pose rather than try to solve those problems.

To explain what that means and to give at least a sense of where I am headed, I look now at an important work of Picasso's that can also illustrate some of the issues I discuss. *La vie* (plate 1) is surely one of Picasso's most important and famously inscrutable pic-

tures. I say it is inscrutable, but on one level, that is not exactly true. It is generally accepted that the male figure at left resembles Carles Casagemas, Picasso's close friend, who committed suicide sometime before Picasso started the picture, and whose death then became a theme in Picasso's art.<sup>1</sup> Beside him is a nude female figure that has been taken to represent Germaine, the young woman who was Casagemas's love at the time of his death, and whom he tried to shoot when he took his own life. On the right is the figure of a woman holding a baby, another stock feature of Picasso's Blue-period pictures. Given the presence of Casagemas and of a baby, the picture seems inescapably to oppose the two figure groups as embodiments of life and death, or some similar and similarly allegorical pair of meanings. Between the two figure groups are two pictures that bear a generic resemblance to Picasso's work of the time.<sup>2</sup>

But it is hard to be more specific than that. Perhaps that is because Picasso does not supply enough iconographic specificity or fixity to let us go further confidently. For example, the figure of Casagemas was first painted with a head that resembles Picasso's. Preparatory drawings show the same Picasso-like features, in some cases with an older, male figure at the right in the mother's place (fig. 1). The older man holds a palette, like a painter. It may even be Santiago Rusiñol, as William H. Robinson has suggested (Robinson, *Picasso and the Mysteries of Life*, 96). If so many elements—indeed, the *central* elements—of the allegory were in flux until the project itself was far advanced, how should we think of Picasso's meaning?<sup>3</sup> Can we say that he had in mind an idea, a theme, which he conceived first with his head on the left-hand figure and an old painter in opposition at the right, but that in the course of executing that image, it occurred to him that his point might be better expressed if *Casagemas's* head and the figure of a *young mother* were to occupy those places? What point might that even conceivably be? If Picasso changed the painting's meaning drastically by altering only a few details, his move does less to put in place the new meaning (about which we are still unsure) than to show how loosely that meaning adheres to its form.

John Richardson's highly informative and believable interpretation of the painting, open-ended as it is in many respects, is striking for its breadth, its erudition, and its sensitivity. Even so, it hardly seems like a specific answer to one's desire to know what the painting is about. In the end, it leaves us more or less where we began. Richardson argues convincingly that Picasso uses tarot and other esoteric symbolism, references to intimates like Casagemas and Germaine, "echoes of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise," echoes of Gauguin's *D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* (fig. 2), and the trope of the studio as "Theatrum Mundi"—all to get us from Alfred Barr's "Obviously allegory is intended" to Richardson's own "It certainly poses [. . .] nebulous and unanswerable questions" (Richardson, *Life of Picasso*, 270–75).

But I do not mean to criticize Richardson. Far from objecting to his procedure, I applaud him for leaving the painting's iconography more richly read and also for recognizing that it remains, for all his work, unresolved. Elizabeth Cowling's reading ranges at least as freely as Richardson's and produces an alternative set of speculations that likewise



FIGURE 1

Pablo Picasso, Study for *La vie*, 1903. Museu Picasso Barcelona.



FIGURE 2

Paul Gauguin, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, 1897–98. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

serves to provoke the reader's wondering. Cowling notes the difficulty of "interpreting [*La vie*]'s opaque iconography satisfactorily" and admits that "despite sustained attempts by distinguished scholars there is little consensus" about the work's allegorical meaning.<sup>4</sup> She refers to the late shift from Picasso's features to Casagemas's and from the old painter to the woman with baby and to speculation that the picture may be "'about' Picasso's Oedipal conflict with his painter-father" or about "the incompatibility of sexual love and parenthood" (Cowling, 102). Further, noting the final form of the picture, with Casagemas and the woman with child, Cowling proposes other possibilities: that the picture is "a solemn follow-up to the irreverent, mocking *Burial of Casagemas*," or an allegory on a theme like the "Three Ages of Man," or "Life and Death" (apropos of the latter, she remarks that the baby does not look healthy or even obviously alive, and the woman who holds it "looks like a revenant"), or "Adam and Eve after the Fall" (Cowling, 103). Having too many allegories to choose from feels a lot like having nebulous questions.

Cowling also adduces sources, or at least important precedents, for *La vie*: Picasso's own *Two Sisters* and *The Embrace*, Courbet's *Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Comprising Seven Years of My Artistic Life* (1855), Gauguin's *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (seconding Richardson's suggestion), and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes's *Poor Fisherman* (Cowling, 101–2, 104). (Marilyn McCully adds El Greco's *John the Baptist and Saint Francis*.<sup>5</sup> Gereon Becht-Jördens suggests that the Casagemas figure's hand gesture is lifted from the iconography of the *Noli me tangere*.<sup>6</sup>)

Like Richardson's revelations, Cowling's contributions to our knowledge (and speculations) about *La vie* are plausible, thoughtful, and productive. If I proceed in a different direction, I do so to supplement the work of these writers (and of others), not to counter it. And if I leave us no surer of the topic of Picasso's allegory, I do not see that as failure, either.

Robinson, in his study of *La vie*, considers the development of the painting in its various contexts and states, giving what is probably the fullest available account of its

development. He even adds to the painting's iconography the mysterious Birdman, which appears as a figure mostly painted out on one of the pictures between the two groups. Again, like Richardson and Cowling and McCully and Theodore Reff, Robinson clarifies our understanding of the painting without—however strange it may seem—proposing a clear meaning. Indeed, he suggests that Picasso deliberately withheld the resolution we all seem to be looking for (Robinson, *Picasso and the Mysteries of Life*, 137). I could not agree more. But I want to understand the reason.

Perhaps Picasso is practicing a strategy of evasion—deliberately refusing a kind of intelligibility to protect himself and his work from subjection to literature and literary notions of meaning. Some of the best work in understanding symbolist pictorial art's reaction to its entanglements with literary production shows the importance of such a refusal.<sup>7</sup> Although this interpretation makes sense, it would lead (at least in this stripped-down form) to an impoverished view of *La vie* and other early works of Picasso's unless we can also offer a positive account of its relation to meaning, that is to say, unless the interpretation also included an account of what the painting does, rather than exclusively one of what it refuses to do.<sup>8</sup>

Rosalind Krauss makes such a proposal in response to the iconographic approaches I have been discussing. She is more critical of certain aspects of those approaches than I have been, and her objections deserve full attention. Writing from the “threshold of a postmodernist art,” to whose “proto-history” she considers Picasso's collage to have belonged, Krauss sees in the proliferation of referential readings like those I have been discussing a rearguard action against “the play of meaning,” against “form,” and against “polysemy.”<sup>9</sup> Precise referential readings, which she refers to as expressions of an “aesthetics of the proper name,” fix meaning and exhaust reading (or beholding):

Unlike allegory, in which a linked and burgeoning series of names establishes an open-ended set of analogies—Jonah/Lazarus/Christ—there is in this aesthetics of the proper name a contraction of sense to the simple task of pointing, or labeling, to the act of unequivocal reference. It is as though the shifting, changing sands of visual polysemy, of multiple meanings and regroupings, have made us intolerably nervous, so that we wish to find the bedrock of sense. We wish to achieve a type of signification beyond which there can be no further reading or interpretation. Interpretation, we insist, must be made to stop somewhere.

(Krauss, “In the Name of Picasso,” 28)

Krauss locates the origin of this “aesthetics of the proper name” in the field of latter-day Picasso studies, in Pierre Daix's 1967 identification of Carles Casagemas as the male figure at the left in *La vie*.<sup>10</sup>

[O]nce a real person could be placed as the model for the standing male figure—moreover a person whose life involved the lurid details of impotence and failed homicide but achieved suicide—the earlier interpretations of *La Vie* as an allegory of maturation and development

could be put aside for a more local and specific meaning. Henceforth the picture could be seen as a *tableau vivant* containing the dead man torn between two women, one old and one young, the meaning of which “is” sexual dread. And because early studies for the painting show that the male figure had originally been conceived as Picasso’s self-portrait, one could now hypothesize the artist’s identification with his friend and read the work as “expressing . . . that sense of himself as having been thrust by women into an untenable and ultimately tragic position. . . .”<sup>11</sup>

Krauss’s argument is provocative, and I have some responses to make. As I have noted, the open, allegorical readings of *La vie* did not stop with Daix and Reff (whom Krauss quotes at the end of the extract above). Interest in referential readings did not shut down allegorical readings of *La vie*. Perhaps that is the salutary effect of Krauss’s essay. Or perhaps we might ask Krauss why the reading Reff proposes does not count as an allegory—after all, on that reading, Picasso would be using the enigmatic scene, the two women, and even his own dead friend’s likeness to allegorize the sadness of tragic love. Instead of “Jonah/Lazarus/Christ,” we would have “Casagemas/Picasso/the suffering lover.”<sup>12</sup>

As Krauss points out in a footnote, though, her concern about using proper names in the painting’s interpretation is not that it “merely adds another dimension to the interpretation of a given work” (Krauss, “In the Name of Picasso,” 29n.14), but that it restricts us from meanings that transcend (my word) the local circumstances the proper names denote. This is why Krauss argues that in the hands of more traditional, biographical, critics, *La vie* loses its obvious place in the tradition of studio paintings and ends up being about the seamy details of Casagemas’s end: “[T]he work echoes such distinguished nineteenth-century forebears as Courbet and Manet in insisting that, for a painter, life and art allegorize each other, both caught up equally in the problem of representation. The name Casagemas does not extend far enough to signify either this relationship or this problem” (Krauss, 29).

But would Krauss want to say that we are better off not knowing that the figure on the left is based on the appearance of Casagemas? Of course not. Perhaps she wants us to remember to combine our referential readings with allegorical ones. If that is the case, then we might say that the problem with the “aesthetic of the proper name” is that it tempts us to let historical research stop paintings from addressing themselves to us who live outside the context of production from which they arose. Indeed, because signs structurally incorporate the absence of the referent, it is not just the contingent fact of our historical distance from Picasso and Casagemas that makes reading signs necessarily depend on overcoming the aesthetic of the proper name. For Krauss, Picasso and Casagemas remain absent from the painting as long as we continue to read it as a sign. When we see the painting strictly in relation to historical persons, when we reduce it to its historical referents, we have stopped reading it as a sign. “The aesthetics of the proper name is erected specifically on the grave of form” (Krauss, “In the Name of Picasso,” 39).

The corrective Krauss finds built into Picasso’s own career is cubist collage, which she calls a “metalanguage of the visual” (Krauss, “In the Name of Picasso,” 37). It insists on

those structural features of signs that we ought to bear in mind generally. That is to say, collage empties out reference and voids even biographical associations that cling to the author in favor of signs (understood as “*differences without any positive terms*”),<sup>13</sup> so that “the *impersonal* operations of language . . . are the subject of collage” (Krauss, 39; emphasis in original). By referring to the “*impersonal* operations of language,” Krauss means that “from the point of view of structure, a speaker does not so much speak, as he is spoken by, language. The linguistic structure of signs ‘speaks’ Picasso’s collages . . .” (39). That the sign speaks for itself, out of its structure, in the beholder’s encounter with it—not from within the context of its production (which includes its historical referents and historical author)—Krauss takes to be a structural fact about signs. Collage is special only in the way it forces the issue, in the fact that it is *about* this fact. Hence Picasso’s proto-postmodernism. And hence the incompatibility of an “aesthetics of the proper name” with Krauss’s notion of the sign. The conflict is about shifting the locus of meaning-production from the author to the reader, or from the painter to the beholder, not about the propensity of a scholar with a positive identification to forget form.

But would that proto-postmodernism really be Picasso’s? No. That is not what Krauss says. The postmodernism is all ours, as it were, insofar as it is a decision about how to interpret signs. Although Krauss would not put it that way either, it is where the logic of her position arguably leads. I say so because, in speaking of signs as part of a “linguistic structure,” which “speaks,” Krauss’s argument makes explicit what Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels would call its theoretical nature. By placing the locus of interpretive authority in *language* (rather than in the historical intentions of an author), Krauss’s argument becomes *theoretical*, in their sense of the term. Once an account of interpretation distinguishes authorial intention from meaning, they explain, it becomes “theoretical.” Further, as they argue, one inevitable—even if unwanted—consequence of a “theoretical” position is a radical polysemy (i.e., in principle, anything could [be taken to] mean anything).<sup>14</sup> To put the question succinctly, if authorial intention is not the object of interpretation, what is? Knapp and Michaels have argued that nothing could be. So if Picasso really meant his collage to thematize the supposed “originless play of the signifier,” then he is a (proto-)postmodernist; on a poststructuralist account (such as I take Krauss’s to be, or at least to entail), however, his collages participate in, even epitomize, that free play, not because of his intentions for them, but because they are signs, just like *La vie* or any other picture.

So we agree that *La vie* is an allegory. As such, it assumes the burden of speaking to us, of embodying in visible form a call of some kind. It must exist to compel us. And we have two different proposals: that we seek out the determinate references of the figures and other elements of the picture and try to reconstruct Picasso’s intentions, or that we let the painting drift away from its origins and enter fully into the free play of the signifier. Which proposal you accept—whether you feel compelled to understand the picture according to Picasso’s historical situation or want to treat it as marks cut off from their authorial origin—depends on where you stand methodologically.

Either way, however, you face a problem in responding to *La vie*. The painting in the first proposal is filled with objectively determined references to people, pictorial types, older paintings, biblical personages, tarot cards, and much more. But despite the efforts of our best researchers, some or most of those references always remain private, beyond our reach. Our responses to the painting, even after considerable research, remain those of outsiders. Even worse, this limitation has to do, not just with our research, but also with our relation to history itself. For instance, I accept without reservation that the male figure on the left is a picture of Casagemas, and I dimly imagine what a grave and painful image that must have offered Picasso. But Picasso is gone, along with everyone else who knew Casagemas, and despite the apparent callousness in saying so, I have to admit that Casagemas the historical person means nothing to me. If we concede that the painting depends on its reference to Casagemas, then we may find ourselves narrowly limited in our effort to respond to the picture—to bring to it or to allow it to compel from us the quality of feeling appropriate to it.

Even if we recognize that the male figure on the left is a picture of Casagemas, we may nevertheless empty out its referential function in order to put it into play as a signifier. Then the historical remoteness of Casagemas ceases to be a problem for us, but the reference to him (whatever meanings we agree to project onto the work) also ceases to guide us. Nor does any other resemblance, identification, or reference we can propose necessarily have purchase on our experience of the painting. Your response to the painting is your own, no matter how insightful or arbitrary. You may develop highly eccentric ideas about the picture, yet I cannot say that you have failed to respond to it. I can only complain that you have ceased to respond to the painting before which we stand and have begun to respond, if that is the right word, to your own eccentric invention. In short, either way we go methodologically, we appear to be blocked from responding to this allegory built around the figure of Casagemas.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps this dilemma seems a little artificial. After all, we do respond to works of art, even very old ones, and there is something coherent about our responses to them. That is perfectly true, but it is also important that our methodological positions seem to leave no room for works of art to compel meaningful responses from us. That is to say, our methodological reflections are hollow unless they can be part of our reflection on the way works do or do not have authority for us.

I provide an alternative approach to this and other works of Picasso's Blue and Rose periods that centers on formal features of the works that are remarked less frequently or never. In their light, these pictures—including *La vie*—make more sense, even if that approach does not explain why a woman with a baby (rather than a bearded man with a palette) stands on the composition's right-hand side.

What I mean by *authority* is fundamentally the ability to compel (action, belief, emotion, and so forth). I mean this precisely in opposition to the ability to coerce. I am interested in authority, not authoritarianism, which is more like a failure of authority than an expression

of it. The chapters that follow provide more than one opportunity to see the difference. I have no particular source (other than its ordinary usage) in mind for this use of the term *authority*. The term has roots in ancient Rome, where it had, as it does for us, a broad use. "*Auctoritas* was to be found in public and in private life," E. D. Watt explains: "It was ascribed to founders, parents, tutors, patrons and givers of advice, to wise men and to ancestors."<sup>16</sup> Under the Republic, for example, each civil official "had the *potestas* or the *imperium*, limited in time and in scope, that went with his office. Within these specified limits, his commands were legally binding" (Watt, 12). A civil official also had *auctoritas*, although he could not legally on that basis require compliance. The Roman Senate, by contrast, had only *auctoritas*. Senatorial power lay in it and in it alone. Watt, following Theodor Mommsen, describes this civic or legal sense of *auctoritas* as "something more than advice (*Ratschlag*) and less than command (*Befehl*), as the kind of counsel which could not properly be shunned" (12). When one looks at a painting like *La vie*, one has the feeling of being offered food for reflection. The lesson's seriousness derives from the painter's perspective as witness, but our response joins a faith in that act of witness with a certain resource of our own—a moral or personal seriousness that allows us to be compelled or moved or affected by the painter's visual testimony. The painter claims the authority of one with something compelling to reveal who is in a position to reveal it. A beholder's task is to rise to the occasion the painter produces.

Paintings, however, do not work by piling up evidence for the point of view they express. Similarly, if authority cannot be reduced to coercion, neither is it exactly argument. Hannah Arendt explains: "Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority has failed. Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance."<sup>17</sup> In its original Roman sense, she continues, authority was connected to founding. (This is also a sense Watt mentions.) "Those endowed with authority were the elders, the Senate or the *patres*, who had obtained it by descent and by transmission (tradition) from those who had laid the foundations for all things to come, the ancestors, whom the Romans therefore called the *maiores*" (Arendt, 121–22). When that tradition ended, that is, when the succession that connected Rome to its founders was broken, its "political and spiritual heritage passed to the Christian Church," "the death and resurrection of Christ" became the new foundation, and with that shift the community of believers became a religion (125). The Church's authority was then based on and preserved and transmitted in a distinctly Roman way (125–26). The Church, however, amalgamated this Roman authority with Greek Platonic philosophy based on "transcending measurements and rules" (127)—in short, on reason. But this delicate amalgamation depended on the stability of the trio of Roman inheritances:

Wherever one of the elements of the Roman trinity, religion or authority or tradition, was doubted or eliminated, the remaining two were no longer secure. Thus, it was Luther's

error to think that his challenge of the temporal authority of the Church and his appeal to unguided individual judgment would leave tradition and religion intact. So it was the error of Hobbes and the political theorists of the seventeenth century to hope that authority and religion could be saved without tradition. So, too, was it finally the error of the humanists to think it would be possible to remain within an unbroken tradition of Western civilization without religion and without authority.

(128)

So what does authority look like in the aftermath of these “errors”? What has become of authority in the modern age?

For her answer, Arendt turns to Machiavelli and Robespierre, who saw that authority depended on founding and understood that a modern act of founding could serve the purpose. Further, and as Marx pointed out apropos the French Revolution, these revolutionary acts of founding have “appeared on the stage of history in Roman costume” (Arendt, 139). That is to say, they are simultaneously modern and inaugural events and “attempts to repair these foundations, to renew the broken thread of tradition” (140).

This is not the place to discuss the character and historical trappings of modern revolutions. Our topic is the relation of the young Picasso and some of his contemporaries to the problems of symbolist art and poetry. My argument is that they, like Arendt’s revolutionaries, experienced modernity as a challenge to reflect on a lost or forgotten relation to authority and that that task entails considering the modern subject’s place in history and the relevance of historical truth to our moral considerations in the present. This means considering the modern loss of the pillars of Roman authority and the crisis that loss precipitated.

PART I

“—HYPOCRITE LECTEUR, —MON  
SEMBLABLE, —MON FRÈRE”

## MODERNISMS AND AUTHORITIES

After a short introit framing his theme, Clement Greenberg begins rolling out the historical logic of modernism with what sounds like a general reference to life under modernity: "A society, as it becomes less and less able, in the course of its development, to justify the inevitability of its particular forms, breaks up the accepted notions upon which artists and writers must depend in large part for communication with their audiences. It becomes difficult to assume anything. All the verities involved by religion, authority, tradition, style, are thrown into question, and the writer or artist is no longer able to estimate the response of his audience to the symbols and references with which he works."<sup>1</sup>

Despite my general reservations about Greenberg's account of modernism (both the theoretical and the historical sides of it), I cite it to show how deeply embedded in it is the notion that modernism means losing touch with "the verities involved by religion [and] authority." To put it plainly, in what follows, I argue that he is more or less right about that, even if I might put the matter in a more nuanced way.<sup>2</sup> Let's say he is recognizing modern art's perspective on the problems Arendt described.

As a more nuanced account of modernism, consider a similar passage from Stanley Cavell, explaining how and why, under modernity, "the writing of philosophy is *difficult* in a new way" (emphasis in the original).

It is the difficulty modern philosophy shares with the modern arts (and, for that matter, with modern theology; and, for all I know, with modern physics), a difficulty broached, or

reflected, in the nineteenth-century's radical breaking of tradition within the several arts; a moment epitomized in Marx's remark that ". . . the criticism of religion is in the main complete . . ." (*Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Introduction). This is the beginning of what I have called the modern, characterizing it as a moment in which history and its conventions can no longer be taken for granted; the time in which music and painting and poetry (like nations) have to define themselves against their pasts; the beginning of the moment in which each of the arts becomes its own subject, as if its immediate artistic task is to establish its own existence. The new difficulty which comes to light in the modernist situation is that of maintaining one's belief in one's own enterprise, for the past and the present become problematic together. I believe that philosophy shares the modernist difficulty now everywhere evident in the major arts, the difficulty of making one's present effort become a part of the present history of the enterprise to which one has committed one's mind, such as it is.<sup>3</sup>

More clearly and fully than Greenberg, Cavell sounds the themes I noted first in Arendt. The moderns must refound their relationship with their enterprises, with their institutions, even with their knowledge or lose the authority to speak for and to one another. This is what I take Cavell to mean in saying, farther along: "When, in what follows, I feel pressed by the question of my right to speak for philosophy, I sometimes suggest that I am merely speaking for *myself*, and sometimes I suggest that philosophy is not *mine* at all—its results are true for every man or else they are worthless" (Cavell, xxv-xxvi). This is a way of expressing the difficulty of arriving at conclusions on one's own—that is to say, without recourse to any external authority, "merely speaking for *myself*"—that can be meaningful (even for oneself) only if they are true for everyone. One must be independent of external authority in one's reasoning, and then independent again, in a different way, to be able to assert that the truth of one's conclusions does not depend on one's particular position. Cavell's way of talking about his difficulty is, then, also a way of expressing the difficulty of speaking philosophically *at all*. As if to respond to this concern, or to reframe it, Cavell considers popularizers of philosophy—or, more precisely, those who believe in popularizing philosophy: "I think someone who believes in popular, or in popularizing, philosophy [ . . . ] believes that the ordinary man stands in relation to serious philosophy as, say, the ordinary believer stands in relation to serious theology—that he cannot understand it in its own terms but that it is nevertheless good for him to know its results, in some form or other" (xxvii).

Popularizing philosophy does what Cavell can't do—it reconciles easily the desire to speak for oneself with the need to speak only if what one says can count for everyone. This popularizing that just conveys authoritative findings to the layman, Cavell says, is "the late version of one of philosophy's most ancient betrayals—the effort to use philosophy's name to put a front on beliefs rather than to face the source of assumption, or of emptiness, which actually maintains them" (Cavell, xxvii-xxviii). The popularizers' solution to the problem is a betrayal because it does not let the (popular) audience be independent too. It requires that readers of such work take what it says on authority and

accept that they are in no position to reestablish its truth independently for themselves. This may be okay or necessary, as Cavell sees it, for theology but it is not, for philosophy. In this Cavell brushes against some trouble in modernist theology (perhaps without having it exactly in mind).

What Cavell calls the “question of philosophy’s audience” (Cavell, xxviii) is the heart of his account of philosophy’s modernism, but it is also as old as his own philosophical tradition—as old as Socrates’s learning from the Oracle that no man was wiser than he, and thus knowing that he did not know. Cavell takes that discovery to be “the discovery of philosophy, when it is the effort to find answers, and permit questions, which nobody knows the way to nor the answer to any better than you yourself” (xxviii).

When Socrates learned that the Oracle had said no man is wiser than Socrates, he interpreted this to mean, we are told, that he knew that he did not know. And we are likely to take this as a bit of faded irony or as a stuffy humility. What I take Socrates to have seen is that, about the questions which were causing him wonder and hope and confusion and pain, he knew that he did not know what no man can know, and that any man could learn what he wanted to learn. No man is in any better position for knowing it than any other man—unless *wanting* to know is a special position. And this discovery about himself is the same as the discovery of philosophy, when it is the effort to find answers, and permit questions, which nobody knows the way to nor the answer to any better than you yourself.

(Cavell, xxviii)

In other words, Cavell sees modernism’s problem in philosophy’s origin, and his response to the challenge of philosophizing in the modern moment is to take up, to reappropriate, philosophy’s original challenge: having no access to external or higher authority, we are all given the task of finding the authority to speak for ourselves and to one another.<sup>4</sup> This is also the heart of modernity’s discomfort with revealed religion and the reason modernism rejects dogma: revelation and dogma are claims someone (a theologian, a prophet, the Church) makes: to know the truth better than you or to have been in a better position than you to know the truth. One may respond that one’s theology has squared its claims with modernism’s objections, that it has refrained the authority of scripture so as to make it responsive or accountable to anyone’s personal experience—to permit you that independence. Maybe that’s as much as to say that theology (some of it—*that* theology, anyway) has submitted itself to modernism’s challenge, or that that theology has become philosophy.

Robert Pippin has also represented modernity and modernism in philosophical terms—not because they are philosophical first and last in their character, but because, like Greenberg and Cavell, he sees them as expressions of a relation between modern people and the way they understand themselves, the world, and their place in it. “Modern institutions,” as Pippin puts it, meaning “literary, religious, moral, educational, and aesthetic as well as scientific” institutions, “presume a distinct sort of authority, a claim to allegiance based on distinct premises that are essentially philosophical claims and do not

remain unaffected by skeptical attacks, however complicated and abstract the academic form of those attacks can initially be.”<sup>5</sup>

Modern philosophy’s aim, its response to the “skeptical attacks” it launches against everything within reach, its “ideal,” is a “classical philosophical ideal: the possibility that human beings can regulate and evaluate their beliefs by rational self-reflection, that they can free themselves from interest, passion, tradition, prejudice and autonomously ‘rule’ their own thoughts, and that they can determine their actions as a result of self-reflection and rational evaluation” (Pippin, 12). Here Pippin’s account parallels Cavell’s diagnosis of modern philosophy’s recourse to what individuals can establish for themselves. The history of philosophy and critical theory since Kant has called into question central elements of this classical ideal—and even its feasibility and desirability in general. Indeed, that history—the history of that calling-into-question—is the topic of Pippin’s study. Nevertheless, in the end, he is able to affirm that, no matter how skeptical we are of our claims to “independent self-reflection,” our skeptical questioning is always a claim to “a renewed form of independence,” even if it can no longer seek “reassurance in self-certainty or foundations, and provokes again the groundless search for reconciliations with other self-conscious agents unavoidable in modernity” (178).

If criticisms of modernism’s project are attempts to discover its blind spots, they can always also be counted as attempts to advance its project, its skeptical attack, which aims to relieve us of what we can no longer believe in and replace it with what we can believe in, independently and critically, on our own authority. In other words, when we talk of modernism, we should not speak of it as something we can have surpassed. Rather than do that, Pippin outlines a frame of mind that seems inescapable by this time, to which skepticism holds beliefs rigorously accountable, and in which our attempts at justification have to be both personal (based on nothing but what we can know, not dependent on external authority) and generalizable (they mustn’t be dependent on our personal “interest, passion, tradition, prejudice”).<sup>6</sup>

When Pippin speaks of “skeptical attacks,” and specifically “more and more ambitious claims for the supreme authority of reason in human affairs, contra the claims of tradition, the ancestors, and, especially, the Church [ . . . ]” (Pippin, 4), I take him to mean, as I took Cavell to mean, that one must speak, if one will speak with authority, in the light of some justification that responds to skepticism—a justification that, like Cavell’s philosophical speech and unlike that of his philosophical popularizers, takes on the problem of establishing at first hand and of making public or else abandoning the ground on which one makes one’s claims. I take him to mean, further, that those claims hold independent of the contingent, particular, personal position from which they are made.

No wonder, then, that modernism excludes the Roman Catholic Church “especially.” Its deposit of faith, its claim to truth, is founded not on its availability to everyone, but on precisely the opposite, on the claim that it was transmitted in the Catholic Church’s teaching (that it was a “form of sound words” [2 Timothy 1:13]) and that Jesus Christ would ensure (in some way that promises nothing to do with responsiveness to skeptical

challenges) that the Church would not err subsequently in its doctrine (“And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.” [Matthew 28:20]). This is the gesture of founding at the core of the Church’s authority, as Arendt describes it. The Catholic Church is on the outs with modernism, not simply because it is more vulnerable to skeptical attacks than a lot of other institutions; it is dependent on principle, in the sense Pippin has in mind, so that it cannot attempt a methodological re-grounding as modern philosophy has (or, at very least, it can’t try it in the same ways).

Thus, the Catholic Church’s position in modernity is not just the result of a rearguard mentality or of conservative leadership, as is sometimes said. The Catholic Church has a distinctive and inalienable claim to its special and avowed place in the list of levees that failed so that modernism could sweep across our intellectual landscape. If nothing else, I hope I have at least already drawn attention to what I see as an uncontroversial claim: that attacking or rejecting the Church’s authority is a standard, though sometimes implicit, feature of accounts of the origin of modernism. (Often, revealed religion more generally can take the Church’s place; nevertheless, for reasons we’ll see soon, the Roman Catholic Church remains the essential example.) To add to that claim, I suggest also that the rejection of the Church in these accounts is not incidental, but structural, part of their logic. I say “suggest,” rather than “claim” or “insist,” because I don’t aim to prove it, or at least to let proving it be my burden. But that’s not the last I have to say on the subject, either.

What Greenberg, Cavell, Marx, and Pippin (and others) say together is that the modern world had its faith in religious dogma shaken vigorously (“ . . . the criticism of religion is in the main complete . . . ”). But Cavell, at least, by referring to the continued existence of serious theology, acknowledges that although the criticism of religion may be complete and theology (or the Catholic Church) stands—for those who want to give an accounting of the modern world or of modernism—as the paradigm of what can no longer ground our beliefs and our actions, theology did not end with modernism. In what follows, it is not my brief to continue sketching a picture of modernism in general that traces its relation to skeptical attacks on dogmatic authority. From here, I begin to narrow the scope of my project to close in on one moment in that history, and on two projects that show, in extraordinary vividness, modernism’s struggle with authority: Picasso’s paintings of the so-called Blue and Rose periods (roughly, 1902 to 1905) and Apollinaire’s short stories from *L’hérésiarque et Cie* (1910). In the rest of this chapter, I take specific historical examples and arguments to define the problem of authority in the later nineteenth century and explain how it relates to the task of writing. Ultimately, I turn to the work of Charles Baudelaire and Apollinaire for examples of poems that assert authority over the reader.

## THEOCRATIC AND THEOLOGICAL

To focus on the problem of authority in approximately the moment that concerns us, I turn briefly to two examples drawn from the *fin de siècle*. They demonstrate individually

the problem of authority as it stood at the turn of the twentieth century; between them, they also show what I call the thematic face of authority: the need for appeals to authority to define themselves in relation to or against other kinds of appeals (judicial and “physiocratic” against theocratic; historical against divine).

In October 1899 Julien Benda (who later earned some fame for his *La trahison des clercs* [1927]) published an essay on the Dreyfus Affair.<sup>7</sup> In “L’Affaire Dreyfus et le Principe d’autorité” (The Dreyfus Affair and the principle of authority), Benda describes the Dreyfus Affair as a showdown between two “antagonistic elements,” “social forces” and “individual forces,” which, in their ongoing conflict, “constitute the history of humanity” (Benda, 190). The individual forces tend toward minimal social organization, represented at a certain extreme by the notion of anarchy; meanwhile, the social forces drive toward the “hierarchical pole” (Benda, 190). Benda explains the relevance of this scheme to understanding the Dreyfus Affair. He begins by considering the government’s actions of 1894 and 1895, from Dreyfus’s arrest through his punishment:

What is the character of all these acts? Absolutism: the certitude of being inspired by the truth; the image they spontaneously evoke is that of the sword of God lowering itself here, uncontrolled, terrible, infallible, and irremediable. Having recognized that, one may affirm that from the day of his demotion and when everyone believed in the guilt of the condemned man, a divorce had already accomplished itself among men: some applauding the theocratic character of the sanction; others finding that man, however well established his conviction might be, never has the right to declare it in such an affirmative manner and unconsciously, out of hatred of human pride, already conferring some vague sympathy on the condemned man.<sup>8</sup>

Benda’s point is less about the Dreyfus Affair than about authority. Benda, in effect, turns the two sides of the conflict over Dreyfus into opposing stances toward a particular kind of authority—that is, toward the right or the ability of those in positions of power to declare the truth and to act on it. There are those who support (perhaps *relish* would be a more apt term) “theocratic” authority, which is to say, a total authority—authority founded on a readiness to do violence such as Arendt attributed to modern attempts to found (such as Machiavelli’s and Robespierre’s) and on the pretense of certitude, without that limitation that takes the form of doubt (a sensitivity to the skeptical attacks of which Pippin writes)—and there are those who sympathize with Dreyfus before ever learning any mitigating or exculpatory information, precisely because they do not accept authority based on bald assertion of power or on certainty. Benda, one may already suppose, feels some reservations about this hierarchical, “theocratic,” authority. In fact, they are reservations that Cavell and Pippin noted: “theocratic” authority is just what modernism refuses to tolerate on their accounts—one might say that, on their accounts, modernism just is the refusal of authority. But the matter is not so simple. Benda continues:

Here, it is appropriate to dispel a misunderstanding. Many people believe that one of the essential attributes of the modern mind, one of those by which it most clearly opposes itself to the primitive mind, is the repudiation of all authority. That is false: the least disciplined man knows quite well that in taking a cup of tea to assuage a migraine, in avoiding iced drinks when he is perspiring, or in using with confidence his table of logarithms, he is implicitly obeying an authority; he knows quite well that if the beliefs that determine his actions were each subjected to full determination by reason, without the cooperation of authority, he would not live twenty-four hours. So in recognizing subjectively the existence and the necessity of an authority, [there is] no schism between the modern mind and the old. Where is the schism? In the objective value they recognize, the one and the other, in that authority, the old mind according to authority a superhuman essence, a definitive character, and admitting that it manifests itself by irrevocable acts, the modern mind according to it by contrast a completely human essence, a necessarily fragile and transitory character, and demanding that it show itself by acts that are always revocable.<sup>9</sup>

Everyone depends on authority. One lives one's life by performing thousands of little acts of faith in various authorities (the authority of home remedies, of conventional wisdom, of publishers of reference works). The modern challenge to authority isn't a refusal of authority per se; rather, it's a matter of qualifying all authority because of the fallible and relative quality of human knowing. Hence the importance of Benda's use of the term *theocratic* to denote the kind of authority that underwrote the initial phases of the Dreyfus Affair: he was not claiming that the army had a revelation of divine truth, or even that the military asserted anything of the sort, but that it mimicked in its pretensions to certitude the *kind* of authority in its decisions that the Church asserts. It is a kind of modern refounding, in the manner of Arendt's Robespierre. The other kind of authority, which the modern mind finds more congenial and which calls only on human ways of knowing, is not "theocratic," but it is also never certain.

Benda sees advantages in the "theocratic" character of the army's authority. In fact, if he were inclined to defend the army's position, he says, he "would have begun by declaring that 'probably Dreyfus was innocent,' a declaration that would vitiate immediately any victorious effort by my adversaries on the question of fact; then, audaciously transforming the Affair into a pure moral question, I'd have said: 'The army living on nothing but the health of its authority, and the army being more indispensable to us than ever, the greater interest demands the upholding of the sentence.'"<sup>10</sup> He heaps scorn on the "moderates," on the other hand, who want to reform the army.<sup>11</sup>

Rather than either support "theocratic" authority for the military or advocate the suppression of the army, though, Benda looks forward to a modern turning away from "theocratic" or militaristic authority that will transform the army, and transform war with it. One day, the common fighting man will see through the illusions the powerful have used to turn him into an obedient soldier—"fear," "notions of fatherland, of national heritage, of Latin race, of the Germanic world, etc. . . ." After the common soldier sees through

these leftovers of “feudal tyranny,” “he will no longer throw himself into war except at the point of immediate need.” From that time on, the army will respond, not to “discipline,” but to “personal interest” (Benda, 205). “The theocratic army will have given way to the physiocratic army” (“L’armée théocratique aura fait place à l’armée physiocratique”; 205).

Benda then warns us, who overcome old “theocratic” ideas with our modern critical minds, against imagining ourselves superior and triumphant. After all, by assuring “the brutal victory of the fitter races over the less fit, the theocratic ideal [ . . . ] contributed powerfully to the happiness of the species.” That is because when earlier man, “by reason of the grossness of his sensibility and the tyrannizing difficulties of material life, could not absorb the altruistic principles necessary to the preservation of human associations other than by submission to a super-worldly [*supra-terrestre*] command, the theocratic ideal was a true agent of social benefit” (Benda, 206). Benda doesn’t specify which victories or what moment in history or prehistory he has in mind, but presumably he means that those human ancestors who could bracket their individual concerns well enough to unite against rivals advanced the cause of humanity generally, and further that because they were unable to anticipate the benefit of collective action, they managed it only by shared submission to the authority of otherworldly, “theocratic,” ideals. So, false as those ideals may have been, they at least served the well-being of mankind, or of *our* mankind. (Presumably, we are the winners’ heirs.)

Now that we no longer need this tyrannical authority to clarify our interests for us, however, we’re better off. But we should not suppose that we have reached the end of our education: “a crisis, no matter how beneficial it may be, does not mark a radical substitution of the reign of truth for that of error, but simply the supplanting of an erroneous doctrine by a less erroneous doctrine.”<sup>12</sup> Someday we’ll seem like barbarians, too.

But the process itself is justified. If we moderns have lost our belief in the old ideals, we have gained a new belief in reason and its ability to replace those outworn ideals with ever truer notions. So we should feel “profound humility as to our individual powers, combined with a certain naive pride stemming from our awareness that we belong to a species that advances toward perfection and knows that it is headed there.”<sup>13</sup>

Benda’s scheme describes an ongoing exchange between the forces of material necessity and self-interest (which we might call “physiocratic” authority), on one hand, and the collective or supernatural imperatives of God and country (his “theocratic” authority), on the other. Early in his essay, he represents this exchange as a tension between hierarchical forms of social organization and anarchy, but he quickly removes the discussion to the realm of justification, of authority. Talk of social hierarchies and of anarchism never really returns. Benda’s account of authority (including migraine remedies and logarithms) does not really have much to do with government, either; it is an account of how beliefs underwrite our actions, not of how we respond to people of superior rank. The most intriguing aspect of Benda’s essay, to my eye and in relation to my focus, is that he opposes the unmodern “theocratic” notion of authority to self-interest, which is to say, to the practical exigencies of life in general and to the pursuit of material advantage. In fact,

to the extent he finds it possible, he empties out all authority and replaces it with practical considerations. Right as he is that we moderns submit to certain forms of authority (accepting some of what we know on authority, for example), he also shows forcefully and sometimes in spite of himself how inimical submission to authority is to the modern mind. Indeed, he demonstrates it by redirecting his topic at every turn away from the matter of religious doctrine that lends his discussion of authority its paradigm. This is a crucial problem with Benda's thinking, but one that makes his argument all the more relevant for our purposes.

Pablo Picasso and the other figures I discuss came of age in the modern world, which is to say, more or less, in Benda's world. Barcelona was no haven from the problems Benda described, and we know that Picasso's ambit—from his youth through the cubist period and beyond—was filled with people who wrestled with problems of authority and power, anarchism and order. As we know, Picasso concerned himself with those issues to some extent.<sup>14</sup> Apollinaire was even more explicitly engaged.<sup>15</sup> My aim in what follows is not to add to that discussion, not directly anyway, by supporting or rebutting claims about Picasso's engagement with anarchism or about the nature of his putative anarchism. My purpose is to discuss the way he addresses the problem of authority in his work from about 1902 to about 1905. In so doing, I make a claim about his relation to the problems of modernism—specifically, its concern with authority.

Here we can see the relation—or one face of it, which we might call the methodological face—of Picasso's early work to the problem of authority. In calling one face of the problem of authority “methodological,” I refer to the need for an authority to establish its claim to a truth. We generally refer to people as authorities because they can be relied on to know the truth (about their areas of expertise). The Church's authority rests on its assertions about the truth of its doctrine. The authority of our arguments about a work of art depends on the soundness of our methods. Our brief look at *La vie* led to two ways of understanding the picture. One gathers enough arcane historical data to decode iconographic references to produce an allegorical reading we can proclaim to our public, as popularizers of philosophy proclaim the results of philosophy. The modern mind finds this kind of authority suspect—external, dependent, theocratic. (Roland Barthes's “Death of the Author” is the locus classicus for the equation of [the critic's] interest in the author with a theocratic authoritarianism.)<sup>16</sup> The other way of understanding appeals to our personal experiences, to our encounter with the picture itself. But if those experiences are merely subjective—if my response holds only for me—then I have failed to find a way to speak for everyone (as Cavell might put it), to overcome my dependence on my own position (as Pippin might say), or to avoid emptying authority out altogether (as we saw Benda do, in effect). Picasso sought to embody in and to project for the beholder a modern relation to authority in his paintings. Hence his engagement with religion. It is far from coincidental that just at the moment Picasso was devising his enigmatic allegories and plays on traditional iconography, Christianity was simultaneously at a critical stage in its own engagement with modernism.

All the writers I have mentioned so far (Marx, Benda, Greenberg, Cavell, Pippin, and others) have connected the problem of authority (whether they used that term or not) with religion. As I have said, there are good, one might say structural, reasons for that. There are also important historical reasons for the prominence of “the criticism of religion” in turn-of-the-century thought, even though, as Marx noted, it had reached radical conclusions sometime before. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Christianity underwent an extraordinary self-critical review that struck at the heart of its authority and quite possibly put all other authority at stake along with its own.<sup>17</sup>

In 1906 Albert Schweitzer published his famous *Quest of the Historical Jesus*. In it, he summarizes and reflects on modern (mostly, but not exclusively, German) theology after the catastrophic effort of modern historical method in its attempt to rebuild the Christian faith in accordance with the results of modern historical investigation. The process begins with the attempt to remove “mythical elements” from Christian doctrine.<sup>18</sup> Thus miracles fare badly in the quest; indeed, Jesus’s identity with the “supra-mundane Christ” figures as nothing more than a “deception” invented by Greek early Christian theology. Schweitzer’s work depended on that unveiling: the dogma of the Dual Nature of Jesus “had to be shattered before men could once more go out in quest of the historical Jesus” (Schweitzer, 3). Ultimately, Schweitzer sees in this tradition both a destructive and a constructive result:

Those who are fond of talking about negative theology can find their account here. There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the Life of Jesus.

The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give His work its final consecration, never had any existence. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb.

(Schweitzer, 398)

This conclusion, destructive as it is, makes possible the positive issue of the quest: “But the truth is, it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it. Not the historical Jesus, but the spirit which goes forth from Him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the world” (401). And, although the modern world still does not want this message, it is more needed than ever. Modern Christianity has become too comfortable with the world, and too easily overlooks the imperatives of Jesus’s message. Schweitzer concludes:

For that reason it is a good thing that the true historical Jesus should overthrow the modern Jesus, should rise up against the modern spirit and send upon earth, not peace, but a sword. He was not teacher, not a casuist; He was an imperious ruler. It was because He was so in

His inmost being that He could think of Himself as the Son of Man. That was only the temporally conditioned expression of the fact that He was an authoritative ruler. The names in which men expressed their recognition of Him as such, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, have become for us historical parables. We can find no designation which expresses what He is for us.

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as in ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

(Schweitzer, 403)

I refer to Schweitzer's classic work for a few reasons. First, it shows that the purge of "mythical elements" from Christian doctrine was part of a vital theological questioning (the heart of modern liberal theology), and not only the work of a hostile, atheistic debunking. Second, as a survey of developments, Schweitzer's text vividly demonstrates the diffuse character of this questioning. The struggle within the modern, naturalistic worldview for religious belief had been neither simply antagonistic nor small. (Together, the first two points might suggest that theology could take active part in the modernism I described earlier, with Cavell's and Pippin's help. Whether the Church could be part of that modernism is another topic.) Third, for liberal theology—here again, Schweitzer is exemplary—criticism's attack on the supramundane elements of the Gospel accounts of Jesus's life turns out to be curiously beside the point. Theology's engagement with historical criticism yields (at least as Schweitzer sees it) only the conclusion that Jesus's truth transcends historical fact. Christ's death and resurrection cease to be the founding of which Arendt wrote—or, rather, they become challenges for the modern Christian, challenges to found or accept or affirm the kingdom here and now.

This historical criticism was alive and well in France too during the nineteenth century. The *Revue Germanique* was a, if not the, chief forum for inquiry into historical criticism and the principal conduit for German historical biblical criticism in France. It featured long reviews of Ernest Renan and David Friedrich Strauss and original essays on the challenges Christianity and Catholicism faced under modernity.<sup>19</sup> Renan's historical criticism had made a big impression on the French psyche from the midcentury. Later writers in France, most notably Maurice Blondel, Alfred Loisy, and Lucien Laberthonnière, advanced the cause of theological questioning that came to be called Catholic modernism. It must be understood, though, that the three did not present themselves as anything like a unified movement. In fact, "modernism" as a coherent movement emerged slowly and was never highly organized. The name itself is a largely retrospective coinage, and the limits of its usefulness remain debatable. But that does not mean that the thinkers we now associate with Catholic modernism didn't share significant common

ideas or even that they didn't work together. Through the efforts of some determined organizers, such as Baron Friedrich von Hügel, so-called modernists gradually came to know one another and exchange ideas. But a (or *the*) defining moment of Catholic modernism was 1907, when Pope Saint Pius X's encyclicals appeared: *Lamentabili sane exitu* (published in July) and *Pascendi dominici gregis* (published in September). In the first of them the pope enumerated and condemned the errors of theological modernism; in the second he offered a detailed analysis of modernism and condemned it as the "synthesis of all heresies." Even after *Pascendi*, many of the so-called modernists resisted the term Pius applied to the movement and even denied that there was a movement.<sup>20</sup>

Let's say, though, along with both Schweitzer and Pius X, that there is enough coherence among the theological currents named just above to justify speaking of a movement with common aims and ideas. Consider Schweitzer's conclusions, according to which once doubtful doctrines have been debunked, what remains is not a Jesus Christ who has a dual nature (human and divine), but two Jesuses: a historical Jesus and a divine Jesus, who cannot be reconciled. Some researchers, seeing this, pass directly into atheism, having reached the conclusion that Jesus was just a man who tried to start a political or social movement by appeal to existing Jewish scripture and tradition and that the divine Jesus is a retrospective creation of the early Church, which is to say, a creation of some followers of Jesus who, determined to carry on after their leader's death, converted his political objectives into an eschatological expectation. Some, like Renan, who decide to view Jesus as nothing more than an admirable man nevertheless retain a distinctly religious notion that approaches pantheism or syncretism. Others, like Schweitzer, reach the conclusion that Jesus's words are a timeless message, which no fact about the life of the historical Jesus can support or negate, because the message, which finds new form and expression in all times and places, is the true and rightful object of our attention: "That He continues, notwithstanding, to reign as the alone Great and alone True in a world of which He denied the continuance, is the prime example of that antithesis between spiritual and natural truth which underlies all life and all events, and in Him emerges into the field of history" (Schweitzer, 2).

#### AUTHORS AND AUTHORITY

Pippin, once again, offers a general account of the relevance to modernist art of problems like those I have been discussing under the names "modernism" and "authority." If, as Pippin says, "[t]o be a modern individual is to demand independence; on the one hand, historical and intellectual 'maturity,' as Kant put it, a freedom from dependence on historical tradition and the power to rule one's own beliefs; on the other, social or existential self-direction and autonomy" (Pippin, *Modernism*, 38), then the modern novel (Pippin's prime example) is an extended development of certain doubts about the modern individual—not about particular individuals, such as Emma Bovary, but about individuals who seek the kind of independence the modern mind requires:

The novels all take a profound historical perspective; the fate of their characters is in some way portrayed as a necessary fate. There is no language within modern self-understanding for simply accepting the magnitude of their dependence on the utterly contingent mediation of their desires by others. They must deceive themselves about it, promote their own false independence, and so live lives of envy, self-hatred, and disillusion. What independence there is, the independence of the artistic imagination, is often achieved at the price of a very costly social “refusal,” as in the modernist obsession with gamblers, outlaws, con men (all figures of the ever alienated artist), those who try to act out or confirm their independence from the mediation of others; or more typically, at the price of great loneliness and isolation, in a way, at the price of the cessation of human desire, as in the later Marcel [of Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (published 1913–27)], in his cork-lined room, Henry James’s artist characters (e.g. Ralph Touchett [of *Portrait of a Lady* (1881)]), or Thomas Mann’s paradigmatic artist-figures, sick or even dying.

(Pippin, 39)

Marcel’s experience of modernity costs him his faith in all “authorities in the world”—leaving a void he fills in his “final aesthetic retreat” with “self-consciousness or reflection (his claim to ‘authority’)” (Pippin, 42). Trading a social world for a private one, he replaces external authority with the authority of self-knowledge or of understanding won by reflection. Works of modernist art can also challenge their readers or beholders directly, without the intervention of a model modern like Marcel. On Pippin’s reading, Manet’s *Olympia* (1863; Musée d’Orsay, Paris) forces its beholders in effect to accept their independence by denying the authority of established categories to inform an understanding of the particularity of existence (36). Moreover, “the direct, unashamed gaze of the woman at the viewer” apostrophizes the beholder, as if to ask: “And what, exactly, are you looking for? What did you expect, those pink idealizations of classic paintings?” Hence “the classic canons and ideals” that were always previously sufficient to make sense of a nude “are rejected, leaving, Manet already suggests, only the unredeemable particularity of modern existence and the sheer materiality of the painting itself” (37). The woman and the painting, each liberated from its traditional “frame,” challenge the authority of received ways of encountering their kind (women, paintings) and pose new questions, about “exchange relations,” “‘free’ contract between individuals, or of ‘naked’ power” (37).<sup>21</sup>

In what follows, I enlarge on the matter Pippin raises, of a relation between modernity’s refusal of extrinsic, received authority and modernist art’s search for a way to reestablish for itself a new authority.

## THESIS AND HYPOTHESIS

It is time now to say more precisely what that authority might be, and what it might have been for people working on the cusp of the twentieth century. I’ll begin once again at an earlier point in the history of what becomes modernism. Instead of Pius X, I’ll begin with

Pius IX, whose long pontificate, from 1846 to 1878, spanned the central years of a troubled century in the French Church's history. The Concordat of 1801 had established the functional working relation of the French state to the Church that persisted through the nineteenth century and right up to the period I'll be considering more deeply. But relations between France and the Church often came under strain. In the late 1840s, Pius IX authorized a project that culminated in the encyclical *Quanta cura*—his famous Syllabus of Errors—which was sent to all bishops on December 8, 1864. The syllabus (I refer to Pius IX's syllabus—not to Pius X's *Lamentabili sane exitu*) is, more or less, a list of statements that the Church declared to be in error. From the moment it found its way into the press, a large segment of modern European society felt itself to be on the wrong side of the syllabus, which condemns encroachments by science, rationalism, socialism, liberalism, religious tolerance, and the modern state on the doctrines, freedom, and authority of the Church. Several countries, including France, forbade the Church to publish the syllabus (without, it should be noted, forbidding the often anticlerical press to interpret and criticize it).

The French government had special reason to resent the syllabus of 1864. Just a few months before Pius IX sent it to the Church's bishops—indeed on September 15 of the same year—France had reached an agreement with Victor Emmanuel II, the Italian king, to withdraw the French forces that had been assigned to protect the Vatican's sovereignty. The Holy See and its sympathizers took this to be Napoleon III's way of canceling his commitment to the Church and abandoning the Vatican to the shark-infested waters of Italian unification. Many saw the syllabus as a counterattack against Napoleon III, a reprisal for the agreement with Victor Emmanuel. In a sense, that is unjust. Since the syllabus had been in preparation for about fifteen years, it can't simply be called a response to Napoleon III's betrayal. Still, some saw it, or its timing, that way, and although they may have been right about the timing, it is clear that the syllabus attacked not only Napoleon III, but general trends in modern society (which Napoleon III could nevertheless be said to epitomize).

One of the syllabus's points that played badly in France was its position on Church teaching and temporal law under liberalism. The syllabus condemned the subordination of Church teaching to temporal law—as in error 42: "In case of conflicting law enacted by the two powers [Church and state], the civil law prevails." Consequently, many who accepted the view of ascendant liberalism saw the syllabus as insisting that Catholics' obedience to the Church could not accommodate the claims of the state, and therefore as prohibiting faithful Catholics from living in a modern, liberal state.

Bishop Félix Dupanloup of Orléans sought to mitigate their predicament. Dupanloup was an imposing figure in the public life of the French Church during the mid-nineteenth century. He was an educational reformer and campaigner who wrote on pedagogy as well as on the place of religious institutions in the modern world, especially education. Dupanloup played a curiously personal role in the early education of both Renan and Paul Gauguin—a role so significant, in fact, that both felt it necessary later in life to

reflect on it. Dupanloup also made an important and powerful response to the controversy the syllabus provoked in France. His *Convention of the 15th September and the Encyclical of the 8th December* (*La convention du 15 septembre et l'encyclique du 8 décembre*) takes on the claim that the syllabus was a retort to the agreement between Napoleon III and Victor Emmanuel—not by dissociating the two documents, but by insisting that they must be seen together. He proposed that they be seen in juxtaposition, as illustrations of the principles and (more to the point) the wisdom and integrity of the parties.

In his polemic, Dupanloup offers an adequate defense of the syllabus against the accusation that it is sniping at Napoleon III, but he offers an ingenious argument against anyone who aims to use the syllabus to force the question of the French Catholic's potentially conflicted obedience to Church and state. To the first point, Dupanloup points out that the convention of September 15 permitted "two powerful sovereigns" to dispose of a very small neighbor. "This is political." The encyclical of December 8, however, was God's highest representative on Earth addressing all bishops around the globe. "This is religious." Dupanloup sums up: "Politics and religion thus give to the world their measure. On one side, it must be confessed, is power; on the other grandeur."<sup>22</sup>

In other words, Pius IX was not doing anything to anyone, nor was he even addressing himself to those raising the cry. Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel, in contrast, were toying with the fate of a sovereign nation and seemed, callously, to consider it no one's business but their own what they might do with that little country. Their actions seem defensible (no one was objecting to the convention—only to the encyclical) only insofar as we understand that temporal power is both the tool and the justification of politics. The Church shows in its conduct, by contrast, that ecclesiastical grandeur is both humbler and loftier than the power of the state: the Church's territory is the very small country, but its sovereign is justified by God, not by might, and he addresses himself to a whole world, not just to another conniving ruler. Dupanloup's parsing of political and religious authority exemplifies authority working out its thematic face—that is, establishing or defining one authority in relation to another, so that their relation becomes a theme of each authority's reflection on itself. Thus, as Arendt points out, the Church and modern revolutionary states compare themselves to Rome. Dupanloup, by defining the truths of politics against those of religion, seeks to elevate religious truths and to associate political truths with the coercive mechanisms of worldly power. Good as the argument may be—it is surely open to criticism—Dupanloup does his best work elsewhere.

Dupanloup concludes the little book by explaining just how the syllabus's remarks on political liberty, which seem to make it impossible for a Catholic to live in a country whose laws are at odds with those of the Church, really do not put Catholics in an impossible conflict with civil authority. His point is elegant: "the Church is not enfeoffed by her nature to any form of government"; rather, it "accepts all, provided they be just" (Dupanloup, *Convention and Encyclical*, 73; 137). Indeed, "[a]ll governments are comparative and imperfect," and members of the Church may choose freely from among all the available forms of government (republics, monarchies, empires) (74; 138). That is the key: the

members of the Church may choose their relative and imperfect government. They're not affirming principles; they're navigating realities:

How, then, with so liberal a spirit, so large a constitution, could the Church be the enemy of political liberty?

Do you speak of unlimited liberty? When and where in history have you met with this chimera?

What are your own ideas of liberty, allow me to ask?<sup>23</sup>

Dupanloup answers the question himself:

You, yourselves, vociferous advocates for liberty, into what a strange forgetfulness of liberty do you incessantly fall, in what regards us? [. . .] I could here give you in detail [Je pourrais vous faire dire ici en détail] all the illiberal measures you have demanded or approved against us. Understand, then, your own real position in the matter of liberality.

Then you profess to be astonished that the Pope, when attacked, reviled, threatened every day in the name of liberty, turns against this word with a double meaning. St. Peter, his immortal predecessor, also stigmatized this false liberty, which he termed *velamen malitiae* [a cloak for malice (1 Peter 2:16)]! You are surprised that, seeing the earth disturbed by your experiments, he still lacks confidence, and you cry: "No, his principles are incompatible with ours, they are impracticable . . ." Have yours ever been tested? Do you proclaim anything more than an ideal in the clouds? Are you not forced, proud philosophers, to accept the distinction which so shocks you with the theologians, the distinction between thesis and hypothesis, theory and application?<sup>24</sup>

That's the key moment in Dupanloup's argument. The Church, having articulated in the syllabus propositions that distinguish what is right from what is wrong, appears to put its members in a predicament, because it is unimaginable how they might really, practically, live in France or Italy—or the United States, for that matter—without committing either an error as enumerated in the syllabus or a crime as defined by the state.

But in reality, as Dupanloup saw it, the syllabus just tells the faithful the difference between the principles the Church affirms and those it rejects. If the state can espouse liberalism and tolerance yet enact measures that restrict liberty (and show particularly limited tolerance for the Church), then it is already itself affirming principles it does not practice. How can it blame the Catholics of France for living in the same predicament, for living with the same difference between the principles they accept in theory (the thesis) and those they find themselves able and compelled to live under (the hypothesis)? Thus whereas the syllabus, for example, denounces the separation of Church and state, the distinction between thesis and hypothesis, properly understood, shows how to reconcile that absolute condemnation with real circumstances. The historian Marvin O'Connell offers a plainspoken paraphrase of Dupanloup's reasoning: "The separation of church and state, while far from the ideal of complementary partnership between the

secular and the sacred, is still better than a caesaropapism which reduces religion to a governmental function."<sup>25</sup> So while affirming the ideal of Church involvement in temporal matters, Catholics could nevertheless live without contradiction or troubled conscience in a secular state as a condition of life and citizenship in the modern world. Moreover—and as Dupanloup's defense shows—because no liberal state, however vociferously it advocates liberty ("liberté, égalité, fraternité," "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"), actually offers complete liberty, or even aspires to do so, it is not only Catholics who have to accept this condition: the secular liberal world also lives in what Dupanloup calls the hypothesis rather than the thesis.

#### LIBERTY AND APOSTASY

Dupanloup was a famous compromiser. His careful leadership of dissenting elements in the Church during the controversy over the doctrine of infallibility is an excellent example. His career was marked from the beginning by his gift for diplomacy. Renan's memoirs tell an unflattering but intriguing story of an episode that illustrates that gift. They detail his early training under Dupanloup's personal tutelage and guidance—which Renan considered decisive for own his intellectual development—but he also narrates the turning point in Dupanloup's early career, since he sees it as the feat that won Dupanloup his first school. The story shows Dupanloup's political talents forcefully, if not flatteringly.

The decisive moment is the death of Prince de Talleyrand in 1838. (I tell the story here as Renan does, without questioning its historical accuracy.) The prince, having decided after a long, wicked career to effect a deathbed conversion and reconcile himself to the Church—a "final lie" for the sake of "human conventions"—had to find the right priest. Renan sarcastically explains the delicate choice. Neither an old, hard-boiled priest, who would demand too much, nor a young zealot, whom Talleyrand would have hated. The ideal would be "a worldly priest, lettered, as little the philosopher as possible, not at all a theologian, having with the old classes those relations of origin and society without which the Gospel has little access in circles for which it was not made."<sup>26</sup> The young abbé Félix Dupanloup is his choice. Dupanloup, in Renan's account, is a well-connected, literary- (rather than theologically) minded priest—someone suited "for a task of worldly tact rather than of theology, in which it was necessary to know how to fool at once the world and heaven."<sup>27</sup>

Dupanloup surprises Talleyrand by being less compliant than the old prince anticipated. Talleyrand, determined to wait for the last minute, stalls until the morning of his last day to capitulate: "The anguish was extreme. One knows the importance Catholics attach to the moment of death. If future rewards and punishments have some reality, it is clear that these rewards and punishments should be set in proportion to a whole life of virtue or vice. The Catholic doesn't understand it that way. A good death makes up for everything."<sup>28</sup> This from the former seminarian who mocks Dupanloup for lacking

seriousness about theology. (As we'll see, Apollinaire's tale of a deathbed conversion offers a similarly ironic take on strategic absolution.)

Dupanloup waits in the next room while Talleyrand entertains his reservations. Finally, the prince sends for the priest and signs his name, sealing the pact that reconciles him with the Church. The event, in Renan's account, is Dupanloup's making. Dupanloup is offered positions and honors and money, Renan says, and takes the money, not for himself—Renan insists that Dupanloup is perfectly disinterested where his personal fortunes are concerned—but to launch his plan to spread propaganda by "l'éducation classique et religieuse" (Renan, 163).

Thus begins Dupanloup's adventure as the head of the seminary school of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. Saint-Nicolas had been a seminary, engaged exclusively in the education of clergy, but Dupanloup, once he was placed in charge of it, aimed to transform it into a force in education by recruiting students, regardless of their vocation, from among the aristocracy and the most talented young scholars in all France (Renan, 167–68). (Coincidentally, the parish church of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet was seized by the radical right-wing traditionalist [or "intégriste"] *Fraternité sacerdotale Saint-Pie-X* on February 27, 1977.)

That's how Renan, a smart student in a small Breton town, entered Dupanloup's fold. His summons to attend Dupanloup's Saint-Nicolas saved him from a career as a provincial cleric (Renan, 157–58). After leaving Saint-Nicolas, Renan entered the seminary school at Saint-Sulpice, which was just the opposite of Saint-Nicolas. Whereas Dupanloup's curriculum emphasized literature at the expense of theology and philosophy, Saint-Sulpice founded its educational mission on theology:

Saint-Sulpice taught me first to consider as childishness all that M. Dupanloup had taught me to cherish most. What is simpler? If Christianity is a revealed thing, is not the capital occupation of the Christian the study of that very revelation, which is to say theology? Theology and the study of the Bible came soon to absorb me, to give me the true reasons to believe in Christianity and also the true reasons not to adhere to it. For four years, a terrible struggle occupied all of me, until this word, which I repulsed for a long time as a diabolical obsession: "That is not true!" tried again and again at my interior ear with an invincible persistence.<sup>29</sup>

The result of that inner struggle was Renan's contribution to the historical biblical criticism Schweitzer discussed, his influential *Vie de Jésus* (*Life of Jesus*) and other writings. The character of that struggle is important, too: Renan struggled against the institution that was instructing him but was not, he states emphatically enough, in rebellion against it. As his reference to the voice in his ear suggests, the struggle was fought within himself, adjudicated by his own love of right. Renan makes a point of this:

As for me, I don't think that in any period of my life I have obeyed; yes, I've been docile, submissive, but to an intellectual principle, never to a material force proceeding from the

fear of punishment. My mother never ordered me to do anything. Between me and my ecclesiastical masters all was free and spontaneous. Whoever has known this *rationabile obsequium* [reasonable service] could no longer tolerate any other. An order is a humiliation; whoever has obeyed is *capitis minor* [diminished in respect of citizen rights], sullied in the germ of the noble life. Ecclesiastical obedience does not degrade; because it is voluntary, and one may separate oneself.<sup>30</sup>

Renan is like a priest in that his obedience is spontaneous, not a response to coercion. By this he means that priests are in principle free, because what they believe it right to do must be in agreement with what they are required to do. Renan paints a picture of a perfect liberty within a perfect authority. It's also a perfect excuse for his apostasy—as if the Church, to reproach him for renouncing his faith, would have to pretend that it was acceptable for priests to profess faith even if they had none. Authority, to remain legitimate, needs to be in accord with liberty. We might even say: for authority to rescue itself from a reduction, such as Benda performs, into “theocratic” and “physiocratic” authorities—which are not really credible authorities at all but different species of coercion—it must ground itself in truth. The Church must respect, then, the conclusions of the individual theologian's sincere pursuit of truth, even if they lead him into apostasy.

Recall that Dupanloup also wrote about authority in his apology for Pius IX's syllabus. And he reached conclusions very different from Renan's, so that he remained within the Church whereas Renan regarded the Church as an obstacle to the truth. But Dupanloup offered no conflicting definition of authority. Indeed, he wrote about authority on other occasions and to reconcile it with liberty in ways that show that a shared notion of authority underlay his view and Renan's. For example, in his *Première lettre à M. le Duc de Broglie* (1844), Dupanloup writes:

Yes, Catholicism has the spirit of liberty, just as it has the spirit of authority.

But it must be understood: liberty for good, liberty for truth, liberty for virtue: there is the true force of humanity, there is its conquering force, its creative force: nothing is more brilliant, nothing is more fecund.

...

True authority, legitimate liberty should always be allied, never at war.

There is no right against right.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, people are fallible and often lapse into the false liberty that is not in harmony with authority. Here true authority helps, according to Dupanloup—“divine authority itself profoundly respects our liberty.”<sup>32</sup> “Christianity and evangelical grace” work together as a force to “free man from his fetters, from the tyrannical violences that oppress him, that constrain him, that diminish his liberty.”<sup>33</sup> Legitimate liberty is the liberty to do what is right. When tyrants (such as the French government), who seek to deprive the public of true liberty, combine their attack with the seductions of a false liberty, which is really license, the result is a great difficulty (Dupanloup, “La Liberté,” 256). Dupanloup

sounds like Renan. (Or rather, Renan, for all the disdain he heaps on Dupanloup as a philosopher, offers the same account of liberty and authority that Dupanloup does.)

Dupanloup spells out the relation between authority and writing, too. In his book on education (*De l'éducation*), he defines authority in a way that especially interests me because it brings the issue of authority into direct contact with the work of authorship:

*Authority*: in Latin *auctoritas*, comes from the noun *auctor*, author, creator. The word itself comes from *agere, augere*, which indicates the power of action and sometimes a creative action.

But in human thought, what is the author? The author is he who creates, who produces a thing.

The dictionary of the Academy, too, says: *Author, he who is the first cause of something.*

There is the idea itself, the simple idea, the essential idea that this name presents.

This name suits God eminently as author, as the first cause of all things. One also says: God is *the author of the universe: the author of nature; the author of all that exists.*

One says of a father: *That's the author of my days; of an illustrious ancestor: that's the author of my race.*

In literature, *an author* is he who has made a book: nothing is more commonly repeated. He is *the author of this book*; this book is his work.

An artist is also the author of the picture he has painted, of the statue he has sculpted.

A legislator is the author of a law he has made: thus one says: *Lycurgus is the author of Lacedemonian law.*

*The author* is thus always he who creates, who produces, who invents, who establishes, who institutes something.<sup>34</sup>

Dupanloup gives the same account of authority-as-founding that Arendt offered. But he emphasizes its connection with authorship. Dupanloup's view of authority is a literary one, or at least his view of authority owes its origin and its nature as much to the relation between author and work and reader and work as it does to any other paradigm—that is, he does not think of authority as a police force or a court of law. It can be paternal or it can be legal, but his idea of authority is at least equally the relation of a poet to his poem and of a painter to his painting. He concludes with the point I would underscore:

Authority is the natural right of an author over his work.

Indeed, it is said to be the right to command, and to this right corresponds the duty to obey.<sup>35</sup>

You may write to compel others, but that prerogative also entails the duty to accept the consequences of what you write. Authority is meaningless without obedience. Again, this statement is consistent with Renan's and Dupanloup's accounts of the relation of liberty to authority, seen, as it were, from the reverse angle: We have seen that the seminarian's obedience is not submission to another's commands but rather assent to the truth. If you

are the one who claims to say what is true, however, your assent is implied and you are obliged to live in conformity with it. Your authority is at stake. Authority is not the power to issue arbitrary commands; rather, it entails joining with those under one's authority in submission to the truth one proclaims (and the imperatives or injunctions that follow from it). This is what I call the ethical face of the problem of authority: living out the implications of what one proclaims with authority. If I tell my children that they must eat a healthy diet but do so from behind my nightly platter of *poutine*, I lose authority in their eyes—because my behavior indicates to them that I don't know what a healthy diet is or do not take my own pronouncement seriously enough to obey it.

## REVELATION AND GOSSIP

Søren Kierkegaard makes the point forcefully. *The Book on Adler* is Kierkegaard's study of Pastor Adolph Peter Adler, a theologian and preacher who claimed to have received a revelation and then withdrew his claim, or qualified it, saying that he was uncertain whether he had received a revelation. Adler is an exemplary figure for Kierkegaard because his uncertainty about the revelation embodies the confusion of an age that as Kierkegaard put it, has forgotten authority.<sup>36</sup>

In *The Book on Adler*, however, Kierkegaard also writes about writing and different kinds of writing. He advances a distinction between what he calls premise-authors and genuine authors and repeatedly opposes works that reach conclusions and are genuine, on the one hand, to the chatter of newspapers, on the other.<sup>37</sup> These remarks on writing, are also comments on ways of living—they are not separate from the problems of revelation and authority that are Kierkegaard's main theme. Nor are they distinct from the problem of authority in writing as Dupanloup, for example, presents it. The book's introduction begins by calling its age, "according to what the barber says," an "age of movement." Kierkegaard supposes therefore the likelihood that many people "have premises for living but do not arrive at any conclusion" and in this, they are like their age (Kierkegaard, 7).

Newspapers emblemize the needy incompleteness of those who generate premises rather than conclusions. Modernity's understanding of itself is the stuff of barbers' and newspapers' gossip. Revelation is more difficult under such circumstances—not because of modernity's scientific, naturalistic spirit nor because of the historical investigation Schweitzer traces, but rather because of modernity's chatter, because of its newspapers, and because of the relation to one's own experience that such forums as chatter and newspapers produce. It was not always thus—"in those distant times when a man was vouchsafed lofty revelations, he used a long time to understand himself in this marvel before he began to want to guide others." Our age is different, though:

Now, however, immediately the next morning one puts in the newspaper that one had a revelation last night. Perhaps one fears that the quiet solitary reflection (on what in the

most extreme sense might very well alter a person's whole existence even if he never mentioned it to anyone) would lead one to the humbling but rescuing insight that it was an illusion, so one would drop the whole matter and would seek to become reconciled with God with respect to it, so one on lesser terms would truly become a teacher who knew how to teach others and to hold the highest infinitely in honor.

(Kierkegaard, 22–23)

Putting your revelation in the newspaper the morning after receiving it is not a way of disseminating it; it's a way of evading it. You publish your revelation experience but wait for the public to tell you how to take it, as fact or delusion, as a dream or a call. The prophet who publishes his revelation in the newspaper, as premise rather than conclusion, "wants to convert his call from God into a call from public opinion" (Kierkegaard, 25). (Dupanloup might say you were neither exercising the author's right to command nor honoring the author's duty to obey. Renan might say you had chosen mere obedience over the love of truth, over the diabolical or divine word that assaults your inward ear.) Keeping it to yourself until you are sure of yourself, sure enough of it to let it change your life—that would be the response of a true prophet, one who had not forgotten the meaning of authority and who wanted to speak with authority.

In the modern age, however, the forgetting of that meaning is widespread. That is why Adler is exemplary rather than simply extraordinary. Adler was eventually suspended by the Danish church—not because his revelation was false but rather because he was judged mentally unfit, a judgment that shows the Danish church no longer able or willing to appeal to its own authority to tell true doctrine from heresy. (Otherwise, the church would presumably have declared Adler a heretic or a prophet.) The church no longer asserted—that is to say, it had forgotten—its authority. Indeed the modern Christian, accustomed to pondering the miracles of two thousand years ago, experiences in doing so a task that differs greatly from facing a contemporary irruption of the supernatural in the natural world. Believing that Christ changed water into wine two thousand years ago is easy compared with taking seriously someone in the flesh who claims to have witnessed the same thing only yesterday (Kierkegaard, 46ff.).

To sum up: authority (as opposed to coercion, worldly power) flows from truth. Whatever matter that truth addresses, it always also means that the figure asserting the authority knows himself and understands himself in his relationship to the truth. The modern search for truth in historical criticism, at the expense of the Church's authority, sets the stage for a crisis. The Church's assertion of authority becomes problematic. In the process, however, historical method loses its own authority. (It can establish facts for us, but not compel us. That is what Schweitzer announced in 1906: now that we have the facts about the historical Jesus, we can see that we need the divine one instead.) If neither doctrine nor historical research can underwrite the authority we need, how shall we ground it? Further, we have seen a crisis in what it means to possess authority. Authority means acting on the truth, both professing it and embracing the imperatives that follow

from it. In order to recognize or submit to authority, one must acknowledge its truth and acknowledge that its truth is also a truth about oneself (about what one must do, become, admit, proclaim) and, finally, one must embrace and be compelled by that truth, whether one asserts authority or recognizes the authority of another. One participates in—one gains—authority by submitting to genuine authority. This is the ethical face of the problem of authority. Authority poses two challenges: first, establishing authority by gaining a clear relation to a truth; second, establishing authority by living the consequences of the truth. Thus freedom is only the freedom to obey true authority (the freedom to act on the truth); freedom turned to any other purpose is merely license (or, to phrase the same idea differently, submission to some coercion).

As both Dupanloup and Kierkegaard make clear, authority is not a problem only for the Church (or a church). Furthermore, even someone (like Renan) who rejects the divinity of Jesus still faces the problem of authority. It is a problem that belongs to writing in general—even to representation in general. It is probably no surprise, then, that I claim the poets and painters that I discuss engage the problem of authority in their works.

#### POETS AND DESPOTS

To clarify my point in relation to artistic representations and to begin closing in on the figures with whose works my argument is most centrally occupied, I go to the headwaters of symbolist poetry, with a few remarks about Baudelaire's "Au lecteur," in which I follow very loosely an argument of Ross Chambers.<sup>38</sup> The poem, which opens Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, is about the relationship between the figure Chambers describes as an "Oriental despot"—whose identity is unclear or shifting—and the victims of his repressive violence. The poem embodies the idea of despotic rule in different persons: in the figure of "Satan Trismégiste," or "le Diable," who "vaporizes" "the rich metal of our will" and "holds the strings that move us," and in the personification of "Ennui," which "dreams of scaffolds as it smokes its houka."

As the title of the poem implies, "Au lecteur" also takes up its relationship to its reader as a central theme. The poem's famous ending, "—Hypocrite lecteur, —mon semblable, —mon frère!" makes clear that the stance the poem assumes toward the reader includes both kinship or similarity (*semblable, frère*) and a posture of denunciation (*hypocrite*). The cruelty, one might even say violence, of the denunciation places the subject of the poem and the reader in a relationship of domination that bears comparison to the dominion of the despotic figures of Satan and Boredom the poem names and narrates. Chambers explains:

What founds the similarity between text and reader, then, in the final analysis, is at the level of what in the reader is concealed (including concealed from the reader himself) but in the text is laid bare; and what defines the communicational relationship between text and reader, and establishes the necessary difference without which the act of communication

would be pointless, is the act of denunciation which positions speaker and addressee, respectively, as subject and object of a symbolic act of cruelty, the denunciatory stripping away of that concealment. There is an Oriental despot in the reader and an Oriental despot in the text, and in one sense it is the selfsame despot, the houka-smoking, gallows-dreaming victim of Ennui. But, of the two, the Oriental despot in the text lays claim to being stronger and crueller, since by denunciation he forces acknowledgement, that is discovery of the Oriental despot in the reader ("Tu le connais, lecteur!"), while retaining in some degree his own "cover."

(Chambers, 104-5)

The text pictures repressive, despotic figures, but also exercises a cruel, even despotic authority over the reader. And that despotic authority grows from the knowledge the despot in the text has and proclaims *of himself* and *of the reader*. That is to say, the text's despotism is not coercion, but real authority.

There are differences between the despots of Satan and Boredom and the despot in the poem's voice. Satan and Boredom vaporize the will, lure the reader into hell by lassitude and self-deception. But the subject who speaks in the text calls the reader to acknowledgment. He sounds the alarm. Moreover, rather than seduce the reader, as Satan and Boredom do, the subject of the poem speaks to the reader, at first as his double (using the first-person plural); then, having established his claim to know the same vices and weaknesses, to have been dominated by the same despots, the poem's subject abruptly confronts the reader personally and directly (and notably in the familiar form of the second-person singular). This shift gives the voice of the text the superiority Chambers notes.<sup>39</sup> It also forces the reader to assent and accept the denunciation or else to deny being the reader the text addresses (Chambers, 104).

A strikingly similar theme is at work in Apollinaire's "Zone," which begins with a curious piece of theology:

You are tired at last of this old world  
O shepherd Eiffel Tower the flock of bridges bleats at the morning  
You have had enough of life in this Greek and Roman antiquity  
Even the automobiles here seem to be ancient  
Religion alone has remained entirely fresh religion  
Has remained simple like the hangars at the airfield  
You [tu] alone in all Europe are not antique O Christian faith  
The most modern European is you [vous] Pope Pius X  
And you [tu] whom the windows look down at shame prevents you [te]  
From entering a church and confessing [t'y confesser] this morning  
You [Tu] read prospectuses catalogues and posters which shout aloud  
Here is poetry this morning and for prose there are the newspapers  
There are volumes for 25 centimes full of detective stories  
Portraits of famous men and a thousand titles<sup>40</sup>

Apollinaire's reference to Pius X seems key to understanding the opposition between old and modern and how it works. Pius is, after all, "the most modern European," even though Apollinaire is being ironic when he calls Pius X that. Pius cuts a conservative figure in the popular understanding of recent Church history; indeed, it was he who had elevated the notion of modernism to broad intellectual currency by denouncing it and suppressing it in 1907. I say Apollinaire is being ironic, though, not nonsensical. I suppose what he means is that by insisting, against certain conclusions of liberal theology, that New Testament miracles like the Ascension are real rather than mythological (to borrow a term from liberal theology), Pius makes Jesus's acts directly comparable to those of latter-day aviators.<sup>41</sup> And so Apollinaire portrays Jesus as the first and greatest aviator: "C'est le Christ qui monte au ciel mieux que les aviateurs / Il détient le record du monde pour la hauteur" (9). Catholicism's technology, under Pius X, has remained ahead of the latest breakthroughs in aviation. Further, its insistence on a literal understanding of the Ascension permits Apollinaire to regard it, not as a historical claim at a comfortable distance, but from the viewpoint of contemporaneity that Kierkegaard commended to the modern Christian.

The difference between aviation and the Ascension is that one is part of man's increasing control over the natural order—a distinctive feature of modernity—whereas the other is supernatural, the intrusion of the divine into the worldly, whose untroubled acceptance can be seen as a feature of a premodern mode. One thing that theological modernism, at least, can do, however, is collapse the two into a single order, either by "demythologizing" Christian doctrine—purging religious faith of whatever is at odds with modern standards of plausibility—or by proposing to see the divine as immanent in the natural world generally (a viewpoint that can verge on pantheism), or by doing both.

Another feature of "Zone" seems to be a nod to theological modernism: As Christ flies into the sky, he is followed by an assortment of personages and creatures, many of them of mythological or biblical provenance: devils, angels, "Icare Enoch Elie Apollonius de Thyane," and birds (some of them mythological or associated with the sacred) from different parts of the world. The motley mythological array suggests syncretism—Christ leads a troop that represents not only nature but also different religious or mythological traditions, implying that Christ coexists with them and that they regard Christ as a peer. Despite Christ's primacy among the flying host, not all of them respect Him.<sup>42</sup> The devils describe Him as having stolen the idea of flying from Simon Magus: "Ils disent qu'il imite Simon Mage en Judée / Ils crient s'il sait voler qu'on l'appelle voleur" (9). Christ's miracles—that He knows how to fly (*voler*)—are borrowed from earlier religious traditions; that is, they make him a thief (*voleur*). This strikes me as Apollinaire's characteristically witty way of paraphrasing a syncretic view of Christianity—his Christianity gives specific form to universal ideas. In effect, then, it "steals" a universal truth. The idea that all religions are versions of a single truth is another key feature of theological modernism. (It is also arguably modernist in the sense that Pippin, for instance, explained. This syncretic impulse can express a desire to free religious feeling from dependence on the perspective one owes to one's particular, limited, contingent religious tradition.)<sup>43</sup>

The modernist collapses I have just noted—of miracle into nature and of Christianity into syncretism—mirror another collapse with deep roots in symbolist aesthetics. Just as the narrator sees the supernatural and the natural worlds together (as Christ flies with the aviators), so he sees poetry and the language of newspapers and billboards together, as members of the same order. The narrator begins reading posters for poetry and newspapers for prose. The tension between literature (poetry, prose in the artistic sense) and the language of the modern poster and popular periodical has—and had when Apollinaire wrote “Zone”—quite a pedigree. (Mallarmé is the most famous case of a major figure of modernist literature expressing an ambivalent relation to the popular press.<sup>44</sup> And his case is unquestionably relevant to our understanding of members of the *bande à Picasso*, such as Apollinaire.) One can think of Apollinaire as launching an attack on the high-art status of poetry, on behalf of the “low” media of journalism and advertising.<sup>45</sup> Another way to see it—or possibly, another way to describe the same thing—is as a poetic pantheism, in which every utterance is available to poetry.

Hans Robert Jauss's view of “Zone” unites Apollinaire's excitement about modernity with its cost: the excitement of modernity comes at the price of alienation from himself, from his voice: “Admittedly, the *flâneur* in *Zone* is everywhere able, on his walk through Paris, to discover and praise the poetry of technology and the beauty of ‘industrial art.’ Yet to the extent that he succumbs to the fascination of the metropolis—from the early morning of the working masses to the stale nightly pleasures of the poor—he must also undergo the experience of having his own self elude him, even as he seeks, in both the ‘I’ and the ‘You’ of his changing voices, to call it to account.”<sup>46</sup> Jauss's point is that Apollinaire's “vers libre” and “new aesthetic of simultaneity, of continuous fragmentation and amimetic montage,” put the reader in a difficult position: “Since the occasion determining the kaleidoscopically changing foci of the poem remains hidden from the reader, he is now a ‘third person,’ in the role of an alien, as it were, for whom the event evoked is entirely unfamiliar” (Jauss, 43). Thus Apollinaire has set the reader an unusual task: “he must now constantly produce for himself hypotheses of meaning, and reorder the irritating actuality of the text in everchanging arrangements” (Jauss, “1912,” 43). This is a matter, not just of suppressing the usual forms of narrative or descriptive coherence, but also of calling forth a different kind of reader:

It requires [. . .] that the reader abandon the conventional contemplative focus and become productive himself, reconstructing a modern experience of the whole through the destruction of his usual expectations. A reconstruction, that is, of the aesthetic idea of the world that makes the immemorably old recognizable once more in the absolutely new. In the discontinuous lyrical movement of *Zone*, and in the praise of the unprecedented ascendancy of modernity—in which is inscribed, as a countercurrent, the experiences of the dismembered, alienated self—the contradiction between the initial vision and the closing image can remain unresolved.

(Jauss, 43–44)

The initial vision to which Jauss refers is that of the soaring Christ, and the closing image, the encounter the narrator describes “after a night of carousing, seeking sleep among his oceanic fetishes, [where] there appears to him, instead of the modern Christ in the utopian form of a flyer, an unrecognized god dismembered into a great multitude” (Jauss, “1912,” 42). Rather than a reader who receives an aesthetic world as a whole image transmitted by an author’s poetic labor, Jauss describes one who assembles a simultaneous polyphony of images and thereby makes the poetic world immediate and, indeed, modern. The two figures of deity Jauss mentions—the modern Christ and the “inferior Christs”—represent, as I understand Jauss to say, an optimistic embrace of modernity, on the one hand, and the price one pays, “the lyrical ‘I’s’ loss of its own self” (Jauss, 42), on the other.

This trade-off—in which modernity exchanges objective intelligibility, underwritten, as it were, by the poet’s authority, for an immediacy of personal experience, leaving to the reader the task of establishing the authority of a reading—strikes me as a central issue in “Zone.” Its relation to the poem’s religious/sacrilegious thematics seems no less important. If I differ from Jauss in matters I’ve been reviewing, it is on the reader’s place in this unusual and modern kind of poetry. Jauss sees “Zone” as part (and the more radical “Lundi rue Christine” as a more advanced part) of the history of modernism, specifically, its move to “free aesthetic reception from its contemplative passivity by involving the reader, the observer, or onlooker himself in the concretization of the aesthetic object. He becomes, after a fashion, a fellow creator of the work, and as such abandons the classical illusion par excellence of an expectation of a closed form filled with meaning, and understands that the foundation of meaning in interpretation, like artistic activity itself, is always only a possible development of an interminable task” (Jauss, “1912,” 62).

I have to disagree. I return later to the problems Jauss raises. But for now, one way to express that disagreement (not the only way or even the most categorical) is to suggest that the “I’s” alienation from itself also functions to provide “cover” (as Chambers might say) for the poem’s voice to confront the reader with its authority.

Consider, for instance, the “tu” the narrator addresses (as opposed to the “vous” he uses, appropriately enough, for Pius X), who is on the horns of a dilemma:

Et toi que les fenêtres observent la honte te retient  
D’entrer dans une église et de t’y confesser ce matin

The “you,” before he is drawn to the call of the posters and newspapers, finds himself torn between shame and the desire to reconcile himself with the Church. To pass a church that way is to be in the grip of faith—to feel sufficiently drawn to the confessional to feel held back from it. And to refuse the call of the confessional is different from simply not having faith.

The “you” the narrator addresses feels like a puzzle at first.<sup>47</sup> There is a “tu” in the third line of the poem, but one may read that (incorrectly) as referring to the Eiffel-tower-

as-shepherdess, and another in the seventh, which may refer to Christianity. Pius X is “vous.” So the “toi” in the ninth line—should that be read as addressing and as referring to the reader? As if Apollinaire were telling me about me? Not clearly: the matter gets a little complicated over the course of the next stanza or so, but it comes to seem that the narrator is doing something like talking to himself about himself. In fact, the narrator comes likewise to be identifiable with Apollinaire himself, since the poem refers autobiographically to “le plus ancien de tes camarades René Dalize” (8).

My interest in this particular passage, though, combines the “tu”’s failure to answer the call to confession, which he hears but cannot obey, with the use of the second person (even more, of the second-person familiar), which transforms the description of this ambivalent response into a confrontation: it is at once a claim about what the “tu” is feeling and an accusation (that the “tu” resists the call because of shame, which is hardly a legitimate reason). Indeed, the two lines in question amplify the sense of confrontation. The windows observe “you.” Shame, too, suggests a self-conscious awareness of how one must (or might) seem to another (a confessor, God, oneself in a reflective or self-critical mood). Ultimately, if we decide that the “tu” who feels the ambivalent attraction to the confessional is also the (autobiographical) narrator, that decision won’t undermine the sense that using the second person creates a confrontational mood; it will only dramatize what we all already know: that you can confront yourself. As such, I take Apollinaire’s “tu” to be in some sense, at least, an apostrophe to the reader (even if he then “reveals” it to be his voice addressing itself). Just like the closing of Baudelaire’s “Au lecteur,” “Zone”’s “tu” demands (again: even if it appears almost immediately to rescind the demand) that you either acknowledge its claim (that you are held back from the confessional by shame) or admit that you aren’t the poem’s reader.

This use of the second person, and other, similar techniques for addressing (or, as I say, apostrophizing)<sup>48</sup> the reader, especially when such techniques mean confronting the addressee with a call to reform (like the call to the confessional) or with the addressee’s failure to heed a call—this is one of the themes I point to in the work by Picasso and the poets closest to him. It is a way a poem can assert authority. In what follows, I explain the place of the problem of authority in poetry and painting, too, around Picasso and Apollinaire in the early years of the twentieth century.