

**Cross-Channel Dialogues:
Antinaturalism in Britain and France, c. 1878-1898**

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Abstract

Symbolism was the first overtly international artistic movement, in the broadest sense of the word. To date, however, much Symbolist scholarship, shaped by the seminal Modernist accounts of Chassé, Goldwater and Lövgren, has focused on the achievements of French artists and writers to the exclusion of the equally significant contributions made by artists from other countries. British artists in particular have been sidelined, despite frequent contemporary acknowledgment of the importance of key artists such as Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts and Beardsley. Unfortunately, recent attempts to redress this imbalance, notably the 1997 Tate Gallery exhibition *Symbolism in Britain*, have erred toward the opposite extreme, claiming that Symbolism had first evolved in Britain, only to be appropriated by France. Furthermore, the retroactive application of the term Symbolism to British artists is problematic. By adopting the broader definition of antinaturalism and creating a series of case studies focusing on pairs or trios of artists whose interactions highlight important aspects of this cross-Channel exchange, this thesis aims to look anew at a major strand of cultural thought that transcended national boundaries.

This thesis seeks to recover an understanding of both the mutually beneficial, if occasionally contentious, cross-Channel dialogue and the mechanisms that made it possible. In the first half of the thesis, I consider the role of international exhibitions, especially the 1878 and 1889 Expositions Universelles, in promoting dialogue and disseminating artistic reputations, with particular emphasis on Burne-Jones, Watts, Moreau and Puvis de Chavannes. The second half considers antinaturalist exchange in the private sphere, with particular attention to the importance of reproductive and original prints in the reception and interpretation of artists and their work on both sides of the Channel. I also examine the role played in this exchange by poetry and music and the impulse toward a synthesis in the arts, with special emphasis on Debussy as a mediator between Rossetti and Maurice Denis and on the Wagnerian prints of Fantin-Latour, Redon and Beardsley. Returning once again to the arena of the Exposition Universelle, my thesis concludes with a consideration of critical perceptions of a new internationalism in the Exposition's fine art displays, and an assessment of the impact of the cross-Channel antinaturalist exchange in this development.

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Introduction

Cross-Channel Dialogues

At the conclusion of his exhaustive history of Symbolism, *La Mêlée symboliste*, the critic Ernest Raynaud made the following surprising claim: Charles Morice is wrong to claim that the Symbolist movement was French in origin. It was no more so than Romanticism, of which it is a variety, and like Romanticism, of Anglo-German origin. [...] Aestheticism signified the cult of the form, with all concern for teaching and utilitarianism banished. It signified a spiritualised art, absolute art, art for art's sake, as understood by our poets inspired by them, Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire; these were the fundamentals of what we have since called the religion of beauty. All the refinements of Symbolism were implied in this formula: the hatred of the vulgar and the common, the search for rare sensations, the taste for the precious, archaisms, neologisms, unusual and coruscating words. In this order of ideas, the English aesthetes had anticipated everything.¹

Raynaud's vision of Symbolism, albeit largely centred upon its evolution in France, acknowledges the fundamental role that British writers and artists played in its development. Nor was he alone among his contemporaries in recognising the importance of international, and more specifically cross-Channel, exchanges to Symbolism's growth. Camille Mauclair's *L'Art en silence* (1901) paid frequent tribute to the impact of artists such as Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti on the Symbolist imagination, while two decades earlier, Joris-Karl Huysmans had paid ironic but genuine homage to the visionary paintings of George Frederic Watts in *À rebours* and Gabriel Sarrazin had devoted much ink in *La Revue indépendante* (1884) and in a monograph on English poetry (1885) to the parallels between the goals of the 'Aesthetic School' and his fellow Symbolists. Meanwhile, in London, Henri Fantin-Latour, who had been quietly exhibiting imaginative lithographs at the Dudley Gallery's Black and White Exhibitions since the 1870s, began to garner praise in the 1880s and 1890s for the Wagnerian subjects he showed at the Royal Academy, while

¹ 'Mais Charles Morice a tort de prétendre que le mouvement symboliste fut d'origine française. Il ne le fut pas plus que le romantisme dont il est une variété. Il est, comme lui, d'origine anglo-germaine. [...] L'esthétisme, cela signifiait le culte de la forme, tout souci d'enseignement et d'utilitarisme écarté. Cela signifiait l'art spiritualisé, l'art absolu, l'art pour l'art, tel que l'entendirent chez nous les poètes inspirés d'eux: Théophile Gautier et Charles Baudelaire; c'étaient les fondements jetés de ce qu'on a appelé depuis: la religion de la beauté. Tous les raffinements du symbolisme étaient impliqués dans cette formule; la haine du vulgaire, du commun, la recherche des sensations rares, le goût du précieux, des archaïsmes, des néologismes, des mots insolites et coruscants. Dans cet ordre d'idées, les esthètes anglais ont tout prévu.' E. Raynaud, *La Mêlée symboliste* (Paris, 1918-1920), vol. 3, pp. 166-68. All translations from the French are mine, unless otherwise noted.

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Odilon Redon was making a bid to break into the London art market at a gallery near the offices of the influential publisher John Lane. Meanwhile, Aubrey Beardsley was not only praising the art of his French contemporaries to Arthur Symons and André Raffalovich, but also boasting of his contacts with such luminaries as Pierre Puvis de

Chavannes. Over the last three decades of the nineteenth century, an era during which the impulse towards international rapprochement and dialogue coexisted uneasily with rising militarism and competing nationalisms, artistic exchange formed a vital, if frequently contentious, backbone in the evolution of a Symbolist aesthetic, and its importance was repeatedly, albeit sometimes grudgingly, acknowledged by commentators on both sides of the Channel.

This was not, however, the account of Symbolism put forward by the object of Raynaud's criticism, Charles Morice. Morice, in his 1889 treatise *La Littérature de toute à l'heure*, claimed that Symbolism's origins were 'Baudelairean and Verlainian' and thus wholly French and that its purity was only lately being polluted by the deleterious influence of foreigners.

Jean Moréas, a Greek; Jules Laforgue, long influenced by English and German poetics; Gustave Kahn, a Semite: to these foreign origins I attribute this neglect of the French, Latin genius, which, more than all others, loathes this systematic neglect of natural laws.²

It has been said that the ability to name something carries with it the privilege of ownership. Symbolism is a powerful case in point. It was arguably the first ever overtly international artistic movement – and I use the word 'artistic' in the broadest sense possible – yet it has suffered a curious fate at the hands of history and scholarship. In part because it was first formally named and its principles set forth by Jean Moréas in his 1886 'Manifeste de Symbolisme', and many of its most vocal and articulate practitioners were French, much subsequent scholarship on Symbolist literature and art has been strongly Francocentric, to the detriment or, on occasion, exclusion of the contributions of other countries. However blatantly nationalistic Morice's views were, his Francocentrism and that of many of his colleagues set the prevailing tone in the historiography of Symbolism for the greater part of the

² Jean Moréas, grec; Jules Laforgue, longtemps influencé par les poétiques anglaise et allemande; Gustave Kahn, sémite: à ces origines étrangères j'attribue cet oubli du génie français, latin, qui, plus que tout autre, répugne à cet oubli systématique des lois naturelles': C. Morice, *La Littérature de tout à l'heure* (Paris, 1889), p. 316. He adds in a note that 'c'est une des singularités du mouvement dit décadent que, si français par son origine baudelairienne et verlainienne, il fut, en ces derniers temps de sa plus retentissante période, comme capté par des écrivains jeunes de races étrangères à la nôtre' (p. 319).

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twentieth century. Nowhere does this hold truer than in the case of the France's beloved enemy, Britain. Yet the idea that French Symbolism engaged in a monologue rather than a dialogue with other nations is nowhere more erroneous than in regard to its longstanding cross-Channel rival. The eclipse of the contributions of British artists and writers has only recently begun to be challenged. It is my aim, in this thesis, to recover a deeper understanding of the dialogues, in word and image, conducted by Symbolist artists on both sides of the Channel, and in so doing reveal a more balanced and complex relationship between the two countries than has previously been acknowledged.

Why has the international, and more specifically the Anglo-French, character of Symbolism been so consistently sidelined? A number of factors have shaped the entrenchment of French pre-eminence. British insularity, on the part of both artists – notably those who dominated the New English Art Club (ironically, those very painters who promoted a British brand of Impressionism) at the turn of the century – and critics must surely bear part of the blame. However, the ascendancy of

littérateur-art critics such as Morice gave rise to two apparently contradictory problems that have

long dogged efforts to re-evaluate Symbolism's position as a cultural phenomenon and art historical current. In a major artistic centre in which decades of institutional upheaval had contributed to the ascent of a dealer-critic system as best suited to the interests of the avant-garde, the art critic had accumulated tremendous influence; nowhere did this hold truer than in Symbolist circles, in which affiliations between poets and painters were prevalent and exceptionally strong, and it was the rare poet or novelist who did not practice art criticism at some point in his career.³ The eloquence and dominance of literary critics in France ensured the entrenchment of a new aesthetic hierarchy: in place of the hierarchy of genres that had reigned over the Salon and, to a lesser extent, the Royal Academy exhibitions, a pecking order of the arts arose, with music, the least mimetic, at the top, followed by poetry, with painting, deemed inextricably tied to the material world, at the bottom.⁴ Painting and the

³ For explorations of the changing role of art criticism in 19th century France, see C. and H. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York, 1993); J.-P. Bouillon, ed., *La critique d'art en France 1850-1900* (Saint-Etienne, 1989); and M. Orwicz, ed., *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France* (Manchester, 1994).

⁴ My discussion here and throughout this thesis of debates on the relative merits and objectives of literature and the visual arts is informed by Linda Goddard's investigation of inter-arts rivalries in France at the fin-de-siècle: L. Goddard, 'Aesthetic Hierarchies: Interchange and Rivalry Between the Visual Arts and Literature in France, c. 1890-c. 1920', Ph.D. thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art (London, 2004).

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graphic arts were consistently subordinated to literature, with the implication that where poet-critics led, painting simply followed and conformed to their aesthetic objectives. Most significantly, the authority of Symbolist critics has meant that the appropriateness of the very term Symbolism – a concept coined to define a nascent current in literature, rather than the visual arts – as a framework for thinking about this strand of late-nineteenth century art has, as I shall argue below, too long gone unquestioned and has considerably obstructed attempts at reassessment.

In turn, the 'literary' nature of Symbolist art, and its ostensible dependence on both literary subject matter and exegesis, has earned the distrust and neglect of Modernist critics. Combined with its bewildering stylistic diversity, its 'perverse' embrace of the past, its apparent flouting of the High Modernist doctrines of flatness and the drive to abstraction formulated and enforced by powerful critics like Clement Greenberg, and the dominance of France as the norm against which all modern art was judged (and often found wanting), this has long ensured that when Symbolism was studied at all, it was treated selectively and, ultimately, misleadingly.⁵ Earlier surveys of Symbolism, such as those by Charles Chassé (1947), Sven Lövgren (1959), and Robert Goldwater (1979), focus not merely on France, but on the formal innovations of a few avant-garde heroes such as Paul Gauguin, the Pont-Aven group and the Nabis, whose non-representational art conforms to Modernist notions of artistic progress.⁶ Given the normative position of French art, British antinaturalism, which could boast no obvious counterparts to Gauguin, was bound to suffer in comparison.⁷

Although in the 1950s Jacques Lethève and Robert Rosenblum both wrote seminal

⁵ Several of the artists I examine did, in fact, push the boundaries of representation, although the ends to which they applied such innovations are in themselves often controversial. Maurice Denis's conservative *nouveau classicisme* is a well-documented case in point, and the status of Gustave Moreau's so-called 'abstract' paintings, although frequently cited by apologists alongside his position as the teacher of Matisse, Rouault and Marquet as a key Modernist credential, is open to debate; see C. Scassellati Cooke, 'The ideal of history painting: Georges Rouault and other students of Gustave Moreau at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 1892-1898', *Burlington Magazine* 148, no. 1238 (May 2006), pp. 332-39, for a penetrating re-evaluation of such assumptions.

⁶ While Goldwater does extend his discussion to include Belgian, Dutch and Norwegian artists, British

artists occupy a decidedly marginal position in his arguments. The Belgian art historian Robert Delevoey proposed a somewhat more pan-European view in *Journal du Symbolisme* (Geneva, 1977), but his arguments still focus on the Francophone nations.

⁷ Dianne Sachko Macleod has cogently argued that British modernism must be assessed on its own terms, as a product of its political and cultural milieu, rather than measured against a French yardstick; her emphasis on the impact of Britain's political stability under Victoria's reign on the development of a modern idiom, versus the effect of periodic revolution in France on the French avant-garde, has informed my discussion, particularly in Chapters 1-3 (D. S. Macleod, 'The dialectics of modernism and English art', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, no. 1, 1995, pp. 1-14).

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analyses of its reception and influence in France, such advocates were the exception rather than the rule.⁸

As scholarly interest in Symbolism began to revive in the 1970s, awareness of its manifestations beyond France and the need for a reassessment that took them into account grew. Writing in the catalogue of the 1972 Arts Council exhibition of French Symbolist painting, Alan Bowness called for a reconsideration of Symbolism as an 'alternative tradition' that functioned as a bridge between Romanticism and Surrealism and existed alongside Impressionism in opposition to academic norms, rather than as a retardataire aberration.⁹ However, the most dramatic challenge to the traditional view of France as the source and centre of Symbolism, around which other nations orbited as satellites basking in its reflected light, was not mounted until 1995, in the form of the exhibition organised by Jean Clair, *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*.¹⁰ Casting its net to cover Symbolisms from Spain to Russia, the exhibition considered their development from a bewildering array of angles. However, the vast size of the undertaking guaranteed that breadth trumped depth and relatively little was added to an understanding of cross-Channel artistic interchange. The most recent survey of Symbolism, by Rodolphe Rapetti (2005), takes a similarly pan-European approach and, although Rapetti accords British artists more attention than many of his predecessors, he tellingly categorises Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Watts as 'guiding spirits' rather than key players.¹¹ At the same time, scholars of Victorian art began to shake off the parochialism that had long prevailed in the field with investigations into the impact of Pre-Raphaelitism (an equally problematic term which I shall address below) on the Continent; however, many of them continued to adhere to the conventional line that the British artists had inspired their European peers without

⁸ J. Lethève, 'La connaissance des peintres préraphaélites anglais 1855-1900', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (May-June 1959), pp. 315-28; R. Rosenblum, 'British Painting vs. Paris', *Partisan Review* 24 (Winter 1957), pp. 95-100.

⁹ A. Bowness, 'An Alternative Tradition?', in *French Symbolist Painters: Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, Redon and their Followers* (exh. cat., London, Hayward Gallery and Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, 1972), pp. 14-20.

¹⁰ J. Clair, ed., *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe* (exh. cat., Montreal, Musée des beaux-arts, 1995).

Clair runs counter to tradition by identifying the centre of Symbolism as Belgium, rather than France, on the basis that, by virtue of geography and culture, it is the crossroads of Latin and Germanic Europe.

¹¹ R. Rapetti, *Symbolism*, trans. D. Dusinberre (Paris, 2005), pp. 21-32. Rapetti also claims that 'points of contact [between British and Continental artists] were few and far between' (p. 21), an assumption which, this thesis will demonstrate, is groundless.

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themselves absorbing any lessons from their contemporaries,¹² and focused study of France's impact on British art has lagged behind.¹³

The most significant, and certainly the most public, challenge to the longestablished perception of France as leader and Britain as follower was mounted by the 1997 Tate Gallery exhibition *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910*.¹⁴ Although its stated goal – to restore the imaginative, antirealist

strand of Victorian art to its rightful place in a European context and to correct the longstanding bias toward France – was admirable, the exhibition’s title alone inadvertently lays bare the numerous problems with which it and its thesis were fraught. By expanding Symbolism’s accepted lifespan of the last two decades of the nineteenth century more than twofold, the curators not only lost focus but, more alarmingly, simply subverted the old formula, implying that Symbolism had in fact originated in Britain decades before its traditional birth date and had been appropriated by the French. Not only are several of the essays and catalogue entries suffused with a palpable John Bullishness,¹⁵ the representation of major French artists by either one or two minor works, if at all, reinforced the misleading impression that where Britain led, France merely followed. More troubling was the authors’ insistence on imposing a narrow and simplistic definition upon a movement – or, to be more accurate, a current – that was characterised from the start by its nebulousness, by its ability to elude classification and by its key players’ elliptical pronouncements;¹⁶ if they opened out Symbolism’s timeframe, the corresponding constriction of its import closed off avenues to a real reassessment of Britain’s place in the Symbolist constellation. And most troubling of all was their imposition of the term ‘Symbolist’ on British art.

Edmund Wilson claimed, in 1931, that ‘the battle of Symbolism was not fought out in English’, and, as MaryAnne Stevens points out, his remark is largely

¹² See, for example, S. P. Casteras and A. C. Faxon, eds., *Pre-Raphaelite Art in its European Context* (London, 1995) and T. Tobin, ed., *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism* (New York, 2004).

¹³ Edward Morris’s encyclopedic study, *French Art in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, was only published in 2005. Its approach is almost exclusively documentary and, while invaluable as a survey of the whole century, contains relatively little material on Symbolism.

¹⁴ A. Wilton and R. Upstone, eds., *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910* (exh. cat., London, Tate Gallery, Munich, Haus der Kunst and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1997).

¹⁵ A notable exception is MaryAnne Stevens’s essay, ‘Symbolism: a French Monopoly?’, in *ibid.*, pp. 47-63.

¹⁶ Indeed, A. G. Lehmann opens his study of Symbolist literature in France with the admission that it is far easier to say what Symbolism is not than to define what constitutes it: A. G. Lehmann, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 14-18.

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justified.¹⁷ Furthermore, as Caroline Arsiccott suggests, the application of a term with a French pedigree to British art is perhaps more an expression of critical insecurity regarding its stature in comparison with its continental rivals than a legitimate revisionist reading.¹⁸ The first significant study of Symbolism in English, Arthur Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, was only published in 1899, and centred on French Symbolism, Symons admitting that ‘France is the country of movements, and it is naturally in France that I have studied the development of a principle’.¹⁹ If literary Britain lagged behind France in giving rise to, much less acknowledging, a native Symbolist movement – the countless *petites revues* put out by rival cenacles that proliferated in Paris in the 1880s only found their analogue in Britain in the 1890s in such short-lived publications as *The Pageant* and *The Savoy* – then the British art world lagged still further. A thorough survey of art periodicals covering the last two decades of the nineteenth century does not turn up any instances in which British artists who were admired and emulated by French Symbolists, such as Burne-Jones and Rossetti, are termed ‘Symbolist’. A corresponding survey of French art criticism, both mainstream and avant-garde, is similarly fruitless. Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts and sometimes Beardsley are often mentioned in the same breath as, and praised (or derided) for the same qualities as, their French counterparts,

but even thoroughgoing Anglophiles such as Robert de la Sizeranne and Gabriel Mourey never acknowledged them as Symbolists, preferring the term ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ and terming them instead ‘idealist’ or ‘imaginative’ artists.²⁰ Clearly, any attempt to re-categorise the artists more popularly known as Pre-Raphaelites as Symbolists in the French sense is at best retroactive and at worst wishful thinking. Although they were recognised – at least in France – as having a similar objective and aesthetic as ‘Symbolist’ painters, they were never, for a variety of reasons, regarded in their own day as Symbolists.

¹⁷ E. Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York, 1931), p. 32, cited by Stevens in Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 47.

¹⁸ C. Arscott, ‘Signing off’, *Tate* 13 (1997), p. 88.

¹⁹ A. Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London, 1899), p. 5.

²⁰ ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ is, of course, just as slippery a term as ‘Symbolist’, considering its frequent misapplication and the radical differences between the hyper-realistic, socially engaged art of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the sensuous, allusive imagery developed by Rossetti and his followers after the disintegration of the Brotherhood; see E. Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 87-131, for a thorough discussion of the origins and mutations of the term in Britain. The term is even more problematic in a nineteenth-century French context, as critics tended to use it with little understanding, to the extent that it sometimes served as a blanket term for all contemporary British art. I have tried to restrict my usage of the terms ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ and ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’ to quotations from historical sources.

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Indeed, the validity of Symbolism as a term for the visual arts as a whole is ripe for reconsideration. It is worth rehearsing its etymology here. Although Jean Moréas is widely credited with inventing the term in the notorious manifesto published in *Le Figaro* on 18 September 1886, as well as with defining its central tenet as ‘cloth[ing] the Idea with a sensible form which, nevertheless, would not be a goal in itself but, at the same time as it served to express the Idea, would remain subject to it’, this was not in fact the first time it had been applied to either poets or artists, not least by Moréas himself.²¹ The previous year, in a riposte to Paul Bourde’s article on Decadent poets, he had urged that Mallarmé, Verlaine, Laurent Tailhade, Charles Vignier, Morice and, not least, himself instead be grouped under the heading ‘symbolists’.²² In both cases, his definition of Symbolism gave primacy to literature, although the principle of ‘subjective deformation’ was later co-opted by Maurice Denis in his own manifesto, significantly not on Symbolism but *néo-traditionnisme*. One could argue that Moréas had not genuinely broken with centuries of precedent in defining Symbolism in literary terms: Larousse’s *Grand Dictionnaire Universel* (1876) included exhaustive entries on symbol and symbolism, but in the mass of examples, drawn from literature, rhetoric, chemistry, religion and mythology, the sole reference to pictorial symbolism came at the end of the entry in a brief discussion of Egyptian art.²³

‘Symbolism’, with a lower-case s, was apparently used for the first time to characterise an artist’s style in the same year, when Emile Zola, reviewing the 1876 Salon, grumbled that ‘Gustave Moreau has launched himself into symbolism’, while the critic Léonce Duboscq du Pesquidoux noted in his review of the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition Universelle that it had become a commonplace to accuse Moreau of ‘wanting to practice philosophical symbolism’.²⁴ As with Louis Leroy’s ‘impressionism’, its purpose was decidedly derisive. In the hands of the committed Naturalist Zola, implicit in the condemnation is that Moreau practiced a literary, rather than painterly art, concerned with the fantastical to the exclusion of the grit and grime of modern life. Although in the 1880s, Symbolist writers forged strong

²¹ J. Moréas, ‘Le Symbolisme – Manifeste de Jean Moréas’, *Le Figaro* (18 September 1886).

²² Idem, ‘Les Décadents – réponse de Jean Moréas’, *XIXe siècle* (11 August 1885).

²³ P. Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle*, vol. 14 (Paris: 1876), pp.1310-12.

²⁴ 'Gustave Moreau s'est lancé dans le symbolisme': E. Zola, 'Salon de 1876', in *Emile Zola Salons*, ed. F. W. J. Hemmings and R. Niess (Geneva, 1959), p. 187. 'M. Moreau veut-il faire du symbolisme philosophique, comme on l'en a accusé?': L. Duboscq du Pesquidoux, *L'Art au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1881), vol. 1, p. 81.

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links with painters whose aesthetic they considered commensurate with their own principles, particularly Moreau, Puvis and Redon, pictorial Symbolism only received a thorough theoretical treatment in 1892 – the year after Symbolism had both been crowned the victor over Naturalism in Jules Huret's compilation of interviews with writers, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, and pronounced dead by none other than Moréas²⁵ – when the controversial young art critic Gabriel-Albert Aurier published his seminal tract, tellingly titled 'Le Symbolisme en peinture – Paul Gauguin'.²⁶ Aurier's definition, although it acknowledged the debts owed by painters like Gauguin and followers such as Emile Bernard to the previous generation (including Moreau, Puvis and the Pre-Raphaelites), hinged specifically on the radical formal innovations of Gauguin and largely excluded other forms of pictorial Symbolism.²⁷ To confuse the matter still further, Aurier's contemporary, André Mellerio, published *Le Mouvement idéaliste en peinture* four years later, in which most of the artists mentioned by Aurier were grouped under the heading of 'Idealists', while in the intervening years the critic Henri Mazel went on record with the declaration that 'Symbolism is foreign to the plastic arts', on the basis that painting could never transcend the confines of material reality.²⁸ Given the frequent highhandedness of Symbolist writers with regard to the visual arts, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the French artists associated in the public and literary imagination with the movement actively resisted the label. There were of course exceptions, like Denis. More typical, however, was Moreau, adulated by Symbolist and Decadent writers from Huysmans to Robert de Montesquiou, Francis Poictevin and Joséphin Péladan, but whose lack of reciprocal admiration is attested to in the countless autographed editions of Symbolist poetry and prose in his library with the pages uncut, while Redon was, with good reason, compulsively suspicious of writers' attempts to appropriate his oneiric imagery for their own ends. Given the inadequacy of Symbolism as a label for the visual arts and the fact that most of the artists most deeply involved in the cross-Channel nexus of 'Symbolism' would either have not recognised or refused outright the label

²⁵ J. Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (Paris, 1891).

²⁶ Aurier had, in fact, planned to publish the article in 1889, to coincide with Gauguin's exhibition at the Café Volpini.

²⁷ For an exhaustive study of Aurier's art criticism and relations with artists, see J. Simpson, *Aurier, Symbolism and the Visual Arts* (Bern, 1999).

²⁸ 'Le symbolisme est étranger à l'art plastique': 'Saint-Antoine' [Henri Mazel], 'Qu'est-ce que le symbolisme?', *L'Ermitage* (June 1894), p. 335. Henri Peyre echoes Mazel's point in his study of the same name: H. Peyre, *Qu'est-ce que le symbolisme?* (Paris, 1974), pp. 212-28.

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'Symbolist', and that it is patently mistaken to suppose that such a current did not exist before the advent of Moréas, Aurier et al., it makes sense to seek a more openended

term that allows us to look anew at the vast, protean current that exercised such a strong influence over the second half of the nineteenth century and to better understand the channels of influence and artistic interchange that evolved between Britain and France. Michael Marlais has suggested grouping the artists variously classed as Symbolists, Synthetists, Idealists and Idéistes under the broad category of antinaturalism, used as a blanket concept for the intellectual mood that resisted

naturalism's predilection for the material, the factual and the ordinary and embraced the imaginative and the intangible.²⁹ I have adopted antinaturalism as a means of stripping away the baggage long associated with Symbolism and Pre-Raphaelitism, in order that we might look with fresh eyes at an important strand of cultural thought that transcended national boundaries. I have also found antinaturalism a useful means of extricating the visual from the dominance of the literary that is sustained by two of the most recent investigations, by Annie Dubernard-Laurent (1996) and Laurence Brogniez (2003), of Symbolism in Britain and France.³⁰ While an inquiry into the fertile and contentious bonds between writers and artists forms a significant portion of my study, close visual analysis informs my arguments just as strongly.

My investigation of cross-Channel exchanges among antinaturalist artists is not intended as a comprehensive historical survey; an attempt at an exhaustive study of such a protean movement within the scope of a doctoral thesis would privilege breadth over depth and ultimately contribute little to an understanding of this rich and complex international nexus. Rather, I have chosen to structure my enquiry as a series of six case studies focusing on key elements in this cross-Channel dialogue. In so

²⁹M. Marlais, *Conservative echoes in fin de siècle Parisian art criticism* (University Park, 1992), p. 6. Marlais contends that Symbolism and the revival of idealism should be seen as 'two sides of the same coin'. I should add that my use of the term 'antinaturalism' must not be taken as typifying a polar opposition between antinaturalism and naturalism; as Sharon L. Hirsh demonstrates in her social history of Symbolism, Symbolists were motivated by many of the same sociopolitical concerns, such as urban decay, mental illness, the power of the crowd and feminism, as their Naturalist counterparts: S. L. Hirsh, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (Cambridge 2004).

³⁰Dubernard-Laurent's thesis covers the period 1855-1900 and, in fact, her most innovative arguments centre on the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites at the 1855 Exposition Universelle and their influence on the realism of Courbet; her coverage of Symbolist exchange at the end of the century is primarily a rehearsal of much of the information covered in *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts* (A. Dubernard-Laurent, 'Le Pré-Raphaélisme en Angleterre, les arts et les lettres en France. Essai d'étude comparative', Ph.D. thesis, Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, 1996). Brogniez broadens her focus to include Belgium and her exploration of the role of writers in promoting British painters on the continent is extremely detailed, but her approach is primarily literary (L. Brogniez, *Préraphaélisme et Symbolisme. Peinture littéraire et image poétique*, Paris 2003).

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doing, I have necessarily been obliged to delimit both a time frame and my selection of contributors to the exchange. While compelling arguments have been advanced for setting the birth date of antinaturalism either, as Bowness does, as early as 1856, hard on the heels of the death of Théodore Chassériau³¹ and a year before Baudelaire penned his celebration of synaesthesia, 'Correspondances', or as late as 1886, as Clair does,³² and evidence of exchanges, albeit sparse and sporadic, between French and British artists certainly exists from the mid-1850s, I have chosen to take as my starting point the first significant point of contact between France and the so-called second wave of Pre-Raphaelitism, the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris, and to bring my study to a conclusion in 1898, upon the deaths of many leading antinaturalist figures and at a time when the critical consensus assumed that antinaturalism/Symbolism had run its course.³³ I have also limited the artists under discussion to those who participated most in this exchange of ideas, whether on the strength of written or visual evidence, and whose work displays noteworthy affinities with their cross-Channel counterparts. The reader will therefore only find Gauguin in these pages as a go-between for Redon and his London patron Mortimer Menpes; other luminaries such as Sérusier, Bernard and van Gogh are absent. I have chosen to discard the commonplace but ultimately facile Modernist division of Symbolist/antinaturalist artists into two camps, followers of Moreau (those who clothed new subject matter in traditional forms) and followers of Puvis (those who recognised that new subject

matter demanded a new visual vocabulary), for although some of the artists I examine here (Moreau, Rossetti, Burne-Jones) clearly fall into the former category and others (Puvis, Redon) are superficially allied with the latter,³⁴ others, like Watts, Beardsley and Fantin-Latour, are difficult to categorise, while Denis, whose anti-literary emphasis on form in his 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme' at first glance marks him as an obvious follower of Puvis, displays remarkable affinities with Rossetti and Burne-Jones in his interest in poetry and mysticism and his quasi-devotional idealisation of women.

³¹ Bowness (1972), p. 14.

³² Clair (1995), p. 17.

³³ These chronological boundaries are somewhat fluid, particularly with respect to my discussion of Rossetti, whose career reached its apogee long before 1878 and whose influence in France was by and large posthumous; see Chapter 4.

³⁴ M. Stevens, 'Towards a definition of Symbolism', in J. Christian, ed., *The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art* (exh. cat., London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1989), p. 35.

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Contrary to conventional accounts of Symbolism, which treat it as aspiring to an ivory-tower isolation from the turmoil of contemporary society, the first half of this study seeks to uncover the role of the public arena in the evolution of a cross-Channel dialogue. My first chapter focuses on the reception of Burne-Jones and Watts's painting at the 1878 Exposition Universelle – its first outing in France – and sets it within the wider context of the Exposition and contemporary debates concerning the state and relative positions of French and British art in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. Studies of cross-Channel antinaturalism traditionally give primacy to the 1889 Exposition as a site of artistic exchange but, I contend, the enthusiastic reception which Burne-Jones and Watts found in Paris in 1889 could not have occurred without the initial discovery of 1878. My examination of the consequences of the earlier Exposition sets the stage for the second and third chapters, the first of which investigates the position occupied by antinaturalism in the physical and political milieu of the 1889 Exposition and focuses on the display of paintings by Puvis and Watts. I argue that, rather than representing a retreat from the Exposition's crass materialism and triumphalist politics, Puvis and Watts engage with the fantasy vision of the Third Republic promoted by the Exposition's organisers by delivering a stinging critique and offering an alternative dream. The last chapter in this sequence is a case study of Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and Moreau's *Galatée*; in addition to analysing their significance in the context of the 1889 Exposition, where both were exhibited, I consider the affinities between Burne-Jones and Moreau, beginning with the genesis of both works, and examine their mutual use of Renaissance prototypes to the end of creating a new and perverse type of religious art.

Of course, many important exchanges occurred beyond the exhibition hall, and the second half of my thesis tracks the flow of influence in the more private milieux of personal connections, specialist periodicals and the print trade. The dissemination of artistic reputations between Britain and France through reproductive prints and the corresponding problems of visual mistranslation engendered by technological limitations remain a little-studied area but, while the evidence is necessarily anecdotal, my contention is that it proved a vital channel of influence. The importance of reproductions and their inherent limitations particularly informs my fourth chapter, which looks at the posthumous reputation and influence of Rossetti in France, as both poet and painter, and more specifically on Denis's and Redon's responses to

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reproductions of his art, as well as on Denis's collaboration with Claude Debussy on a musical setting of Rossetti's poem 'The Blessed Damozel'. I suggest that the Rossetti who was known and emulated in France was the product of translation and would, in some ways, have been unrecognisable in his native Britain. Conversely, in the fifth chapter I examine the British response to Moreau, especially to the exhibitions of his work in London at the Grosvenor Gallery (1877) and the offices of the art publisher Goupil, and I explore the impact of his depictions of Salome on Beardsley, whom Oscar Wilde accused of flouting his own Moreau-influenced conception of this character but whose engagement with Moreau's Salome in fact informed his apparently parodic illustrations for the play *Salome*. My final chapter explores the spread of Wagnerian imagery in Britain through the medium of Fantin-Latour's and Redon's transfer lithographs and their influence on the Wagnerian imagery of Beardsley, the only major British artist to participate in this aspect of antinaturalism, as well as Fantin's role in transmitting a Rococo-inflected Wagnerian aesthetic to Beardsley. Finally, my coda considers the state of antinaturalism and cross-Channel artistic exchange around 1900, and suggests that reports of antinaturalism's death have been greatly exaggerated.

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Chapter 1

'Strange but striking poetry': the reception of British antinaturalist painting at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1878

In 1867 the English school . . . was in the midst of indecision. The Pre-Raphaelites stopped, and another branch, still enclosed in the secret of a bud, was preparing to burst from the trunk . . . A fog hovered over English art, hiding its imminent transformations, which we see today.¹

When the 1878 Exposition Universelle opened its gates, some observers scoffed that it was but a pitiful shadow of its glittering elder sisters. Subsequent scholarship on the Expositions has followed suit. The Expositions of 1855, 1867, and especially 1889 and 1900 have benefited from in-depth studies, while the 1878 Exposition has languished in relative obscurity.² Most attempts to explore the Exposition's problems and complexities have tended to be founded on erroneous assumptions about its political backdrop and to treat the 1878 Exposition as a minor event in comparison with its predecessors and successors, as a sort of insignificant lull. This oversight has likewise affected study of the Expositions' contribution to the development of the fine arts in Europe. What critical attention the 1878 Exposition's displays of fine art have received has focused almost wholly on the French section, with little significant attention thus far given to the involvement of other participating nations, particularly Britain.

At first glance, this lacuna may not seem exceptional. The 1878 Exposition Universelle was the most troubled of the Expositions organised under the aegis of the

¹'En 1867 l'école anglaise . . . était en pleine indécision. Les préraphaélites s'arrêtaient, et un autre rameau encore renfermé dans le secret du bourgeon, se préparait à s'élancer du tronc. . . . Une brume planait au-dessus de l'art anglais, cachant de prochaines transformations, celles que nous voyons aujourd'hui.' E. Duranty, 'Exposition Universelle: Les écoles étrangères de Peinture. Troisième et dernier article: Belgique et Angleterre', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1878), p. 298. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the French are my own.

² Exceptions to this reluctance to discuss the events of 1878 include J. M. Roos, 'Within the "Zone of Silence": Monet and Manet in 1878', *Art History* 11, no. 3 (1988), pp. 374-407, and L. Straarup-Hansen, 'French Painting at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, 1878' (MA dissertation, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 2002). Paul Greenhalgh and Raymond Isay both include the 1878 Exposition in their broader discussions of the phenomenon of Expositions Universelles and similar events, but neither gives it as much importance as its cousins: P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: the Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions, and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 115-16; R.

Isay, *Panorama des Expositions Universelles* (Paris, 1937), pp. 137-75. Miriam R. Levin also touches on the 1878 Exposition in *Republican Art and Ideology in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Ann Arbor, 1986); however, her refusal to attach any importance to the fact that the Republicans were not in full control of the government before 1879 and her underlying assumption that the 1878 Exposition took place more or less under similar political circumstances to that of the 1889 Exposition are highly problematic.

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Third Republic;³ Daniel Halévy's characterisation of the Third Republic as 'a regime of discord tempered by festivals' has more than a grain of truth in it.⁴ Furthermore, despite the pomp and glitter of the opening festivities and the general air of desperate gaiety which reigned over the duration of the Exposition,⁵ the French Fine Art section could not be said to show French artistic achievement at its acme. For a variety of reasons, including political infighting, aesthetic conservatism, and the packing of the selection committee with Academicians and other official artists who acted in their own interests, the distinctly unrepresentative French Fine Art exhibition gave the general public and art critics alike the impression that the best France had to offer was stale, backward-looking history painting.⁶ French art critics were unanimous in voicing despair at what they saw, as well as fear that France had been irreparably weakened by the recent loss of so many great artists and the ordeals it had suffered during the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune.⁷ France's artistic supremacy, which it and other European nations had for so long taken for granted, seemed for the first time to be under genuine threat.

France's temporary fall from its pedestal had an unexpected but significant side effect. Artists and critics were suddenly compelled to look more closely and with a more open mind at the art of other nations, not least at that of its neighbour on the other side of the Channel. 1878 was not, of course, the first time that contemporary British painting had had a forum in France. Constable had found numerous admirers when he exhibited at the Salon in the 1820s and was acknowledged as a key influence on the Barbizon painters; the British Fine Art section at the 1855 Exposition, particularly the works by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, had caused a great stir, with critics struck by the Pre-Raphaelites' acid colour and insistence on

³ For summaries of the political situation in France during the first decade of the Third Republic, see J. P. T. Bury, *France 1814-1940*, 5th ed. (London and New York, 1985); *idem*, *Gambetta and the Making of the Third Republic* (London, 1973); G. Chapman, *The Third Republic of France: The First Phase, 1871-1894* (London, 1962); J. Chastenet, *Histoire de la Troisième République: L'Enfance de la Troisième* (Paris, 1952); and D. Halévy, *La République des ducs* (Paris, 1937).

⁴ D. Halévy, 'Après le Seize Mai. Une année d'Exposition: 1878', *La revue universelle* 16 (1936), p. 423.

⁵ For contemporary accounts of the opening festivities, see especially R. Delorme, ed., *L'art et l'industrie de tous les peuples à l'Exposition Universelle de 1878* (Paris, 1878), pp. 11-15, and L. Gonse, 'Coup d'oeil à vol d'oiseau sur l'Exposition Universelle', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1878), pp. 481-3.

⁶ Straarup-Hansen (2002), pp. 50-1. For a discussion of differences between 'academic' and 'official' painting, see A. Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 1986), pp. 15-21.

⁷ See, for example, P. Mantz, 'Exposition Universelle: La Peinture française', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (October 1878), pp. 417-20 (hereafter Mantz 1878a).

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near-microscopic detail.⁸ However, in both 1855 and 1867, British painting, Pre-Raphaelite in particular, was generally treated more as a curiosity distinguished by its quaint naïveté than as a school of art worthy of consideration on a level with its French counterpart. As well, as Edmond Duranty pointed out in his review of the British section at the 1878 Exposition, the intervals of eleven or twelve years between Expositions were bound to produce a disjointed view of the changes and progress

occurring in the British school.

However, 1878 was to be different from British painting's previous outings in Paris. Over the previous eleven-year interval, after what critics generally agreed had been a disappointing exhibition in 1867, Edward Burne-Jones and George Frederic Watts had emerged as stars of the secessionist Grosvenor Gallery and talents to be reckoned with; the 1878 Exposition Universelle marked the first exhibition of their works in France.⁹ In fact, the so-called second Pre-Raphaelite school was represented in force in the British section, with contributions from many painters considered followers of Burne-Jones, including Grosvenor regulars John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, Marie Spartali Stillman, Walter Crane, Albert Moore, and Thomas Armstrong. Critics were struck by, and consistently remarked on, these artists' strong group identity and idiosyncratic common points, namely, a preference for literary and imaginative subjects, an emulation of early Renaissance style and technique, a disregard for academic correctness in drawing, and an emphasis on atmosphere and suggestion at the expense of concrete narrative.

I do not want to fall into the anachronistic trap of dubbing Burne-Jones and Watts 'Symbolists', not least because, as noted in the Introduction, this primarily literary term is generally acknowledged to have been coined, and its principles elucidated, in Jean Moréas's 1886 'Manifeste du Symbolisme', well after the Exposition. Yet subjecting painting to the same rule as literature obscures the

⁸ For French critical judgments of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings displayed at the 1855 Exposition Universelle, see for example C. Baudelaire, 'Salon de 1859', in *idem, Critique d'art* (Paris, 1992), p. 269, which specifically praises John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*; E. Chesneau, *La peinture anglaise, 1730-1882* (Paris, 1882), Duranty (1878), and E. Rod, 'Les Préraphaélites anglais (1^{er} article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1887), pp. 177-95. Note that the term 'Pre-Raphaelite' could be used very loosely, and sometimes without much understanding, by French critics in the nineteenth century; sometimes it was used as a blanket term to refer to all English painting from 1850 onward.

⁹ Edward Burne-Jones was born Edward Burne Jones and only began to hyphenate his surname in 1886, eventually formalising the change in 1894 when he received his baronetcy. For the sake of consistency, I shall refer to him as Burne-Jones, except in direct quotations. This is particularly important in cases where uncertainty about the correct spelling highlights a critic's lack of familiarity with the artist.

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divergent development of a Symbolist, or rather antinaturalist, tendency in visual art. In fact, the first traced use of the term 'symbolism' in relation to painting occurs in Emile Zola's complaint in 1876 that 'Gustave Moreau has launched himself into symbolism'.¹⁰ The committed Naturalist Zola did not intend this as a compliment, and repeated his disparaging remarks in his review of Moreau's 'symbolist' paintings at the 1878 Exposition. On a more positive note, the Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn, apologist for Moréas and an important art critic in his own right, took 1878 as the starting point of his biographical sketch of the movement, 'Les Origines du Symbolisme'. While Kahn devoted relatively little space to the visual arts in his account, he noted that the brightest hopes for a movement that could emerge from the crushing domination of the Naturalists and the Parnassians were to be found in the painting of the Impressionists and the quintessential French antinaturalist painter, Moreau:

'Painting was the impressionists exhibiting wonders in vacant apartments for three months. It was, at the Exposition of 1878, a marvellous panel by Gustave Moreau, opening onto legend a door worked in niello, damascening and gold . . .'¹¹

Symbolist-penned histories of the movement are notorious for painting conflicting pictures of its origins and for giving personal rivalries and one-upmanship free rein;

Kahn's version is rather unusual in locating Symbolism's origins almost as much in painting as in literature, although the visual arts quickly cede their place in his account to fellow poets.¹²

Conversely, while Symbolism may never have boasted the spokesmen or the articulated programme in Britain that it enjoyed in France, it is worth pointing out that the critic Frederick Wedmore, in his *Studies in English Art*, published in book form in 1880, wrote of Burne-Jones that 'in some sense it is to his disadvantage that he has set himself so especially to the art of symbolism, and the realisation of classic or mediaeval story'.¹³ Although Wedmore noted that Burne-Jones's 'symbolism' alienated many viewers, he maintained that it also set him apart from the stale

¹⁰ 'Gustave Moreau s'est lancé dans le symbolisme'. Zola (1959), p. 187.

¹¹ 'La peinture c'était les impressionnistes exposant des merveilles dans des appartements vacants pour trois mois. C'était, à l'exposition de 1878, un merveilleux panneau de Gustave Moreau, ouvrant sur la légende une porte niellée et damasquinée et orfèvrée . . .' G. Kahn, 'Les Origines du Symbolisme' (1900), in *idem, Symbolistes et Décadents* (Geneva, 1977, 1936), p. 17.

¹² See Goddard (2004) for an in-depth discussion of Symbolist debates on the position of the visual arts in relation to literature.

¹³ F. Wedmore, *Studies in English Art: Second Series* (London, 1880), pp. 210-11.

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conventionalism of many of his peers. Furthermore, Burne-Jones and Watts were embraced by Symbolist poets and critics in France after 1886 and comparisons were frequently drawn between their work and that of French antinaturalist painters, in particular Moreau and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. Tellingly, the Anglophile writer Robert de la Sizeranne noted in the introduction to *La Peinture anglaise contemporaine* (1895), unfortunately without indicating a date for the beginning of this trend, that 'for a long time, at meetings of symbolists, the names of Watts and Burne-Jones have been pronounced with reverence, and many accept them and repeat them as magic words whose virtue requires no explanation'.¹⁴ Although they were not recognised as Symbolist artists per se by their contemporaries, their work was acknowledged as displaying a kinship with the French antinaturalist artists embraced by Symbolist writers.

Curiously, the importance of the appearance of Burne-Jones and Watts at the 1878 Exposition, and its impact on the establishment of a dialogue between antinaturalist artists in Britain and France, have been either ignored or downplayed in favour of the 1889 Exposition, almost from the start. As early as 1898, Sizeranne, arguably the chief contemporary chronicler of British Symbolism in France, dismissed Burne-Jones's works at the 1878 Exposition as 'an attraction to critics, but not to the public';¹⁵ this assessment was echoed six years later by Georgiana Burne-Jones in her biography of her late husband.¹⁶ The classic starting point of twentieth-century scholarship on the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites in France, Jacques Lethève's 'La Connaissance des peintres préraphaélites anglais 1855-1900',¹⁷ ascribes little importance to 1878, and most subsequent studies have followed suit.¹⁸

¹⁴ 'Depuis longtemps, dans les cénacles symbolistes, on entend prononcer avec recueillement les noms de Watts et de Burne-Jones, et beaucoup les acceptent et se les transmettent comme on fait d'un vocable magique dont la vertu dispense de tout éclaircissement'. R. de la Sizeranne, *La Peinture anglaise contemporaine* (Paris, 1895), pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ R. de la Sizeranne, 'In Memoriam: Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Bart. (Born Aug. 28, 1833; Died June 17, 1898.) A Tribute from France', *Magazine of Art* (August 1898), p. 513.

¹⁶ G. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, (London, 1904), vol. 2, p. 85.

¹⁷ Lethève (1959), pp. 318-19.

¹⁸ Two such studies are C. Allemand-Cosneau, 'La fortune critique de Burne-Jones en France', in J. Munro, ed., *Burne-Jones, 1833-1898: Dessins du Fitzwilliam Museum de Cambridge* (exh. cat., Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts and Charleroi, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1992),

pp. 69-80, and L. des Cars, 'Burne-Jones and France', in J. Christian and S. Wildman, eds., *Edward Burne-Jones, Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (exh. cat., New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Birmingham, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and Paris, Musée d'Orsay 1998), pp. 25-39. Both authors cite Charles Blanc's evaluation of *The Beguiling of Merlin* but say little else about contemporary critical reactions to Burne-Jones's work in 1878.

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The continuing disregard of the 1878 Exposition Universelle has, unfortunately, hindered a deeper understanding of this cross-Channel dialogue. The Francocentrism of most previous analyses has unjustly obscured the complex, and above all, cosmopolitan nature of the exhibitions. While British antinaturalism, represented in this instance by Burne-Jones and Watts, excited noticeably less attention in 1878 than it did in 1889, it would be incorrect to view the outpouring of enthusiasm for their work at the later Exposition as an Athena-like phenomenon, sprung fully formed from nowhere. Rather, as I hope to demonstrate here, not only did the political circumstances in 1878 provide favourable conditions for it to take root, the appearance of British antinaturalist painting at the Exposition Universelle was vital to the generation of an exchange of ideas between Britain and France.

'Great tranquilliser' or temporary nepenthe? The organisation of the French Fine Art Section

In announcing the new International Exposition to the world, France affirms her confidence in her institutions; she declares her willingness to persevere in the ideas of moderation and wisdom that have inspired her politics over the last five years; she proclaims that she wants peace, which alone has the power to render human activity truly fecund in giving it security.

– Teisserenc de Bort, 1876¹⁹

The erroneous assumption common to most studies of the 1878 Exposition Universelle is that the Exposition had been an overwhelmingly, if not purely, Republican project from its very beginnings. Even two of the more even-handed examples, Daniel Halévy's 'Après le Seize Mai. Une année d'Exposition: 1878'²⁰ and Jane Mayo Roos's 'Within the "Zone of Silence": Monet and Manet in 1878', fall victim to the conviction that the Exposition's creation represented a triumph by the Republicans over their conservative detractors. In fact, the intent to hold an Exposition had been declared on 4 April 1876, more than a year before the Seize Mai crisis and when the government's overall composition still merited Halévy's label 'the Republic of dukes'. The decree was signed on 13 April by none other than the

¹⁹ 'En annonçant au monde la nouvelle Exposition internationale, la France affirme sa confiance dans les institutions qu'elle s'est données; elle déclare sa volonté de persévérer dans les idées de modération et de sagesse qui ont inspiré sa politique depuis cinq ans; elle proclame qu'elle veut la paix, qui a seule le pouvoir de rendre l'activité humaine vraiment féconde en lui donnant la sécurité'. Teisserenc de Bort, Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, in his 1876 proposal for the 1878 Exposition Universelle, quoted in Delorme (1878), p. 3.

²⁰ Halévy (1936), p. 423.

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President, Maréchal MacMahon, a staunch monarchist.²¹ Furthermore, although the Exposition's commissioner, Jean-Baptiste-Sébastien Krantz, was a committed Republican, Teisserenc de Bort, the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce under MacMahon, who was also closely involved in the Exposition's planning, had also served under Thiers and tended towards conservatism.

Given the potential of the Exposition to act as a 'great tranquilliser' on a France still recovering from the twin nightmare of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune and on a government characterised by ceaseless party struggles,²² politicians of all stripes stood to benefit from involving themselves with the Exposition. Hence, strong emphasis was placed upon the new, hard-won peace and on

values such as moderation and wisdom – values that presumably did not already come clothed in specific ideological colours, and which could easily be tailored to suit either end of the political spectrum. Indeed, Teisserenc de Bort's favourable reference to France's politics 'over the last five years' could well be understood as advocating the repression that characterised the governments of Thiers and MacMahon.

Promoting moderation and trumpeting peace and prosperity might have made good political sense for the Exposition as a whole, but it did not necessarily translate into good policy in the selection of paintings for the French Fine Art section.

Although the exhibition was intended to portray the official state of the modern French school, with no work dating from before the last Exposition in 1867 admitted,²³ restrictions placed upon the types of work selected prevented the creation of a complete survey of the decade. One of the most troubling constraints was a ban on all images of the Franco-Prussian war or, indeed, any contemporary military subjects.²⁴ Furthermore, the opening notice in the official exhibition catalogue was essentially a celebration (a premature one, as it turned out) of the rehabilitation of history painting in the grand tradition.²⁵ Glossy, highly finished historical canvases by

²¹The decree is reprinted in *Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners for the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878, to the Queen's most excellent Majesty*, (London, 1880), vol. 1, p. 151. For a summary of the events surrounding the so-called Seize Mai crisis, see Bury (1973), pp. 398-417.

²²Chapman (1962), p. 189.

²³P. Vaisse, *La troisième république et les peintres* (Paris, 1995), p. 125.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 56-57. The list of excluded works is kept in the Archives nationales, Versement de la direction des Beaux-Arts au ministère de l'Instruction publique: F21 524. Military paintings were given a small exhibition at the private Galerie Goupil, concurrent with the Exposition.

²⁵'Notice Sommaire', *Exposition Universelle internationale de 1878, à Paris: Catalogue officiel, publié par le Commissariat Général. Tome I: Groupe I, Oeuvres d'Art, classes 1 à 5*, (Paris, 1878), p. 5.

Vaisse (1995), p. 125, surmises that the author of the unsigned notice was Philippe de Chennevières, the current Director of Fine Arts for the Third Republic and a notorious conservative, both in politics

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leading Academicians such as Cabanel, Delaunay, and Bouguereau held sway in the French section; many more innovative artists whose work fell outside these boundaries found their works rejected by the jury. A major case in point is the Barbizon School. While their deliberately mundane and naturalistic depictions of the French countryside had garnered critical acclaim and state support in the 1860s,²⁶ they were poorly represented at the Exposition; work by three of the most illustrious Barbizon painters, Théodore Rousseau, Jean-François Millet, and Narcisse Diaz de la Peña, was not included at all. Other 'independents', including Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Henri Fantin-Latour, abstained from submitting, choosing to send their work to the Salon instead.²⁷ In effect, the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition verged on conservatism in its ostensible desire to appear apolitical; in its attempt to turn the clock back eleven years, it acted as a nepenthe on the eyes and minds of its audience, wiping away the troubles – and the innovations – of the intervening years. Paul Greenhalgh has asserted that the centrality of the visual arts at this Exposition was vital to France's presentation of itself as having fully recovered from the defeat of 1871;²⁸ if this was so, then, judging by the content of the French Fine Art section and the critical response, the ploy failed miserably.

This shunning of current trends toward realism and contemporary subjects produced one unintended and little-noted side effect. While the selection of paintings in the French section seemed on the whole to privilege historical painting, in the sense of depictions of actual historical events (so long as they were far enough in the past not to dredge up painful memories), the selection committee's distaste for realistic and contemporary subjects left the door open for imaginative subjects – images based on

literature, on people and events which had never existed except in the imagination or on the page. Collective trauma often awakens a need to escape the present and the and in art; his arrogant mismanagement of the French Fine Art exhibition at the Exposition ultimately resulted in his dismissal. See also P. Mainardi, *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 47-48.

²⁶For a discussion of the French state's attitudes toward landscape painting as reflected in its purchasing policy, see J. M. Roos, 'Herbivores versus herbiphobes: landscape painting and the State', in J. House, ed., *Landscapes of France: Impressionism and its Rivals*, (exh. cat., London, Hayward Gallery and Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), pp. 40-51.

²⁷Fantin exhibited one group portrait (*The Dubourg Family*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and four musical subjects in pastel and lithograph at the 1878 Salon (D. Druick and M. Hoog, *Fantin-Latour*, exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, and San Francisco, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, 1982, p. 356). Puvis sent two panels of his Panthéon murals to the 1878 Salon (S. Lemoine, ed., *Toward Modern Art: From Puvis de Chavannes to Matisse and Picasso*, exh. cat., Venice, Palazzo Grassi, 2002, p. 536).

²⁸Greenhalgh (1995), p. 116.

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immediate past by effacing the contemporary with images of the distant past or the imaginary; the milieu of the first post-war Exposition was no exception.²⁹ Thus it was that a 'literary painter' such as Gustave Moreau, whose fantastical mythological and Biblical scenes had proved as perplexing to critics as they were difficult to ignore, found his way into the French section with no less than eleven works.³⁰ Although Moreau presumably scraped in under the rubric of history painting, pictures such as *L'Apparition* [Figure 1, Mathieu 186] and *Salomé* [Figure 2, Mathieu 184] bore little resemblance to the fussy meticulousness of detail and readily deciphered narrative that characterised much of the 'grande peinture' in the French section. Paul Mantz declared him the most imaginative and fascinating painter in the entire section, although he confessed bewilderment as to their meaning.³¹

The irony, of course, is that four of Moreau's submissions to the Exposition were profoundly informed by the Franco-Prussian War and its after-effects. While *Salomé*, *Hercule et l'Hydre de Lerne* (Mathieu 176) and *L'Apparition* had already marked his triumphant return to the Salon in 1876, he had in the intervening years conceived a cycle of biblical subjects – *Moïse exposé sur le Nil* (Mathieu 202), *Jacob et l'Ange* (Mathieu 199), and *David* (Mathieu 201) – intended to symbolise both the ages of man and contemporary circumstances in France. As Moreau explained his intentions to his friend Alexandre Destouches, 'The [angel in] *Jacob* would be the guardian angel of France, checking her in her idiotic course toward the material', while Moses represented 'the hope of a new law represented by this tender and innocent infant raised by God' and David, 'the sombre melancholy of the past age of tradition so dear to great spirits weeping over the great modern decay, the angel at his feet ready to inspire him if there should be an agreement to listen to God'.³² A large-

²⁹My argument here is informed by Adrian Rifkin's account of the effects of the Occupation on Parisian popular song and cinema: A. Rifkin, *Street noises: Parisian pleasure, 1900-1940* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 25-26. Although Rifkin deliberately excludes 'high culture' from his discussion, I contend that his reading offers an effective approach to the jury's apparently 'escapist' (mis)interpretation of Moreau.

³⁰On Moreau's struggles with the label of 'literary painter', see P. Cooke, 'Text and Image, Allegory and Symbol in Gustave Moreau's *Jupiter et Sémélé*', in P. McGuinness, ed., *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin de Siècle: French and European Perspectives*, (Exeter, 2000), pp. 122-3.

³¹Mantz (1878a), pp. 427-28.

³²'Le Jacob serait l'ange de la France l'arrêtant dans sa course idiote vers la matière. Le Moïse, l'espérance dans une nouvelle loi représentée par ce mignon d'enfant innocent et poussé par Dieu. Le David, la sombre mélancolie de l'âge passé et la tradition si chère aux grands esprits pleurant sur la grande décomposition moderne, l'ange à ses pieds prêt à rendre l'inspiration si on consent à écouter Dieu'. P. Cooke, ed., *Ecrits sur l'art par Gustave Moreau* (Fontfroide, 2002), vol. 1, p. 111. Moreau

apparently wrote this explanation between 1876 and 1877. See also G. Lacambre, ed., *Gustave* 37

scale watercolour depicting the fall of Phaëton (Mathieu 205) reflected even more explicitly Moreau's disillusionment with early Third Republic society. Phaëton, having recklessly driven the chariot of the sun (the State) too close to the sun, plunges with his terrified horses into a dark abyss out of which surges the grotesque and triumphant serpent Python. Python's head is a fusion of serpent and bird of prey – a none-too-subtle reference to the eagle of Prussia. Indeed, *Phaëton* could be viewed as a macabre and fantastic counterpart to Puvis's 'real allegory' *Le Pigeon* of 1871, in which a woman clutches a dove protectively to her breast while trying to ward off the menace of the Prussian eagle. Moreau's rage over the current state of affairs in France is palpable. Indeed, this was not his first attempt to give artistic vent to his anger; almost immediately after the French defeat in 1871, he began to plan a vast polyptych entitled *France Vanquished*. He abandoned it after making some preliminary sketches, however, probably regarding the project as excessively allegorical. Instead, he cloaked his indignation in the academically-sanctioned forms of mythological and religious painting and in the dazzling colour and welter of bejewelled detail that had by this date become his hallmarks. Hoodwinked by Moreau's esoteric and exotic style, and lulled by his evident adherence to officially accepted subjects, the jury allowed social commentary, so heavily veiled in symbolism as to be almost illegible, entrance to an otherwise 'apolitical' and 'ahistorical' exhibition.

Whatever the intention of the exhibition's commissioners, and despite the triumphalism in evidence on numerous broadsheet front pages on opening day, critics were less than impressed with the results. Those who were tied more closely to the planning of the French Fine Art section found themselves scrambling to put a good face on things; the aforementioned notice in the official catalogue was at pains to point out that despite the deaths of many leading lights of French painting since 1867, artistic production had nonetheless been increasing at a steady rate, unintentionally vaunting quantity over quality.³³ Charles Blanc, who, for political reasons completely opposed to those of Chennevières, was an ardent promoter of grand-tradition history painting, proffered perhaps the most creative (or far-fetched) explanation for the weakness of the present French school: 'Painting isn't an indigenous art in our *Moreau: between epic and dream* (exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais, Chicago, Art Institute and New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), pp. 179-82 (hereafter Lacambre 1998a).

³³*Catalogue officiel* (1878), p. 5

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country, as it is in Italy. . . . The French have always been better sculptors and architects than painters and musicians'.³⁴

Others were less ready to offer excuses. Paul Mantz, a respected moderate critic who reviewed the French painting exhibition for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, opened his exposé with a three-page-long tirade against not only the sorry state of French painting at the Exposition, but the inferiority of the exhibition spaces to those of other countries; he pronounced the prevailing spirit of the exhibition to be 'a certain sadness . . . an art whose spirit does not flourish freely.'³⁵ Bertall, a caricaturist notorious for his parodies of pretentious academic paintings in the *Journal amusant*, went even further, urging readers in a piece published in *L'Artiste* to visit the concurrent *Exposition retrospective de tableaux et dessins de maîtres modernes* at the Galerie Durand-Ruel instead. He claimed that this exhibition, which featured the work of Courbet, Corot, and the Barbizon painters, was more representative of the French school and more interesting than anything to be found in the galleries of the Champ de Mars besides.³⁶ Even Blanc, before making his implausible apology for

current French painting, found himself gazing wistfully at the Austro-Hungarian Fine Art section, envying its ‘youth, abundance, sap, greenness which are not found at all in our [art].’³⁷

Blanc was not alone in casting a resentful (and, perhaps, fearful) eye at the fine art exhibitions of other nations at the Exposition. France might welcome other nations to display their art at its Expositions, so long as they did not threaten its acknowledged superiority in that sphere. Not all critics were as alarmist as one writing under the pseudonym ‘Lord Pilgrim’, who issued this dire warning:

No one can fail to notice the decadence of the French school if one judges it by the Exposition Universelle of 1878. . . . But let [the artists] beware. The foreign schools, so self-effacing in 1855, scarcely alive in 1867, are on the point of taking first place.³⁸

³⁴ ‘La peinture n’est pas chez nous ce qu’elle est en Italie, un art indigène. . . . Les Français ont été toujours plus sculpteurs et plus architectes qu’ils n’étaient peintres et musiciens’. C. Blanc, *Les Beaux-Arts à l’Exposition Universelle de 1878* (Paris, 1878), pp. 183–4.

³⁵ ‘D’une certaine tristesse . . . d’un art où le coeur ne s’épanouit pas librement’. Mantz (1878a), p. 420.

³⁶ Bertall [Albert d’Arnoux], ‘La Tribune de l’école française’, *L’Artiste* (September 1878), p. 155.

³⁷ ‘Une jeunesse, une abondance, un suc, une verne qui ne sont point dans la nôtre’. Blanc (1878), p. 177. It is probably not coincidental that the country to which Blanc chose to compare France is Germanic.

³⁸ ‘Nul ne peut nier la décadence de l’école française si on en juge par l’Exposition Universelle de 1878. [...] Mais qu’ils y prennent bien garde. Les écoles étrangères, si effacées en 1855, à peine vivantes en 1867, sont sur le point de prendre le haut du pavé . . .’ ‘Lord Pilgrim’, ‘Premier avertissement aux artistes’, *L’Artiste* (September 1878), p. 149.

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However, one thing was becoming clear, and was grudgingly acknowledged: France could no longer afford to dismiss the artistic production of her neighbours³⁹ – including that of Britain, long a political and economic rival, but up until this point taken for granted as an artistic inferior. Little did it realise that the innovations, both in art and in exhibition policies, that had been fomenting for the past two years in London were not in line with what it had been primed to expect by the two previous Expositions.

Britain: a cross-Channel rival

In France, the State is ever-present, even in the arts, but there are countries where the State is nowhere to be seen, and in the arts even less. [...] England, which we may invoke as an example of what can be accomplished in large part due to private initiative, has given us an illustration of a response of this type.

– Charles Tardieu, 1877⁴⁰

The Belgian critic Charles Tardieu’s 1877 contribution to the debate on the level of government involvement in the arts, an increasingly hot topic in the decade leading up to the demise of the Salon, was far from original in using Britain’s relative dearth of state support for the arts as an opposing model to the French paradigm.

While Tardieu concluded that neither system was perfect,⁴¹ and each country’s envy of the benefits of the other’s model exemplified the tendency to covet what one did not have, his choice of France and Britain to illustrate the argument was telling.

Guy Chapman characterised Franco-British relations throughout the first decades of the Third Republic as ‘never friendly, rarely splenetic’.⁴² Wilhelmine Germany presented a much greater source of anxiety to France in the wake of the Franco-Prussian defeat; Britain was not so much feared as alternately envied and disdained. While the two nations had not been in open conflict with each other since the fall of Napoleon I, a simmering resentment continued to colour France’s relations

³⁹Literally, as Antonin Proust, who became the Minister of Fine Arts under Jules Grévy, warned in an address to the Chamber of Deputies on the state of the arts, particularly the decorative arts, after the

close of the Exposition (see Mainardi 1993, p. 64).

⁴⁰ 'En France, l'État est partout, même en art, mais il est des pays où l'État n'est nulle part, et en art moins que partout ailleurs. [...] L'Angleterre, dont nous avons raison cependant d'invoquer l'exemple pour montrer ce que peut dans une large mesure l'initiative privée, l'Angleterre nous a donné le spectacle d'une réaction de ce genre'. C. Tardieu, 'L'Art et l'État', *L'Art* 8 (1877), p. 159.

⁴¹ Tardieu ultimately came down on the side of state intervention in the arts, for the novel reason that, if nothing else, it inspired and fuelled rebellion, which ultimately kept art vital ('Elle crée l'opposition, c'est-à-dire la lutte, c'est-à-dire la vie'): *ibid.*, p. 160.

⁴² Chapman (1962), p. 345.

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with Britain. The peace, imperial power, and economic dominance that Britain had enjoyed while France first succumbed to Prussia's armies, then struggled to rebuild itself, as well as its apparent disregard of other European nations, stirred the latter's jealousy.⁴³ Some of the French envy of Britain was a case of the grass being greener on the other side, for the view within Britain in the 1870s was considerably less green, with the first signs of the diminution of its economic might and imperial strength, and the spectre of the Russo-Turkish War in 1876.⁴⁴ Still, 'egotistical England,' to borrow Gambetta's unflattering nickname,⁴⁵ however disliked it might have been on the other side of the Channel, was difficult to ignore.

The relative political stability certainly seems to have contributed to the far smoother organisation of the British section of the Exposition Universelle. There appears to be no evidence of wrangling over finances or of any shortages of cash; in fact, the British section as a whole occupied a much greater space on the Champ de Mars (21,826 square metres) than that allotted to any other foreign country (Belgium came a distant second, with 9,494 square metres of exhibition space),⁴⁶ and no expense was spared on the Fine Art section, despite the fact that it ultimately cost five times the original estimate.⁴⁷ Although we have no record of how much space was allotted to the fine arts within the British section, the fact that the size of Britain's art exhibition (726 works in total) vastly exceeded that of all other foreign countries, and that critics consistently praised the spacious hang, would suggest that the exhibition space was generous.⁴⁸ In contrast to the French art exhibition, the Fine Art committee, which had been appointed not by an elected official but by the Prince of Wales, was not only much smaller, but, as might be expected in a nation in which involvement in the arts was still largely a private affair, only half of its members were

⁴³ On Anglophobia in the French press, 1871-77, see Bury (1973), pp. 340-1.

⁴⁴ On British foreign policy in the 1870s, see D. Read, *The Age of Urban Democracy: England 1868-1914* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 189-200. It is worth noting that the Russo-Turkish War marked what seems to have been the only period of political activity in the life of Burne-Jones, although apparently he had to be spurred into action by William Morris; G. Burne-Jones (1904), pp. 83-4.

⁴⁵ Bury (1973), p. 340.

⁴⁶ *Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners* (1880), p. 32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁸ The official catalogue of the Exposition gives the categorical breakdown of the British Fine Art section as 283 oils, 191 paintings and drawings in other media, 46 sculptures, 170 architectural drawings and models, and 36 engravings and etchings. The French Fine Art display comprised 2,071 works, and the Belgian section, the second-largest foreign exhibition, contained 431 works. Most other European nations contributed between 100 and 300 works.

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artists; the remainder were aristocratic amateurs.⁴⁹ All of the former, except the architect Charles Barry, were academicians; this also held true of the three-man jury for Paintings, which consisted of Frederick Leighton, Edward Armitage and William Dobson.⁵⁰ Considering the presence of academicians on both the jury and the committee, one might have expected an exhibition as dominated by academic painting

as the French Fine Art section; however, this did not prove to be the case. To be sure, the work of academicians and other painters who regularly graced the walls of the Royal Academy, such as Leighton, Millais, and Herkomer, formed a sizable portion of the exhibition, but artists who either could not or chose not to exhibit at the Royal Academy received stronger representation than did their French counterparts.

Notably, one of the members of the Fine Art committee was Sir Coutts

Lindsay, the wealthy amateur and founder of the recently opened Grosvenor Gallery [Figure 3]. Unfortunately, no record of his exact contribution to the final shape of the British Fine Art section survives, but given the parallels between his own venture and the nature of the British art exhibition in Paris, we can surmise that he was at least partly responsible for its more innovative aspects.⁵¹ Although the British galleries were probably not decorated in the lavish Aesthetic style of the Grosvenor, French critics' praise of the galleries' calm and lack of clutter and the sympathetic hang of the pictures would suggest that his insistence, revolutionary at the time, on treating paintings as aesthetic objects worthy of contemplation in harmonious surroundings, informed the display. More importantly, it was likely due to his influence, and to his probable desire to do for his preferred British artists abroad what he had done for foreign artists at home,⁵² that a goodly number of the artists whose work he had

⁴⁹ The members of the Fine Art committee were the Duke of Westminster (chairman), the Lord de l'Isle and Dudley, Sir Coutts Lindsay, Sir Richard Wallace, Sir Francis Grant, P.R.A., Sir John Gilbert, R.A., Colonel Arthur Ellis, Charles Barry, Sir Frederick Leighton, R.A., and W. Calder Marshall, R.A. (*Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners*, 1880, p. 54).

⁵⁰ Ibid. Originally four artists and one architect – Sir John Gilbert, Sir Frederick Leighton, W. Calder Marshall, Charles Barry, and Sir Francis Grant – were on the 10-member committee. Grant died in 1877, decreasing the total to four.

⁵¹ In the last decade Sir Coutts Lindsay and the Grosvenor Gallery have attracted increasing attention; the foremost studies include S. P. Casteras, ed., *The Grosvenor Gallery: a Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1996); C. Denney, 'The Role of Sir Coutts Lindsay', in Casteras and Faxon (1995), pp. 61-80; and *idem*, *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890* (London, 2000). Unfortunately, none of them discuss Lindsay's role in the organisation of the 1878 Exposition, although all three highlight the overt internationalism of his own exhibition policies.

⁵² Lindsay's support of foreign artists exhibiting in London was groundbreaking for its time; the Grosvenor played host to a significantly more cosmopolitan roster of artists throughout its existence than any other exhibition venue in London. See B. Bryant, 'G. F. Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery: "poems painted on canvas" and the new internationalism', in Casteras (1996), pp. 117-21, for further discussion.

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personally selected for the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition the previous year were invited to contribute to the British Fine Art section. Thus, Burne-Jones was represented by the most admired of the eight works with which he had made his 1877 reappearance at the Grosvenor Gallery, *The Beguiling of Merlin* [Figure 4]⁵³ – incidentally, a depiction of an episode in a French, rather than an English, Arthurian romance – as well as by two large watercolours, *Love among the Ruins* [Figure 5] and *Love Disguised as Reason*.⁵⁴ Watts was represented by a much wider range of work – in addition to six portraits, one Biblical scene, and one sculpture, he sent *The Three Goddesses* [Figure 6]⁵⁵ and, most notably, his star picture from the first Grosvenor exhibition, *Love and Death* [Figure 7].⁵⁶ Although no photographs of the British galleries have surfaced thus far, the schematic layout published in the illustrated catalogue gives a fair idea of Lindsay's probable influence over the hang. One of his innovations at the Grosvenor had been to group all works by a single artist together, thus privileging the artist as a singular creative talent.⁵⁷ He also insisted that at least six, and preferably twelve, inches of space be left between pictures to alleviate the visual cacophony prevalent in conventional hanging practice; this had the added

benefit of further privileging the individual work of art as an autonomous aesthetic object worthy of contemplation in and of itself. Although the hang in the British galleries at the Exposition was rather denser than Lindsay would have favoured at the Grosvenor, he almost certainly had a hand in choosing prime locations in the display for the artists he championed; *The Beguiling of Merlin* hung almost dead centre on the

⁵³Exhibited at the Exposition under the title *Merlin et Viviane* (no. 121).
⁵⁴*Love Among the Ruins* (no. 84) was the only one of Burne-Jones's works to have its title translated literally. I have chosen to focus my discussion of Burne-Jones on *The Beguiling of Merlin* and *Love among the Ruins*, as *Love Disguised as Reason* (c. 1870, Cape Town, South African National Gallery; listed in the Exposition catalogue as *L'Amour docteur*, no. 85) barely figures in most reviews. For a complete listing of works by Burne-Jones and Watts exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, see C. Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁵⁵Exhibited at the Exposition as *Pallas, Junon et Vénus* (no. 265). Duranty, however, refers to it as *Le Jugement de Paris*, despite the absence of the figure of Paris, and when it was first exhibited at Deschamp's Gallery in 1876, it went by the title *The Three Graces*. See Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 114, for a complete history of the painting's title.

⁵⁶Watts painted multiple versions of *Love and Death* (no. 267), and which version was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery and in the Exposition Universelle is a matter of some uncertainty. The canvas now in the Whitworth Gallery at the University of Manchester, reproduced here, is generally accepted as the 1878 painting; however, Colleen Denney argues that the earliest version (1875), now in the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, was the painting exhibited, based upon records in that museum's archives (Denney 1995, p. 79). While this version may have been the one shown in Paris, I doubt that it was exhibited at the Grosvenor, as it lacks the dove in the lower right corner remarked upon by several critics, in particular Oscar Wilde in his review of the exhibition in the *Dublin University Magazine*, and present in the Whitworth's version.

⁵⁷Denney (2000), pp. 50-51.

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end wall of the large central gallery, with *Love and Death* above it to the left and the rest of Watts's paintings nearby.⁵⁸ While it would be an exaggeration to claim that Lindsay managed to transport the Grosvenor's aesthetic and programme wholesale to the Exposition – certainly, he would have been obliged to bow to the wishes of other committee members and accept the work of Academicians inimical to the Gallery's aesthetic – it would be fair to say that he was able to preserve crucial elements of its spirit in both the selection and the hang. The reverence for the individual artist as creative genius, the preference for literary and mythological subjects guaranteed to appeal to an elite audience, and the formation of an identifiable group of artists with common concerns translated remarkably well in Paris.

Initial French reactions to Britain's presence at the Exposition gave little indication that attitudes were on the cusp of change. The Rue des Nations (the 'international main street' to which most of the nations represented at the Exposition had contributed façades intended to represent typical national architecture), in which Britain was represented by a row of Tudor-revival houses, provided Charles Blanc with an opportunity to scoff at the lack of originality in British architecture. He attributed this to Britain's being 'the land of individualism,' which, in his estimation, meant that the only area of innovation in which Britons were capable was domestic architecture. Moreover, he asserted that most of what was best about British architecture had actually been imported from France.⁵⁹ On a more light-hearted note, the cartoonist Cham, who had made a speciality of lampooning Paris's Salons and other exhibitions, made a single, telling reference to Britain in his collection *L'Exposition pour rire* [Figure 8]: captioned, in English, 'SHOCKING!', it skewered stereotypical British prudishness in the shape of a heavily clothed and bonneted matron shrinking in horror in front of a display of meerschaum pipes in one of the Industrial Arts sections with the caption 'British modesty lowering its eyes before

pipes without trousers!’⁶⁰ However, once inside the British Fine Art section, it proved more difficult for critics to find ready targets for mockery. Not only did they consistently comment favourably on the spaciousness, comfort, and attractiveness of

⁵⁸ H. Blackburn, *Exposition Universelle, Paris 1878. Catalogue illustré de la section des beaux-arts: école anglaise* (Paris, 1878), p. 3.

⁵⁹ Blanc (1878), pp. 43-47.

⁶⁰ ‘La pudeur britannique baissant les yeux devant les pipes qui ne sont pas culottées!’ Cham, *L’Exposition pour rire*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1878). The double meaning of ‘pipe’ (slang in French for penis) would have made Cham’s caption especially risqué for his French readership.

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the gallery itself, especially in comparison to its French counterpart,⁶¹ they found themselves confronted with what, to eyes whose last sight of British painting had been eleven years past, was something new and strange. They were witnessing, several years behind Britain, what Pierre Bourdieu has termed a period of rupture, during which a new grammar of form is devised and a consequent demand for a new critical vocabulary, and the great variation in responses indicates the sort of a challenge it presented.⁶²

‘A slightly strange but striking poetry’: Burne-Jones at the Exposition Universelle

We French turned [for inspiration] more willingly to the Flemish primitives, to the van Eyck brothers, to Holbein. But the English found [in the Italian Primitives] a derivative of their poetic fantasy – *fancy* – that is sharper and bolder than our own. We don’t have *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in our theatre, and a French brain couldn’t conceive of a creature as spiritually mad as Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. – Philippe Burty, 1869⁶³

While the 1878 Exposition Universelle marked the first occasion on which the works of Burne-Jones and Watts were displayed in France, neither artist was an entirely unknown quantity in that country. The first known mention of Burne-Jones in a French periodical appeared in Philippe Burty’s review of the 1869 Royal Academy summer exhibition, in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*; Watts was discussed in the same article, although as a frequent exhibitor at the Royal Academy throughout the 1860s it was probably not the first time his name had figured in the pages of the *Gazette* or other French art periodicals. However, both artists had more recently found a much stronger ambassador and advocate in the shape of Joseph Comyns Carr, exhibitions assistant at the Grosvenor Gallery and *directeur pour l’Angleterre* for the new periodical *L’Art*.⁶⁴ Carr had contributed a three-part review of the first Grosvenor

⁶¹ See for example Gonse (1878), p. 492.

⁶² P. Bourdieu and A. Darbel, *The Love of Art*, trans. C. Beatty and N. Merriman (Cambridge, 1991), p. 43.

⁶³ ‘Nos Français sont allés plus volontiers aux primitifs Flamands, aux van Eyck, à Holbein. Mais les Anglais ont trouvé là un dérivatif à leur fantaisie poétique – *fancy* – qui est plus aiguisée, plus hardie que la nôtre. Nous n’avons pas dans notre théâtre le *Songe d’une nuit d’été*, et un cerveau français ne saurait pas concevoir un être aussi spirituellement fou que le Mercutio de *Roméo et Juliette*’. P. Burty, ‘Exposition de la Royal Academy’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July 1869), p. 53. Note that ‘fancy’ appears in English in the original text.

⁶⁴ On the role of Comyns Carr as a promoter of Burne-Jones and Watts in France, see B. Bryant, ‘G. F. Watts and the Symbolist Vision’, in Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 65-82 and *idem*, ‘G. F. Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery: “Poems Painted on Canvas” and the New Internationalism’, in Casteras (1996), pp. 109-28.

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Gallery exhibition to *L’Art* in 1877, in which he eloquently praised Burne-Jones and Watts, devoting particular attention to *The Beguiling of Merlin* and to *Love and Death*.⁶⁵ Although none of Watts’s work was illustrated, the third instalment featured an excellent etching by Adolfe Lalauze after *The Beguiling of Merlin* [Figure 9]. It

seems reasonable to assume that the major critics – Blanc; Duranty and Alfred de Lostalot, whose reviews appeared in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*; Paul Mantz, who covered the foreign fine art sections for *Le Temps*; Arsène Houssaye, writing in *L'Événement*; and Ernest Chesneau, writing in *Le Moniteur universel* – who reviewed the British Fine Art section would have come across Carr's articles and the engraving. It is a truism that a picture is worth a thousand words; nevertheless, the decision to commission a reproduction of a work by a then-unknown artist by a leading engraver suggests how much Lindsay and Comyns Carr staked on establishing Burne-Jones's reputation in France. That out of the profusion of different techniques then available they chose etching, one of methods most highly regarded in France, even as it was being superseded by newer, cheaper, quicker processes, speaks volumes.⁶⁶ Still, no matter how finely wrought, a small black-and-white etching could only give a bare idea of the impact of the paintings themselves in their true size and colours.⁶⁷

Within all of the above-mentioned reviews of the British section lay the implicit acknowledgment that British painting, in particular the strand represented by Burne-Jones and Watts, required a different critical vocabulary. The words *poésie* and *poétique* were, at this date, seldom applied to the visual arts, with the important exception of Corot's late work; Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e Siècle* in 1874 lists numerous literary definitions and contexts for *poétique*, but only one example, at the end of the entry, of usage in the context of the visual arts.⁶⁸ These observers could well have been using the word literally, as Burne-Jones's paintings, to name one of the more obvious examples, were largely inspired by poetry and made no

⁶⁵ J. Comyns Carr, 'La Saison d'art à Londres: la "Grosvenor Gallery"', *L'Art* 9-10 (1877), pp. 265-73, 3-10, 77-83.

⁶⁶ Although Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay is a useful point of entry into the problems of reproductive prints, it envisions reproductive technique as evolving in a lockstep fashion and emphasises photography at the expense of other methods: W. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in idem, *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn (London, 1999), pp. 211-44. Stephen Bann has presented a convincing case for examining the rivalries between multiple, concurrent methods of reproduction: S. Bann, *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 8-11.

⁶⁷ One of the etching's flaws is a slight alteration in the direction of Nimuë's gaze from that in the painting, lessening the intensity of the confrontation between Nimuë and Merlin.

⁶⁸ 'Poétique des beaux-arts, Exposition de ce qu'il y a d'élevé, d'idéal dans les beaux-arts'. P. Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e siècle*, vol. 12.2 (Paris, 1874), p. 1245.

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overt reference to contemporary life. However, most of them imply that it captures a quality of British painting that sets it apart from its Continental cousins: 'a slightly strange but striking poetry,' for Duranty, summed up the efforts of the second wave of Pre-Raphaelites.⁶⁹ Houssaye went even further, declaring that '*Messieurs les Anglais* are restless men and poets', breaking down the heretofore implied separation of the roles of painter and poet.⁷⁰

Indeed, issues of nationality and national characteristics were running themes in the majority of the reviews. The notion of British artists' technical inferiority to the French, and their mediocre training, received frequent attention.⁷¹ Alfred de Lostalot, a notoriously conservative critic who reviewed the Drawings and Watercolours section for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, was the most scathing in his assessment, scornfully remarking of *Love among the Ruins*, 'It's a curious work, but we seek vainly to understand why the painter entrusted a subject of this size to paper rather than to canvas, because it multiplied the difficulties for no good reason', and finally conceding, rather patronisingly, of the entire British section of watercolours, that while they possessed a certain naïve charm, they were 'perhaps without eminently

plastic qualities, but one can't have everything.'⁷² Ironically, Ernest Chesneau transformed the evident ignorance of technique and disregard for orthodox methods of 'M. Jones Burne' into a positive virtue, claiming,

⁶⁹'Une poésie un peu bizarre mais d'accent très net'. Duranty (1878), p. 299.

⁷⁰'Messieurs les Anglais sont des inquiets et des poètes'. A. Houssaye, 'Les Beaux-arts à l'Exposition Universelle (V): Messieurs les Anglais', *L'Événement* (4 October 1878).

⁷¹Indeed, Burne-Jones, who was almost entirely self-taught, apart from some lessons in drawing from Rossetti, received no formal training whatsoever. Watts's case is slightly different: while he was briefly a student at the Royal Academy Schools as a teenager (and was ultimately elected an academician in 1867 on the strength of his portraits), he received almost no teaching and his attendance was desultory. A subsequent informal apprenticeship to the sculptor William Behnes constituted the remainder of his training. See W. Blunt, *'England's Michelangelo': a biography of George Frederic Watts, O.M., R.A.* (London, 1975), pp. 7-10, for a more thorough, if rather anecdotal, account of his early years and education.

⁷²'C'est cependant un curieux travail que l'*Amour dans les ruines* de M. Burne Jones, mais nous cherchons vainement à comprendre pourquoi le peintre a confié au papier plutôt qu'à la toile un sujet de cette taille, car c'était accumuler à plaisir les difficultés'; 'Ce ne sont peut-être pas des qualités éminemment plastiques, mais on ne peut pas tout avoir': A. de Lostalot, 'Exposition Universelle: aquarelles, dessins et gravures', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (October 1878), pp. 644-5. Lostalot was not the only Frenchman to be baffled by Burne-Jones's unorthodox working methods; *Love Among the Ruins* was badly damaged in a Paris photographer's studio in 1893 because the photographer's assistants mistook it for an oil painting and gave it an egg white wash in preparation for photography. Burne-Jones subsequently produced a replica in oils (now in the Bearsted Collection, Wightwick Manor).

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Moreover, here, – and it must be said in general, about all English painting, – the process isn't governed by law as it is in France, the methods of facture are not limited, the medium isn't valued at much, only the result counts for something. Is the desired effect obtained? *All right*. So much the better.⁷³

The English physiognomy, particularly as embodied by Burne-Jones's gaunt, lantern-jawed Vivien, drew snide criticism from Duranty:

The lean type with large hollow eyes that M. Burne-Jones and M. Richmond have given the Vivien of the Middle Ages and the antique Ariadne is yet again an English type, the type of poetic souls *par excellence*, but still with the strongly accentuated jaw that is fond of rare meats and a hard undercurrent of fierceness that makes itself felt even from afar.⁷⁴

Yet he also conceded that the English type had its saving graces, chiefly 'the beauty and height of the forehead, the nobility of the nose and the penetrating firmness of the gaze,' remarking, not without a hint of envy, that such traits could not but reflect the power and intelligence of the English race.⁷⁵ Blanc (who persisted in referring to the artist as 'Burnes Jones' throughout his review) took a more charitable view, but dodged the issue of the 'English type' by describing the figure of Vivien as a fusion of the styles of Mantegna and Prud'hon.⁷⁶

Duranty's somewhat jaundiced take on the peculiarities of Burne-Jones's 'Englishness', while echoed by other critics, may to an extent reflect his discomfort with a type of painting at odds with his own preferences – he is best remembered as a champion of the Impressionists and an habitué of Manet's circle at the Café Guerbois. The two most sympathetic reviewers, Chesneau and Mantz, instead ascribed the *merits* of *The Beguiling of Merlin* to its creator's nationality. Chesneau went even further, writing that '[Burne-Jones's] adoration of the true, when placed at the service of a high imagination, brings to the things it interprets thus a singular appreciation, an emotion, a poetic transfiguration, alas! sought in vain from the "truth" of young French painters which comes from academic traditions which are nothing but studio

⁷³'D'ailleurs, ici, – et il faut le dire en général, de toute la peinture anglaise, – le procédé n'a pas de lois

comme en France, les modes de factures ne sont pas limités, le moyen n'est considéré pour rien, le résultat seul compte pour quelque chose. L'effet voulu est-il obtenu? *All right*. Tout est pour le mieux'. E. Chesneau, 'Exposition Universelle. Beaux-arts: les écoles étrangères (I)', *Le Moniteur universel* (4 July 1878). Note that 'All right' appears in English in the original text. Chesneau later incorporated his critique of Burne-Jones in this article, verbatim, into *La peinture anglaise* (p. 238).

⁷⁴'Le type maigre aux grands yeux caves que M. Burne-Jones et M. Richmond ont donné à la Viviane du Moyen-Age et à l'Ariadne antique, est encore un type anglais, le type des âmes poétiques par excellence, mais toujours avec la mâchoire accusée et amie des viandes saignantes, et toujours avec un arrière-sentiment dur et farouche, sensible quoique lointain.' Duranty (1878), p. 306.

⁷⁵'La beauté et l'élévation du front, la noblesse du nez et la fermeté pénétrante du regard'. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁷⁶Blanc (1878), p. 335.

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formulae'.⁷⁷ Mantz correctly identified Leonardo as the source of Burne-Jones's androgynous figures, and, while allowing that 'such refinements rather disconcert the spectator accustomed to obvious things', he added that they 'are possible, and at home, in the land of Shakespeare'.⁷⁸ Ironically, this very aspect of Burne-Jones's work had been decried by British critics as 'effeminacy' and 'morbidity'; no doubt it was to more open-minded critics like Mantz that Burne-Jones's first biographer Malcolm Bell referred when he wrote that it had taken the appreciation of French critics to belatedly open the eyes of their British colleagues to Burne-Jones's genius.⁷⁹ More intriguing still are the visual correspondences between *The Beguiling of Merlin* and Moreau's *L'Apparition* and *Salomé*, works which were appearing together for the second time at the Exposition, after their first pairing in the previous year's Grosvenor Gallery exhibition. Apart from the obvious similarities in composition and narrative – a sinuous, serpentine femme fatale confronting (or, in the case of *L'Apparition*, being confronted by) her male victim – the facture of the surfaces of both paintings also displays revealing parallels. The surfaces of both *L'Apparition* and *Salomé* appear encrusted with jewels (a particularly remarkable feat in the former case, as its medium does not allow the impasto possible with oil), a glittering *horror vacui* that heightens the atmosphere of hothouse exoticism and sexual terror; *The Beguiling of Merlin* is similarly encrusted, though with hawthorn blossoms rather than jewels. It would be easy to attribute the welter of obsessively drawn detail in Burne-Jones's painting to his Pre-Raphaelite heritage; here, however, the blossoms have a stylised, decorative quality, as if made of extremely fine enamel.⁸⁰ In fact, their fragile artificiality and their hard, enamel-like finish contribute to the scene's leaden,

⁷⁷'Cette adoration du vrai, quand elle est mise au service d'une haute imagination, apporte aux choses interprétées de la sorte une singulière plus-value, une émotion, une transfiguration poétique, hélas! vainement demandée en dehors de la vérité partant de jeunes peintres français à des traditions d'académie qui ne sont que des recettes d'atelier': Chesneau (1878).

⁷⁸'De tels raffinements déroutent un peu le spectateur ami des choses claires; ils sont possibles, ils sont à leur place dans le pays de Shakespeare'. P. Mantz, 'Exposition Universelle. Les Écoles étrangères (X): Angleterre', *Le Temps*, 11 November 1878 (hereafter Mantz 1878b).

⁷⁹M. Bell, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones. A Record and Review* (London and New York, 1892), p. 5.

⁸⁰Note that the word 'decorative' had different, and more positive, connotations in British and French art criticism of the late nineteenth century than it does today; not only was it used as a complimentary term by contemporary advocates of Aestheticism, 'art décoratif', in the sense of monumental painting intended for an architectural setting, was generally considered to be the highest genre to which an artist could aspire in France.

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airless atmosphere of dread in much the same way as Moreau's jewel-encrusted canvas.⁸¹

British observers had maintained a curious silence about *L'Apparition* when it graced the walls of the Grosvenor Gallery's East Gallery – no doubt a disappointment to the managers of the Grosvenor, who appeared to have put a considerable effort into

securing its loan.⁸² Comyns Carr himself only mentioned it in passing in his review in *L'Art*, perhaps less because of a lack of interest than because he probably saw no need to extol at length a work that had already occupied so many column inches in its own country the year before.⁸³ In London, however, the only references to Moreau's presence at the Grosvenor are a passing mention in an article in the *Academy* by William Michael Rossetti (disposed perhaps by his relationships, familial and professional, with the Pre-Raphaelites to notice him)⁸⁴ and a brief allusion to 'the flashy attractions of M. Gustave Moreau's picture', erroneously described as depicting the head of Christ, in an unsigned review in the *Athenaeum*.⁸⁵ Oddly enough, Moreau garnered more attention from British reviewers at the 1878 Exposition, although references were brief and sometimes patronising; a critic for the *Art Journal* drew parallels between his colour and, bizarrely, that of William Etty.⁸⁶ Although Duranty did not make the connection between the two artists in his 1878 review, another realist critic, Jules Castagnary, did, noting that in his visit to the British exhibition, he perceived 'here and there certain vague resemblances to some of our painters – thus it is that M. Jones in his *Merlin and Vivien* evidently concerns himself with Gustave

⁸¹ Burne-Jones's maternal grandfather, Benjamin Coley, was the head of a jewellery firm in Birmingham, and it is tempting to speculate on what role this heritage played in the painter's style and methods, especially given Burne-Jones's comment that he 'love[d] to treat [his] pictures as a goldsmith does his jewels' (quoted in Wildman and Christian 1998, p. 42). The bejewelled quality of Moreau's paintings and his concept of 'richesse nécessaire' was a common topic of discussion among his contemporaries – not always flatteringly. For example, the heated (although possibly apocryphal) exchange between Moreau and his former friend Degas, as recorded by Paul Valéry: Moreau is said to have demanded of Degas, 'Do you have pretensions to restoring art through dance?' only to receive the rejoinder, 'And you're claiming to revive it with jewellery?'

⁸² Comyns Carr arranged the loan through his connections at *L'Art*; the dealer Léon Gauchez, in whose possession it was in 1877, wrote for the magazine under the pseudonym Paul Leroi, and Moreau's address in the exhibition catalogue was listed as the London office of *L'Art* – coincidentally, next door to the gallery in New Bond Street. Lindsay's decision to hang it, with the work of a wide array of other foreign artists, in the first room gallery-goers entered is indicative of his overt internationalism; see Bryant (1996) in Casteras (1996), pp. 120-21.

⁸³ Comyns Carr (1877), p. 270.

⁸⁴ Bryant (1996), p. 121.

⁸⁵ 'The Salon, Paris (second notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2586 (19 May 1877), p. 647.

⁸⁶ 'International Art at the Universal Exposition, Paris', *Art Journal* 18 (1878), p. 198. The reviewer singled out *Moses exposed on the Nile* and *Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra* as typical of Moreau's style.

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Moreau'.⁸⁷ Duranty picked up this thread in a review of the Grosvenor Gallery's summer exhibition in 1879 – the first instance in which the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* had asked its *correspondant d'Angleterre* to cover the Grosvenor exhibition alongside that of the Royal Academy – when he characterised Burne-Jones's work as 'loaded with intentions and implications which recall the complications of the imagination of M. Gustave Moreau'.⁸⁸ These were the first recorded comparisons of Burne-Jones and Moreau – the first, as it turned out, of many over the next two decades.

Watts and the Shadow of Puvis de Chavannes

Watts's imaginative works proved more problematic for the critics – somewhat surprisingly, since he drew upon more conventional academic models than Burne-Jones did, and his stylistic references originated mainly in the Cinquecento painting embraced by the critical and academic establishments in both Britain and France. Indeed, Blanc passed over them entirely in his review, simply praising Watts as a skilful and sensitive portraitist.⁸⁹ As with Burne-Jones, the majority of French critiques were formalist, rather than moralising. Where Watts's reputation at home had benefited from the high-minded tone of critics in the broadsheet and periodical

press who cast his art as a ‘manly’ and ‘healthy’ alternative to the effeminacy and morbidity of Burne-Jones’s style and subject matter while giving less weight to formal flaws,⁹⁰ French critics evinced less interest in Watts’s masculine rectitude and focused instead on his peculiarities as a painter – often to his detriment. Chesneau, who had waxed so enthusiastic over Burne-Jones, dismissed *The Three Goddesses* as ‘thoroughly mediocre’ and scoffed, ‘No doubt M. Watts has made an interesting

⁸⁷ ‘Une surprise que nous avons éprouvés dans notre promenade a été de constater çà et là certaines velléités de quelques-uns de nos peintres. C’est ainsi que M. Jones dans son *Merlin et Viviane* se préoccupe évidemment de Gustave Moreau’. J. Castagnary, ‘L’Exposition (XIV). Beaux-arts – Angleterre’, *Le Siècle* (24 May 1878).

⁸⁸ ‘Chargée d’intentions, de sous-entendus, et qui rappelle les complications de l’imagination de M. Gustave Moreau’. E. Duranty, ‘Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor-Gallery, à Londres’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (October 1879), p. 372.

⁸⁹Blanc (1878), p. 336.

⁹⁰ See, among many examples this anonymous review of Burne-Jones’s paintings in the 1878 Grosvenor exhibition: ‘As to the value, in a larger sense, of this art, and of the poetry which is its companion, we most seriously protest against it (with a reverence for its genius and a tenderness for its beauty) as unmasculine; [...] it is fresh strenuous paganism, emasculated by false modern emotionalism’. (‘The Grosvenor Gallery: Second Notice’, *Magazine of Art*, 1878, p. 81.) By contrast, the same reviewer (presumably) characterised Watts’s paintings in the exhibition as ‘noble’ and ‘lofty’ (‘The Grosvenor Gallery: First Notice’, *Magazine of Art*, 1878, p. 50).

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attempt in his picture *Love and Death* [. . .] but utterly for naught’;⁹¹ most of the other reviewers followed suit, praising his imagination and the sincerity of his efforts while condemning Watts’s faulty grasp of anatomy, his dry facture and his bizarre colour schemes.

Duranty discussed Watts’s imaginative subjects at length, but he was at a loss as to how to categorise the artist, coining the term ‘post-Raphaelite’ to describe him, in recognition of his affinities with the Pre-Raphaelites and his stylistic debt to Michelangelo and other artists of the High Renaissance. While he seemed to feel qualified to comment upon the sculptural quality of Watts’s drawing and on his eccentricities and deficiencies as a colourist,⁹² he had little to say about the content of either *Love and Death* or *The Three Goddesses*. His one brief comment on the latter is telling. While Watts originally entitled the painting *The Three Goddesses*, and it was listed in the official exhibition catalogue as *Pallas, Juno and Venus*, Duranty refers to it as *The Judgment of Paris*.⁹³ Yet Paris is nowhere in evidence – unless, by a stretch of the imagination, the viewer is meant to place himself in the role of Paris – and none of the three figures bears any of the traditional attributes of those goddesses. It seems as if, faced with an image devoid of any readily evident narrative and populated only by three mysterious, impassive nudes, Duranty clutched at straws to give some semblance of a conventional meaning to the painting.

The salient characteristics of *The Three Goddesses* – the suppression of meaning and the monochrome palette – appear to reveal the origins of a dialogue with another artist whose style, programme and aspirations closely paralleled those of Watts. While *Love and Death*, by virtue of its imposing size and dramatic subject, garnered more critical attention than Watts’s other works in the British Fine Art section, *The Three Goddesses* displays more compelling links with French antinaturalism, and in particular with the work of Puvis de Chavannes, which have thus far received surprisingly little attention. While Puvis absented himself,

⁹¹ ‘Fort médiocre’; ‘Sans doute M. Watts a fait une tentative intéressante dans son tableau de *l’Amour et la Mort* [. . .] mais absolument en vain’. Chesneau (1878). Chesneau subsequently softened his criticism of Watts in *La peinture anglaise*, praising both *The Three Goddesses* and *Love and Death* for expressing ‘a real poetic sentiment’ (‘un réel sentiment poétique’, pp. 265-66), but, in common with

most other French critics who wrote on that artist, he continued to assert that Watts's imaginative reach exceeded his technical grasp.

⁹² It is worth bearing in mind that *Love and Death* looked much darker when Duranty saw it at the Exposition than it does today. Watts subsequently reworked it, lightening the colours considerably; see Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 167-8. For a contemporary account of Watts's working methods, see C. Monkhouse, 'The Watts Exhibition', *Magazine of Art* (1882), pp. 181-2.

⁹³ Duranty (1878), p. 310.

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apparently voluntarily, from the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition, precluding comparisons of both artists' works, a parallel reading of French criticism from 1878 and the following decade demonstrates that mainstream critics responded similarly to the work of both artists, faulting both for their divergence from academic ideals and slavish emulation of archaic models (in Puvis's case, Giotto and Benozzo Gozzoli), but rarely raising the issue of subject matter or narrative inscrutability.⁹⁴ Although Puvis would presumably have seen Watts's work in 1878, he never exhibited in Britain during his lifetime, and Watts would almost certainly not have seen any of his paintings before he began work on *The Three Goddesses*. He may, however, have had access to reproductions; line drawings of Puvis's work regularly featured in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*,⁹⁵ and an etching after his *Death and the Maidens* (1872) [Figure 10] was published by Durand-Ruel in 1873 and available for sale in London, at which time he had just completed the painting. The engraving gives a poor idea of Puvis's chalky colour and the sculptural solidity of his figures, but in the static poses and pensive gazes of the two girls in the lower right, to say nothing of Puvis's sophisticated twist on traditional allegorical iconography, Watts would probably have recognised a kindred spirit. Significantly, Watts first exhibited *The Three Goddesses* in 1876 at the Deschamps Gallery, a venue linked with Durand-Ruel's and favoured by Whistler, where French and British art were shown side by side; thus, he underlined that painting's experimental nature.⁹⁶ Louis Huth, the collector who purchased the work from Deschamps and lent it to the British exhibition at the Exposition Universelle, was a devotee of this particular aspect of Watts's oeuvre and a keen collector of the work of other artists working in a similar vein. Thanks to Huth's generosity, *The Three Goddesses* enjoyed a greater and longer-lived reputation in France than it did in Britain. As well as lending it to the Exposition Universelle, he allowed an etching to be made after it to illustrate Comyns Carr's review of the 1880 Grosvenor Gallery exhibition for *L'Art* [Figure 11], thus increasing its audience and

⁹⁴ These tendencies were particularly evident in reviews of Puvis's 1879 Salon submissions; see M.-T. de Forges, 'Un nouveau tableau de Puvis de Chavannes au musée du Louvre', *Revue du Louvre* 20, no. 4 (1970), p. 248. Like Watts, Puvis had foregone an orthodox academic education, opting for a wandering apprenticeship in the 1850s in the ateliers of Henri Scheffer, Delacroix and Couture; see A. B. Price, *Pierre Puvis de Chavannes* (exh. cat., Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1994), pp. 11-12, for further particulars of his training.

⁹⁵ Reproductions of Puvis's work in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* before 1878 include a heliogravure after *La Fantaisie*, *GBA*, June 1866, p. 510; an engraving after *L'Été*, *GBA*, June 1873, p. 477; and a fold-out line-engraving of *Sainte Geneviève*, *GBA*, June 1876, facing p. 692.

⁹⁶ Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 115.

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extending its presence in the public eye. The article itself is notable for gliding over the painting's subject and concentrating on Watts's treatment of the nude – a theme rare in current British art but of key importance in France – and his 'spiritualisme raffiné', concerns which, as Barbara Bryant notes, prefigured the language of Symbolist criticism in the coming decade.⁹⁷

Duranty stated at the beginning of his review of the British section that of all the national art exhibitions, it was 'the most interesting in terms of national character,

distinctive spirit, and the characteristic aspect of its works, although insular English art has ties with the Continent that one can easily see'.⁹⁸ Ostensibly he was referring to its ties with Continental art of the past – drawing comparisons between Burne-Jones and Florentine painting of the Quattrocento and, more unusually, Albrecht Dürer, as well as between Watts and the High Renaissance and Mannerism – but it is tempting to wonder whether he detected any common ground between Watts and Puvis, the contemporary artist whose work came closest in spirit to his own. Might he have seen, for example, similarities between *The Three Goddesses*, with its monumental yet strangely flat figures, limited tonal range, matte surface, and lack of an obvious narrative, and the easel paintings of Puvis de Chavannes, which had been praised and ridiculed in equal measure for the same qualities? Watts's trio of impassive nudes, while betraying debts to the contemporary life class, classical images of the Three Graces, and Dürer's *Four Witches*,⁹⁹ may not only echo some of Puvis's earlier work, but have served as an inspiration – not previously noted – for one of his most iconic and frequently-reproduced canvases, *Jeunes femmes au bord de la mer* [Figure 12]. This painting, exhibited with the subtitle 'panneau décoratif' at the 1879 Salon, portrays three statuesque, half-draped young women – goddesses or mortals, there is nothing to indicate which might be the case – disposed in attitudes that almost exactly reiterate those of Watts's goddesses, the key differences being the reclining poses of the two outer figures, and the bold cropping of the woman on the right. Although Puvis's palette includes more vivid hues than he ever used in his murals,¹⁰⁰ the

⁹⁷J. Comyns Carr, 'La Royal Academy et la Grosvenor Gallery', *L'Art* 12 (1880), p. 172; B. Bryant, 'G. F. Watts and the Symbolist Vision', in Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 67.

⁹⁸'La plus intéressante par le caractère national, par l'esprit tranché et par l'aspect tout particulier de ses oeuvres, bien que l'art insulaire anglais ait avec le continent des attaches que l'on peut voir aisément'. Duranty (1878), p. 298.

⁹⁹Albrecht Dürer, *Four Witches*, engraving, Vienna, Albertina, 1497. I am grateful to Glyn Davies for drawing my attention to the parallels between Dürer's engraving and *The Three Goddesses*.

¹⁰⁰De Forges (1970), p. 248.

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relatively limited tonal range and dry, chalky finish recall those of *The Three Goddesses* (which Mantz had disparaged as 'terreuse'),¹⁰¹ as does the strangely bare, conventionalised landscape with a few sparse sprigs of vegetation, which hovers ambiguously between the idyllic and the desolate.

Although Puvis had by 1878 established himself as one of the foremost monumental painters in France, he was no stranger to smaller-scale decorative allegory; in 1866 he had completed a suite of decorative panels for the Paris home of the sculptor and writer Claude Vignon. This set of four panels depicts 'four symbolic figures': *Fantasy* (*La Fantaisie*), *Vigilance* (*La Vigilance*), *Meditation* (or *Reminiscence – Le Recueillement*) and *History* (*L'Histoire*),¹⁰² portrayed as classically draped female figures in generalised bucolic settings. *Meditation* stands out as the only figure not assigned a time-hallowed identifying attribute; even so, she, like her sisters, is labelled with a *trompe l'oeil* plaque, ensuring correct interpretation. *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, however, removes all signposts that might help the viewer interpret what he sees. The title and its tag of 'panneau décoratif' may go some way to explaining why critics at the 1879 Salon rarely questioned the strangeness of the scene or even tried to supply a narrative of their own; Roland Barthes's theories on the ability of an image's 'linguistic message' to anchor and guide its interpretation are particularly apposite here.¹⁰³ Directed to view the work as purely decorative, both in the sense of being intended for installation in an architectural scheme (even though, in actual fact, it was neither commissioned nor ever used in a decorative scheme)¹⁰⁴ and

of lacking a clear narrative, most observers naturally placed more weight on its formal qualities than on trying to puzzle out a narrative; given a title devoid of any reference to classical mythology, that simply described the figures as ‘young girls by the seashore’, critics could not neatly slot it into the rubric of mythological or history painting.

The significance – and mutability – of titles is another point of commonality between *Jeunes filles* and *The Three Goddesses*. Watts’s painting, exhibited a total of

¹⁰¹Mantz (1878b).

¹⁰²Puvis’s first biographer, Marius Vachon, lists the ensemble as consisting of *La Fantaisie*, *La Vigilance*, *Le Rêve*, and *La Poésie* (M. Vachon, *Puvis de Chavannes*, Paris 1895, pp. 77-78); see Price (1994) for further detail on the commission of the decorative scheme. The panels are now divided between the Musée d’Orsay and the Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki, Japan.

¹⁰³R. Barthes, ‘Rhetoric of the Image’, in idem, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), pp. 40-41.

¹⁰⁴Puvis did not even find a purchaser for the painting immediately after the Salon; it was eventually bought after its third exhibition at his one-man show at Durand-Ruel’s in 1887 by an M. Boivin.

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six times during his lifetime, appeared under four different names. From its first outing in 1876 as *The Three Graces*, it became *Pallas, Juno and Venus* (Paris, 1878), then *The Three Goddesses* (Grosvenor Gallery, 1880), then *Ida* (Paris, 1883), before finally settling for the next twenty-two years into the guise of *The Judgment of Paris* (Glasgow, 1888; Wolverhampton, 1902; Royal Academy, 1905).¹⁰⁵ What role Watts himself played in the fluctuation of the title is unknown. As we have already seen, however, even the critics reviewing the exhibitions did not always respect the title given them in the catalogue, imposing their own title on the work and with it, a different reading of the scene. Describing the figures as Graces, personifications of beauty and harmony, or as a trio of anonymous goddesses might conjure up either an ‘art for art’s sake’ celebration of female beauty and cause us to read the expression of the figure on the left as calm or even indolent; call them Pallas, Juno and Venus and state (or simply imply) that they are being judged by Paris, and a connection with a classical epic is established, while the left-hand figure’s expression, if we presume that she is Venus, takes on an air of brazen self-confidence or mocking triumph. Puvis’s title underwent a smaller but crucial alteration which subtly shaped the stories critics chose to impose upon it. Exhibited at the 1879 Salon as *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, a title it retained at the 1883 Exposition Nationale, it was then shown at the 1887 Durand-Ruel exhibition as *Femmes au bord de la mer*.¹⁰⁶ The change in French from ‘filles’ to ‘femmes’ implies an increase in maturity and experience, probably (although not necessarily) the product of the loss of virginity. Although most commentators at the 1879 Salon refrained from attempts at exegesis,¹⁰⁷ the caricaturist Stop could not resist trying to explain just what these young girls were doing at the seaside; in a parody of the picture published during the Salon’s run in the *Journal amusant* [Figure 13], he not only lampooned Puvis’s bold cropping by lopping the left-hand figure in half at the waist, but changed the two distant seagulls into vicious birds attacking the girl in the centre, explaining that she was trying to defend herself against them by using her abundant tresses as a flail. Eight years later,

¹⁰⁵Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 114 ; see also Note 55 above.

¹⁰⁶De Forges (1970), p. 241.

¹⁰⁷One notable exception to this trend was the poet Théodore de Banville, who described the young girls as both ‘pure as the azure waves’ and yet seeming ‘despairing like Baudelaire’s Damned Women; they might wish to go still farther away, near a calmer sea unruffled by either the flight of great birds or the gaze of human eyes’ (‘pures comme l’onde azurée’; ‘désespérées comme les Femmes Damnées de Baudelaire; elles voudraient aller encore plus loin, près d’une mer encore plus tranquille et que n’aurait effleurée ni le vol des grands oiseaux ni le regard des yeux humains’). T. de Banville, ‘Salon de 1879’,

Le National, May 1879, quoted in De Forges (1970), p. 248.

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confronted by *Femmes au bord de la mer* (no longer labeled ‘panneau décoratif’), Gustave Kahn argued that the minimalist title ‘forces us to see a poem, an allegory analogous to that of the Sirens’.¹⁰⁸ He elaborated on this claim, constructing a tale of loss and unfulfilled longing in which the young women, whose inscrutable mien he interpreted as weary and desolate, wait on the shore, tired of singing as they await the arrival of a ship bearing a hero that never comes. Kahn even went so far as to claim that the three women in fact represented three different physical and emotional states of the same woman.¹⁰⁹ This latter judgment echoes those made by Chesneau and Duranty six and ten years earlier – about *The Three Goddesses*.

After-Effects: The 1883 Exposition Internationale and the Literary Publicity Machine

If Burne-Jones’s and Watts’s appearance at the 1878 Exposition Universelle did not make such a resounding splash as their next outing at the 1889 Exposition, it produced instead the effect of two small stones dropped side by side into a pond, whose waves reverberate, rebounding and spreading. The general acclaim accorded the British art exhibition, as Michael Orwicz has demonstrated, played a small but crucial role in the loosening of the stranglehold of conservative ‘grande peinture’ in the Salon and other major exhibitions; fearing that Britain’s ascendancy would seriously threaten French domination of the art market, Jules Ferry’s regime (the so-called

‘Republic of the Republicans’), from 1879 onward, actively promoted a wider array of styles.¹¹⁰ Watts felt the impact first: he was awarded a first-class medal at the Exposition, the only British artist, apart from Alma-Tadema, to receive that honour. While Burne-Jones was content to wait until the 1889 Exposition to exhibit again in France, Watts’s work made two return visits shortly afterward. No doubt because of his coup at the Exposition, his *Orpheus and Eurydice* was accorded a prominence at the 1880 Salon rarely given to a British artist, its fame increased by an etching published the previous year in *L’Art*; reviewing the Salon for the *Gazette des Beaux-*
¹⁰⁸ ‘[Il] force nous est d’y voir un poème, une allégorie analogue à celle des Sirènes’. G. Kahn, ‘Exposition Puvis de Chavannes’, *Revue indépendante* 6, no. 15 (January 1888), p. 144.
¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹¹⁰ M. Orwicz, ‘Anti-academicism and state power in the early Third Republic’, *Art History* 14, no. 4 (December 1991), pp. 571-74. Orwicz notes that the personal interests and tastes of those members of republican parties involved in arts administration during the 1880s played a significant part in government policy; especially important in this regard was Antonin Proust, who would organise the Centennale exhibition at the 1889 Exposition Universelle.

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Arts, Philippe de Chennevières, the disgraced director of the French Fine Art section in 1878, confessed that what he had seen of Watts both two years ago and at present made him ‘jealous for our Gustave Moreau, of whom he appears the fortunate rival’.¹¹¹ More significantly, the seven works – including *The Three Goddesses*, now renamed *Ida* – which he exhibited at the 1883 Exposition Internationale at the Galeries Georges Petit caught the eye of J.-K. Huysmans, who was then in the midst of writing his seminal novel of the Decadence, *À rebours*.¹¹² Soon thereafter Huysmans placed Watts, whose work he characterised as ‘sketched by an ailing Gustave Moreau, painted in by an anaemic Michelangelo and retouched by a Raphael drowned in a sea of blue’, in his protagonist Des Esseintes’s exclusive pantheon of contemporary artists, in the company of Moreau, Rodolphe Bresdin, and Odilon Redon.¹¹³ Meanwhile, across town in the Palais des Champs-Élysées, four of Puvis’s key panel paintings – *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, *Femme à sa toilette*, *L’Enfant*

prodigue, and *Le pauvre Pêcheur* were on view, as were two of his new paintings at the Salon, a melancholy portrait of his companion Marie Cantacuzène and *Le Rêve* – another trio of female figures, albeit decidedly more celestial, whom he designated in the *livret* as Love, Glory and Riches (significantly, the three prizes offered Paris, and personified by, Watts's Venus, Pallas, and Juno).¹¹⁴

Huysmans's embrace of Watts, however jaundiced, is indicative of a key development in the fortunes of British antinaturalists in France, but whether this change would have happened when it did, much less at all, without the impetus of the 1878 Exposition is doubtful. Significantly, in 1879 the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* sent Duranty to London to review the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition for the first time; although the magazine had had a London correspondent almost since its inception in 1859, there had been no coverage of the first two Grosvenor shows. Except for a

¹¹¹ 'J'en étais jaloux pour notre Gust. Moreau, dont il parut alors le rival heureux'. P. de Chennevières, 'Le Salon de 1880 (troisième et dernier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July 1880), p. 66.

¹¹² The other paintings Watts sent to the Exposition Internationale were a portrait of Swinburne (National Portrait Gallery), *Paolo and Francesca*, *The Denunciation of Cain* (both Watts Gallery, Compton), and three *Eves*, one of which is almost certainly a version of '*She Shall Be Called Woman*' (Walker Art Gallery). See Bryant in Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 67.

¹¹³ 'Esquissé par un Gustave Moreau malade, brossés par un Michel-Ange anémié et retouchés par un Raphaël noyé dans le bleu'. J.-K. Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris, 1884), pp. 173-74. Huysmans, at the outset of his career as an art critic, wrote a review of the British Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition for *L'Artiste*, but mentioned neither Watts nor Burne-Jones by name and dismissed the exhibition as a whole as embodying eclecticism run mad – 'modern, medieval, antique, everything rubs shoulders as if at a masked ball' ('moderne, moyen âge, antique, tout s'y coudoie comme en un bal masqué').

Huysmans, 'Exposition universelle: l'Ecole anglaise', *L'Artiste* no. 22 (2 June 1878), p. 167.

¹¹⁴ *Le Rêve*, 1883 (Musée d'Orsay).

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break in 1880, presumably due to Duranty's untimely death, the *Gazette's* London correspondents covered every Grosvenor show up until the gallery's demise in 1890, also turning their eyes toward the New Gallery, which Carr and Charles Hallé had set up in 1887 following disagreements with Lindsay over the increasing commercialisation of the Grosvenor and where Burne-Jones and Watts henceforth exhibited their new work. Comyns Carr continued to publish lengthy accounts of the Grosvenor exhibitions in *L'Art* until the end of his tenure there in 1882, and other French art periodicals began, sporadically, to follow his lead. With increased journalistic coverage of the antinaturalist trend in Britain came an ever greater number of reproductions of paintings, more often than not of rising quality. Where Comyns Carr left off, Chesneau took up the slack, publishing *La peinture anglaise, 1730-1882* in 1882 and, a truly dreadful engraving after *The Beguiling of Merlin* notwithstanding, augmenting Burne-Jones's reputation in France.

It was at about this time that, while journalists and critics continued to write, increasingly favourably, about this strand of contemporary British art, that Symbolist and Decadent novelists and poets in France began to gravitate towards the oeuvre of Burne-Jones, Watts, and the recently deceased Rossetti.¹¹⁵ While Huysmans, Edouard Rod, and Paul Bourget promoted them in prose, the dandy-poet Jean Lorrain, who became one of Burne-Jones's most vocal advocates in the late 1880s and 1890s, included a poem entitled 'Printemps mystique, pour Burne Jones' in his 1887 collection *Les Griseries*. While not alluding to a specific work, from its references to 'bois épineux' and 'pâles aubépines' it would be reasonable to infer that Lorrain had the hawthorn wood of *The Beguiling of Merlin* in mind.¹¹⁶ Bourdieu's contention that the only audience Symbolists aimed at was other Symbolists, generating a hermetic and perfectly autonomous field of cultural production, although a vast

oversimplification, highlights the significance of the adoption of Burne-Jones and Watts, and the suggestive, unashamedly elitist and (ostensibly) ‘anywhere out of the world’ art they produced, by their cross-Channel peers.¹¹⁷ A parallel acceptance of French antinaturalist artists by British writers of similar sensibilities (much less by mainstream commentators) was slower to take root, only coming into full flower after

¹¹⁵ I follow Lethève (1959), pp. 320-21, in the dating of this paradigm shift, although there are a few notable exceptions, particularly in the case of Rossetti; see Chapter 4.

¹¹⁶ J. Lorrain, *Les Griseries* (Paris, 1887), pp. 85-86. Also included in the volume is ‘Printemps classique, pour Gustave Moreau’ (pp. 131-32). For further discussion of Lorrain’s writings on Burne-Jones and Moreau, see Chapter 3.

¹¹⁷ P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. R. Johnson (Cambridge, 1993), p. 39.

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the 1889 Exposition, and was marked by recurrent nationalistic backlash.¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, 1878 proved to be a pivotal moment in British antinaturalism’s dialogue with France.

Whether British painting would have been taken as seriously as it was at the 1878 Exposition Universelle had the French school not sunk to such an apparent low point, and had the general mood not dictated a reaction against contemporary subjects and a turning toward art that depicted a past that only existed in the imagination, is open to speculation. But if ‘misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows,’ it also, in this case, initiated a dialogue between two neighbours and long-time rivals.

¹¹⁸ The most well-known example of this backlash is the bitter debate, initiated by Chesneau with his open letter ‘The English School in Peril’, played out in the *Magazine of Art* 1887-88, and culminating in W. P. Frith’s excoriation of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists, whom he blamed for polluting the moral and technical purity of English art. It is significant that he should have conflated these two particular movements, as, while there was often little love lost between them, they represented two sides of the same coin of rebellion against the positivism and striving for objectivity that characterised establishment art in both countries.

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Chapter 2

‘The revenge of art on life’: Republican fantasia and antinaturalist escapism at the 1889 Exposition Universelle

Marius Vachon, Puvis de Chavannes’s first biographer, recalled a visit he made to the 1889 Exposition Universelle with the artist that had left a strong impression on him. Strolling through the vast Galerie des Machines, Vachon noticed a mounting unease take hold of Puvis, until, finding it too much to bear, he cried, ‘My children, there is no more art to be made. How can a painter or a poet fight against the social influence, the power of all this over the imagination? Let us go!’ When Vachon anxiously sought him out in his atelier the following day, Puvis was in low spirits. ‘I was sick from that visit,’ he told Vachon. ‘I had nightmares all night. What’s to become of us artists in the face of this invasion of engineers and mechanics?’¹ Leaving aside the irony that Puvis himself had originally been destined for a career as an engineer and that his rapidly ascending star as a muralist assured that demand for his own work would not flag, this apocalyptic vision of art and the imagination menaced by technology, however poignant, has become such a familiar trope in studies of Symbolism and other fin-de-siècle anti-realist movements that its uncritical acceptance hinders a deeper understanding of the ways in which antinaturalism responded to political and social change.

Robert de la Sizeranne, the Anglophile critic whose *La peinture contemporaine anglaise* (1895) rapidly became the key text on contemporary British painting, and antinaturalist painting in particular, on both sides of the Channel,² offered a radically different view of antinaturalism’s position at the 1889 Exposition.

Reminiscing in 1898 about his visit to the British Fine Art section, he eulogised the cathedral calm of the galleries, hung with eight canvases by Watts flanking Burne-Jones's masterpiece *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, as a refuge from all things commercial and vulgar:

As we came out of the Gallery of Machinery . . . we found ourselves in the silent and beautiful English Art Section, and we felt as though everywhere else in the exhibition we had seen nothing but matter, and here we had come on the exhibition of the soul . . . It seemed as though we had come forth from the

¹ 'Mes enfants, il n'y a plus d'art à faire. Comment un peintre, un poète, pourrait-il lutter avec cela d'influence sociale, de puissance sur les imaginations? Allons-nous en! [...] J'ai été malade de cette visite [...] j'en ai eu le cauchemar toute la nuit. Qu'allons-nous devenir, nous artistes, devant cette invasion d'ingénieurs et de mécaniciens?' M. Vachon, *Puvis de Chavannes* (Paris, 1895), p. 16.

² The book was published in a translation by H. M. Poynter as *English Contemporary Art* in 1898.

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Universal Exhibition of Wealth to see the symbolical expression of the Scorn of Wealth. All round this room were others, where emblems and signs of strength and luxury were collected from all the nations of the world – pyramids, silvered or gilt, representing the amount of precious metal dug year by year out of the earth; palaces and booths containing the most sumptuous products of the remotest isles – and here behold a king laying his crown at the feet of a beggar-maid for her beauty's sake! . . . It was a dream – but a noble dream – and every young man who passed that way, even though resolved never to sacrifice strength to right, or riches to beauty, was glad, nevertheless, that an artist should have depicted the Apotheosis of Poverty. It was the revenge of art on life.³

Sizeranne posits antinaturalist painting as constituting a spiritual oasis for sensitive souls at the margins of an increasingly secular and mechanised society; once again Art is pitted against Life, but in his scenario, Art achieves a small but decisive moral victory. It is as tempting to fall into Sizeranne's trap as into Vachon's; both set antinaturalist art – French and British – in polar opposition to contemporary society. Both of these views, however, pinpoint an important aspect of the immense appeal that antinaturalist art held for audiences at the 1889 Exposition Universelle – its offer of a rarefied escape from the quotidian and the overtly 'modern'. Although, as I have demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the presence of British antinaturalism at the 1878 Exposition was more influential on the current's subsequent development than has been previously acknowledged, the 1889 Exposition has overwhelmingly been viewed, then and now, as the moment antinaturalism truly 'arrived'.⁴ In order to better understand why 1889 was such a pivotal moment, both in the development of an anti-realist idiom and in the evolution of a dialogue between artists in Britain and France, however, we may need a different approach from the ones proposed above, one which delves beneath the Exposition's ostensible deification of science and technological progress. Jennifer L. Shaw's argument may provide a more appropriate model; she contends that the formation of a national identity under the Third Republic hinged on using public artworks – in particular, those of Puvis, whose work was claimed equally by conservatives and the avant-garde – to harness individual

³ R. de la Sizeranne, 'In Memoriam, Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Tribute from France', *Magazine of Art* (August 1898), p. 515.

⁴ This is particularly true of most twentieth-century studies of the reception of British antinaturalism (especially Burne-Jones) in France; apart from Lethève (1959), these include Des Cars, in Wildman and Christian (1998) and C. Allemand-Cosneau, in Munro (1992). Wilton and Upstone (1997), on the other hand, by stretching the chronological boundaries of Symbolism back to 1860 and as far ahead as 1910, dilute the significance of the exchanges taking place around the 1889 Exposition.

subjectivity and personal fantasy in creating a sense of collective identity.⁵ Where the previous Exposition had been an intended balm for wounded national pride and a show of resilience to the rest of the Western world, the 1889 Exposition Universelle, with its fantastical, polychrome architecture and its exploitation of technology for the purpose of whimsy (especially in the nightly light-and-water shows), may be read as much as a dream – a collective fantasy of the modern state – as the antinaturalist paintings exhibited within its grounds.

Reading the work of Puvis, Moreau, Watts and Burne-Jones as an alternative fantasy responding to, or subverting, the collective dream formulated by the Exposition may allow us to better appreciate the growing complexities of the cross-Channel dialogue. Following three seemingly separate but ultimately intertwined threads, from the Exposition's socio-political milieu to its architectural and sculptural programme, to the positioning of antinaturalist art within the framework of the Centennale and British fine art section, to, finally, the paintings of Puvis and Watts themselves,⁶ I aim to demonstrate not only the increasing influence of French and British antinaturalists upon each other and the implications for the continuation of their dialogue in the 1890s, but also how they were beginning to self-consciously locate themselves within a defined artistic tradition. The antinaturalist reaction to the positivist, public-spirited dream of the Third Republic as embodied by the Exposition constituted not so much a total retreat into a private dream-world as a reflection 'in a glass darkly' of their surroundings.

The Gentle Art of Making Enemies: Nationalism and the Exposition's Politics

In order to gain a purchase on the reception of these works, and the alternative fantasy they proposed, we need to examine the socio-political milieu of the 1889 Exposition, the so-called 'Republic of Republicans', with a particular eye to the Exposition's repercussions for Franco-British relations (still, at this point, characterised primarily by cordial dislike).⁷ The preceding decade, which had

⁵ J. L. Shaw, *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* (New Haven and London, 2002), pp. 10-11.

⁶ While I will make some reference to Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and Moreau's *Galatée* in this chapter, I have reserved much of my discussion of these artists for Chapter 3.

⁷ I am indebted in my approach in this section, as I was in the preceding chapter, to Paul Greenhalgh's insistence that the works in the Fine Art sections of the Expositions cannot be considered independently

witnessed the ascendancy of a centre-left Republican government, increasing economic prosperity and colonial power, and a measure of relative calm at home and abroad, yet which had also witnessed the mounting threat of Boulangism, gave rise to a potent blend of optimistic positivism, nationalist pride, and fearful distrust that was in some ways a far cry from the national mood in 1878, in other ways uncomfortably familiar.

I have spoken already of the hoped-for tranquillising effect of the 1878 Exposition in the wake of the Seize Mai crisis;⁸ the organisers of the 1889 Exposition seem to have begun with the intention of calming one source of discontent, and ended by playing a central role in averting another, unforeseen, crisis. The Exposition was, among other things, intended as a soporific for the fantasies of *revanche* that had never entirely faded since the humiliating defeat of 1871.⁹ However, it found itself in the unlikely position of keeper of peace and saviour of the government when the premature possibility of *revanche* and rebellion reared its head in the shape of Boulangism.¹⁰ This is not the place to discuss the complexities of Boulangism; it will suffice to note that one of its most remarkable qualities was the appeal of its extreme

nationalist and anti-establishment platform to both ends of the political spectrum. That Boulanger could have inspired such hero worship and captured the imagination and loyalties of such diverse and divergent groups bespeaks a deep-seated discontent with the Republican agenda, driven by its fundamental beliefs of democracy, equality, and science.

Ironically, given its conciliatory posture, the Exposition also managed to drive a wedge between France and many of the countries invited to take part. The significance of its date at the centenary of the Revolution, and indeed the overt initial staging of the Exposition as a commemoration of the Revolution and celebration of its ideals, were not lost on the monarchies invited to participate – not least, Britain.¹¹ of the Exposition's physical fabric and social setting, although I strongly disagree with his dismissal of the art displays as having had little impact on artistic innovation (Greenhalgh, 1988, p. 218).

⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹ See R. Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 169-222, on the sublimation of *revanche* in the last decade of the century and its manifestations in visual culture.

¹⁰ For detailed accounts of Boulangism's rise and fall, see Chapman (1962), pp. 265-91 and R. Tombs, *France 1814-1914* (London, 1996), pp. 447-53. Jacques Chastenet insists most succinctly on the Exposition's role in 'giving the coup de grace to Boulangism' (Chastenet, 1952, p. 214).

¹¹ French monarchists and legitimists were also, understandably, upset by the conflation of centenary and Exposition; an unsigned editorial in the rightwing *La Patrie* expressed strong reservations about the appropriateness of combining the two events, and the newspaper appears to have acted on its

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Queen Victoria refused to attend the opening, even recalling her ambassador to ensure that no representative of the British government was in Paris for the opening.¹² (The Prince of Wales, a popular fixture of the 1878 Exposition, was, however, permitted to attend, and made as favourable an impression on the French press as he had done eleven years before.) The Queen was far from being the only Briton not amused by the implications of an Exposition that paid tribute to the overthrow of a monarchy: the British press's coverage of the preparations for the Exposition's opening ranged from mild disdain to open scorn, though few matched the mix of hostility and nationalistic one-upmanship of an unsigned article in the *Saturday Review*:

The French have made a bad start with their Exhibition. The first circular issued by the Government, with its tall talk about the Hegira of the First Revolution – there have been so many that it is indispensable to distinguish them by numbers – set all Monarchical Governments against it; and though this unfortunate document was subsequently disavowed, they have failed to obtain that recognition for their venture which Royal and Imperial commissions can alone confer.¹³

Even a retroactive attempt by the opposition to censure the British government for its diplomatic faux pas in banning the British ambassador from the opening ceremonies came to grief, and was met with bemusement and scepticism in France; a journalist writing for *Le Moniteur universel* commented tartly that 'as agreeable as these flatteries are, we prefer, for our part, that foreigners not occupy themselves with our domestic affairs, and Mr Gladstone's congratulations do not make up for the impression given us by Bismarck's small-talk in the Reichstag'.¹⁴ Perhaps, a month into the Exposition's run, observers on both sides were beginning to realise the inherent ludicrousness of what was fast becoming a tempest in a teapot. The rightwing neo-Catholic writer Eugène Melchior de Vogüé summed up the situation most succinctly, remarking cynically that both the republican grandstanding and the convictions by devoting relatively little space to coverage of the Exposition, particularly in comparison with 1878. 'L'Exposition Universelle', *La Patrie* (2 May 1889).

¹² Greenhalgh (1988), pp. 35-36. An article in *Le Temps*, published the day after the Exposition's

opening, notes that Britain's sole representative at the ceremonies was Austin Lee, first secretary to the embassy of England, whereas most other participating countries were represented by ambassadors and ministers, although not, with the sole exception of Belgium, by their monarchs ('Dernières nouvelles: Inauguration de l'Exposition Universelle de 1889', *Le Temps*, 7 May 1889).

¹³ 'The Paris Exhibition', *Saturday Review* 67, no. 1748 (27 April 1889), p. 506. The writer goes on to note, with no small satisfaction, that 'Great Britain alone is fairly forward in her arrangements' and is likely to be one of the few national sections ready in time for the opening (p. 507).

¹⁴ 'Mais, quelque agréables que soient ces flatteries, nous aimons mieux, pour notre part, que les étrangers ne s'occupent pas de nos affaires intérieures, et les félicitations de M. Gladstone ne rachètent pas l'impression que nous laissent les menus propos du prince de Bismarck au Reichstag'. L. L., 'Le Parlement anglais et l'Exposition de 1889', *Le Moniteur universel* (2 June 1889).

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monarchist backlash were lost on the average Exposition-goer, who viewed the Exposition as a celebration of industry and technology first, and of France's superiority second.¹⁵

Given the adverse British reaction to the Exposition's commemoration of the Revolution's centenary, and France's awareness of it, it is strange, to say the least, that the radical nature of the British Fine Art section's star exhibit – a king removing his crown and paying homage to a humble beggar – merited no mention in any contemporary reviews.¹⁶ Silence on such a thorny subject is probably to be expected in British journals; silence in French criticism is rather more surprising. Perhaps, in view of the charged atmosphere, there was a tacit agreement among critics not to raise such a touchy issue. More likely, the unfamiliarity of the subject matter and its unusual rendering overshadowed the work's subversive implications.

Britain was not, of course, the only nation guilty of chauvinistic posturing. In the years leading up to the opening of the Exposition, a growing chorus of opposition in the French government grumbled that the Exposition would only serve as a vector for 'deleterious' foreign ideas, particularly from countries more progressive in the arts and industry.¹⁷ Conversely, some Republican critics expressed bemusement tinged with annoyance at what they perceived as the resolutely nationalistic and insular character of the paintings displayed in the British Fine Art section, implying that after three previous Expositions, the British ought to have learned something from their neighbour's superiority in that arena and applied those lessons to improving their own art. Sizeranne later summed up these critics' perplexity in the face of such apparent intransigence with a revealing military analogy: 'The assaults of realism and impressionism break against their aesthetic like the squadrons of Ney upon the squares of Wellington'.¹⁸

The ill-feeling stirred up by the Exposition's 'revolutionary' nature obscures the fact that, in the decade since the last Exposition, Britain and France had been moving gradually toward an artistic rapprochement, or at least a growing openness to

¹⁵ E. Melchior de Vogüé, *Remarques sur l'Exposition du Centenaire* (Paris, 1889), pp. 6-8.

¹⁶ At least, no traced mention: I refer here to the major newspapers and art periodicals, of which I have made a thorough survey.

¹⁷ G. P. Weisberg, 'The Republican Style in the Age of the Eiffel Tower', in M. Levin and G. P. Weisberg, eds., *1889: When the Eiffel Tower Was New*, exh. cat. (South Hadley, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1989), p. 2.

¹⁸ 'Les assauts du réalisme, de l'impressionnisme se brisent sur leur esthétique comme les escadrons de Ney sur les carrés de Wellington'. Sizeranne (1895), p. 3.

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what the other had to offer. The *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and the *Magazine of Art* may serve as a useful barometer of this détente. The *Gazette's* coverage of the Grosvenor Gallery exhibitions and its devotion of ever greater space to articles on contemporary British art, particularly the art of the Pre-Raphaelites, have already been discussed.¹⁹

The *Magazine of Art* was somewhat slower to catch up, and its interest in art across the Channel did not grow in a predictable upward trajectory. Its growing openness to contemporary French art owed much to the efforts of the critic Claude Phillips, an avowed Francophile whose pivotal role in opening eyes and minds on both sides of the Channel has yet to be examined adequately. Phillips not only served as *correspondant pour l'Angleterre* for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* from 1885, but he also published a series of articles in the *Magazine of Art* in 1885 on Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, and Burne-Jones (the first two being among the first serious studies of those artists in a British art periodical), evidence of a growing, if sometimes grudging, interest in French art, including antinaturalism. If, as the decade drew to a close, there were occasional retrenchments and rumblings of reactionary discontent, most notably in 1888 when W. P. Frith rounded on the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists with a hysterical tirade against what he saw as their technical incompetence and immoral subject matter, it is significant that these detractors conflated and confused progressive tendencies in both Britain and France.²⁰ Furthermore, photographs of the installations of some of the galleries in the Centennale exhibition (notably the Galerie Rapp) indicate that the French Fine Art section's organisers appear, grudgingly or otherwise, to have taken some inspiration from the comparatively sparse hang, probably influenced by that of the Grosvenor Gallery, of the British Fine Art section from the previous Exposition.²¹

Britain's own waning political and economic ascendancy, and its attempts to refashion its image and re-present itself in a way that took the sting out of these changes, also needs to be considered here. Although Britain's colonial and economic might was still the object of resentful envy in France, the nation was in fact, by the time of the Exposition, at the midpoint of the long Indian summer of its world dominance that characterised the last two decades of Victoria's reign. In an attempt to

¹⁹ See Chapter 1.

²⁰ W. P. Frith, 'Crazes in Art, "Pre-Raphaelitism" and "Impressionism"', *Magazine of Art* 11 (1888), pp. 187-91.

²¹ See Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, Paris Album 4o 28 (*Exposition Universelle de 1889*, H. Blancard, 1889), nos. 686 and 687.

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recoup some of the glory it now saw receding inexorably into the past, Britain did precisely that – look to its history. As Anne Helmreich has demonstrated, the swing of the pendulum from unvarnished modernity to nostalgia for a lost golden age can be charted in the reversion to imitation-Tudor architecture for the British sections of the Expositions of 1878, 1889 and 1900.²² Gone were the days of the Crystal Palace; now cutting-edge iron architecture had become the province of France, and Britain staged its identity as a pre-industrial, pre-democratic, and, by extension, pre-Reformation utopia, with the centrepiece of its fine art section a tour-de-force by Burne-Jones, an artist by now a byword for his medievalising tendencies²³ – a jarring intrusion indeed into an Exposition hosted by a Republic that aggressively styled itself as modern and secular.

'Ces palais féeriques': the Exposition as capital of Republican fantasy

As the first Exposition Universelle held during the Third Republic's truly republican phase, the 1889 Exposition offered the state unparalleled opportunity for self-promotion. After the lacklustre architecture of the last Exposition, whose sole new edifice – the Palais du Trocadéro – had inspired derision and whose overall effect had been, as Louis Gonse recalled, 'a bit thin, monotonous, and grey . . . [like] a series of juxtaposed hangars',²⁴ the Republic and its chosen designers, Gustave Eiffel, Stephen Sauvestre, Charles-Louis-Ferdinand Dutert and Jean-Camille Formigé,

worked in close partnership to formulate a tightly integrated architectural and decorative programme in which fancy and (closely regulated) imagination played as important a role as hard science in promulgating the values of the Republic. Most explorations of the Exposition's design have focused on its exploitation of iron and glass and its break with historicist style, particularly in its most iconic structures, the

²² A. Helmreich, 'The Nation and the Garden: England and the World's Fairs at the Turn of the Century', in *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, ed. M. Facos and S. Hirsh (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 39-64. Although Helmreich focuses on the 1900 Exposition Universelle and the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, her arguments are equally applicable in the context of 1889.

²³ Burne-Jones's medievalism was frequently parodied in the British satirical press; *Punch's* typically deflationary caricature of *King Cophetua* during its showing at the Grosvenor Gallery cast the beggar maid as a limp and emaciated Pallid Maiden to whom a Mediaeval Royal Personage (Cophetua) complains, 'Oh I say, look here, you've been sitting on my crown', with the caption, 'Yes, and she looks as if she had, too, poor thing!' For further discussion of British parodies of the picture, see Wildman and Christian (1998), pp. 197 and 254-55.

²⁴ 'Un peu maigre, monotone et gris [...] c'était une série de hangars juxtaposés': L. Gonse, 'Exposition Universelle de 1889. Coup d'oeil avant l'ouverture', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (May 1889), p. 355.

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Tour Eiffel and the Galerie des Machines.²⁵ I want instead to investigate the other weapons in the designers' arsenal – colour, light, moving water – and how they created a fantasia that was critiqued and ultimately subverted by the Symbolist artists exhibiting within it.

The guiding principles of the Exposition's design were, simply put, to throw off the fusty historicism that had characterised much of the century's public architecture and to do so with the aid of cutting-edge materials and design. Naturally, economic concerns played a central role; the extensive use of iron was intended to bolster ailing national industry in the face of American and German competition and to proclaim France's expertise in engineering (and, by implication, military technology) to the world.²⁶ Yet iron edifices stripped of ornamentation, no matter how strongly they might appeal to the most progressive elements of the architectural world, were not guaranteed to charm the broader public.²⁷ The tower and the machine hall remained unadorned, but for the rest of the halls of the Champ de Mars, Formigé enlisted the help of the tile manufacturer Emile Muller to fashion a polychrome skin of enamelled tile to cover the metallic skeletons of the buildings.²⁸ While the result of their efforts is difficult to discern in contemporary photographs of the Exposition, some of Formigé's surviving designs for the decoration of the cupola of the Palais des Beaux-Arts [Figure 14] reveal vivid juxtapositions of warm yellows and cool blues and greens, an explicit borrowing of Neo-classical vocabulary and a careful interweaving of republican motifs into the overall scheme. Judging from

²⁵ Examples include C. Mathieu, *1889: La Tour Eiffel et l'Exposition Universelle* (exh. cat., Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 1989); D. L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989) and Levin and Weisberg (1989). T. Buroillet, ed., *Quand Paris dansait avec Marianne*, (exh. cat., Paris, Musée du Petit Palais, 1989) instead concentrates on the iconography of the Republic's symbol Marianne, a point which I shall discuss in Chapter 3.

²⁶ Silverman (1989), pp. 52-54.

²⁷ The controversy incited by the winning design for the Tour à 300 mètres (the Eiffel Tower) is notorious; a group of prominent and mostly conservative artists, writers and composers published an open letter to Adolphe Alphand, the director of works for the Exposition, in *Le Temps* on 14 February 1887, protesting his decision to erect 'a vertiginously ridiculous tower, dominating Paris, like a gigantic black factory chimney, crushing Notre-Dame, the Sainte-Chapelle, the Tour Saint-Jacques, the Louvre, the dome of the Invalides, the Arc de Triomphe with its barbarous bulk, all our humiliated monuments, all our belittled architecture will disappear in this stupefying dream' ('une tour vertigineusement ridicule, dominant Paris, ainsi qu'une noire et gigantesque cheminée d'usine, écrasant de sa masse barbare Notre-Dame, la Sainte-Chapelle, la tour Saint-Jacques, le Louvre, le dôme des Invalides, l'Arcde-

Triomphe, tous nos monuments humiliés, toutes nos architectures rapetissées, qui disparaîtront dans ce rêve stupéfiant'). As this brief excerpt demonstrates, much of their quarrel with the winning design was the way it seemed to elevate industry above high culture, history and religion (the latter of which will be discussed further in Chapter 3).

²⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the role of polychromy in the Exposition's architecture, see C. Mathieu, 'Architecture métallique et polychrome', in C. Mathieu (1989), pp. 59-73.

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contemporary accounts, classicising sobriety and bright hues combined to striking effect.

One of Formigé's most enthusiastic partisans was the architect and critic Frantz Jourdain, an advocate of unvarnished modernity. Writing in the *Revue des arts décoratifs*, he congratulated the Exposition's architects on their refusal to disguise the nature of their materials and their successful integration of structure and decoration.

His review, which borders on rhapsody, is worth quoting at length.

Contemporary industry, so rich, so intelligent, so inventive and thus far so parsimoniously employed, has this time collaborated greatly in the final success: staff, faïence, enamelled lava, tinted brick, glazed tile, lacquered zinc, coloured plaster, glimmering mosaics, flashing glass, all kinds of terra cotta, used in profusion, throw a sparkling gold powder over these fairylike palaces, which effervesce under the sun like French wines and sing of the triumph of Gallic gaiety and of rationalism over a morose and antediluvian scholasticism.²⁹

An anonymous writer for *La Construction Moderne*, an architectural periodical not ordinarily noted for its expressive prose, was no less fervent in his praise, particularly for the illuminated fountains (an invention first constructed for the London Exhibition of 1884):

On the Champ de Mars, the festival is no less beautiful. The Tower, whose arcs and platforms are bordered with luminous cords, is ablaze with Bengal lights which give it a truly impressive aspect, both fantastic and grandiose. The iron colossus rises in the night enveloped in blood-red flames, while at the summit shines the tricolour beacon and electric reflectors project their blue rays over Paris. Finally, the illuminated fountains launch their sparkling spray toward the heavens. The water takes on the colours of a prism one by one . . . Blue, red, green succeed each other or blend together. Then the light, penetrating the liquid mass, gives it the appearance of molten silver which falls back in droplets in the basin.³⁰

²⁹ 'L'industrie contemporaine, si riche pourtant, si intelligente, si inventive et si parcimonieusement mise jusqu'ici à contribution, a largement collaboré, cette fois, au succès final: les stafs, les faïences, les laves émaillées, les briques teintées, les tuiles vernissées, les zincs laqués, les enduits colorés, les mosaïques chatoyantes, les verres flamboyantes, les terres cuites de toutes natures, employés à profusion, jettent une étincelante poudre d'or sur ces palais féeriques, qui pétillent sous le soleil comme des vins de France et chantent le triomphe de la gaieté gauloise et de rationalisme sur une morose et antédiluvienne scolastique': F. Jourdain, 'La décoration et le rationalisme architecturaux à l'Exposition universelle', *Revue des arts décoratifs* 10 (August 1889), p. 36.

³⁰ 'Au Champ-de-Mars, la fête n'est pas moins belle. La Tour, dont les arcs et les plates-formes sont bordés de cordons lumineux, est embrasée de feux de bengale qui lui donnent un aspect fantastique et grandiose véritablement impressionnant. Le colosse de fer se dresse dans la nuit enveloppé de flammes sanglantes, tandis qu'au sommet brille le phare aux trois couleurs et que des réflecteurs électriques projettent leurs rayons bleus sur Paris. Enfin, les fontaines lumineuses lancent vers le ciel leurs gerbes étincelantes. L'eau emprunte tour à tour les couleurs du prisme [. . .] Le bleu, le rouge, le vert se succèdent ou se mélangent. Puis la lumière pénétrant seule dans la masse liquide la fait paraître de

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Both Jourdain and the writer for *La Construction Moderne* were careful to underpin their panegyrics with references to the aspects of republicanism that had made

possible the construction of these ‘fairy palaces’: technological innovation (the synthesis of new materials and new methods of construction and electricity), rationalism and positivism, and colonialism (Jourdain and Gonse credited the steady influx of goods from the Orient with marked improvements in design and ornamentation at home). Sympathetic commentators echoed these praises, frequently imputing moral values to the glittering domes and towers of the Champ de Mars. Emile Monod boasted that they were an affirmation of the Republic’s ‘pacific genius, creative power and, in many cases, its still incontestable superiority’; although such hyperbole smacks of the flag-waving of a government functionary, similar examples were scattered liberally throughout the pages of republican newspapers and the numerous one-off publications brought out to celebrate the Exposition’s opening.³¹ This city of dreams, they implied, represented the apotheosis of the Republic and the liberal values in which it was grounded, which in turn would feed the desire of all who experienced it to keep France on the path to ever greater glory – a self-perpetuating cycle of dream and reality.

Not everyone was prepared to buy into this official fantasy, however, and the Exposition’s architecture proved a double-edged sword in the hands of its detractors. Much as the Exposition’s champions evoked its metallic and polychrome architecture as proof, because of its beauty, whimsy and modernity, of the Republic’s greatness, its critics used these same features to mock the Exposition’s, and by extension, the Republic’s, philistinism, corruption, and, most significantly, its flimsy impermanence and unreality – the dark underside of the collective dream. J.-K. Huysmans penned a blistering attack on the Exposition, ‘Le Fer’, in which he mocked the tastelessness of the palaces of the Champ de Mars as ‘heavy and garish, emphatic and mediocre, evoking in a different medium the theatrical painting of Makart so cherished in l’argent fondu qui retombe en gouttelettes dans le bassin’: *La Construction Moderne*, vol. 4, no. 31 (11 May 1889), p. 362.

³¹ ‘Le génie pacifique, la puissance créatrice et, dans bien des cas, la supériorité encore incontestable, sinon toujours incontestée’: E. Monod, *Beaux-arts et merveilles de l’industrie à la fin du XIXe siècle (Exposition universelle de 1889): grand ouvrage illustré historique, encyclopédique, descriptif* (Paris, 1889), vol. 1, p. ix. For further examples of republican enthusiasm for the appearance of the Champ de Mars, see especially M. Huart, ‘L’Inauguration’, *L’Événement* (8 May 1889), Gonse (1889) and E. Bergerat, ‘Paris!’, in F.-G. Dumas and L. de Fourcaud, eds., *Revue de l’Exposition Universelle de 1889* (Paris, 1889), p. 6.

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Hamburg in the superfluous splendour of bordellos’.³² In a single sentence Huysmans turned republican pride and moral rectitude on its head, comparing the palaces’ ornamentation not merely to that of a brothel but to a *German* brothel decorated by the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s chief exponent of academic pomposity. In inventing this tawdry fantasy, he insinuated, France had lowered itself to the level of its mortal enemy, for while Germany might be a colossus of blood and iron, France had always consoled itself, especially in the face of humiliating military defeat, on its unimpeachable superiority in the arts and general good taste. Edmond de Goncourt was scarcely more forgiving; making his way through the crowds on opening day, he admired the sunset ablaze with fireworks and the obelisk on the place de la Concorde bathed in white light ‘with the rosy colour of a champagne sorbet’ while noting with waspish amusement the ecstatic-looking ladies queuing for the public toilets, ‘their bladders overcome by emotion’.³³ This crude detail neatly undermines both the highflown rhetoric of the event and the dignity and aesthetic appeal of the setting, highlighting Goncourt’s disgust with all for which the Republic stood.³⁴ Other commentators, more predictably, made the Tour Eiffel [Figure 15] the

target of their criticisms. Despite the mass protest of conservative cultural figures against the possibility of the tower making a permanent blot on the skyline of Paris,³⁵ a significant part of the criticism painted it as inherently precarious, an overconfident iron giant bound to crumble into a scrap heap. A tongue-in-cheek exposé entitled ‘Elle a trois cents mètres!!!’ which appeared in *L’Art* shortly before the Exposition opened playfully deflated the hubristic mythmaking already engulfing the tower by affecting comparisons with the pyramids and the great cathedrals, pagodas and Roman palaces, before ending with the *memento mori* that it would one day be reduced to a pile of rust and its worshipers would all be dead.³⁶ Beneath its sly humour, the article

³² ‘C’est lourd et criard, emphatique et mesquin; cela évoque en un art différent la peinture théâtrale de Mackart [sic] si chère à Hambourg au faste redondant des maisons de filles!’: J.-K. Huysmans, ‘Le Fer’, in *idem*, *Certains* (Paris, 1889), p. 173.

³³ ‘Avec la couleur rosée d’un sorbet au champagne’; ‘la vessie émotionnée’: E. de Goncourt, *Journal* (Paris, 1989), entry for Monday, 6 May 1889, vol. 3, p. 267.

³⁴ He adds, in the entry for 14 July 1889, ‘Today, the anniversary, thundering from all the cannons of the good city of Paris, of the Revolution of ’89, of this revolution which made of the great France of yesteryear the small and ridiculous France of today’ (‘Aujourd’hui, l’anniversaire, tonitruant par tous les canons de la bonne ville de Paris, de la Révolution de 89, de cette révolution qui a fait de la grande France d’autrefois la petite et ridicule France d’aujourd’hui.’) *Ibid.*, p. 295. As a descendant of the aristocracy, Goncourt could scarcely be expected to approve of the celebrations for the centenary of the Revolution.

³⁵ See note 26 above.

³⁶ L. Augé de Lassus, ‘Elle a trois cents metres!!!’, *L’Art* (1889), pp. 164-67.

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underscored some of the unnerving contradictions on which the tower was grounded. For the Tour Eiffel, that much-vaunted symbol of progress, actually represented a technological dead end, a sort of funeral monument to itself. As Richard Guy Wilson has pointed out, the tower and the Galerie des Machines were already outmoded by the time they were built; for France’s greatest rivals, Germany and America, steel construction had by then taken precedence over iron.³⁷ Even if one were unaware of the implications for French industry, it was hard to ignore the disturbing fact that the tower, which fast became the symbol of the Exposition and, by extension, of Paris and of France, was utterly devoid of functional utility – which rather undermined the Republic’s identification with utilitarianism and progress, outdated technology harnessed to create a reflexive, useless memorial to itself. ³⁸ Viewed thus, the collective dream spun by the Exposition was unsettlingly empty. Goncourt wrote of his unease as he gazed on the Champ de Mars from the Trocadéro in just such terms: ‘It is as if it puts you in a dream. This Exposition has no reality . . .’³⁹

Horizons of expectation: the position of antinaturalism at the Exposition

Inside the Palais des Beaux-Arts, the Republic was busy shoring up its standing, seriously threatened at the last Exposition, as the artistic leader of the civilised world with not one but two fine art exhibitions – the jury-selected *Décennale* displaying French artistic production since the 1878 Exposition, and the retrospective *Centennale*, chosen by an individual, showing an ostensibly balanced history of the French school since the Revolution of 1789. Whether its avant-garde artists were willing to go along with this grandiose publicity exercise, and where they chose to position themselves within it, was another question.

The organiser of the *Centennale* was former Fine Arts minister Antonin Proust, a vocal supporter of Realism and a friend and patron of Manet and Monet. Disappointed by the trite conservatism that reigned in the French art exhibition in 1878, he had been lobbying to stage a centenary retrospective in addition to the *Décennale* since the early 1880s. Unlike the *Décennale*, which operated under the

time-honoured system of a jury composed of Academicians and other officially

³⁷ R. G. Wilson, 'Challenge and Response: Americans and the Architecture of the 1889 Exposition', in A. Blaugrund, ed., *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposition* (exh. cat., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989), p. 104.

³⁸ Silverman (1989), p. 3.

³⁹ 'Ça vous met comme dans un rêve. Cette Exposition n'a pas la réalité': Goncourt (1989), entry for Saturday, 8 May 1889, vol. 3, p. 271.

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recognised artists, the Centennale can be read as a record of Proust's personal predilections, complicated by his role as a promoter of republican values. The Centennale's most remarked-upon features were its showcasing of Courbet and the Barbizon school, as if to compensate for the shoddy treatment accorded them in 1878, and its inclusion of recent work by Manet and Monet (a first at an Exposition Universelle).⁴⁰ Raymond Isay defined the spirit of the 1889 Exposition as a contradictory melange of conservatism and progress, novelty and tradition; nowhere is this more evident than in the French Fine Art exhibitions.⁴¹ Ironically, while the Décennale avoided the humiliating debacle of the previous Exposition, the exhibition of contemporary art still came off as staid and conservative while the retrospective succeeded in uniting tradition and innovation.

Although Fantin-Latour showed five Wagnerian paintings in the Décennale,⁴² Puvis and Moreau preferred to exhibit only in the Centennale, apparently in the face of protests from their colleagues on the Décennale jury. Puvis made the token gesture of allowing the mention of his recent decorative schemes for the New Sorbonne and the museums of Amiens and Lyon in the Décennale catalogue while otherwise absenting himself from the exhibition (a fact much lamented by critics).⁴³ He reserved his easel paintings, two of which (*Jeunes filles au bord de la mer* and *L'Enfant prodigue*) fell within the Décennale's purview, for the walls of the Centennale's Galerie Rapp. Moreau, despite his eligibility as a member of the jury and a newlyelected

member of the Institut to show in both exhibitions, and despite the urging of his colleagues, refused to submit work to the Décennale and appeared solely in the retrospective with the bookends of his Salon career: his 1865 success *Le Jeune homme et la Mort* and the 1880 *Galatée*.⁴⁴ A perusal of the catalogue of the Décennale offers

⁴⁰ On Proust's role in the creation and organisation of the Centennale, see Vaisse (1995), pp. 126-28.

⁴¹ Isay (1937), p. 188.

⁴² Fantin-Latour's works in the Exposition excited little comment in the press on either side of the Channel, although what notices he received were complimentary. His Wagnerian pictures will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

⁴³ The works listed in the French Fine Art catalogue were *Pro patriâ ludus* [sic], *Vision antique*, *Inspiration chrétienne*, *Le Rhône et la Saône*, *Le Bois Sacré*, and the mural for the great hemicycle of the Sorbonne; all were unnumbered: *Exposition Universelle internationale de 1889: Catalogue officiel. Tome I: Groupe I, Oeuvres d'Art, classes 1 à 5*, (Lille, 1889), p. 46).

⁴⁴ Moreau's attitude toward the Académie des beaux-arts had always been ambivalent; he craved the recognition that membership would guarantee while cherishing his equivocal status as an outsider and frowning upon the facile, market-friendly classicism it sanctioned. Objections on the grounds of principle were intertwined with personal rivalries: he had put his name forward for election in 1882, only to be beaten out by Gustave Boulanger, who had defeated him in the Prix de Rome competition in 1849. Elected to fill the seat vacated by Boulanger's death in 1888, Moreau was always a reluctant Academician; indeed, the memorial speech he was obliged to deliver for Boulanger upon his election

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an explanation for their actions: the exhibition was dominated by the diluted justemilieu

naturalism of the recently deceased Bastien-Lepage's followers, with painters such as Léon Lhermitte, Alfred Roll and Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret taking pride of

place. Rather than mix with company whose principles stood in diametric opposition to their own, it appears that Puvis and Moreau elected to throw their lot in with history and wished their work to be seen as belonging to a tradition rooted in the Romanticism of Delacroix and Chassériau – even if, as one of the few surviving installation views of the grand staircase [Figure 16] reveals, Puvis’s early allegory *L’Automne* ended up sharing wall space with Courbet’s *Stonebreakers*.⁴⁵

The decision of Puvis and Moreau to anchor their work within tradition indicates a sea change that had been unfolding since 1878. Hans Robert Jauss’s theory of the ‘horizon of expectations’ may be most useful in helping to understand how and why this change occurred. Jauss posits the reception of a new work of literature (or art) as bound up in a complex network of previous aesthetic experience, which directs the reader’s or viewer’s perception; the horizon of expectations shifts subtly and incrementally with the accumulation of new experiences.⁴⁶ It was just such a gradual but accelerating accretion of new experience, in the form of reproduced images and literary advocacy, that brought about the alteration in the reception of Symbolist painting. By this time, Symbolism was no longer an intriguing aberration without a name (Zola’s caustic jibes against Moreau notwithstanding). Moréas’s Symbolist manifesto, with its famous proclamation that poetry should ‘clothe the Idea in a sensible form which, nevertheless, would not be a goal in itself but which, in serving to express the Idea, would remain its subject’ and its avowal that this concept had roots that reached back to the beginnings of literature, had been published in *Le* was a polemic, albeit cloaked in politesse, against the commercialisation of history painting by Boulanger and his ilk. See Cooke (2002), vol. 2, pp. 338-48, for the full text of Moreau’s speech.

⁴⁵ As most surviving installation photographs of the Palais des Beaux-Arts show the grand staircase, the hang of the adjoining Centennale galleries is a matter of speculation. Judging from contemporary reviews, it would appear that works by individual artists were exhibited contiguously (or at least within the same gallery), with star pieces (or those works too large for the side galleries) ranged around the grand staircase.

⁴⁶ H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982), pp. 22-25. Especially important in the present case is his characterisation of the change of the horizon of expectation in the face of a new work: ‘If one characterises as aesthetic distance the disparity between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work, whose reception can result in a “change of horizons” through negation of familiar experiences, or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness, then this aesthetic distance can be objectified historically along the spectrum of the audience’s reactions and criticism’s judgment (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or belated understanding).’

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Figaro in 1886 to cheers and jeers.⁴⁷ Although the applicability of Moréas’s theories to pictorial Symbolism has been a matter of some debate, it is worth noting that shortly after publishing his manifesto, he took up his pen in defence of Symbolist painting, anointing Puvis, ‘whose work, beyond the narrowness of the impression, flourishes among the coruscating haloes of Pure Symbol’, as leader of the movement.⁴⁸ (Ironically, despite the emulation of other Symbolist poets, Puvis always kept himself at a distance, apparently preferring to think of himself as a rejuvenator of the French tradition of high art – which is what the choice of exhibiting solely in the Centennale implies.)⁴⁹ Although the literary Symbolism promulgated by Moréas and his peers might not have reached its apogee by 1889, the term itself was on enough writers’ lips by the time the Exposition opened that, while not often used by critics in mainstream periodicals, terms in a similar vein, such as ‘idealist’ and ‘imaginative’ were frequently applied to the work of Puvis, Moreau and Watts. As well, the latter two were by now linked in the public imagination, thanks to Huysmans, to the Decadent phantasmagoria of *À rebours*. The ‘period of rapture’, to use Bourdieu’s term, in which reviewers found themselves lost in 1878 had now begun to move

toward becoming the norm – or one of them.⁵⁰

Hand in hand with this surge in literary interest in pictorial Symbolism – particularly as practiced in Britain – came a gradually increasing flow of reproductive prints across the Channel, albeit of varying quality. Arguably, these post-1878 reproductions played a more important role in disseminating the reputation of British Symbolists in France and in changing the horizon of expectations in favour of their work than the few, but vital, engravings circulated before Burne-Jones and Watts appeared in the flesh at the 1878 Exposition. The inherent inadequacies of engravings, in terms of size, technique, and colour, to convey the impact of the original painting could not be fully appreciated until the originals themselves were made available; once made aware of the true appearance of Burne-Jones and Watts's paintings, connoisseurs' demands for more reproductions was complicated by their

⁴⁷ Moréas, 'Le Symbolisme – Manifeste de Jean Moréas', *Le Figaro* (18 September 1886).

⁴⁸ 'Mais hâtons-nous de proclamer la souveraineté du maître Puvis de Chavannes, dont l'oeuvre, hors les

parvités de l'impression, s'essore parmi les halos coruscants du Pur Symbole': J. Moréas, 'Peintures', *Le Symboliste* 3 (22 October 1886), p. 9.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Shaw (2002), p. 128. Puvis's rightwing supporters, such as Ferdinand Brunetière, also stressed his alignment with the classical tradition, wishing to 'rescue' his work from the stigma of the inward-looking mysticism associated with Symbolism.

⁵⁰ Bourdieu (1991), p. 43; see also Chapter 1, n. 62.

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recognition that engravings and photographs were unsatisfactory substitutes for the real thing, whetting the appetite for more and better images which could only be satisfied by seeing, once again, more paintings.⁵¹ Thanks to the Grosvenor Gallery's ties with *L'Art*, its illustrated catalogues were available from the Librairie de l'Art from 1878; the illustrations consisted mainly of simple line drawings by the artists themselves or by Alfred Dawson, intended to serve as aides-memoires only.⁵²

According to Philippe Saunier, one of the only known ways for the French amateur frustrated with the poor quality of the catalogues or the sparse illustrations in Ernest Chesneau's *La peinture anglaise* (which went through multiple printings after its 1882 publication), pre-1889, to lay hands on high-quality reproductions was through personal contacts in Britain. Thus, where observers in 1878 responded to the Symbolism of Burne-Jones and Watts with more or less 'innocent' eyes, those in 1889, while unarguably better informed, were depending on a combination of a burgeoning literature on the movement, problematic reproductions, and distant memories of actual paintings.

In any case, French observers' reactions to the British Fine Art exhibition could be broadly characterised as a struggle to negotiate déjà vu and the shock of the new. If French art (at least, the official version of it) had largely recovered its equipoise after the humiliation of the previous Exposition, critics were still bewildered at Britain's continued resistance to its influence – not, some of them admitted, that this was a bad thing. The budding Symbolist critic Albert Aurier sourly congratulated France on its 'intellectual *revanche*' on the art of the rest of the Continent, lamenting that, with the exception of a rare few British and Nordic painters, the art of the other nations in the Exposition mindlessly echoed the juste-milieu platitudes of the Salon and the Décennale.⁵³ Others, usually those establishment critics less well-acquainted with advanced British art, registered momentary disorientation upon stepping into the

⁵¹ Few comprehensive studies of the trade in reproductions of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in France exist; the most complete thus far is P. Saunier, 'Les préraphaélites anglais. Les reproductions de leurs oeuvres et leur réception au XIXe siècle en France', *Revue de l'Art* no. 137 (2002), pp. 73-86. Saunier's investigation owes a great debt to the pioneering work of Jacques Lethève and is concerned mainly with

documentation; he rightly points out the difficulty of mapping the flow of such ephemeral objects, but his insistence that the reproductions were an attraction mainly to writers and exercised little influence on the visual arts is problematic. Furthermore, his concentration on prints and photographs after Burne-Jones and Rossetti entirely sidelines Watts.

⁵² Ibid., p. 75. A complete collection of the catalogues is conserved in the Bibliothèque d'Art et d'Archéologie Jacques Doucet in Paris.

⁵³ G.-A. Aurier, 'A Propos de l'Exposition universelle de 1889', first published in *Le Pléiade* 2, 27 June, 27 July, and 24 August 1889, reprinted in *Textes critiques, 1889-1892. De l'impressionnisme au symbolisme*, eds. D. Mellier, M.-K. Schaub and P. Wat (Paris, 1995), p. 133.

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calm, sparsely-hung galleries; no less than four commentators employed the word 'dépaycé' ('disorientated', but literally 'removed from one's country') to express the uncanny otherness of the art on view – and nowhere was this more the case than in the second gallery, which amounted to a displaced Grosvenor Gallery, a shrine to antinaturalist painting.⁵⁴

Goddesses and monsters: the antinaturalist dream of Watts and Puvis

While Burne-Jones's rapturous reception at the Exposition rested on a single picture, Watts dominated the British galleries in terms of the sheer amount of his work on view – eight paintings, more than any other single artist in the exhibition. Leaving aside the portraits, the six imaginative subjects constitute a remarkable survey of the evolution of Watts's style and concerns over the decade and of the gradual convergence of his approach with that of his French counterparts. Although the allegory *Love and Life* stands as a logical continuation of the aesthetic and conception of *Love and Death* and *Mammon* [Figure 17] falls solidly within the didactic strain that had intermittently characterised Watts's oeuvre since the 1860s, the Michelangesque *Diana and Endymion* and the ethereal, opalescent *Uldra* and *The Judgment of Paris* – these last two characterised by Henry Havard as 'dreamlike fantasies' – signal a new and, as I shall argue, more cosmopolitan direction in Watts's work.⁵⁵

Thanks to a schematic plan of the British galleries reproduced in the catalogue of the British Fine Art section, we know that *King Cophetua* occupied a commanding position in the second gallery of oil paintings, on an end wall in the long, narrow space, flanked by Watts's *Hope* and *The Judgment of Paris*, like the high altar in a church.⁵⁶ Although Sizeranne did not mention any of Watts's canvases in his tribute to Burne-Jones, his assessment of the effect of *King Cophetua* as an altarpiece

⁵⁴ See for example A. Picard, *Exposition universelle internationale de 1889 à Paris: Rapport général* (Paris 1891), vol. 4, p. 109; Monod (1891), p. 603; M. Hamel, 'Exposition universelle de 1889: les écoles étrangères (premier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1889), p. 225; G. Lafenestre, 'La Peinture étrangère à l'Exposition universelle de 1889', *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1 November 1889), p. 140. The latter three qualify the sensation as 'agréablement dépaycé'.

⁵⁵ 'Fantaisies rêveuses': H. Havard, 'L'Exposition des Beaux-Arts. Les écoles étrangères: l'Angleterre, l'Autriche Hongrie', in Dumas and Fourcaud (1889), vol. 2, p. 182. It is worth noting that Havard did not intend this as a compliment; he evinced little regard for the type of painting practiced by Watts and Burne-Jones.

⁵⁶ H. Blackburn, *A Complete Illustrated Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture in the British Fine Art Section* (London and Paris, 1889), p. 43. No installation photographs of the British galleries have thus far surfaced.

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celebrating the supremacy of Beauty over Wealth within the British galleries takes on a deeper significance when we consider that *Mammon* hung on the other side of the gallery. Subtitled by the artist, 'Dedicated to His Worshipers', this grotesque and brutal personification of wealth, nursing moneybags on his lap and impassively crushing the life from two naked youths, was unambiguously posited as an altarpiece;

in fact, Watts, who in his 1880 article ‘The Present Conditions of Art’ had railed that ‘material prosperity has become our real god, but we are surprised to find that the worship of this visible deity does not make us happy’,⁵⁷ had earlier expressed a wish to erect a statue of the monster in Hyde Park, in the hope that ‘his worshippers would be at least honest enough to bend the knee publicly to him’.⁵⁸ Of all his paintings at the Exposition, *Mammon* clung the closest to conventional types – here, the grand manner portrait and the retable⁵⁹ – and strove the hardest for legibility in a contemporary context.⁶⁰ It was also, crucially, the most overt rebuke to the bloated materialism and vulgar disregard for the spiritual that characterised mainstream Victorian society, a lament which, if the aforementioned criticisms of the Exposition are any indication, retained the same urgency in Third Republic France.

In spite, or because of, the pointed criticism which *Mammon* might have been construed to contain, it is curious that this was the painting by Watts most often singled out by republican critics for lengthy discussion, if not praise. André Michel, writing in the *Journal des débats*, dubbed it ‘at once the most characteristic and the least good of his eight exhibited works . . . a Couture translated into English’,⁶¹ no doubt an allusion to the French master’s enormous tour-de-force of moralising history painting, *Les Romains de la décadence* (1847), which held court on the grand staircase of the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Notwithstanding this unflattering conclusion, Michel conceded that he found it difficult to pull his eyes away, and that despite Watts’s

⁵⁷ G. F. Watts, ‘The Present Conditions of Art’, *The Nineteenth Century* (February 1880), p. 243.
⁵⁸ M. S. Watts, *George Frederic Watts: Annals of an Artist’s Life* (London, 1912), vol. 2, p. 149.
⁵⁹ Veronica Franklin Gould draws attention to an interesting parallel between *Mammon* and Watts’s portrait of Cardinal Manning (1882, National Portrait Gallery): V. Franklin Gould, ed., *The Vision of G. F. Watts OM RA (1817-1914)*, (exh. cat., Compton, Watts Gallery, 2004), p. 74. As a sought-after portraitist, Watts was certainly conversant with the conventions of grand portraiture and seems to have skilfully manipulated them to heighten the picture’s impact.

⁶⁰ Colin Trodd argues that in *Mammon*, as opposed to Watts’s more allusive Symbolist works, ‘The job of allegory is to find the symbolic form of the real, to provide the conditions in which this manifestation is understood as a bringing together of the past and the present, and to make a public for art confront who they are by questioning the role of the image in modern life’; C. Trodd, “‘To intensify the sense of teeming life’: Watts and the twilight of transcendence”, in C. Trodd and S. Brown, eds., *Representations of G. F. Watts* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 66.

⁶¹ ‘A la fois le plus caractéristique et le moins bon de ses huit tableaux exposés [...] on dirait un Couture traduit en anglais’: Michel (1889).

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heavy-handedness with both brush and message, ‘nothing he does leaves one indifferent; one does not forget what one has seen’.⁶² Perhaps *Mammon* carried a less potent charge in Paris than it had in London because it seemed so *English*, rather than universal; Michel and his colleagues were amused (and perhaps comforted) by what they saw as Watts’s *très anglais* use of an allegorical subject to justify the inclusion of nude figures, and, as ever, the inadequacy of his technique to his grand ideas became a favourite talking point.⁶³ Possibly, though, republican commentators gravitated toward *Mammon* for precisely the reasons outlined by Michel: despite the clumsy execution, the meaning was readily deciphered, its historical credentials were impeccable, and most importantly, its moral message – that love of money to the exclusion of all else is the root of all evil – could be willingly embraced by upholders of the Republic. Barbara Bryant’s claim that *Mammon* held a fascination primarily for the more extreme fringes of Symbolist and Decadent circles because of its rendering of destruction and evil only tells part of the story; it held as much attraction for those establishment critics suspicious of paintings whose meaning came veiled in allusion and suggestion.⁶⁴

If *Mammon*, despite its timely subject and nightmarish subversion of the

fantasy promoted by the Exposition's organisers, had no real equivalent in French Symbolism, deepening affinities between Watts and Puvis are discernible in two of the former's most recent works, *The Judgment of Paris* [Figure 18] and *Uldra* [Figure 19] and Puvis's *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, on its fourth outing in a decade. I have already discussed the possible influence of Watts's *Three Goddesses* on *Jeunes filles*;⁶⁵ reversing the direction of the comparison draws out a growing convergence of concerns with the blurring of boundaries between the physical and the intangible, the concrete and the poetically allusive. For if Watts's experimental, quasi-decorative composition and suppression of meaning may have influenced Puvis's enigmatic classical-yet-not-classical 'panneau décoratif', *Jeunes filles*, and the poets' plaudits it attracted, may have combined to push Watts still further toward poetic suggestion.⁶⁶

⁶² 'Rien de ce qu'il fait n'est indifférent ; on ne l'oublie pas quand on l'a vu': Ibid.

⁶³ Charles Bigot, for instance, wrote of *Mammon*, 'C'est surtout en regardant la peinture de M. Watts que l'on peut voir quelles différences sépareront toujours le génie anglais et le génie français': C. Bigot, 'Les Beaux-arts à l'Exposition. L'Angleterre', *Le Siècle* (24 June 1889).

⁶⁴ Bryant in Upstone and Wilton (1997), p. 170.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 1.

⁶⁶ Much of the following argument is informed by Jennifer L. Shaw's persuasive analysis of *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer* as the site of poetic potentiality and unfulfilled desire (Shaw 2002, pp. 14-32).

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Jeunes filles, along with *L'Enfant prodigue* and *Le Pauvre pêcheur*, became one of Puvis's calling cards in the 1880s, for both aesthetic and practical reasons; this repeated exposure brought Puvis to the attention of Claude Phillips. In one of the most sympathetic and insightful analyses of his work to come from either side of the Channel during the 1880s, Phillips debunked the now firmly entrenched perception that Puvis was an incompetent draughtsman; pointing to a group of masterly sketches, he argued that Puvis's project was one of purifying simplification.⁶⁷ The article was accompanied by numerous illustrations which, despite their limitations, give the reader a fair sense of Puvis's style. While Phillips may have seemed a voice in the wilderness, and while he himself drew no comparisons with Watts (although he did with Burne-Jones, to the latter's detriment), many of his insights into Puvis's recent work are also applicable to two of the paintings on which Watts was at work when his article appeared.

The bridge between *The Three Goddesses* and *The Judgment of Paris* would seem to be *Uldra*, an atypically modest half-length 'portrait' of a Scandinavian water sprite (*uldra* or *huldre* – contrary to critical assumptions, the subject of the painting was not a specific figure, but one of a type).⁶⁸ Wreathed in swirling veils of pale, shimmering vapour, the blond sprite, whose hair appears to dissolve into the mist, gazes upward, the direction of her eyes implying inner vision. The facture plays a key, and unsettling, role in etherealising the figure. Watts was by now notorious for his idiosyncratic methods and penchant for scumbling and scrubbing the paint onto – or into – his canvases, and in *Uldra* the paint surface is thickly and unevenly built up so that it catches the light, causing the mist to sparkle in imitation of the spray of a waterfall yet also drawing the spectator's attention to its very material presence. The tension between the materiality of the paint and the immateriality of what it depicts is still greater in Watts's rendering of the sprite's body, its contours scarcely delineated, the breasts – the only indication of gender – defined only by the palest of shadows; the body has less physical substance than the insistently plastic paint from which it is created. Shaw has pointed to a parallel tension between potential facture and the illusory physicality of figures in *Jeunes filles*, in which the overall scraped roughness of the surface and the overemphatic black outlines drawn around the left and centre

⁶⁷ C. Phillips, 'Puvis de Chavannes', *The Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), p. 62.

⁶⁸ Indeed, a reviewer in *The Magazine of Art* (incorrectly) described *Uldra* as a portrait when it was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery.

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figures deny the illusion of three-dimensionality and bodily presence.⁶⁹ The dreamlike atmosphere engendered by this unresolved conflict between line and form was much remarked upon. Symbolist poets and theoreticians Théodore de Banville and Gustave Kahn celebrated the painting's allusiveness and oneiric reverie, while more conservative critics, especially the *Revue des deux mondes*'s Ferdinand Brunetière (an admirer himself, if for completely different reasons) vigorously minimised these same aspects, which he considered dangerous to the health of society because they might be seen to promote narcissistic contemplation over responsibility and action. For perhaps the same reasons, *Uldra* proved a greater attraction to Symbolist and Decadent writers than to republican and conservative commentators; René Doumic, writing in *Le Moniteur universel*, lumped it together with *The Judgment of Paris* and *Hope* as an incomprehensible exercise in coloured nothingness, 'what M. Whistler would call a real painting'.⁷⁰ Jean Lorrain, on the other hand, although by taste and temperament a much stronger partisan of Burne-Jones, singled out *Uldra* and *The Judgment of Paris* for praise, delighting in their opalescent colour harmonies and describing in detail the sensuous reverie they sent him into – precisely the sort of 'ill effects' which so worried an establishment critic like Brunetière.⁷¹ *The Judgment of Paris* may be viewed as the outcome of cross-fertilisation between *Uldra* and *Jeunes filles*, though of course it traces its roots in Watts's oeuvre back to *The Three Goddesses*. Yet those earlier goddesses seem positively fleshly and earthbound when confronted with those in *The Judgment of Paris*. Rather than place his figures in a conventionalised landscape, as before, Watts surrounds them in billowing clouds, from which, much like *Uldra*, they emerge as if they were a part of them; once again, the boundary between solid flesh and formless, liquid atmosphere is eroded, dissolved. This dissolution is especially striking when we consider the disparity between the goddesses' heads and bodies. The profile of the left-hand figure (tentatively identified as Minerva, although she is stripped of any identifying attributes) and the face of the central figure (probably Juno) are both unexpectedly solid, with firm outlines and sharply-cut, marmoreal features which would not be out of place on the shoulders of a Greek statue. The bodies, however, are wraithlike and almost androgynous, with the bare minimum of detail to suggest that we are gazing

⁶⁹ Shaw (2002), pp. 22-24.

⁷⁰ R. Doumic, 'Les beaux-arts à l'Exposition: l'Angleterre', *Le Moniteur universel* (25 September 1889).

⁷¹ J. Lorrain, *Mes Expositions universelles* (Paris, 2002), p. 148.

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upon the goddesses of antiquity rather than on disembodied spirits. The disjunction resolves in a surprising manner in the third figure. Presumably Venus, Watts has given her the same insubstantial body as her sisters, and the vaporous golden hair and visionary gaze as his water sprite. Thus, he pushes Puvis's refusal to resolve the conflict between convention and dream, between the material and the dematerialised, almost to breaking point. Yet, like Puvis, he was passionately engaged, in both these pictures, in calling forth the spiritual through the activation of matter – a pursuit central to Symbolism's goals. With all markers of narrative and meaning banished (despite the clues provided by its title), *The Judgment of Paris* demands that we see it as an inner vision, a suggestive fantasy in which the mind of the individual viewer wanders at will. Nothing, it seemed, could be more inimical to the collective fantasy promoted by the state through the Exposition.

Between Hope and Despair

The inward turn seen in *The Judgment of Paris*, *Uldra* and *Jeunes filles*, however subtly contrary to republican goals, carries a less explosive charge than a second pair of Exposition works by Puvis and Watts. Of Watts's submissions to the Exposition, *Hope* [Figure 20] excited the most critical notice and the most debate. And well it might, for none of his subjects diverge so sharply from what its title purported to represent. The entry in the official Exposition catalogue listed the title as "*Hope!*", as if the exclamation mark was required both to clarify the picture's subject and to reinforce its tenuous meaning.⁷² G. K. Chesterton described the painting in 1904 as a representation of 'Despair' rather than 'Hope'⁷³; André Michel, seeing *Hope* at the Exposition, had a similar reaction:

Hope, her eyes bandaged, enveloped in a greenish dress, is seated, slumped rather, on the globe which turns in desolate space. She clutches to her heart, in a desperate embrace, her lyre, of which all the strings, save one, are broken. It is enough for her to make a song, a prayer, a lament rise in the silence of the night. Her infinite lassitude has not killed her faith; . . . in the depths of the immutable ether, a star twinkles and appears to respond to her . . .⁷⁴

⁷² *Catalogue général officiel* (1889), p. 206, no. 163.

⁷³ G. K. Chesterton, *G. F. Watts* (London, 1904), p. 94.

⁷⁴ 'L'*Espérance*, les yeux bandés, enveloppée d'une robe verdâtre, est assise, affaissée plutôt, sur le globe qui tourne dans l'espace désert. Elle serre contre son coeur, d'une étreinte désespérée, sa lyre, dont toutes les cordes, sauf une, sont brisées. C'est assez pour qu'elle fasse monter dans le silence de la nuit un chant, une prière, une plainte. Son infinie lassitude n'a pas tué sa foi; . . . au fond de l'immuable éther, une étoile s'allume et semble lui répondre . . .' Michel (1889).

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While Michel was able to discern a faint note of hope in the depths of painting (the twinkling star), he identified the primary mood of *Hope* as a mixture of despair and desperation (both of which are derived from the same French root). Certainly, Watts's incarnation of Hope broke startlingly with the time-honoured conventions of Christian allegory.⁷⁵ Rather than representing her as a theological virtue, posed upright, gazing calmly and directly outward, and holding a symbolic anchor, he blindfolded her (borrowing an attribute more typical of Faith or Justice), pressed her down, as if under a tremendous weight, into an awkward sitting position, and bathed the scene in a vaporous green atmosphere, a colour suggestive of the polar opposites of new growth and decay. Colin Trodd and Stephanie Brown have observed that many of Watts's late figures, *Hope* in particular, appear to be 'struggling to resist the powers of disenchantment in the modern world',⁷⁶ and the figure's intense physicality bears this out; her bowed head and shoulders appear to be straining against a crushing weight, much like one of Rodin's caryatids, while the knuckles of her left hand clutching the broken lyre have blanched a ghastly greenish white from the pressure of her grip. Although Watts himself explained his unorthodox approach by claiming that 'it is only when one supreme desire is left that one reaches the topmost pitch of hope',⁷⁷ his ambiguous portrayal of Hope – desperate, despairing, striving not to be awakened from a consoling dream – places it centrally within a Symbolist tradition of mingling enchantment, despair and melancholy.

Before Watts painted his two versions of *Hope*,⁷⁸ the most famous – or notorious – nineteenth-century portrayal of the subject was Puvis's *L'Espérance* [Figure 21]. Shown at the 1872 Salon, the first held following the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, it stirred critical outrage with its equivocal depiction of Hope not as an anchor-bearing Christian allegory or as a doughty Marianne figure clad in classicising drapery, but as a frail young girl in white, perched stiffly and precariously

on a breached wall before a ruined city. Daring to embody Hope in such a fragile,

⁷⁵ The theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity were, in fact, recurrent subjects in Watts's oeuvre, although he never represented them as a trilogy; see Gould (2004), p. 78.

⁷⁶ C. Trodd and S. Brown, 'Introduction: Generations of Watts', in Trodd and Brown (2004), p. 10.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Gould (2004), p. 78; no source given.

⁷⁸ The first version, painted in 1885 and exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery that year, is now in a private collection (illustrated in Gould 2004, p. 7 and Wilton and Upstone 1997, p. 201); it differs from the second version, under discussion here, in the colour of the drapery (greyish-white rather than green) and in the background, which is brushy rather than diffuse, with a paler, blue-green tonality.

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contingent guise at such a volatile time earned Puvis the wrath of conservative commentators. Victor Cherbuliez's unflattering assessment is typical:

Shall I speak to you of a certain damsel, scrawny and sickly, dressed in a white tunic or chemise . . . ? [...] This poor little creature represents a great divinity, Hope, at least that's what M. Puvis de Chavannes insists.⁷⁹

Puvis's Hope, while not crushed to the earth, is nevertheless semi-recumbent; indeed, the uneven length of her legs makes it doubtful that she could ever rise. While most observers reserved their scorn for the skinniness of her physique, her gaze must have seemed strange in a figure whose ostensible intent was to inspire optimism in the viewer: although she proffers a sprig of oak, her eyes are turned both upward and inward, either unconscious of or deliberately ignoring the viewer, denying the promise of connection implied by her gesture. Another grievous error was the 'Pre-Raphaelite' tendencies of Puvis's style, according to the reviewer for the *Revue des deux mondes*, who sniffed, 'convenient genre for anyone who can neither draw nor paint'.⁸⁰ Although Watts never saw *L'Espérance* in the flesh, and it is difficult to ascertain whether he could have seen a reproduction before or during work on *Hope*, he certainly could have known it by description; the *Athenaeum*'s article on the 1872 Salon included a detailed account of the picture and insisted, albeit in more positive terms, on its 'Pre-Raphaelite' qualities.⁸¹

L'Espérance, both its clothed Salon and slightly later nude versions, continued to be exhibited throughout the 1880s, despite this unpromising beginning; its political charge defused as painful memories of war ebbed and signs of its aftermath effaced from the cityscape, it came to be lauded by Symbolist critics (notably Gustave Kahn) and to serve as inspiration for avant-garde artists including Gauguin, Emile Bernard and Maurice Denis. Although Puvis did not exhibit it in the Centennale, another of his 'calling-card' panel paintings, *L'Enfant prodigue* [Figure 22], did appear in the

⁷⁹ 'Vous parlerai-je de certaine jeune fille, maigre et malingre, vêtue d'une tunique ou d'une chemise blanche [...] ? Cette pauvrete représente une grande divinité, l'Espérance, c'est du moins ce qu'affirme M. Puvis de Chavannes'. V. Cherbuliez, *Études de littérature et d'art. Études sur l'Allemagne. Lettres sur le Salon de 1872* (Paris, 1873), p. 261.

⁸⁰ 'Genre commode pour qui ne sait ni dessiner, ni peindre': E. Duvergier de Hauranne, 'Le Salon de 1872', *Revue des deux mondes* (1872), pp. 843-44.

⁸¹ 'The Salon, Paris, 1872 (Second Notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2327 (1 June 1872), p. 692. The reviewer (possibly F. G. Stephens or William Michael Rossetti) adds, 'M. Puvis de Chavannes has, however, out-Heroded Herod, to use a term which is most apt to his case, by carrying what our amazed countrymen fancied was Pre-Raphaelitism to an excess which is almost laughable; and yet his work remains most respectable, because the artist is a man of some power, and so very much in earnest as to persist seriously and steadfastly in modes of design and painting which must surely have occurred to him in a dream'.

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exhibition. Its parallels with *Hope*, not previously noted, may serve to further illuminate the disturbing alternative fantasy spun by both paintings within the Exposition's framework. The comparison I am drawing between these two works is not meant to be the last word on the subject; however, bringing them together in this

way may serve to open new directions in interpretation.

Puvis was nothing if not evasive when asked to speak to the significance of his unconventional rendering of biblical parable; Vachon records him explaining the painting's origin as an excuse to use sketches of pigs he had made during a recent trip to rural Burgundy.⁸² Yet this flippant remark points to one of the painting's most unsettling qualities, the near-total disjuncture between figure and landscape. Indeed, it might almost be two paintings joined by accident – on the one hand a modest pastoral landscape, on the other the completely unrelated figure of the Prodigal Son, pushed so far to the right of the composition that he seems to have been caught in the frame by pure chance. The figure is unique in Puvis's oeuvre; in contrast to the generalised masks or averted faces which characterise his pictures, the Prodigal Son's face is sharply delineated. Indeed, the salient lantern jaw, the exaggerated hollows of the cheeks and the deep-set, introspective eyes appear to bear witness to the influence of Burne-Jones (whose *Beguiling of Merlin* Puvis would have seen before he started work on the painting). The young man's slender body is disposed in an attitude of extraordinary vulnerability – a quality which becomes easier to understand when we consider that Puvis took the unusual step of using a female model for preliminary studies of the figure [Figure 23]. Perched uneasily on a fallen tree, staring off into the distance, with his shoulders hunched forward, the Prodigal Son clasps his arms against his chest with startling vehemence, more so than would seem to be warranted in trying to keep off a chill wind.⁸³ We have already witnessed the same violence of gesture in Hope's white-knuckled grip on her lyre, the same bending of head and shoulders beneath an invisible burden. What, one wonders, is the Prodigal Son struggling against? Is he, too, attempting to escape the disenchantment that would maroon him in mundane reality?

My comparison of *Hope* and *L'Enfant prodigue* is not meant to suggest mutual influence – again, it is all but impossible to ascertain whether Watts could have seen a

⁸² Vachon (1895), p. 71.

⁸³ Shaw (2002), p. 32, notes a similar unwonted violence in the disposition of the fisherman's arms in *Le pauvre pêcheur*.

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reproduction of Puvis's work before he began work on his own – but rather to draw out a shared concern for the impossibility of preserving individual dream and contemplation, and a possible common point of inspiration. Both paintings belong to a tradition tracing its origins back to Dürer's defining representation of melancholy, *Melencolia I* [Figure 24]. Watts drew more heavily on the iconography established by Dürer, including two of Melancholy's symbolic accessories, a stringed instrument and a globe, though he transforms the latter from a scientist's tool into a precarious support for Hope.⁸⁴ Both unquestionably emulated the hunched posture, the body beginning to fold in upon itself, and the bleak expression, which Félix Fénéon, upon seeing *L'Enfant prodigue* at the 1883 Exposition Nationale, described as 'one of those dreadfully enveloping melancholies'.⁸⁵

Melancholy's fortunes, however, had changed since Dürer's age, when it was considered, even glorified, as a natural and necessary condition of genius and as the humour most conducive to creativity and intellectual endeavour. As the study of psychology advanced in the nineteenth century, melancholy fell under the cold gaze of medicine. The conversion of its public image from exalted spiritual-intellectual state to psychosomatic illness fed into the fears of creeping degeneration that had haunted France ever since its embarrassing defeat in 1870. Theorists of degeneration, most notably Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau, published dire predictions, and the majority pinpointed melancholy as one of the key symptoms of this alarming trend.⁸⁶

Melancholy, then, represented a threat to the social order, particularly to the vision of progress and harmony promoted by the Republic and the Exposition; introspection and withdrawal, its key symptoms, were dangers to be repressed, averted at any cost. Yet, as we have seen, *Hope* and *L'Enfant prodigue* appear to resist. Bodies compressed in upon themselves as they withstand, in extremis, the forces that would wrench them from their reveries, they represent not so much a retreat from contemporary reality, but a valiant struggle to keep it out.

⁸⁴ *Hope's* composition may also be indebted to Jacob II de Gheyn's 1596 engraving *Melancholicus* (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum), which depicts an old man seated atop a globe, contemplating another smaller globe.

⁸⁵ 'Une de ces mélancolies épouvantablement enveloppantes': F. Fénéon, 'Exposition nationale des beaux-arts (15 septembre-31 octobre)', *La libre revue* 1 (1 October 1883), p. 20.

⁸⁶ On the pathologising of melancholy by the medical profession in the second half of the nineteenth century, see L. Bossi, 'Mélancolie et dégénérescence', in J. Clair, ed., *Mélancolie. Génie et folie en occident* (exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais and Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie, 2005), pp. 398-411.

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The beginning – or the end?

The reverberations of this change in critical fortunes followed closely on the closing of the 1889 Exposition. Watts and Burne-Jones were now firmly established in the firmament of avant-garde painting in Paris, their rise echoing that of Puvis and Watts and occasioning further exchange and collaboration. In 1890, after a decade of acrimonious wrangling after its control was placed in the hands of artists, the official Salon split in two. The more conservative elements remained in their Champs-Élysées quarters as the Société des Artistes Français, while a dissenting group, spearheaded by Puvis and possibly inspired by the secessionist Grosvenor and New Galleries in London,⁸⁷ broke away to form the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts, better known as the Salon du Champ de Mars because it staged its exhibitions in the Palais des Beaux-Arts on the Exposition grounds.⁸⁸ Puvis made a concerted effort to include Burne-Jones in this alternative Salon, which proclaimed its modernity by giving space to the decorative arts and was known for showing artists working in a Symbolist vein;⁸⁹ a series of letters tells the story of his attempt to solicit Burne-Jones's *The Wheel of Fortune* (1883) for inclusion in the 1892 Salon. Although he ultimately had to make do with a selection of drawings in place of the hoped-for painting,⁹⁰ and his wistfully expressed wish for 'a meeting that I have long desired' with Burne-Jones was destined to remain unfulfilled,⁹¹ Puvis was responsible for

⁸⁷ Annie Dubernard-Laurent suggests this connection; certainly, by this date, the example of both galleries was widely known in Paris: Dubernard-Laurent (1996), vol. 4, p. 221.

⁸⁸ The distinction between the kinds of artists who exhibited at the two Salons is not, of course, black and white. Fantin-Latour, for example, remained loyal to the Société des Artistes Français until the end of his life, exhibiting his imaginative pastels and paintings to great acclaim, while one of the key figures in the decision to secede from the Champs-Élysées was the historical genre painter Meissonier, an academic painter par excellence (albeit not in the traditional sense).

⁸⁹ The Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts broke with centuries of tradition in allowing entry to the decorative arts, and as such became an important breeding ground for Art Nouveau; see Silverman (1989), pp. 207-14, for further discussion of the implications of the Salon's split for the status and development of the decorative arts. Painters associated with the second wave of Symbolism who exhibited with the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts included Eugène Carrière, Edmond Aman-Jean, Armand Point, Alexandre Séon and Louis-Welden Hawkins; many of these artists also exhibited at some point with the Salon de la Rose + Croix.

⁹⁰ A letter from Puvis to Burne-Jones, dated 8 February 1892, indicates that Burne-Jones sent a study for the figure of Fortune ('Merci de tout mon coeur d'artiste pour l'envoi de votre puissant et original symbole de la Fortune. – comme tous ceux que j'ai conviés à le voir j'ai été profondément frappé de son aspect de grandeur.'). but the painting itself was never sent, for reasons that must remain obscure. It appears that the drawings mentioned in following letter, dated 28 April 1892, were the only works included in the Salon (Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Puvis de Chavannes, P.: 9308 Bb-

Bc). Puvis's wish was granted nearly a century later, however, when *The Wheel of Fortune* was purchased by the state in 1980.

⁹¹ 'De plus vous me faites espérer une rencontre que je désire depuis bien longtemps'. Fondation Custodia, Puvis de Chavannes, P.: 9308 Bd. In fact, Burne-Jones's final visit to France, in 1878, was also the last time he left England before his death.

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securing Burne-Jones's participation in the Salons of 1893, 1895 and 1896. Moreover, the respect and admiration Puvis expressed seems to have been reciprocated. When, in 1891, Joséphin Péladan sent a pamphlet to Burne-Jones to solicit his participation in the first Salon de la Rose + Croix, the artist, no doubt taken aback by the Sâr's purple prose and alarming vehemence, wrote to Watts expressing his misgivings, describing the pamphlet as 'disgracefully silly, but I was in the mood . . . to help in anything that upholds the ideals I care for . . . do you know Puvis de Chavannes? Who has lifted the same banner'. Burne-Jones then evidently consulted Puvis, who himself refused to associate himself with the Rose + Croix, and on his advice declined to exhibit.⁹²

Puvis also made inroads into the British cultural conscience, which have thus far passed largely unnoticed, as a result of the Exposition. In 1893, James Hibbert, the architect of Preston's new museum, put forward Puvis's name as a possible decorator for the central lantern. Puvis turned down the commission, explaining that his involvement in the decorative cycle for the Boston Public Library precluded it.⁹³ Had he accepted, the mural would have been the only publicly commissioned decorative ensemble in Britain by a French artist, and a striking parallel to the work of Watts, whose ambitions as a monumental decorative painter had been sadly thwarted but whose high-minded subject matter and seriousness of purpose echoed that of Puvis. In any event, the invitation demonstrates that awareness of, and admiration for, Puvis in Britain was more widespread than previously acknowledged. Sir C. J. Holmes devoted eight pages to his obituary in the *Contemporary Review* in 1898, naming him as one of the three greatest contemporary French artists (along with Moreau and Rodin) and claiming that, while his work displayed affinities with that of his recently deceased peers Burne-Jones and Moreau, Puvis was by far the greatest exponent of 'the pictorial conception of the heroic age'.⁹⁴ Much as had been the case in France, the darker, more introspective visions expressed in canvases such as *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, *L'Enfant prodigue* and *Le Pauvre pêcheur* appealed to artists and

⁹² R. Upstone, 'Echoes in Albion's Sacred Wood: Puvis and British Art', in Lemoine (2002), p. 279.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁹⁴ Sir C. J. Holmes, 'Puvis de Chavannes', *Contemporary Review* no. 396 (December 1898), p. 871. Holmes makes no mention of Puvis's easel paintings, with the exception of *The Death of St John the Baptist*, which had been exhibited at the Guildhall the previous year and eventually entered the National Gallery as part of the Hugh Lane bequest in 1917. His Puvis is almost exclusively a decorative painter; moreover, he claims that the artist's name is well-known in England because large numbers of visitors to France saw his murals at Amiens, Paris and Lyon.

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writers of a Symbolist bent, while the tranquil, classicising fantasy of the murals earned the approval of establishment critics.

The Exposition and its aftermath also prompted the only known correspondence between Moreau and Burne-Jones. Moreau, who had been instrumental in awarding Burne-Jones a *médaille d'honneur* for *King Cophetua*, apparently asked his patron Charles Ephrussi to put him in contact with Burne-Jones; through the offices of Ephrussi and Burne-Jones's friend Lady Brook, Burne-Jones sent Moreau a photograph of *The Seven Days of Creation* [Figure 25]. The sole surviving letter from Moreau to Burne-Jones is an effusive note of thanks, extolling

the work's 'charming and delicate attention [to detail]' and acknowledging Burne-Jones as a kindred spirit whose sympathy was 'one of the rarest and most beautiful recompenses of my long working life'.⁹⁵ While we unfortunately have no record of Burne-Jones's letters, Moreau's affinity with Burne-Jones is attested to not only by this letter, but by the fact that the photograph, the only reproduction of a contemporary work in his personal collection, was still hanging in Moreau's house when he died six years later.⁹⁶ Although the existence of this artefact of an interchange between the two artists is occasionally remarked upon without further comment, both Burne-Jones's choice of a work to send Moreau and the latter's response to it are worth considering. *The Seven Days of Creation* shows Burne-Jones at both his most deliberately archaic, with its polyptych format and austere verticality and his most original and (to conservative eyes) unsettling, with its host of melancholic, androgynous angels who appear to exist at an utter remove from reality. Such characteristics were, of course, salient in much of Moreau's work, and it seems safe to suppose that Burne-Jones deliberately selected as his offering to Moreau the painting he considered to best demonstrate their aesthetic affinities.

Strengthened personal ties were not the only result of the Exposition.

Crucially, the early 1890s also saw the Symbolist press in France embrace British antinaturalism. The *Revue Blanche*, best known as the mouthpiece of the Nabis,

⁹⁵ 'Quelle attention délicate et charmante!'; 'd'une sympathie [qui est] . . . pour moi une des plus rares et des plus belles récompenses de ma longue vie de travailleur': Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Moreau, G.: 9308a, letter to Burne-Jones.

⁹⁶ This evidence of Moreau's admiration for Burne-Jones is somewhat complicated by the fact that a disparaging article on the latter, penned by Robert de Montesquiou in 1894 when Burne-Jones's fortunes in France were on the wane and describing his paintings witheringly as 'des *Christmas-cards* géants et sublimes' was found among Moreau's belongings at his death: R. de Montesquiou, 'Burne Jones', *La Revue illustrée* 18, no. 212 (1 October 1894), p. 48.

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sporadically featured articles on the Pre-Raphaelites, most of them aimed at amateurs seeking to enhance their collections of books and reproductions. In February 1894, for example, Gustave Kahn directed readers to a reissue of the Moxon *Tennyson*, whose illustrators he described as 'then almost unknown, now intellectual celebrities', and to a reproduction of Burne-Jones's *Chant d'Amour* published the previous month in the *Magazine of Art*.⁹⁷

If the *Revue Blanche*'s approach to the Pre-Raphaelites leaned more in the direction of connoisseurship than critical analysis, Aurier's decision to include the Pre-Raphaelites along with Puvis and Moreau in what was becoming an increasingly familiar triad as precursors to the latest wave of Symbolist art was more significant. Having already formulated a definition of Symbolist painting specific to the recent work of Gauguin and the Pont-Aven circle in 'Le Symbolisme en peinture – Paul Gauguin', published in the *Mercure de France* in 1891, Aurier elaborated on his initial ideas in 'Les Peintres Symbolistes' the following year, consolidating Symbolism's status as a reaction against the positivism and scientific advances of the nineteenth century and proclaiming its victory over naturalism and materialism: In vain does exclusively materialist, experimental and immediate art struggle against the attacks of a new, idealist and mystical art. On all fronts it claims the right to dream, the right to the pasturelands of the skies, the right to take flight towards the stars denied by the absolute truth.⁹⁸

As Juliet Simpson has suggested, 'Les Peintres Symbolistes' sought to reach – and convert to the Symbolist cause – a much broader audience than Aurier's previous sally, not only by appearing in a journal with a more general readership than the

Symbolist *Mercure de France* but by anchoring pictorial Symbolism firmly within an established tradition of primitive and naïve art.⁹⁹ Aurier was at pains to portray his heroes, ‘Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, the English Pre-Raphaelites’, as having ‘already, in isolation, with glory and victory if without much real doctrine, fought the same fight, claiming the right to dream, flourishing far from materialist swamps and having the courage to proclaim the excellence of the true and good

⁹⁷ G. Kahn, ‘Les Lettres anglaises’, *La Revue Blanche* 6, no. 28 (February 1894), pp. 188, 191. Kahn’s reference to the *Magazine of Art* suggests that by this date, obtaining British art periodicals in France was a relatively simple matter.

⁹⁸ ‘En vain l’art exclusivement matérialiste, l’art expérimental et immédiat, se débat contre les attaques d’un art nouveau, idéaliste et mystique. De toutes parts on revendique le droit au rêve, le droit aux pâturages de l’azur, le droit à l’envolement vers les étoiles niées de l’absolue vérité’. G.-A. Aurier, ‘Les Peintres Symbolistes’, *La Revue encyclopédique* 1, 1 April 1892, pp. 475-87, reprinted in Aurier (1995), p. 96.

⁹⁹ J. Simpson, *Aurier, Symbolism and the Visual Arts* (Bern, 1999), pp. 245-46.

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tradition: that of the Primitives’.¹⁰⁰ Britain’s antinaturalists were no longer an insular curiosity but part of an international vanguard, yet Aurier’s attempt to have it both ways – to portray them both as isolated, misunderstood geniuses and as renovators of a time-honoured tradition – betrays an irrevocable shift toward conservatism.

This subtle but telling paradigm shift in Aurier’s criticism is symptomatic both of a trend toward conservatism and an emphasis on tradition in avant-garde circles and of a change in British antinaturalism’s critical fortunes in the 1890s.¹⁰¹ As Burne-Jones became a fixture of the Champ de Mars and the 1894 version of Watts’s *Love and Life* entered the Musée du Luxembourg to hang in the company of *Le Pauvre pêcheur* and Moreau’s *Orphée*, serious studies of their work proliferated in French art periodicals.¹⁰² Common to many of them were an earnest scholarly effort to situate the artists within an overarching tradition and a memorialising tone, indicating a collective sense that an epoch was slipping irretrievably into the past.¹⁰³ Familiarity – and official recognition – often breeds contempt, and antinaturalism was no exception.

Indeed, Burne-Jones often found himself the scapegoat for the sins of the entire Symbolist movement, never more so than under the sarcastic pen of the anarchist critic and defender of Impressionism Octave Mirbeau. Beginning in 1895, Mirbeau launched a series of scurrilous attacks in *Le Journal* on Burne-Jones and his lesser French imitators that continued unabated until May 1897. Through the parodic character of Kariste, the *über*-Symbolist martyr to his own art (whose name Mirbeau probably invented for its phonetic similarity to ‘Christ’), Mirbeau poured scorn on this

¹⁰⁰ ‘Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, les préraphaélites anglais avaient déjà isolément, avec gloire et victoire, mais sans bien nette doctrine, combattu le même combat, revendiquant le droit au rêve, à l’essor hors des marécages matérialistes, et ayant le courage de proclamer l’excellence de la vraie et de la bonne tradition: celle des Primitifs’: Aurier (1995), p. 105.

¹⁰¹ Michael Marlais has explored the paradoxical appearance of a conservative, traditionalist tone in anti-naturalist avant-garde criticism from 1889-1900, particularly in the writings of Aurier, Maurice Denis and Camille Mauclair, pinpointing its origins in the Third Republic’s aggressive institutionalization of naturalism and materialism: Marlais (1992), p. 7.

¹⁰² Puvis experienced a similar belated recognition in Britain; see, for example, Prince Bojidar Karageorgevitch, ‘Puvis de Chavannes’, *Magazine of Art* 17 (1894), pp. 73-79, which is notable for the space it devotes to Puvis’s easel paintings, including an extended meditation on *Le Pauvre pêcheur* which the Prince considered his masterpiece.

¹⁰³ Notable examples of this trend include P. Leprieur, ‘Artistes contemporains: M. Burne-Jones, décorateur et ornemaniste’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 8 (November 1892), pp. 381-99 and L. Bénédite, *Deux idéalistes: Gustave Moreau et E. Burne-Jones* (Paris, 1899). Critics writing in establishment periodicals tended not to class Burne-Jones and Watts as Symbolists, often opting for the designation of ‘idéaliste’ instead. Richard Thomson suggests that Bénédite, as a state functionary and curator of the Musée du Luxembourg, was especially eager to dissociate Moreau (who had just left his vast personal

collection to the nation) from the less salubrious fringes of Symbolism, particularly Lorrain and Huysmans (Thomson 2004, pp. 27-28); this may explain his decision to classify Moreau and Burne-Jones under a heading with more high-minded connotations.

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strand of Symbolism, reserving much of his fire for Burne-Jones, in no less than seven articles.¹⁰⁴ Although Mirbeau's quarrel with Burne-Jones's Symbolism (and, perhaps more to the point, the excessively allegorical mysticism of the Rose + Croix painters) seems to have been partly motivated by its wilful archaism, from which he inferred a corresponding political conservatism, his repeatedly expressed distaste catalysed a turning of the tide amongst Burne-Jones and Watts's erstwhile Symbolist and Decadent defenders, especially Jean Lorrain and Robert de Montesquiou.¹⁰⁵ Of course, British antinaturalism did not lack for advocates in France in the closing years of the nineteenth century. What distinguished these supporters' accounts, however, were both an appreciation of its affinities with its French counterpart and a palpable nostalgia for the irrecoverable loss of a dream.¹⁰⁶ As the Third Republic's policies shifted inexorably toward the right in the wake of the Boulangist crisis and the escalation of anarchy and the elite retrenched against the spectre of socialism, the private, desolate dream-world of cross-Channel antinaturalism appeared less a questioning – or, in the case of *Hope* and *L'Enfant prodigue*, defiant – alternative to the collective Republican fantasy of 1889 than it seemed to be converging with the more conservative Republic of the *ralliément*. Political and artistic radicals such as Mirbeau and Gustave Geffroy naturally found this hard to stomach. Sizeranne's call to arms for 'the revenge of art on life' had been answered, but with results for which he might not have wished.

¹⁰⁴ Mirbeau's anti-Symbolist writings include 'Des lys! des lys!', *Le Journal* (7 April 1895); 'Toujours des lys', *Le Journal* (28 April 1895); 'Intimités préraphaélites', *Le Journal* (9 June 1895); 'Les artistes de l'âme', *Le Journal* (23 February 1896); 'Mannequins et critiques', *Le Journal* (26 April 1896); and the two-part 'Botticelli proteste!...', *Le Journal* (4-11 October 1896) which imagined Botticelli rising from the grave to protest the Burne-Jonesian perversions being painted in his name (all collected in *Combats esthétiques*, eds. P. Michel and J.-F. Nivet, Paris 1993, vol. 2). Although other Symbolists, particularly Denis and Point, also suffered Mirbeau's barbs, he was consistently kind to Puvis, praising him as 'Le peintre de la vie' (*Le Gaulois*, 26 June 1897). Especially curious in this context is Mirbeau's role in launching the reputation of Maeterlinck, a poet with obvious (and openly acknowledged) debts to Pre-Raphaelite poetry and painting.

¹⁰⁵ Lorrain was a notorious fair-weather friend of artists, and his betrayal of Burne-Jones was particularly cruel; having celebrated the artist in numerous articles, poems and short stories, he began to publish articles deriding him in 1894, culminating in his attack in *Madame Baringhel* on Burne-Jones's portrait of the Baronne Deslandes (shown at the Salon du Champ de Mars in 1896) as 'that washerwoman escaped from the wash house, with her rotted flesh and purplish lips . . . why, she's the muse of bleach!' ('Cette lessiveuse en rupture de lavoir, elle, avec ses chairs faisandées et ces lèvres violâtres . . . mais c'est la Muse de l'eau de Javelle [sic]'). J. Lorrain, *Madame Baringhel* (Paris, 1899), p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ See especially Sizeranne's extended meditation on Burne-Jones's second version of *Love among the Ruins* (Sizeranne 1895, pp. 199-203).

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Chapter 3

Altars of perversity: Burne-Jones, Moreau and the religion of beauty

'The religion of art has established itself on the debris of Faith. This religion wants its priests, its confessors, its martyrs. It raises its basilicas and its chapels. And this, at the very moment when thrones are collapsing, [...] when Renan ironises, when Taine cuts off the flight of the soul by clipping its wings and claims that crime and virtue are the natural products of the brain, like vitriol and sugar . . .'¹

Edward Burne-Jones's 1884 magnum opus, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* [Figure 26], dominates the gallery it now occupies at Tate Britain. With its

forlorn king and enigmatic maiden painted in darkly glowing tones, enveloped in an eerie submarine hush, and flanked by gilded pilasters, it presides over its smaller, brighter neighbours with all the *gravitas* of the high altar in a great cathedral. Across the Channel, in the Musée d'Orsay, Gustave Moreau's *Galatée* [Figure 27, Mathieu 226], painted four years earlier, occupies its own wall in the centre of a smaller, more intimate chamber. Although no longer in its original frame, the dazzling Nereid and her grotto are enclosed in a fair reconstruction of the original, an elaborate, columned neo-Renaissance setting.² If *King Cophetua* seems set in a cathedral nave, *Galatée* and its surroundings more closely resemble a small altarpiece set for private contemplation in a chapel or shrine.

This use of the vocabulary of religious imagery is neither casual, nor is it the product of hindsight. Both *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and *Galatée* engage deliberately, subversively, and even perversely with ideas of worship, with the conventions of religious painting, and with the increasingly porous boundary between the sacred and the profane. Although a strong case can be made for these paintings' function as secular altarpieces dedicated to the worship of Beauty and Woman (sometimes inextricable from each other) in their own right, a greater range of meanings emerges when they are considered not only in the context of a dialogue between their creators, but especially in that of the 1889 Exposition Universelle in

¹ 'La religion de l'art s'est installée sur les débris de la Foi. Cette religion veut ses prêtres, ses confesseurs, ses martyrs. Elle dresse ses basiliques et ses chapelles. Cela, au moment même où les trônes s'écroulent, [...] où Renan ironise, où Taine coupe l'essor de l'âme en lui rognant les ailes et prétend que le crime et la vertu sont des produits naturels du cerveau comme le vitriol et le sucre'. Raynaud (1918), vol. 1, p. 44.

² *Galatée's* original frame was larger and more imposing than its present one, judging from the measurements, which included the frame as well as the painting, that appeared in the 1880 Salon *livret*; see G. Lacambre, 'La *Galatée* de Gustave Moreau entre au musée d'Orsay', 48/14, *La revue du Musée d'Orsay* 6 (spring 1998) (hereafter Lacambre 1998b), p. 50.

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Paris, where they were displayed in their respective nations' fine art exhibitions. The Exposition, the first truly republican one held under the aegis of the troubled Third Republic, an era, as we will recall, aptly characterised by Daniel Halévy as 'a regime of discord tempered by festivals' and by Eugen Weber as 'one long crisis, every lull overshadowed by disbelief that it could last',³ is generally acknowledged by scholars as a high-water mark in the Symbolist dialogue between Britain and France, particularly with regard to the establishment and flowering of Burne-Jones's reputation on the Continent and to his personal and artistic exchange with Moreau.⁴ Yet no study of the 1889 Exposition thus far has focused closely on the parallels between, and resonances generated by, these two paintings.

The Exposition was also an event remarkable for the prevalence of quasireligious language found in contemporary discussions of it. Keeping in mind Georges Bataille's definition of the festival as a site where the 'aspiration for destruction', particularly sacrifice, is given controlled rein, while at the same time offering all the possibilities of consumption at once,⁵ I shall consider the Exposition as a whole as a religious site to which the masses flocked to worship at the altars of new divinities: Technology, Progress, Commerce, Modernity. In this examination of *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and *Galatée* in relation to their setting in this modern pantheon, I hope to show not only the multiple levels on which Burne-Jones and Moreau engaged in a dialogue with each other, but also how their works respond to the shifting notions of religion and religiosity at play within the Exposition to formulate a new and transgressive mode of devotion.

Prelude: The Grosvenor Gallery, the Salon, and the Origins of a Dialogue

As artists who regularly worked with sacred subject matter in the conventional sense, Burne-Jones and Moreau were in a unique position to test and even violate the established practices of religious art. While explicitly religious paintings occupy a relatively minor position in his oeuvre, Burne-Jones, who had gone to Oxford with the intention of taking orders, was involved in the design of church decoration from early in his career. Moreau, on the other hand, did begin his public career as a religious painter: his first Salon work was a Pietà (1852, Mathieu 11) bought by the French ³ Halévy (1936), p. 423; E. Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge and London, 1986), p. 47. ⁴ See, for example, Lethève (1959); Allemand-Cosneau in Munro (1992), pp. 69-80; Wilton and Upstone (1997); *Des Cars* in Wildman and Christian (1998), pp. 25-40; and Dubernard-Laurent (1996). ⁵ G. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. R. Hurley (New York, 1989, 1973), pp. 53-54.

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state for the high altar of the cathedral of Angoulême and seven years later, on another state commission, he produced a rather lacklustre *Chemin de Croix* (Mathieu 61-74) for the church of Décazeville, although religious subjects soon gave way to a highly personal interpretation of history painting in the grand manner. In any case, by the time they produced the works under discussion here, both artists had established a long precedent of fusing literary or mythological subject matter with religious, and more specifically, medieval and renaissance Christian compositional conventions. One of Moreau's greatest Salon successes, *Orphée* [Figure 28, Mathieu 84], openly appropriated Pietà imagery, an act which did not pass unnoticed by the critics; Paul de Saint-Victor described the Thracian maiden as resembling 'a female saint of the German school' and declared that 'the head of Orpheus, asleep in its blond hair, angelic and not at all antique, is also that of a Christian martyr'.⁶

While Moreau's borrowing of religious motifs did not initially ruffle many feathers in Catholic France, Burne-Jones, who came of age artistically within the controversy of the Catholic Emancipation Act, the High Church movement and the beginnings of Aestheticism in Britain, sometimes provoked critics at home. For example, his *Laus Veneris* [Figure 29], shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1878, elicited reactions ranging from discomfort to outright anger. Frederick Wedmore attacked it as 'an uncomfortable picture, so wan and death-like, so stricken with disease of the soul, so eaten up and gnawed away with discomfort and desire, is that sad Queen of Love'.⁷ Although he does not say so in the review, the cause of his wrath may well have been Burne-Jones's overt casting of the goddess of Love in the role of the Virgin Mary; Gail-Nina Anderson has described the picture as 'a perverse *Sacra conversazione* where the life of the senses has leached out all spirituality'.⁸ The rose lying on the floor and the crown resting on Venus's knees, both traditional attributes of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven, give credence to this view. Wedmore and his fellow critics would also have been cognisant of the picture's roots in ⁶ 'Une sainte femme de l'École allemande'; 'La tête d'Orphée, endormie dans ses cheveux blonds, angélique et nullement antique, est aussi celle d'un martyr chrétien'. P. de Saint-Victor, 'Salon de 1866', *La Presse* (13 May 1866), cited in P. Cooke, *Gustave Moreau et les arts jumeaux* (Bern, 2003), p. 83. Cooke also cites several other of Moreau's pictures that appropriate Christian imagery: *Jason et Médée* (1865), Adam and Eve; *Leda* (various versions), the Annunciation or the Coronation of the Virgin; and *Prometheus* (1869), the Passion. The list is probably not exhaustive. For a different view of *Orphée*'s symbolism, see Chapter 5.

⁷ Wedmore (1880), p. 219; the review originally appeared in *Temple Bar Magazine*, May 1878.

⁸ G.-N. Anderson and J. Wright, *Heaven on Earth: the Religion of Beauty in Late Victorian Art* (exh. cat., Nottingham, Djanogly Art Gallery, 1994), p. 42.

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Swinburne's poem of the same name, a retelling of the Tannhäuser legend that shifted the emphasis from repentance and the triumph of Christian virtue to a celebration of

super-sensuous, amoral beauty in which Venus is exalted above the Virgin (early in the poem, Tannhäuser exclaims, ‘Nay, fair Lord Christ, lift up thine eyes and see; / Had now thy mother such a lip – like this? / Thou knowest how sweet a thing it is to me’);⁹ memories of Robert Buchanan’s polemical attack on Swinburne’s ‘blasphemy [and] wretched animalism’ in *The Fleshly School of Poetry* (1871) may also still have been at the back of their minds. When we take into account the fact that *Laus Veneris* was exhibited in a Protestant country still deeply suspicious of Mariolatry and of the veneration of images in general, its ability to unsettle viewers takes on another shade of meaning.¹⁰

Neither *King Cophetua* nor *Galatée* was a new work by the time of the 1889 Exposition Universelle. In order better to understand the impact of these two works at the Exposition, we need to return to the origins of *King Cophetua* and *Galatée*, examining their inspiration, the environments in which they were first exhibited, and the ways they were first received in their native countries. Both works were a long time in germinating, taking more than two decades each to emerge in their final form;¹¹ we must also consider that, over this germination period, Burne-Jones and Moreau came in contact with each other’s work in the flesh for the first time when they exhibited together at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 and at the 1878 Exposition Universelle – the first time Moreau’s work had been shown in Britain, and Burne-Jones’s first outing in France.¹² When Burne-Jones first encountered Moreau’s *L’Apparition* in 1877, he would have been roughing out the composition of the definitive version of *King Cophetua*, although he did not begin working it up on canvas for another three years – the same year *Galatée* appeared at the Salon. The following year, not only were both artists exhibiting together, they were both themselves in Paris; although we have no written evidence of them meeting then (and

⁹ A. C. Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads* (London, 2000, first published 1866), pp. 9-22. Swinburne dedicated the volume ‘to my friend Edward Burne-Jones’.

¹⁰ On the controversy surrounding the High Church movement and the impact of anti-Catholic criticism on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in the 1840s and 1850s, an impact which would continue to be felt, albeit in muted form, for decades afterward, see J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 20-36.

¹¹ In fact, Moreau did not consider *Galatée* finished even after it had been exhibited at the Salon of 1880 and bought by Edmond Taigny; he asked Taigny to return it to him the following year for minor reworking (Lacambre 1998b, p. 54).

¹² See Chapter 1.

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in Burne-Jones’s case our only record of his activities during this, his last visit to Paris, is, infuriatingly, of his attendance at a *guignol* performance with his teenaged son and William Morris), it seems fair to assume that they saw each others’ work at the Exposition. Reproductions of the work of both artists were also becoming more readily available. Prints after Burne-Jones in France have already been discussed; reproductions of Moreau’s work followed soon after.¹³ Indeed, although he never saw *Galatée* in person, Burne-Jones could have encountered it either in a photograph published by Goupil during the 1880 Salon [Figure 30], and probably available from the firm’s London offices; one of Moreau’s compositional studies for the painting was also published that year in Philippe de Chennevières’s Salon review in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. Reproductions can, of course, only capture so much of the spirit and often little of the physical presence of the original, particularly in the case of artists renowned for their colour and their manipulation of surface effect; in *King Cophetua*, though, the subtle encrustation on the king’s armour and crown and especially on the roundels on his cloak seems to indicate that Burne-Jones had closely studied the jewelled, textured surfaces of Moreau’s paintings. Thus, although we have no

evidence of them meeting or corresponded before 1889, by the time both artists began to work in earnest on these paintings, they were aware of one another's work and also, perhaps, of the comparisons critics were beginning to draw between them.

Burne-Jones turned for inspiration to the ballad 'The King and the Beggar Maid' in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and to Tennyson's 'The Beggar Maid', a sixteen-line condensation of the ballad first published in 1842. His first attempt at the subject dates from 1861-62 [Figure 31], relatively early in his career, is a literal transcription of the first six lines of Tennyson's poem:

Her arms across her breast she laid,
She was more fair than words can say:
Bare-footed came the beggar maid
Before the king Cophetua.
In robe and crown the king stepped down
To meet and greet her on her way.¹⁴

¹³ For a survey of the reproduction of Moreau's work during his lifetime, see G. Lacambre, 'La diffusion de l'oeuvre de Gustave Moreau par la reproduction au XIXe siècle', *Bulletin de la Société J.-K. Huysmans* 94 (2001), pp. 30-51. I shall discuss the role of reproductive prints in establishing Moreau's reputation in Britain in Chapter 5.

¹⁴ C. Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson* (London, 1969), p. 522. 'The Beggar Maid' was written in 1833, the year of Burne-Jones's birth.

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The depiction of action came off awkwardly; realising his failure, Burne-Jones laid the work aside unfinished. When he took up the subject again, apparently around 1875, he settled on a different composition, a scene that featured in neither poem: a moment not yet reached in 'The Beggar Maid' and not actually described in the ballad, that of the king seated in his palace, gazing up in mute admiration at the beggar maid perched above him on his throne.¹⁵ Significantly, the inspiration for the new design appears to have been Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* [Figure 32], which Burne-Jones had first seen at the Louvre in 1855 and of which he is known to have possessed an engraving.¹⁶ But *King Cophetua* takes telling liberties with Mantegna's design, placing the beggar maid higher than the Virgin and Cophetua at the viewer's level, thus very much below the beggar maid and literally beneath her notice. When Burne-Jones exhibited the final version at the Grosvenor Gallery's summer exhibition in 1884 (and it is worth noting in passing that the Grosvenor itself was often spoken of, whether reverentially or in jest, in religious terms, as a 'temple of art'), Théodore Duret was less than impressed, complaining in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* that Burne-Jones's choice of subject was symptomatic of the insularity and parochialism of British art (a criticism which, as we shall see, is unjustified).¹⁷ British critics, however, overwhelmingly hailed it as a masterpiece. Yet oddly, the major reviews skirted over the work's religious and potentially blasphemous overtones; most focused their attention on the figure of the king, whom the critic for the conservative *Art Journal* considered a salutary change of direction in Burne-Jones's oeuvre, which had been dogged up until then by accusations of 'morbidness' and 'unmanliness':
Can we in two lines tell of the high humility, the manliness, the chivalry of the noble figure, who, his crown in his hand, sits on the lowest step of the throne, on whose summit he has placed the beggar maid? His gaze is turned towards his love, a gaze of reverence, almost of adoration, for her simple beauty and purity. There is no feeling in Cophetua's mind that he has bent down to this woman.¹⁸

¹⁵ See D. Robinson, Letter to the Editor, *Apollo* (May 1973), p. 626; Robinson dates the origin of the new composition to 1875 based on two sheets of sketches in the Fitzwilliam Museum.

¹⁶ W. S. Taylor, 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid', *Apollo* (February 1973), pp. 151-52. Burne-

Jones's debt to Mantegna was noted by at least two contemporary observers in France, Maurice Hamel and Jean Lorrain.

¹⁷ 'Le sujet . . . même avec l'aide du catalogue reste incompréhensible à tout autre qu'un Anglais': T. Duret, 'Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor Gallery', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1884), pp. 534-35.

¹⁸ 'London Spring Exhibitions: The Grosvenor and the Water-Colour Societies', *Art Journal* (1884), p. 189.

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The sentimental and moralising tone of this review effectively silences any transgressive nuances at play in the painting; furthermore, the reviewer shifts the emphasis away from the beggar maid as object of worship/adoration by dismissing her as 'infinitely less moving than her lover . . . she cannot fail to be less interesting than the king', as well as diminishing the interest and significance of the figures' exotic surroundings by claiming that 'it is the idea, the inspiration of this picture that makes it so fine', rather than execution or technique.¹⁹ F. G. Stephens, reviewing the show for the *Athenaeum*, gives a subtler reading, with greater attention paid to the aesthetic and decorative importance of the setting, but still couches the king's attitude in the language of chivalry rather than of religious devotion: 'The swarthy face of the king [...] is turned upwards with chivalric reverence and self-abnegation'.²⁰ As we shall see, the rapturous reaction to *King Cophetua* in 1889 contrasts sharply with the restraint of its first British critics; it was appreciated for reasons on the other side of the Channel that would likely have surprised its original viewers.

Moreau, on the other hand, derived the inspiration for *Galatée* from both verbal and visual sources: the former, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a personal bible since boyhood; the latter, the frescoes by Raphael [Figure 33] and Sebastiano del Piombo [Figure 34] in the Sala di Galatea in the Villa Farnesina, which he visited during his stay in Italy between 1857 and 1859, and of which he owned a print.²¹ Closer to home, a walk in the Jardins du Luxembourg would have taken him past Auguste-Louis Ottin's new sculptural group, *Polyphemus surprising Acis and Galatea* [Figure 35], from which he appears to have derived the composition of Polyphemus watching over a reclining Galatea from above. Yet in opposition to the dynamism of *The Triumph of Galatea*, and the blood-and-thunder theatrics of Ottin's sculpture, Moreau conceived an image of hieratic silence. Apparently drawing on a favourite subject entirely of his own invention, *La Fée aux griffons* [Figure 36] (and possibly on a reproduction of *Laus Veneris*, with which it shares elements of composition and atmosphere) but making a number of significant changes, particularly in the lowered eyelids and more languid, abandoned pose,²² he set a dreaming, solitary Galatea in a

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ 'The Grosvenor Exhibition (First Notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2949 (3 May 1884).

²¹ Both the print after *The Triumph of Galatea* and a 1660 French edition of the *Metamorphoses*, the latter containing sketches and annotations by Moreau, remained in his possession for the rest of his life and are still to be found in the Musée Gustave-Moreau.

²² See P.-L. Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 1994), pp. 142-43, for further discussion of the parallels between *La Fée aux griffons* and *Galatée*.

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fantastic underwater grotto, apparently unaware of being spied upon by the brooding Cyclops.

When *Galatée* appeared at the Salon of 1880, the last at which Moreau would exhibit, observers were alternately dazzled and bemused. One of the critics in the former category was J.-K. Huysmans, who waxed lyrical – and mystical – in his review:

Here above all the magianisms of the brush of this visionary burst forth [...]

This cavern illuminated by precious stones like a tabernacle . . . contain[s] the inimitable and radiant jewel, the white body, breasts and lips tinted rose, of Galatea, asleep in her long pale hair!²³

Fittingly, Huysmans was the founder and spiritual leader in France of an unofficial cult of Moreau and his art; Des Esseintes, the protagonist of his key novel *À rebours* (itself characterised by Arthur Symons as ‘the breviary of the Decadence’), practices what can only be described as the perverse ritual veneration of Moreau’s pictures.²⁴ Other Symbolist and Decadent writers were quick to follow in Huysmans’s steps; by the end of the decade, the poets Jules Laforgue and Francis Poictevin were writing about making ‘pilgrimages’ to the Musée du Luxembourg to gaze at *Orpheus*, Moreau’s only work then in a public collection, and on a more modest scale, devotees could make a similar pilgrimage to see *Galatée* hanging in the home of its owner, Edmond Taigny, who generously allowed access to those interested in viewing it.²⁵ *Galatée* drew a distinctly lukewarm response from the few British critics who responded to it at all; the reviewer for the *Athenaeum* (possibly William Michael Rossetti or F. G. Stephens) grumbled that ‘M. Gustave Moreau has produced pictures which the irreverent call pyrotechnic [...] In [*Galatée*] the subject is a mere excuse for the display of tawdry colour and meretricious sentiment’.²⁶ Even the more sympathetic Francophile critic, Claude Phillips, although he found much to admire in Moreau’s oeuvre and drew favourable comparisons between his work and that of

²³ ‘C’est ici surtout que vont éclater les magismes du pinceau de ce visionnaire [...] cet antre illuminé de pierres précieuses comme un tabernacle et contenant l’inimitable et radieux bijou, le corps blanc, teinté de rose aux seins et aux lèvres, de la Galatée endormie dans ses longs cheveux pâles!’ J.-K. Huysmans, ‘Salon officiel de 1880’, in *L’Art moderne* (Paris, 1883), pp. 136-138. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the French are my own. In the present case, I have followed the translator’s lead in my rendering of ‘magismes’, apparently a neologism of Huysmans’s invention: Lacambre (1998a), p. 191.

²⁴ See Huysmans (1884), pp. 141-49, for the infamous ekphrasis on *Salomé* and *L’Apparition*.

²⁵ We know this thanks to Moreau’s student, Henri Evenepoel, who described a visit to Taigny’s collection in a letter to his father; he evinced little regard for *Galatée*, preferring the watercolour *Les Voix* (see Lacambre, 1998b, pp. 57-58).

²⁶ ‘The Salon, Paris (First Notice)’, *Athenaeum* no. 2741 (8 May 1880), p. 607.

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Burne-Jones, acknowledged *Galatée*’s ‘charming . . . conception of the bright seanymp,

joying in her ever-fresh youth and free from the burdening thoughts and woes of mortality’ but dismissed the picture in the same breath as ‘marred by the accessories . . . which are treated in somewhat childishly emphatic fashion’.²⁷ Still, the fact that *Galatée* attracted critical notice at all indicates the inroads Moreau had made into the British press’s consciousness since 1877, when *L’Apparition* appeared at the Grosvenor Gallery to deafening silence. In a milieu where omitting to mention a painting in a review effectively nullified its existence, bad or indifferent press could be more effective than none at all in the formation of an artist’s reputation. And in any case, critical reception notwithstanding, *Galatée* appears to have found its way into Burne-Jones’s horizons and may well have been on his mind while he was at work on *King Cophetua*. Placed together within the ostensibly secular milieu of the 1889 Exposition, however, both paintings’ reinterpretation of devotional art took on a deeper and more unsettling significance.

Marianne versus La Vierge Marie: Religious Imagery in the Republic of the Republicans and the Exposition as Religious Site

Like many such unequivocal statements, Robert Tombs’s assertion that the Third Republic ‘set out not to use but to replace the Church’ is potentially misleading

and needs further qualification; had he finished the sentence with ‘. . . with a religion of its own’, he might have struck closer to the mark.²⁸ It is certainly true that the Republic entered its truly republican phase (upon the election of Jules Grévy to the presidency in 1879) on a wave of anticlericalism, and that, although church and state would not formally separate until 1905, the power struggle in which they had been involved for much of the century seemed to be tipping definitively in favour of the state under the pressures of Republican reforms. Indeed, the government engaged in open Church-baiting with its appropriation of saints’ days for holidays celebrating Republican ideals and of the Panthéon to enshrine the Republic’s ‘secular saints’.²⁹ But, faced with a vacuum of its own making, the government responded by inventing its own, self-reflexive religion, complete with a complex iconographic programme. The irony of an ostensibly forward-looking, ‘an-iconic regime’, in the words of

²⁷ C. Phillips, ‘Gustave Moreau’, *Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), pp. 230-31.

²⁸ Tombs (1996), p. 139.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

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Maurice Agulhon, needing to invent an iconography for itself gave rise to some disconcerting contradictions.³⁰ The divinity of the Republic was Marianne, consciously modelled, significantly, on a pagan goddess, Ceres. Presumably a figure with classical antecedents was chosen for its associations with Enlightenment ideals and to highlight Marianne’s role as an ‘anti-Madonna’. However, in actual practice images of the ‘goddess’ were created, positioned, and treated in much the same way as the Catholic images of the Virgin they sought to supplant; reports of good citizens bending the knee, without a hint of irony, to a bust of Marianne set on a plinth before a *mairie* were quite common,³¹ bearing witness to the elision of Catholic practice and the new cult of the Republic. Not surprisingly, Marianne figured prominently in the architectural decoration and freestanding statuary of the 1889 Exposition; her blandly beneficent presence was as ubiquitous as that of the Virgin in the sculptural programme of a cathedral.³²

A few words should be said at this point about the dramatic changes in status that sacred images and objects underwent from the mid-nineteenth century on both sides of the Channel. I have already spoken of the perceived threat posed by religious images *in a religious context* within Protestant Britain and the need to defuse that threat by decontextualising them, by redirecting the emphasis from doctrine to formal qualities (exemplified by the growing scholarly interest in Renaissance art) and mood (typified by artists involved in Aestheticism). The case in France was rather different. Despite the Republic’s hard-edged anticlericalism, which in 1889, on the eve of the *ralliement* (the short-lived and tentative rapprochement between Church and state) was beginning to soften, the state continued to support and commission religious art.³³ However, it championed artists who worked in a Naturalist mode, regarding styles that smacked of archaism as tainted by their associations with the legitimist movement and as harking back to the bad old days of a government dominated by clerics.³⁴ (Indeed,

³⁰ M. Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir. L’imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris, 1989), pp. 21-22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 175.

³² For Marianne’s presence and significance at the Exposition, and throughout Paris, see Burolet (1989).

³³ On the effects of the *ralliement* of the early 1890s on religious painting, see Thomson (2004), pp. 117-22.

³⁴ For a far more in-depth discussion of the status and practice of religious painting under the Third Republic, see M. P. Driskel, *Representing Belief: Politics, Religion, and Society in Nineteenth Century France* (University Park, 1992). Especially relevant here is his tracing of the co-opting of a hieratic,

'Byzantine' aesthetic by the avant-garde from its origins in the authoritarian Ultramontane movement. See also Thomson (2004), pp. 135-39, for a analysis of the ambiguities inherent in modern-life,
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the predominance of this state-sponsored Naturalism, particularly in the work of Bastien-Lepage and his disciples, in the Decennale exhibition at the Exposition probably played a part in Moreau's decision to show his work exclusively in the Centennale, although as a newly elected Academician and a member of the selection jury, he was entitled to show in both.)³⁵ Among the defining qualities of this officially sanctioned Naturalism were its emphasis on narrative action and its embrace of a modern notion of time very much at odds with the changelessness ordinarily associated with religious images. We may recall Hans Belting's thesis that one of the central themes running through the history of religious imagery is the privileging of the hieratic image, or *imago*, over the narrative, or *historia*;³⁶ Third Republic policy would seem, in its relentless promotion of secular modernity, to be attempting to abolish this time-honoured hierarchy.

At the same time, France and Britain were in the grip of a burgeoning craze for sacred objects, both genuine and counterfeit, as collector's items. Museums in both countries, particularly the Musée de Cluny in Paris and the South Kensington Museum in London, were either set up specifically to house medieval, for which in most cases we may read religious, objects, or collected them in quantities; removed from their original settings in churches and monasteries, these began to acquire an aura of aesthetic mystique divorced from, but also in some ways a subversion or perversion of, their intended function.³⁷ (It hardly seems coincidental that two of the most avid fictional collectors of religious objects were the great Decadent heroes of France and Britain, Des Esseintes and Dorian Gray.³⁸) Conversely, religious adoration began to be displaced onto objects and symbols that had not originally had any sacred content; we have already seen one example of this in the guise of Marianne, and as we shall see in a tour of the grounds of the 1889 Exposition, it could assume a bewildering variety of forms.

Naturalist interpretations of religious subjects and in the concurrent casting of secular subjects in sacred terms by leading Naturalists such as Lhermitte and Cottet.

³⁵ See Chapter 2. Moreau's aversion to Naturalism is apparent in much of his art critical writings; see Cooke (2002), vol. 2.

³⁶ H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of Images before the Age of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago 1994), p. 20.

³⁷ On the collecting of medieval art for art's sake, see E. Emery and L. Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: the Medieval Revival in fin-de-siècle France* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 61-84. See also Weber (1986), pp. 34-35, on the fashion among the elite for decadent mysticism and neo-Catholicism in the late 1880s and 1890s and its relationship to the craze for all things (pseudo) medieval.

³⁸ On Dorian's obsessive collecting of copes, descriptions of which were lifted almost verbatim from a guide to the collections of the South Kensington Museum, see O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford, 1994, 1891), pp. 114-15.

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Where, then, do Burne-Jones and Moreau's own ideas on religion fit within this highly charged and paradox-ridden milieu? Neither was a conventional Christian; what few tantalising clues they have left us as to their beliefs may shed some light on how they, and their art, responded to these contradictions. Burne-Jones, as has already been mentioned, read theology at Oxford with the intention of taking orders. According to one of his first biographers, Fortunée de Lisle, during his first year at Oxford, Burne-Jones and his new friend William Morris, ablaze with enthusiasm fed by the heady atmosphere of the Tractarian movement, aspired to found a monastery 'in which they might "combine an ascetic life with the organised production of religious art"; – even then they felt that their religious vocation would be incomplete

unless it included art'.³⁹ Although within a year he had given up this dream, ultimately deciding that art need not be subservient to religion and could be pursued as an end in itself, and despite the contradiction inherent in his being a decorator of churches who gradually stopped attending church, the inseparability in his mind of aesthetic and spiritual concerns continued to inform his oeuvre. If he took pains to dissociate himself from the sillier expressions of this philosophy by certain followers of Aestheticism, the divinity of art and the artistic value of divinity are nonetheless defining concerns in his work, and particularly in *King Cophetua*.

Moreau's religious ideals are rather more difficult to pin down. The child of agnostic parents who appears not to have received a religious education, he was never a practicing Catholic, and his suspicion of the more outrageous manifestations of the Catholic revival of the 1890s (particularly Sâr Péladan and the Salon de la Rose + Croix) is well documented. However, he does seem to have adhered to a number of typical beliefs of the period, including the cult of the Virgin, the veneration of the blood of martyrs, and hostility to scientific positivism.⁴⁰ The only real clues he left as to his beliefs are a series of jottings that probably date from the 1880s in which he set forth a highly personal *credo*:

Do you believe in God?

I believe *only* in him.

I believe neither in that which I touch, nor in that which I see. I only believe in what I do not see and uniquely in what I feel.

³⁹ F. de Lisle, *Burne-Jones* (London, 1904), p. 13.

⁴⁰ See Mathieu (1994), pp. 174-76, and Driskel (1992), p. 229.

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My brain, my reason seem ephemeral to me and of a questionable reality; my interior sentiment alone seems eternal to me and incontestably certain.⁴¹

The similarities of sentiment and vocabulary to the concurrent explosion of Symbolist manifestoes, with their privileging of suggestion and inner vision over the positivist insistence that seeing is believing, is striking. At a later date, Moreau elaborated on this Symbolist/religious manifesto, describing the ideal artist as having 'a soul of childlike ingenuity and stupefying complication; this soul, as a function of art, impose[s] on itself the task of showing everywhere and always . . . that which comes directly from God and that which was neither fashioned nor deformed by men'.⁴²

Both his vision and that of Burne-Jones initially seem to locate them outside the prevailing mood, and many are the writers who have fallen into the trap of considering their art in isolation, or as an instinctive recoiling from it.⁴³ I would argue, instead, that both artists' commitment to a religion of aestheticism and an aesthetic vision of religion engages directly and multifariously with contemporary religious debate – nowhere more so than within the Exposition.

A new array of nuances opens up when we consider *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* within the architectural setting of the Exposition Universelle. Although the Exposition's organisers promoted it as an unequivocal celebration of progress, a revival of the expansive spirit of the 1867 Exposition after the lean years of the early Third Republic,⁴⁴ and there is every indication that the majority of the Expositiongoing

public responded with wholehearted enthusiasm, peeling back the veneer of propaganda reveals a deep ambivalence toward the prevailing Liberal ideology of free trade, material progress, imperialism and capitalism that informed most elements of

⁴¹ 'Croyez-vous en Dieu? Je ne crois qu'à lui seul. Je ne crois ni à ce que je touche, ni à ce que je vois. Je ne crois qu'à ce que je ne vois pas et uniquement à ce que je sens. Mon cerveau, ma raison me semblent éphémères et d'une réalité douteuse; mon sentiment intérieur seul me paraît éternel,

incontestablement certain'. Cooke (2002), vol. 1, p. 163. Cooke dates this note after 1880 based on a reference in the remainder of the text to the (apparently recent) death of Flaubert.

⁴² 'Une âme d'une ingénuité enfantine et d'une complication stupéfiante. Cette âme, comme fonction d'art, s'était imposé le devoir de montrer partout et toujours . . . ce qui lui vient directement de Dieu et ce qui n'a pas été façonné ni déformé par les hommes'. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 165. Cooke believes this note may have been a self-penned obituary.

⁴³ Huysmans must bear the blame for originating the stereotype of Moreau as 'un mystique enfermé, en plein Paris, dans une cellule où ne pénètre même plus le bruit de la vie contemporaine qui bat furieusement pourtant les portes du cloître': Huysmans (1883), p. 135. Burne-Jones's definition of his art as 'a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be – in a better light than any light that ever shone – in a land that no one can define or remember, only desire' has often been cited uncritically by scholars as evidence of wilful isolation from society; see for example M. Harrison and B. Waters, *Burne-Jones* (London, 1973) and P. Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones* (Stroud, 1975, 1997).

⁴⁴ Isay (1937), p. 182.

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the Exposition.⁴⁵ This unease becomes painfully apparent when we examine three of the principal architectural spaces in the Exposition grounds: the Palais des Beaux-Arts, the Galerie des Machines, and the Tour Eiffel.

Of the three, the Palais des Beaux-Arts [Figures 37.1-12.4] made the greatest effort to conceal its modern design and construction, draping a historicising skin, complete with allegorical figures of Poetry, Study, Truth and Colour, over its iron framework. Although Frantz Jourdain praised the decorators for their use of modern, industrial materials without attempting to disguise them,⁴⁶ and the architects Dutert, Sauvestre and Formigé for breaking with the teachings of the École des Beaux-Arts, the supposed triumph of ahistorical architecture is not so clear-cut when we examine the building from two different angles, inside and out. Viewed side-on, the palace's exterior displays the streaming horizontality of a contemporary urban train station. Yet viewed from its frontal approach, with its dome of glittering faience tiles, it resembles nothing so much as an Italian Gothic church. Once inside, the central hall and ground floor sculpture galleries extend the impression of streaming forward motion, evoking the anxiety of rushing through a crowd (in this case, of sculptures as well as of people) to catch a train – but again, beneath the dome, as well as in some of the galleries (not least in the British Fine Art section) a reverential calm and stillness reigned. Paul Mantz made this most explicit in his comment that the Palais des Beaux-Arts had 'the calming serenity of a temple', though he was quick to temper any undue religious overtones by qualifying it as a temple of peace where the results of the artistic conflicts since the Revolution now hung in 'fraternity and concord'.⁴⁷

Moving beyond the uneasy compromise between a quasi-sacred past and an ahistorical present, we come to the Exposition's most iconic structures, the Galerie des Machines and the Tour Eiffel. The machine hall [Figures 38.1-2] might be considered an exercise in architectural jingoism: modelled on St Pancras Station, then the largest freestanding iron structure in the world, it seemed to be trying to beat British technological prowess at its own game.⁴⁸ Beneath its soaring glass and iron vault,

⁴⁵ See Greenhalgh (1988), pp. 23-27, for further discussion of the driving political ideology behind the pre-1914 Expositions.

⁴⁶ Jourdain (1889), pp. 36-38. See also Chapter 2.

⁴⁷ 'La sérénité calmante d'un temple'; 'fraternité et concorde': P. Mantz, 'Exposition universelle de 1889: La Peinture française (1^{er} article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 2 (July 1889), p. 28.

⁴⁸ For the history and design of the Galerie des Machines, see M.-L. Crosnier Leconte, 'La Galerie des Machines', in C. Mathieu (1989), pp. 164-95.

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progress elevated to the realm and status of deities. It was a point not lost on observers, whether or not they approved (although of the key buildings on the Champ

de Mars, it was the most consistently praised by otherwise sceptical critics, both British and French) – but in terms of sheer contentiousness it paled in comparison with the Tour Eiffel.

It is easy to forget that the tower, so much a part of Paris's identity for the past century, was once viewed as an unwelcome intruder in the cityscape; before the design had even been agreed, controversy was already swirling around it. Before the design competition opened, a reporter for *La Semaine des Constructeurs* was already scoffing at the very idea as 'an ill-advised rival to the Tower of Babel';⁴⁹ shortly after the winning design, by Eiffel and Sauvestre, was selected, Paul Eudel, writing in *L'Illustration*, again labelled it a 'Tower of Babel', adding, 'personally, I confess I'd willingly swap this heavy piece of iron scaffolding for the chapel of Amboise, the doors of Saint-Maclou, the campanile of Pisa, the spire of the Sainte-Chapelle or the staircase of Chambord'.⁵⁰ Eudel's desire to substitute a piece of ecclesiastical architecture of established aesthetic merit for this unapologetically stripped down and of-the-moment structure betrays an anxiety voiced by other observers that the tower would displace Notre-Dame as the city's symbol (indeed, this anxiety seems to have been compounded by the recognition that the tower's design fused the spire of Notre-Dame and the legs of the Arc de Triomphe), and by extension, exchange the values represented by the church for the empty glamour of progress and commerce.

Huysmans memorably employed the trope of Tour Eiffel versus Notre-Dame in a scathing attack on the Exposition's architecture, declaring,

[The tower] should be the spire of Notre-Dame of the Junk Shop, a spire stripped of bells, but armed with a cannon that announces the opening and closing of the offices, that calls the faithful to the Mass of finance, to the Vespers of the bank charge, a cannon which sounds, with its volleys of powder, the liturgical feast days of Capital!⁵¹

⁴⁹ 'Malencontreuse rivale de la Tour de Babel': *La Semaine des Constructeurs* 10, no. 45 (May 1886), p. 537.

⁵⁰ 'Personnellement j'avoue que je troquerais ce lourd échafaudage en fer, pour la chapelle d'Amboise, les portes de Saint-Maclou, le campanile de Pise, la flèche de la Sainte-Chapelle, ou l'escalier de Chambord': P. Eudel, 'Les Projets du concours pour l'Exposition de 1889', *L'Illustration* 87, no. 2258 (5 June 1886), p. 395.

⁵¹ 'Elle serait la flèche de Notre-Dame de la Brocante, la flèche privée des cloches, mais armée d'un canon qui annonce l'ouverture et la fin des offices, qui convie les fidèles aux messes de la finance, aux vêpres de l'agio, d'un canon, qui sonne, avec ses volées de poudre, les fêtes liturgiques du Capital!': Huysmans (1889), p. 179.

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Even popular souvenir images of the Exposition bore witness to this ambivalence. Some of the more high-flown illustrations portrayed the tower emerging from a starry mist like a celestial being; on the other hand, an engraving by Georges Garen [Figure 39] depicting the Exposition grounds at night gives the Tower, ablaze with artificial light and wreathed at its base with crimson smoke from the fireworks and plumes of spray from the illuminated fountains, a decidedly diabolical – even apocalyptic – air. **Animal, Vegetable, Mineral – Or All Three at Once?**

Within this confrontation between iron/modernity and church/tradition, the ways in which Burne-Jones and Moreau treat metal, decoration, and construction assume a particular potency. Robert de la Sizeranne recalled the stunning effect *King Cophetua* engendered when it was viewed within, and in contrast to, the overall setting of the Exposition; it is worth revisiting his impressions:

It seemed as though we had come forth from the Universal Exhibition of Wealth to see the symbolical expression of the Scorn of Wealth. All round this room were others, where emblems and signs of strength and luxury were

collected from all the nations of the world – pyramids, silvered or gilt, representing the amount of precious metal dug year by year out of the earth; palaces and booths containing the most sumptuous products of the remotest isles – and here behold a king laying his crown at the feet of a beggar-maid for her beauty’s sake! . . . It was a dream – but a noble dream – and every young man who passed that way, even though resolved never to sacrifice strength to right, or riches to beauty, was glad, nevertheless, that an artist should have depicted the Apotheosis of Poverty. It was the revenge of art on life.⁵²

Thanks to a schematic plan of the British galleries reproduced in the catalogue of the British Fine Art section, we know that *King Cophetua* occupied a commanding position in the second gallery of oil paintings, on an end wall in the long, narrow space, flanked by G. F. Watts’s *Hope* and *The Judgment of Paris* – like the high altar in a church.⁵³ Although Sizeranne does not allude to it here, his assessment of the effect of *King Cophetua* as an altarpiece celebrating the supremacy of Beauty over Wealth within the British galleries takes on further significance when we consider that in the same room hung Watts’s *Mammon*. Subtitled by the artist, ‘Dedicated to His Worshippers’, this cruel personification of wealth was unambiguously posited as an anti-altarpiece; as we will recall, Watts had earlier expressed a wish to erect a statue of

⁵² Sizeranne (1898), p. 515.

⁵³ H. Blackburn, *A Complete Illustrated Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture in the British Fine Art Section* (London and Paris, 1889), p. 43. No installation views of the British galleries have thus far surfaced; likewise, no plans of the hang of the Centennale have been traced.

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the monster in Hyde Park, in the hope that ‘his worshippers would be at least honest enough to bend the knee publicly to him’.⁵⁴

However, Sizeranne’s paeon to this ‘Apotheosis of Poverty’ obscures the complexity of its relation to its surroundings. *King Cophetua*, its longstanding association with the Socialist philosophy of Burne-Jones’s friend William Morris notwithstanding, is not a straightforward deprecation of wealth;⁵⁵ nor does it turn its back so completely on the technology of the present. Burne-Jones appears to have drawn the architectural setting from Carlo Crivelli’s *Annunciation* [Figure 40], in the National Gallery from 1864.⁵⁶ This reverent referencing of the Quattrocento would seem to isolate the scene safely from the nineteenth-century present – that is, until we consider that Burne-Jones transformed the wood panelling of the Virgin’s chamber, Midas-like, into a highly polished bronze jewel-box, simultaneously vertiginous and claustrophobic in its extreme narrowness and soaring height. Some of the designs in his *Flower Book*, on which he was at work from 1882, suggest the fascination this brazen chamber held for him, and are notable for the disparity between their chilly settings and the events unfolding within them: *Golden Shower* [Figure 41] transposes the story of Danaë from the warm domestic interior favoured by other artists to an empty, highly polished golden chamber in which a heavily draped Danaë palpably shivers, while *Golden Gate* and *Welcome to the House* [Figure 42] envision the gates of the celestial sphere as fashioned of a similarly cold, uncomfortable golden bronze that hardly seems guaranteed to make the prospect of entering Heaven very enticing. The other metallic elements of the picture, Cophetua’s armour and crown, are even more extraordinary. The armour bears little or no relation to any historical armour, resembling leather, feathers and fish scales – organic material, that is, rather than mineral. The hybrid nature of the armour was not lost on French observers, one of whom characterised it and its surroundings as ‘mineral flora’ – incidentally, the exact phrase used by Huysmans to describe the setting of *Galatea* nine years earlier.⁵⁷ Georgiana Burne-Jones records that her husband had commissioned the metalworker

W. A. S. Benson to design the pieces, 'expressly in order to lift them out of

⁵⁴ M. S. Watts (1912), vol. 2, p. 149.

⁵⁵ See G. Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, p. 139.

⁵⁶ Indeed, Burne-Jones had an embarrassment of Crivelli at his fingertips while he worked on *King Cophetua*; the National Gallery acquired nine of its eleven works by that master between 1859-1875, while the South Kensington Museum received the bequest of the so-called Jones Madonna in 1882.

⁵⁷ 'Flore minérale'. M. Hamel, 'Exposition universelle de 1889: les écoles étrangères (premier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1889), p. 230. See also Huysmans (1883), p. 137.

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association with any historical time'.⁵⁸ When we recall that the winning design for the Tour Eiffel was the one that broke the most sharply with the past, Burne-Jones's wilful syncretism, and his willingness to make use of Benson's revival of traditional metalworking techniques allied with contemporary methods of production, rather than paint directly from historical pieces, reveals a deeper and more subtly questioning connection with technology than has previously been taken for granted.

Even the beggar maid herself is not immune to all of this creeping metal.

Although ostensibly clad in rags, the colour, the drape of the stuff and the stiffness of the hem of her shift more closely resemble silver or pewter than fabric.⁵⁹ The dress caused Burne-Jones considerable difficulties, as demonstrated by the number of drapery studies he made and his remarks in a letter in November 1883 about his desire 'to put on the Beggar Maid a sufficiently beggarly coat, that will not look unappetizing to King Cophetua, – that I hope has been achieved, so that she shall look as if she deserved to have it made of cloth of gold and set with pearls'.⁶⁰ It would seem that Burne-Jones settled on a compromise halfway between rags and cloth of gold, a compromise that both anchors the maid in the rich metallic setting like a jewel and also throws her into isolated relief. Even her limbs and face, whose extraordinary pallor was remarked upon by most reviewers, resemble ivory or marble rather than living flesh, evoking a kinship with Galatea, the 'milk-white' Nereid. Jean Lorrain, one of Burne-Jones's most ardent devotees in France, seized on the tension between flesh and mineral in his fairy tale 'La Princesse des chemins' (1892), essentially an evocation of the picture in prose. After devoting fully two-fifths of the text to an overheated catalogue of the metallic and jewelled wonders of the king's palace, he turns his attention to the beggar maid, characterising her flesh, and in particular her feet, as 'ivory stained with blood'.⁶¹ Trapped in an intermediate state between mineral (although ivory, significantly, is an organic substance with the hardness of stone) and flesh, Burne-Jones's beggar maid, and Lorrain's prose rendering of her, provide a

⁵⁸ Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, p. 145-46.

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Elizabeth Prettejohn for drawing my attention to the metallic character of the dress.

⁶⁰ Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, pp. 134-35.

⁶¹ 'Ivoire taché de sang'. J. Lorrain, 'La Princesse des Chemins', in *Princesses d'ivoire et d'ivresse* (Paris, 1902, first published with a dedication to Burne-Jones in *L'Echo de Paris*, 22 August 1892), p. 21. I am grateful to Elizabeth Emery for pointing me to its later appearance in the *Revue illustrée* in 1897, complete with Pre-Raphaelite pastiche illustrations by Manuel Orazzi but without the original dedication and with no reproductions of, or reference to, *King Cophetua*. See also M. Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. A. Davidson (London and New York, 1970, 1931), p. 364, for a discussion, albeit dismissive, of the fairy tale.

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vivid illustration of Francette Pacteau's contention that the use of jewel metaphors in the description of the feminine body results in the evacuation of that very body, leaving an imprisoning casing of precious materials.⁶² Small wonder, then, that Lorrain leaves the beggar maid staring sadly out of the window 'as if through the bars of a gaol'.⁶³

Moreau situates *Galatée* in a different sort of built environment, a coral grotto

overgrown with the simultaneously vegetable and animal forms of anemones and soft corals – creatures in whom scientific interest had been growing steadily. Ernest Chesneau’s remark in his Salon review that he ‘reckon[ed] Mr Darwin himself would not look at the painting without some interest’ indicates an awareness of Moreau’s creative engagement with the study of biology and evolution (belying Huysmans’s notorious characterisation of him as ‘a mystic shut away in the middle of Paris’).⁶⁴ Recent research has shown that he based the marine fauna in *Galatée* upon illustrations in Philip Henry Gosse’s *Actinologia Britannica* (published in London, 1858-60), which he consulted in the library of the Muséum de l’Histoire Naturelle [Figure 43].⁶⁵ A glance at the sketches he made after the illustrations, though, shows his imagination already at work, transforming the dull browns and greys and muted reds of Gosse’s illustrations into a vibrantly coloured fantasy. We cannot know whether he also read Gosse’s description of coralaceous anemones, whose explication of the structure of their stone skeletons borrows heavily from the language of Gothic architecture with its talk of walls supported by ribs and the arrangement of coral plates in cycles, but it seems likely that, in choosing to construct an underwater cathedral with an organic structure, he was well aware of the implications of combining nature and artifice.⁶⁶

Another layer of meaning reveals itself when we compare Moreau’s rendering of the scene to his precedents in the Villa Farnesina. Raphael depicted Galatea triumphantly skimming over the waves on a dolphin-drawn chariot; although she is a water nymph, she is above, and by implication has mastery over, her own element.

Yet Moreau has placed a seemingly water-breathing Galatea *within* water, in an

⁶² F. Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (London, 1994), pp. 28-29.

⁶³ ‘Comme à travers les barreaux d’une geôle’. Lorrain (1902), p. 24.

⁶⁴ ‘Je me figure que M. Darwin lui-même ne la verrait pas sans quelque intérêt’. E. Chesneau, ‘Salon de 1880’, *Le Moniteur universel* (2 May 1880).

⁶⁵ Lacambre (1998b), p. 54.

⁶⁶ P. H. Gosse, *Actinologia Britannica: A History of the British Sea Anemones and Corals* (London, 1858-60), p. 307.

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enclosed space, surrounded by otherworldly anemones – beautiful and poisonous creatures that exist in a limbo halfway between the animal and the vegetable. Her oneness with them and with the water is underlined by Moreau’s extraordinary treatment of her long blonde hair; the thickly built-up paint surface is almost identical with that of the anemones, and the ends of her locks appear to dissolve into the water. Polyphemus appears at first glance manifestly an intruder in the world of this beautiful, unthinking marine animal, sufficient in herself; she recalls nothing so much as Bataille’s characterisation of the animal, ‘in the world like water in water’.⁶⁷ Yet as the ends of Galatea’s tresses melt into their surroundings, the rest of her hair resembles nothing so much as the striations of the rocks and the flowering vine trailing across her groin seems to emerge from her, implying that she is part plant, somehow related to the surrounding marine flora – a creature simultaneously water and stone, floral and carnal. Odilon Redon, who certainly knew the painting, and whose interest in biology is thoroughly documented, took the morphing of forms to an extreme in his own version, *The Cyclops* [Figure 44]; however, the doubts about the substance of Galatea’s body raised in Moreau’s painting are arguably more disconcerting for being unresolved.

The morphing of form and the fluidity of the substance of Galatea’s body had a precedent that Moreau certainly knew well: the original story in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.⁶⁸ The frustrated Polyphemus serenades Galatea (who listens

unobserved) with a dizzying stream of simile and metaphor, the register shifting capriciously from the trite to the bizarre bordering on grotesque over the course of fifteen lines, comparing her successively to the petals of privet (l.789), an alder (l.790), crystal glass, a young kid (l.791), shells worn smooth by the ocean (l.792), the sun in winter and shade in summer (l.793), a gazelle, a plane tree (l.794), ice, grapes (l.795), curdled milk, the wings of a swan (l.796), a garden (l.797), an untamed heifer (l.798), an ancient oak, waves (l.799), willow, bryony (l.800), a stone crag, a river in full spate (l.801), a peacock, fire (l.802), thorns, a she-bear (l.803), the sea, and a trampled snake (l.804) – it is almost as if Galatea herself undergoes a series of metamorphoses, from plant to animal to stone to water and back again.

⁶⁷Bataille (1989), p. 25.

⁶⁸The full story is found in *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, book 13, ll. 740-897, trans. D. Raeburn (London, 2004), pp. 534-41.

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Both critics and poets took up this trope of morphing form and substance; we have already seen Huysmans's characterisation of Galatea as a jewel set among jewels; Victor Champier echoed this by comparing her both to a flower ('an exquisite flower rising, all fragrant, from the Ideal') and to a jewel.⁶⁹ But perhaps more significant in this case are a group of four sonnets inspired by *Galatée* by the Symbolist poets Robert de Montesquiou (1880), Henri de Régnier (1887), the Cuban Julián del Casal (1891), and Jean Lorrain (1893).⁷⁰ All four share a few salient characteristics, including a lapidary use of language, an obvious delight in the naming and description of rich and luxurious materials (both organic and inorganic), and a tendency to work from the outside in, or from background to foreground, setting the scene and then positioning Galatea (and Polyphemus, often as an afterthought) within her surroundings as a jeweller carefully places a jewel in its setting. De Montesquiou in particular accentuated the fluidity of Galatea's body, alluding to her 'fluid whiteness' and further qualifying her as 'streaming, milky, astral', while positioning her in the midst of marine flora which he described alternately as stained glass (an integral component of a cathedral, echoed by Lorrain in his reference to the grotto's 'sonorous vaults') and 'gems close to blossoming'.⁷¹ The confusion and elision of form reaches an extreme in Régnier's sonnet, 'Galatée'; never published in his lifetime, it is worth quoting in full here.

Un rêve de cristal, d'azur et de fleurs peintes,
Éclos loin du soleil, qui n'est jamais venu,
Par le seuil entr'ouvert du retrait inconnu,
S'introduire en la nuit des ténèbres enfreintes.
Aux parois d'airain clair, décor de flores feintes,
Et, comme elles, dressant l'émail de son corps nu,
Galathée, immobile et d'un geste ingénu
Défiant à jamais l'insulte des étreintes,
Calme, sous le regard du cyclope affolé
De l'éternel appât de la chair tentatrice,
Dont le désir crispe son masque en bronze lisse,

⁶⁹'La fleur exquise sortie toute embaumée de l'idéal'. V. Champier, *L'Année artistique. Troisième année, 1880-1881* (Paris, 1881), p. 83.

⁷⁰See Cooke (2003), pp. 161-65, for an in-depth discussion of the sonnets.

⁷¹'Sa blancheur fluide'; 'Ruisselante, lactée, astrale'; 'gemmes près d'éclore'. R. de Montesquiou, 'Nymphe', in idem, *Le Chef des odeurs suaves* (Paris, 1893), p. 135; see also note 104.

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Songe, parmi les fleurs du retrait isolé,

Receleur du trésor de ses gloires charnelles,
À l'intacte blancheur des neiges fraternelles.⁷²

That the setting is 'a dream of crystal, azure, and *painted* flowers' immediately suggests a refined, excessive, and self-referential artificiality; strikingly, Galatea herself, spied upon by a bronze Cyclops, is the most artificial element of the scene, with a body composed, literally, of flesh, snow, and enamel – the logical extreme of Ovid's amorphous paean. Within the Exposition Universelle, with its mind-boggling array of goods and edifices composed of one substance pretending to be another, the notion of Galatea as shape-shifting goddess, simultaneously animal and mineral, acquires a particularly disquieting resonance.

The disturbing suggestion that the adoration of Polyphemus has elevated the animal and the mineral to the level of the divine takes yet another turn when we gaze more closely at the assemblage of tiny figures on the floor of the grotto. Weightless wraiths defined only by coloured outlines, in contrast to Galatea whose body is modelled by light and shadow without the benefit of line, they seem to echo both her human form and the linear, un-modelled rendering of the corals and anemones, occupying a state somewhere between the two. That Moreau took as much trouble over these figures, whom Lorrain portrayed in his sonnet as 'divinities of the abyss, souls or flowers of flesh',⁷³ as he did over Galatea herself is evident from numerous meticulous studies; their presence clearly contributes much to the picture's overall meaning.⁷⁴ One such figure, hidden to the left of Galatea's feet among a tangle of coral, is worth lingering over [Figure 45]. This transparent water nymph is disposed in the attitude of voluptuous suffering, with hands apparently bound behind her head, in which St Sebastian is usually portrayed.⁷⁵ It was common practice in the painting

⁷² H. de Régnier, 'Galatée', Musée Gustave Moreau, correspondance Delarue, quoted in Lacambre (1998b), p. 61.

⁷³ 'Divinités du gouffre, âmes ou fleurs de chair': J. Lorrain, 'Galathée', in idem, *L'Ombre ardent. Poésies* (Paris, 1897). Lorrain wrote the poem in 1893 and sent a handwritten copy to Moreau.

⁷⁴ See G. Lacambre, 'Une nouvelle acquisition du musée d'Orsay: la *Galatée*, 1880, de Gustave Moreau', *Revue du Louvre* 4 (October 1998), p. 76 (hereafter Lacambre 1998c), for the studies. Moreau appears to have used the same model, Adrienne Dubois, for both Galatea and some of the grotto figures.

⁷⁵ Although Lacambre and Cooke have both noted the presence of 'small figures' at the borders of the picture, they make no further comment on their significance. They also goes unmentioned in all Salon reviews I have thus far found – even, surprisingly, that of Huysmans. However, given that one needs to come within inches of the picture's surface to discern the figures, and that no photographs of the installation of the *salle hors concours*, where *Galatée* hung, have surfaced so far, it is possible that the original viewing conditions simply precluded anyone noticing the figures. St Sebastian was,

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of altarpieces in the Quattrocento to place a small image of a saint or of Christ at the bottom of the centre panel below the main image as a means of establishing a closer connection between the main image and the altar, on which the Eucharist was celebrated.⁷⁶ By inserting a diminutive figure resembling St Sebastian – a saint whose body was adored in Decadent circles as the site of the intertwining of beauty and masochistic suffering – in a tangle of animal-flowers, many of them painted in sanguine reds, below a Nereid enthroned like a Madonna in an underwater cave, Moreau strengthens the painting's claim to be read overtly as an altarpiece, one that twists and travesties Christian practice, substituting for the veneration of virtue the worship of a painful and potentially destructive beauty.

A comparable blasphemous detail lurks in the minutely worked paint surface of *King Cophetua*, obscured by the play of light on the glazing. A line drawn in the wet paint with the point of the brush handle outlines the beggar maid's head;⁷⁷

surrounding this is a faintly glowing aureole. Again, this passed unnoticed by observers on both sides of the Channel; even if it had been readily visible under the glass which French critics found so peculiar, it was nowhere near as obvious or outrageous as the gold-leaf haloes Burne-Jones's mentor Rossetti placed behind the heads of genuine saints in modern dress (or, worse yet, behind the head of a nude and assertively carnal Venus).⁷⁸ The presence of this aureole, however subtle, demands that we read the beggar maid as a Madonna, venerated by Cophetua, whom Jean Lorrain described, tellingly, as 'immobile, as if in prayer'.⁷⁹ But this is a Madonna who, unlike Mantegna's with her sweetly inclined head and graceful gestures, will never acknowledge prayers. Once again, the paralysing stasis of the worship of beauty supersedes the veneration, and, presumably, active emulation of virtue ostensibly encouraged in its Renaissance ancestor.

incidentally, a frequent subject in Moreau's oeuvre throughout the 1870s, including a watercolour (Fogg Art Museum, Mathieu 165) exhibited at the 1876 Salon.

⁷⁶H. van Os, *Sienese Altarpieces, 1215-1460: Form, Content, Function. Volume 1: 1215-1344*, trans. M. Hoyle (Groningen, 1988), pp. 13-14; I am grateful to Glyn Davies for first informing me of the practice of appending such figures to the main panels of altarpieces. Moreau would have seen numerous examples of this practice during his visit to Siena in 1858.

⁷⁷Penelope Fitzgerald has noted this feature and claims that Burne-Jones did it in order to emphasis the head; my own close observation appears to back up her claim. Fitzgerald (1997), p. 200.

⁷⁸See Chapter 4.

⁷⁹'Immobile et comme en prière'. Lorrain (2002), p. 136.

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Through a Glass, Darkly: A Dialogue with the Renaissance

The debt of both Burne-Jones and Moreau to the religious art of the Quattrocento is a factor frequently cited as a defining element of their work by contemporary observers, and by and large agreed upon by twentieth-century scholars; indeed, Mantz insisted that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the two artists' affinity with each other was their shared reverence for this era and the resulting work 'conceived in the style of 1490'.⁸⁰ Yet although Burne-Jones's drawing upon Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* and Crivelli's *Annunciation* are noted in most studies of *King Cophetua*, and while Moreau's stylistic debt to Mantegna in general was a truism repeated unthinkingly *ad infinitum* by nineteenth-century critics, relatively little attention has been given to the possibility that they both drew on Mantegna's Madonna; likewise, their affinities with the work of Leonardo da Vinci, particularly the *Mona Lisa*, remain surprisingly unexplored. I would suggest that viewing the dialogue between *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* as mediated by the lens of the past, and in the case of Leonardo, by the magisterial reading of Walter Pater, sheds further light on the transformation of the aesthetics of the Renaissance and the essentially public character of its sacred paintings into a private, decorative, and perverse religious art.

Burne-Jones visited Paris for the first time in 1855 with William Morris, viewing the *Madonna della Vittoria* at the Louvre and returning home with an engraving after it; Moreau, as an habitué of the Louvre from his student days, was well acquainted with the work.⁸¹ The compositional parallels between the *Madonna* and *King Cophetua* have already been noted, but arresting disparities between the two open up when we look closer. The dais on which the Madonna is enthroned, although highly ornamental and artificial, is festooned with natural materials – greenery, fruits and flowers. Transported into the world of *King Cophetua*, fruit and flowers harden into metal and gems; poignantly, the scattered posy of anemones in the beggar maid's hand and at her feet are almost all that remains of Mantegna's floral effusion. As well, the facial expression of the kneeling knight, Francesco Gonzaga, was unusual for

⁸⁰ ‘Conçu à la mode de 1490’: P. Mantz, ‘La Peinture française (4e et dernier article)’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (November 1889), p. 508. While noting approvingly the similarities between *King Cophetua* and *Galatée*, Mantz allowed his national pride to get the better of him by insisting that Moreau should be viewed as the precursor and Burne-Jones as the follower by virtue of Moreau’s being seven years older.

⁸¹ For a thorough analysis of the painting’s iconography, see R. Lightbown, *Mantegna* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 180-84.

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its time in that, in place of the respectful solemnity normally associated with donors, he gazes smilingly up at the Virgin, his broad grin as much one of complicity as of gratitude: we should remember that the occasion for the commission of the altarpiece was an important military victory, highlighting the inextricable connections between the Church and civic and political matters.⁸² Yet Cophetua, his melancholy gaze unacknowledged as he languishes in gloomily ornate surroundings, his crown lying uselessly in his lap, abdicates the responsibilities of his position for the sake of adoring his own ‘Madonna’.

Moreau appears to have borrowed from, and subverted, the *Madonna della Vittoria* to similarly bizarre and perverse effect. The shape of the canopy over the Virgin’s throne and the lushness of the foliage and fruits find an analogue in the profuse growth of marine life in Galatea’s grotto; however, where Mantegna sets the Virgin’s throne in a heavenly realm of air and light (with patches of blue sky glimpsed in the interstices between the ribs of the canopy), Moreau plunges it into a dark, airless, watery space – if not exactly underground and, by extension, in the underworld, then uncomfortably close. But Moreau also seized on, and distorted, marine elements already present in Mantegna’s painting. The canopy is hung with strings of coral and pearls (the latter long associated with purity) in the form of paternosters, each bead standing for an *Ave*, while a branch of coral dangles directly above the Madonna; according to Ronald Lightbown, coral was believed at the time to ward off demons and was worn as a protecting amulet in battle.⁸³ In *Galatée*, however, the coral appears instead to *attract* a ‘demon’, while the symbolic virtues associated with coral and pearls are blurred and warped (Galatea herself, with her nacreous flesh, could be considered one giant pearl whose purity sits uneasily with her sensuality and causes suffering rather than purification). One last detail, easy to miss, completes the perverse reading of Mantegna. At the base of the throne is a relief panel depicting the Temptation, with Adam and Eve flanking the serpent-entwined Tree of Knowledge; by positioning them thus, Mantegna collapsed the narrative of the Fall and the Redemption (symbolised by the Virgin). The group of three tiny figures picked out in red outline in the lower left corner of *Galatée* bears a noticeable resemblance to the relief – but Galatea’s disengagement from worldly concerns would appear to preclude any possibility of redemption.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

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The swing from the public and exterior to the private and interior mines another level of meaning in Burne-Jones’s appropriation and transformation of Crivelli’s Annunciation. I have already noted the effect of his borrowing and gilding of the interior space of the Virgin’s house; moving from the interior to the exterior, or more precisely, to the doorframe, brings forth other points of comparison. If we examine the carved scrolls ornamenting the doorposts in the *Annunciation* with those on the pilasters of *King Cophetua*’s frame, we see that the picture frame is almost a direct copy of the doorposts. Given how well Burne-Jones knew the *Annunciation* and that he is known to have commissioned the frame expressly for his own

painting,⁸⁴ we may safely assume that this was done deliberately. Enlarging the doorframe to frame the entire canvas effectively turns the scene inside out, transforming this most public and politically charged of Annunciations – Crivelli was commissioned to paint it to celebrate the granting of semi-autonomous government to his adopted home of Ascoli Piceno, and was ordered to include the city’s patron saint, Emidius, and set it in a recognisable street – into one of stifling interiority.⁸⁵ The brilliant, all-pervading sunlight that drenches Crivelli’s Ascoli street is darkened to a tenebrous gloom out of which the figures emerge like phantoms; the landscape is reduced to a crepuscular patch glimpsed through a high window. The open doorway in the *Annunciation* symbolises Mary’s epithet, *Porta Coeli* (doorway of Heaven) and implies her willingness to intercede in earthly affairs;⁸⁶ Burne-Jones’s transformation of Crivelli’s doorway into the frame of a space without a door, with no visible exit apart from the small high window, effectively isolates Cophetua’s throne room from the outside world and strands it in a dream from which there appears to be no waking. A slightly later common ancestor of *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* adds another key to the unravelling of their mysteries: the *Mona Lisa* [Figure 46]. That both Burne-Jones and Moreau were familiar with it is beyond question, and a debt to Leonardo is immediately apparent in the shadowy, fantastical landscapes in the backgrounds of both paintings.⁸⁷ French critics were quick to note the family resemblance between Galatea and Mona Lisa; Marius Vachon, to name but one, described the painting as

⁸⁴ J. Christian, ed., *Edward Burne-Jones* (exh. cat., London, Hayward Gallery, Southampton, Southampton Art Gallery and Birmingham, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1975), p. 56; see also Wildman and Christian (1998), p. 255, for further information on the frame.

⁸⁵ See R. Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 323–44, for an exhaustive discussion of the *Annunciation*’s commission and iconographical programme.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁸⁷ Moreau also seems to acknowledge a debt to the grotto-like space in the *Virgin of the Rocks*.

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suffused ‘with the mysterious and troubling poetry in the conception of [Moreau’s] feminine ideal, like the *Gioconda* of Leonardo da Vinci’.⁸⁸ W. S. Taylor has also raised the possibility of its influence on Burne-Jones’s depiction of the beggar maid.⁸⁹ But we might most usefully view the relationship of *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* to the *Mona Lisa* through yet another lens, Walter Pater’s ‘Notes on Leonardo da Vinci’. First published anonymously in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1869 and reprinted twice in *The Renaissance* in 1873 and 1877, it would certainly have been within Burne-Jones’s frame of reference, and while *The Renaissance* does not seem to have been translated into French until after the First World War, it was being embraced by Symbolist literary figures: Mallarmé praised Pater as ‘the writer of highly embroidered prose *par excellence* of our time’.⁹⁰

Pater’s delirious, impressionistic evocation of the *Mona Lisa* remains notorious for its ability to snuff out the possibility of ever again looking at the painting with an innocent eye; indirectly, traces of its effect appear in *King Cophetua* and *Galatée*. What is of particular interest here is his insistence on the *Mona Lisa* as what Paul Barolsky has termed ‘the essential synthesis of antitheses’⁹¹ – of Nature and Art, of myth and history, of body and soul, of paganism and Christianity, of life and death and of eternity and change. In Pater’s words, She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her

but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands.⁹² This fusion of innocence and perverse secret knowledge made Pater's Gioconda a potent synthesis of chaste Madonna and amoral pagan goddess; underlying all of these stated contradictions are those of attraction and repulsion, fleshly warmth and marmoreal coldness. Kenneth Clark, a scholar whose approach to Leonardo was decidedly Paterian, echoed this paradox when he declared of the Mona Lisa that 'this absence of normal sensuality makes us pause and shiver, like a sudden wave of cold

⁸⁸ 'D'une poésie mystérieuse et troublante dans la conception de son idéal féminin, comme la *Joconde* de Léonard de Vinci'. M. Vachon, 'Salon de 1880', *La France* (30 April 1880).

⁸⁹ Taylor (1973), p. 153.

⁹⁰ 'Le prosateur ouvrier par excellence de ce temps': cited in P. Barolsky, *Walter Pater's Renaissance* (University Park, 1987), p. 48.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹² W. Pater, *The Renaissance* (Oxford, 1986, 1873), p. 80.

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air in a beautiful building'.⁹³ This is a sort of classical perfection at odds with the normative humanistic classicism promoted in the Renaissance but with great resonance in the late nineteenth century. Burne-Jones's beggar maid, too, with her marble skin and unreadable expression, embodies this conflict between attraction and repulsion, warmth and cold, as does Galatea with her seaweed hair and mineral body (whose primeval physical presence can be read, literally, as 'older than the rocks among which she sits') – and as Clark would one day find himself shivering in front of the *Mona Lisa*, one visitor to the Grosvenor Gallery in 1884 reported, standing before *King Cophetua*, 'a bathing feel', that is, the shrinking of flesh from ice-cold water.⁹⁴

Altars of Perversity: Masochism, Decoration, and the Suspension of Narrative

The distortion of worship is thrown into even higher relief in both paintings when we consider the growing elaboration of the decorative against the lessening of narrative action. A look at the evolution from study to final composition is instructive. Most of Burne-Jones's post-1875 studies for *King Cophetua* depict the king and the beggar maid enthroned in relatively spare surroundings [Figure 47]. While one could not, with any fairness, describe the scene as dynamic, there is some indication of a narrative: Cophetua is placed in closer proximity to the beggar maid, who, blushing slightly, acknowledges his presence by demurely averting her gaze, while a pair of pages sings lustily in the background. Yet when we turn to the final version, we find the two marooned in a brazen chamber whose every surface is worked and decorated; Cophetua, now seated on a lower step, gazes across an unbridgeable distance at the maid, who not only does not acknowledge him but seems completely unaware of him as she stares blankly, as if hypnotised, out of the canvas. Even the pages have fallen silent. In this regard, it is useful to examine Burne-Jones's own parody of the painting. In a comic drawing made for the young daughter of a friend in 1885, he recast *King Cophetua* in the style of his *bête noire*, Rubens [Figure 48]. The beggar maid, metamorphosed into a buxom, half-draped female who is Rubenesque in every sense of the word, holds court from a curtained dais with a burly Cophetua in Roman armour who gesticulates wildly, to the accompaniment of shouting and further gesticulation from the pages. The figures' inherent

⁹³ K. Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci* (London, 1989, 1939), p. 175.

⁹⁴ Fitzgerald (1997), p. 200. The visitor was Mary Gladstone.

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ridiculousness aside, Burne-Jones's distaste for the other distinguishing characteristics of Rubens's swirling baroque classicism – the sweeping, windblown movement (here

subtly lampooned by the dashing figure), the heavy-handed drama, the muscular classicism and the over-emphasis of the figure at the expense of the setting (Burne-Jones's cod-Rubens is transposed to a sparsely sketched outdoor setting on the edge of what appears to be a Roman military camp) – is evident, and we may take it as an indication of the centrality of the devaluation of narrative action and the privileging of decorative stasis to the picture.

A similar transformation is evident in *Galatée*. A watercolour of the subject painted in 1878 [Figure 49] shows an almost coy Galatea, in a nearly empty grotto, lowering her eyes and draping an arm across her body against Polyphemus's avid, menacing gaze. Already, a key element of the narrative has been effaced – Galatea's handsome lover, Acis, whom Polyphemus murders out of jealousy. In this confrontation lies the possibility that Galatea has spurned the Cyclops not for a man but for communion with herself. In the finished painting, Galatea is set, in Huysmans's phrase, like a jewel among jewels, her right arm resting against the side of her coral throne, her eyes half-closed in a dreaming, self-absorbed smile. Tellingly, one of the noticeable changes Moreau made after the painting was shown at the Salon, visible in a comparison between the painting today and the Goupil photograph, was a repainting of Galatea's right hand; originally it rested, relaxed, on the rock. In the finished painting, it grips the rock, fingers tensed, as if clenched in the throes of a masturbatory reverie. Huysmans's observation that the figures in Moreau's oeuvre give 'the impression of a spiritual onanism, oft repeated, in chaste flesh' seems especially pertinent here.⁹⁵

One of the most important factors in the diminishment of narrative in both paintings is so obvious as to be easy to overlook: the titles. In history and literary painting, the title is indispensable to the viewer's identification and understanding of the subject and the incident. Yet Moreau and Burne-Jones have both entitled their pictures in ways that not only give the viewer precious little assistance in reading them, but that at the same time direct the eye to focus on some elements while effacing others by not mentioning them. If the titles fulfil the role of 'linguistic message' that Barthes termed 'anchorage', they do so in a vague and deceptive

⁹⁵ 'L'impression de l'onanisme spirituel, répété, dans une chair chaste'. Huysmans (1889), p. 19. I am grateful to Linda Goddard for drawing my attention to the relevance of this description here.

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manner.⁹⁶ A comparison of *Galatée* with one of its putative sources, Ottin's *Polyphemus surprising Acis and Galatea*, is instructive. The title names all three figures and its present participle invites us to view them as active participants in a narrative whose circumstances (the dalliance of Acis and Galatea inciting the murderous jealousy of the Cyclops) will lead to a dramatic conclusion (Polyphemus crushing Acis under a boulder). Moreau, ever wary of pedantic exegesis and frequently wilfully enigmatic in his titles and 'explanations' of his work, reduces this comparatively long-winded title to the bare minimum.⁹⁷ Not only is Acis no longer physically or verbally present, Polyphemus's existence has been effectively cancelled by his absence from the title; we are guided to regard the picture not as an episode in an overarching story, but rather as a meditation on the beauty of Galatea herself. The fact that the vast majority of Salon and Exposition reviews make little or no reference to Polyphemus and focus almost exclusively on Galatea gives some indication of the extent to which the picture's title succeeded in directing the gaze. Indeed, Chesneau admonished,

Do not search for M. Gustave Moreau's *Galatea in Fable*. This very great artist [...] never borrows from ancient texts word for word. These texts

furnish him with a situation, a theme that he then develops in the free activity of his thoughts. Galatea here is nothing but a symbol, that of Beauty; a name, that of Woman.⁹⁸

The case of *King Cophetua* is somewhat different. The ability to recognise a narrative hinges on a familiarity with Burne-Jones's literary sources; this was unproblematic enough in Britain, but less so in France, where Tennyson's poetry was not necessarily a ready reference and the original ballad probably even more obscure (witness the umbrage Duret took when faced with the painting on its native soil).⁹⁹ Like Moreau, Burne-Jones supplied no explanation of the subject in the French Exposition catalogue.¹⁰⁰ Although a few critics particularly well-versed in

⁹⁶ Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1977), pp. 39-41.

⁹⁷ See Cooke (2003), pp. 116-19, for a discussion of the importance of titles in Moreau's Salon paintings of the 1860s. Cooke partly attributes Moreau's refusal to give the viewer sufficient clues to a reaction against the practice of Paul Chenavard, who appended a verbose and pedantic explication to his *Divina Tragedia* (1859) in the Salon *livret*.

⁹⁸ 'Ne cherchez pas la *Galatée* de M. Gustave Moreau dans la Fable. Ce très grand artiste [...] n'emprunte jamais aux textes anciens leur lettre précise. Ces textes lui fournissent une situation, un thème qu'il développe ensuite dans la libre activité de sa pensée. Galatée ici n'est qu'un symbole, celui de la Beauté; un nom, celui de la Femme'. Chesneau (1880).

⁹⁹ See n.17 above.

¹⁰⁰ There is a brief description of the painting in Blackburn (1889), p. 9, but no allusion to the story or even to the literary sources.

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contemporary English poetry, including André Michel and Jean Lorrain, recognised *King Cophetua*'s literary sources (and Lorrain, in the same vein as the painting's first observers in Britain, laced his review with enthusiastically misspelled snippets of 'The Beggar Maid', throwing in a line of Keats for good measure),¹⁰¹ the unfamiliarity of the subject combined with the title's faintly exotic names, lack of a verb, and refusal to give the viewer any means of deducing a narrative meant that, at least for a non-Anglophone audience, Cophetua and the beggar maid are two figures of unknown (and possibly unknowable) relation to each other, two frozen figures stranded in an ornate setting for reasons that can only be guessed at. Unencumbered by familiarity with the picture's literary sources, French observers were not conditioned to read as narrowly as their British counterparts and tended to respond, rather like Cophetua himself, by paying rapt attention to the scene's aesthetic pleasures rather than by trying to reconstruct a narrative. Maurice Hamel, at the end of a rhapsodic account of the beauty and strangeness of the figures and their surroundings, notes almost as an afterthought that 'the disjointedness and the passivity of the scene have something disturbing about them that escapes analysis', speculating that 'this could be called the dream of life and the artist may have rendered here the anguish of the future, the fascination of souls before the unknown abruptly revealed' – hardly what Tennyson can have had in mind.¹⁰² Others, like Michel, were content to conclude (in English, no less), 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever'.¹⁰³

The simultaneous draining away, or looping, of narrative and heightening of decoration to a stifling level are qualities which figure strongly in Gilles Deleuze's formulation of masochism; in his essay 'Coldness and Cruelty' he identifies the prototypical masochistic setting as one of 'cluttered intimacy, [which] creates a chiaroscuro where the only things that emerge are suspended gestures and suspended suffering'.¹⁰⁴ The masochist, as Deleuze defines him, is one who does not in fact enjoy and seek out suffering as an end in itself, but who accepts it as a necessary

¹⁰¹ Lorrain (2002), pp. 134-35.

¹⁰² 'Le décousu, le passif de la scène a quelque chose d'inquiétant et qui échappe à l'analyse'; 'Cela pourrait s'appeler le rêve de la vie et l'artiste aurait rendu l'angoisse de l'avenir, la fascination des âmes

devant l'inconnu brusquement ouvert'. Hamel (1889), p. 230.

¹⁰³ A. Michel, 'Les beaux-arts à l'Exposition Universelle. Les écoles étrangères: l'Angleterre (I)', *Journal des débats* (28 July 1889).

¹⁰⁴ G. Deleuze, 'Coldness and Cruelty', in *idem* and L. von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York, 1989, first published Paris, 1967), p. 34. I am indebted in my thinking on masochism and the decorative to C. Arscott, 'Venus as dominatrix: nineteenth-century artists and their creations', in C. Arscott and K. Scott, eds., *Manifestations of Venus: Art and sexuality* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 109-25.

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condition of an infinitely deferred pleasure. When we remember Belting's contention that the privileging of the hieratic image, or *imago*, over the narrative, or *historia*, is also one of the defining themes running through the history of religious painting, the implications for a perverse reading of the pictures deepen.¹⁰⁵ The conflation of the veneration of beauty with masochistic suffering in *Galatée* and *King Cophetua* was almost immediately taken up by Symbolist poets and novelists in France. *Galatée*, as mentioned previously, became the subject of sonnets by several Symbolist poets, written in lapidary language that echoes the richly elaborated decorativeness and immobility of the scene; the final tercet of Montesquiou's 'Nymphé',

Galathéa sommeille en un rêve étranger,

Sous l'adoration triste dont l'enveloppe

L'unique fixité songeuse du Cyclope¹⁰⁶

underlines the inextricability of suffering and adoration in Polyphemus's never-to-beanswered

gaze.

King Cophetua is not known to have inspired any new poems, but its suspended narrative and oneiric air of mystery proved an irresistible challenge for at least one novelist – particularly remarkable given the central problem in ekphrasis, the impossibility of setting a static image in motion and of reconciling the spatial and the temporal. Three years before Lorrain published 'La Princesse des chemins', the painting found itself translated into prose in Edouard Rod's novel *Les Trois coeurs*, serialised in the *Journal des débats* during the run of the Exposition (the first instalment of which appeared alongside André Michel's appreciative review of the British Fine Art section, in particular Burne-Jones).¹⁰⁷ Rod, a sometime art critic

¹⁰⁵ Belting (1994), p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Montesquiou (1893), p. 135; Lacambre (1998b) contends that the poem was written much earlier, probably in 1885, based on the date a copy of it was sent to Moreau. For further discussion of the *Galatée* sonnets, see Cooke (2003), pp. 148-54. Interestingly, 'Lilia', another poem in *Le Chef des odeurs suaves* (in the same sequence as 'Nymphé'), centres on Burne-Jones, even mentioning him by name in the first line. Although it appears not to describe a specific painting, it is tempting to speculate whether its hypnotic repetition of the word 'lys' may have some connection with Octave Mirbeau's scurrilous attacks (1895) on Burne-Jones and his followers, 'Des Lys! des lys!' and 'Toujours des lys!' (see Chapter 2).

¹⁰⁷ E. Rod, *Les Trois coeurs* (Paris, 1890, first serialised in *Le Journal des débats*, July-November 1889). *King Cophetua* exerted a hold on the Francophone literary imagination well into the twentieth century. In addition to *Les Trois coeurs* and Lorrain's 'La Princesse des chemins', I have counted Iwan Gilkin's drama *Le Roi Cophetua* (Brussels, 1919), which renames the beggar maid Rosamie, makes her compete for the love of the king against three maidens of noble birth, and gives her a far greater vocal presence than in any literary precedents, and Julien Gracq's novella of the same name (published in *La Presqu'île*, Paris, 1970), which goes a step further in recasting the 'beggar maid' as a taciturn housemaid whose threatening, ambiguous silence and rare utterances help to characterise her as a cold and mysterious dominatrix who holds the male narrator in sexual thrall.

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whose contributions to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* included one of the first serious studies in French of Pre-Raphaelitism from its origins to the present day, like

Huysmans before him blurred the boundary between art criticism and fiction.¹⁰⁸ *Les Trois coeurs*, on the surface the fairly conventional story of a love triangle in contemporary Paris, does for Burne-Jones on a modest scale what Huysmans did for Moreau in *À rebours*. Its protagonist, Richard Noral, transforms his study into a shrine hung with reproductions of talismanic images of women whose juxtaposition is both revealing and resonant: a fifteenth-century Rhenish Virgin from the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, Il Sodoma's *Judith*, Rossetti's *La Pia de' Tolomei*, Moreau's *La Chimère* and 'King Cophetua', by Burne-Jones, uselessly kneeling at the feet of his beggar maid: enveloped in her rags on the throne to which love has led her, her sorrowful features recount her long suffering, proclaiming her powerless to enjoy the happiness come too late, and her eyes, in which anguish persistently floats, say that she will not be able to respond to the ecstasies of the worshipper abasing himself before her'.¹⁰⁹ In a narrative characterised by relentless repetition, Noral returns again and again to his gloomy inner sanctum to contemplate the images of the beggar maid and her spiritual sisters in a state of melancholic inactivity worthy of Cophetua himself. Indeed, each time he enters his study and falls into a trance before his personal pantheon, the narrative grinds to a halt. Pacteau has noted the disruptive properties of physical descriptions of women in fiction.¹¹⁰ But the women who bring about the narrative 'freezing' in *Les Trois coeurs* are painted and decorative (that key aspect of Deleuze's formulation of masochism), not flesh and blood; conversely, it is Noral's wife and mistress, not the rather ineffectual man himself, who serve to drive the plot forward, and neither one is the recipient of his worshipping gaze. He evidently prefers (we are told he 'had wanted to surround himself with these [images] to trouble his own heart') to retreat from his escalating difficulties in the pleasurable and painfully pleasurable search for transcendence in these 'material visions of

¹⁰⁸ Rod (1887), pp. 177-95 and 399-416.

¹⁰⁹ 'Le Roi Cophetua, de Burne-Jones, inutilement agenouillé aux pieds de sa mendicante: enveloppée dans ses haillons sur le trône où l'amour l'a conduite, ses traits douloureux racontent sa longue souffrance, la proclamant impuissante à jouir du bonheur trop tard venu, et ses yeux, où flotte obstinément l'angoisse, disent qu'elle ne saura pas répondre aux extases de l'adorateur abîmé devant elle', Rod (1890), pp. 29-30. Based on Rod's description of *La Chimère*, it seems likely that he refers to the 1867 painting now in the Fogg Museum, Cambridge, MA (Mathieu 104) (see Mathieu, 1994, p. 101).

¹¹⁰ Pacteau (1994), pp. 107-8.

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intangible things, entering the soul through the eyes'.¹¹¹ Ultimately, as the crisis precipitated by his double life comes to a head, he comes to identify himself with the sole male figure in his study, 'King Cophetua languish[ing] at the feet of his beggar maid'.¹¹²

The parallel I have drawn between Noral's despondent stare and that of Cophetua (and, for that matter, Polyphemus) is not fortuitous. For one of the most striking aspects of both pictures is their refusal to resolve the position of the beholder and the beheld. Cophetua's gaze is doomed never to be answered; so hypnotic and hypnotised is the beggar maid's stare, so utter her refusal to acknowledge him, that the thought arises that she may be a vision in Cophetua's fevered imagination. Yet when we gaze into the gleaming surface of this hall of mirrors, only the beggar maid's feet are reflected. Is she, then, the only physical presence, and the king her hallucination? The disjuncture between beholder and beheld becomes even more unsettling when we turn to *Galatée*. At first glance, Polyphemus appears as an intruder in Galatée's marine domain, gazing at her as if into the depths of an aquarium, held apart by an invisible barrier. (Even then, the nature of the setting remains open to interpretation: one reviewer, on first seeing it at the Salon, took it for 'the heart of the earth'.)¹¹³

However, a closer look reveals the ends of the nymph's hair reflected as if in a pool, as if she is above, rather than in, the water; moreover, the dim, watery light bathing the Cyclops suggests that he, and not Galatea, is underwater. This, in tandem with the disconcerting disparity in scale between the two figures, raises the possibility that not only may Galatea be the fantasy of Polyphemus, he may instead – or simultaneously – be her dream. The interplay of gazes here, apart from its significance for the frustration of narrative and of desire, has further ramifications. Moreau has bucked classical and art-historical precedent by giving Polyphemus, in addition to the usual huge single eye in the middle of his forehead, two human eyes; this departure from convention serves in part to humanise the Cyclops and to render him more sympathetic (compare the horrifying yet faintly comical Polyphemus in Redon's *Cyclopes*). Yet at the same time, tripling the number of Polyphemus's eyes radically

¹¹¹ 'Richard avait voulu s'entourer comme pour se troubler le coeur'; 'visions matérielles de choses intangibles, entrant dans l'âme par les yeux'. Rod (1890), pp. 136 and 31.

¹¹² 'Le Roi Cophetua languissait aux pieds de sa mendicante'. Ibid., p. 187.

¹¹³ 'Au sein de la terre'. Champier (1881), p. 83.

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over-endows him with the power of vision.¹¹⁴ Are we, then, to take his waking dream of Galatea as a result of this excess of vision? If so, Polyphemus's hyper-visual hallucination (and, by extension, that of Cophetua and the beggar maid) could be considered an inversion of the positivist dictum that seeing is believing, substituting the notion that believing makes us see what we desire most to see. Taken together, in the setting of the Exposition Universelle where so much else willingly and dumbly gave itself up to the gaze, where the positivist avowal of the primacy of the material and the visible clashed with the Symbolist and antinaturalist privileging of suggestion and inner vision, where almost anything could and did become an object of veneration, *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* conceive a world where beauty equals divinity, where to worship it is to suffer eternally, where veneration dissolves the identity and the existence of both worshipper and worshiped – altars of perversity, indeed.

¹¹⁴ See D. de Margerie, *Autour de Gustave Moreau. La Maison des Danaïdes* (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire, 1998), p. 30, for an interesting angle on Polyphemus's three eyes and the implications raised by the crossed gazes.

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Chapter 4

Lost in translation? Rossetti's reputation and influence in France, 1872-1898

Traduire, c'est trahir

old French adage

Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when in the course of its survival a work has reached the age of its fame.¹

When many artists die, their reputations follow them to the grave. In the case of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, on the other hand, dying could arguably be thought of as one of the best career manoeuvres he ever made. Concealed from public view during his lifetime, whether because of his notorious sensitivity to criticism or because his well-established network of patrons lessened the pressure to exhibit, his paintings and drawings were revealed to the public – directly in Britain, indirectly in France – as almost a complete body of work in simultaneous retrospective exhibitions at the Royal Academy and the Burlington Fine Arts Club early in 1883. Roughly halfway between France's first exposure to the new wave of British anti-naturalist painting at the 1878 Exposition and the publication of Moréas's Symbolist manifesto, and months before the publication of Ernest Chesneau's *La Peinture anglaise* (re)introduced him to the French public, Rossetti could scarcely have chosen a more opportune moment to

expire.

If this statement appears overly provocative – certainly, it contains a deliberate echo of Sâr Péladan’s characteristically intemperate injunction to the equally reclusive Gustave Moreau, ‘Drop dead, for the greatest good of art, for your own glory’ – then let me explain why I have chosen to open with this salvo.² The sudden access to his art afforded by his death excited an extraordinary level of interest from critics, poets and painters on both sides of the Channel; it would be fair to estimate that the ink spilt in the two decades after he died far exceeds what was written about him, both in quantity and variety, during his whole lifetime. Furthermore, the steady increase in access to his paintings, whether through reproductions, loan exhibitions, sales or acquisition by public collections, allowed a younger generation of anti-realist painters to draw inspiration from his work. Yet the fin-de-siècle explosion of interest in Rossetti, and specifically in what Rossetti had to offer Symbolism in France, remains

¹ W. Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, in *Illuminations* (1999), p. 72.

² ‘Mourez tôt, mourez tout de suite, pour le plus grand bien de l’art, pour votre propre gloire’: J. Péladan, ‘Gustave Moreau’, *L’Ermitage* (January 1895), p. 34.

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largely unexplored in subsequent scholarship on the impact of the Pre-Raphaelites in France. Burne-Jones and Watts have commanded the lion’s share of attention in such studies; Rossetti, although generally acknowledged to have been a key figure in the cross-Channel exchange, has remained a shadowy presence at the margins.³ Even the literature that accords him greater impact on the course of Symbolism in France has focused on his poetry to the exclusion of his painting, despite the inseparability of the verbal and visual aspects of his oeuvre.⁴ In fact, Rossetti’s affinities with the central Symbolist tropes of *correspondances* and the unity of the arts were integral to his appeal for continental Symbolism; moreover, unlike Burne-Jones and Watts, he occupied the unique position of having inspired works in multiple media.

Why this disparity, and why this false division? The most obvious answer is that Rossetti’s work was much less visible than that of his compatriots. While new work by Burne-Jones and Watts could be seen at least once a year in London from the late 1870s, and both exhibited more or less regularly in France, Rossetti exhibited little during his lifetime in Britain (and not at all in the last two decades of his life) and never in France – either during his lifetime (an exhibition of his recent work in
³ For example, Lethève (1959), because of his focus on exhibitions and documentation, mostly passes over Rossetti; E. Becker, ‘Sensual eroticism or empty tranquility: Rossetti’s reputation around 1900’, in J. Treuherz et al., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (exh. cat., Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 2003), while casting his net wider to take account of Rossetti’s reception in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, employs a similar documentary approach and is much indebted to Lethève. S. Phelps Smith, ‘From Allegory to Symbol: Rossetti’s Renaissance Poets and His Influence on Continental Symbolism’, in Casteras and Faxon (1995), provides a more in-depth analysis of the appeal Rossetti’s brand of antinaturalism held for Continental artists, but does not discuss any specific works inspired or influenced by him.

⁴ A particularly egregious example is the only recent biography of Rossetti in French, J. de Langlade, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Paris, 1985), which, while it devotes a full chapter to Rossetti’s discovery by Debussy, Albert Samain, Pierre Louÿs and other poets, merely notes in passing that Rossetti’s artistic influence manifested itself in the work of Moreau, Redon, and other Symbolists (bizarrely, Van Gogh is included in this list) without further discussion. Indeed, Rossetti’s painting barely receives mention in the rest of the text, which is luridly sensationalistic in the mould of Violet Hunt’s *The Wife of Rossetti* (1932) and proffers such unedifying details as the assertion that Rossetti, in his final decade, enjoyed a *ménage à trois* with Fanny Cornforth and Alexa Wilding.

⁵ Many of Rossetti’s biographers have operated on the assumption that he withdrew wholly from exhibiting his work as a reaction against the scathing criticism *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (S.44) received in 1850; see for example J. Comyns Carr, *Some Eminent Victorians* (London, 1908), p. 65. As Colin Cruise has recently demonstrated, Rossetti did in fact continue to exhibit in small, independent group

shows (notably the Hogarth Club) up to 1856: C. Cruise, “‘Sincerity and earnestness’: D. G. Rossetti’s early exhibitions 1849-53”, *Burlington Magazine* 146 (January 2004), pp. 4-12. Rossetti knowingly colluded in his self-mythologising as a mysterious, temperamental recluse, for example telling Chesneau that ‘since the age of twenty-two, I can say that I have never exhibited anywhere, for personal motives whose details here would be egotistical’ (‘Depuis l’âge de vingt-deux ans, je puis dire que je n’ai jamais exposé nulle part, pour des motifs qui me sont personnelles [sic] et dont le détail ici serait égoïste [sic]’): Rossetti, letter to Ernest Chesneau, 7 November 1868, W. E. Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Cambridge, 2003), vol. 4, p. 119.

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Paris in 1862 mooted by Whistler evidently came to nothing)⁶ or posthumously. Furthermore, to this day, no French collection, either public or private, possesses any of his paintings.⁷ Although, in addition to the two 1883 retrospectives, Rossetti’s work appeared at the Manchester Exhibition in 1888 and 74 of his paintings were displayed at the New Gallery in 1894, outside of these exhibitions a visitor to Britain hoping to view his paintings faced disappointment. By 1890, only two of his paintings – *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* [Figure 50, S.44] and *Beata Beatrix* [Figure 51, S.168] – had entered the National Gallery. If one was prepared to venture further afield, the altarpiece of Llandaff Cathedral in Cardiff, the Oxford Union murals, in an advanced state of ruin, and *Dante’s Dream* in Liverpool (the only one of Rossetti’s paintings to enter a museum during his lifetime) raised the tally to five. Otherwise, one had to rely on the largesse of collectors, a few of whom were apparently willing to show their paintings to amateurs, but, as Paul Bourget, one of the first French writers to develop an interest in Rossetti, lamented after a trip to London in the autumn of 1883, such crumbs of generosity only whetted an insatiable appetite; he was only able to see twenty of the 395 paintings listed in William Sharp’s recent catalogue.⁸ Amateurs like Bourget who crossed the Channel and actively sought out Rossetti’s work were, however, a tiny minority. For a Paris-bound audience, then, viewing Rossetti took place under conditions that set him apart from his peers – namely, his work could be seen *only* in the form of reproductions.

In the previous chapters, I touched upon the problems inherent in the use of reproductions to disseminate original works of art. However, these issues acquire a particular urgency in discussing Rossetti’s reception in France. In the case of Burne-Jones and Watts, reproductions, however unsatisfactory, were periodically supplemented with exhibitions of ‘the real thing’, transforming prints and photographs into aides-memoires rather than imperfect independent objects; reproductions of their work functioned as they were intended, that is, as substitutes for originals. In the case of Beardsley, the medium of illustration meant that his art was intended for

⁶Rossetti wrote to George Price Boyce on 20 October 1862 asking permission to borrow back *Bocca Bacciata* as it would be ‘going to Paris under Whistler’s auspices to an exhibition’: Fredeman (2003), vol. 2, p. 494-95.

⁷According to V. Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1971), and J. McGann, ed., *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive* (2000 and forthcoming).

⁸P. Bourget, ‘Lettre de Londres’, *Le Journal des Débats politiques et littéraires*, 24 September 1884, republished in *Études et portraits* (Paris, 1889), vol. 2. See also Bourget, ‘Sensations d’Oxford’ (1883), republished in *Études et portraits*, vol. 2, pp. 212-18, on the Oxford Union murals.

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reproduction from the start. The French Rossetti, however, was an artist whose original work, because of its near-complete unavailability, effectively ceased to exist. Walter Benjamin’s contention that the ‘aura’ of a work of art decreases in direct proportion to the proliferation of mechanical reproduction would seem to find its inverse in Rossetti’s case.⁹ In the absence of the original work, photographs and engravings, which seem largely to have been published in limited editions and

collected by a literary and artistic elite, took on the ritualistic fetish value that would ordinarily have been accorded the original.¹⁰ Indeed, photographs after Rossetti's paintings were deemed important enough to include in the 1892 Salon de la Rose + Croix; two years later, an exhibition of photographs after Rossetti and Burne-Jones was held in Brussels.¹¹ And still, notwithstanding the remarkable quality of many of these reproductions, they could only give an incomplete, or worse, a deceptive idea of the original. Camille Mauclair recalled that the reproductions of *Beata Beatrix* and other Pre-Raphaelite paintings that he and his colleagues pored over at Mallarmé's *mardis* 'ravished our Symbolist-Wagnerian imaginations', but when he saw the paintings for the first time, 'there was nothing more disappointing'.¹² If the reproductions Mauclair knew were guilty of hiding the inelegance of Rossetti's drawing and facture, neither could they convey, by virtue of their much-reduced scale, the overpowering physical presence of Rossetti's late works. Even in one of the rare coloured mezzotints, the hothouse lushness of the colour that critics agreed was one of the strongest and most distinctive aspects of Rossetti's painting was lost¹³ – a loss, I would argue, comparable to the loss of the elusive essence of his poetry when it was translated into French.

⁹ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1999), pp. 216-17.

¹⁰ For example, in *Les Trois coeurs*, Richard Noral decorates his study with reproductions of talismanic Symbolist and Renaissance paintings of women, including Rossetti's *La Pia de' Tolomei* (S.207); see Chapter 3.

¹¹ For further discussion of Rossetti's presence at the Salon de la Rose + Croix, see below. I have not been able to discover whether a catalogue of the Brussels exhibition exists, but given that Dietrich, one of the major publishers of Pre-Raphaelite reproductions, was located there, it seems reasonable to assume that the photographs exhibited were those published by Dietrich.

¹² 'Tout cela ravissait notre imagination de symbolistes et de wagnériens, et, en photographie, c'était vraiment très attachant. Quand nous avons vu les peintures elles-mêmes, [...] il n'y a rien de plus décevant': C. Mauclair, *Mallarmé chez lui* (Paris, 1935), pp. 72-73. It is worth bearing in mind that at the time of writing, the reputation of Symbolism and Pre-Raphaelitism was at its lowest ebb.

¹³ My decision to focus on Rossetti reproductions owes much to Jerome McGann's approach in his recent monograph on the artist; McGann reasons that as reproductions represented the broader public's only knowledge of the artist, they provide a better way to contextualise him than would the paintings themselves: J. McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game That Must Be Lost* (New Haven and London, 2000), p. ix.

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Any study of Rossetti's role in the development of antinaturalism in France is, then, a study of translations – from English poetry into a French approximation thereof, from painting or drawing into photograph or print, and even, in the case of *The Blessed Damozel*, from two different media (poetry and painting) into a third (music). In tracing Rossetti's impact on the poets who attempted to translate his words and on the artists – Maurice Denis, Odilon Redon and Claude Debussy – who translated his visual world from black-and-white photographs and colourful descriptions into new images, we should bear in mind Benjamin's warnings about the pitfalls and potentials of translation:

In translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were. It cannot live there permanently, to be sure, and it certainly does not reach it in its entirety. Yet, in a singularly impressive manner, at least it points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages. The transfer can never be total, but what reaches this region goes beyond the transmittal of subject matter. This nucleus is best defined as the element that does not lend itself to translation. [...] Unlike the words of the original, it is not translatable, because the relationship between content and language is quite different in the original and the translation.

While the content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds.¹⁴

The most 'successful' translation, then, is not one which adheres slavishly to the letter (or the outline) of the original, but one which manages to capture something of its spirit within the gap it creates between itself and the original. Elements of Rossetti's work did, inevitably, get lost in the translation; however, in some of the more sensitive translations, be they verbal, visual or musical, rich and complex resonances reverberate in these newly opened spaces.

'Un Italien d'Angleterre': French Perceptions of Rossetti

When the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* assigned Théodore Duret to cover the Rossetti retrospectives in 1883, their choice of critic was highly significant. An advocate of the Impressionists, a close friend of Whistler and an enthusiastic promoter of Japanese art, Duret had been the *Gazette's* *correspondant d'Angleterre* since Duranty's death in 1880 and was the epitome of the cosmopolitan avant-garde critic. While Duret, like many of his British counterparts, expressed doubts about the validity of Rossetti's project to resuscitate Renaissance art, the similarities cease there. Unlike

¹⁴ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' (1999), pp. 75-76.

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the mainstream British critics, who seemed contractually obliged to rail against the physical and moral sickness they perceived in Rossetti's late work,¹⁵ Duret's sophistication allowed him to recognise the complexity of the artist's range of literary and visual references¹⁶ and to acknowledge readily the power of the late works' overwhelming physicality, characterising the feminine prototype represented therein as simultaneously compelling, repellent and terrifying: 'she exerts a sort of fascination, but mixed with disquiet; one would be afraid to approach too closely, one feels that if she took you in her arms, she would make your bones crack'.¹⁷

The choice of Duret to report on Rossetti in such a distinguished publication indicates that Rossetti had already, by this date, acquired a reputation in France as a major vanguard artist and a figure whose importance transcended national boundaries. Indeed, in spite of never having exhibited in France, Rossetti had not been entirely unknown there before his death. For instance, Duret's prior knowledge of Rossetti's art is apparent in his review of the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition in 1881 in which he discussed the artist at length despite his absence from the exhibition, admitting that while Rossetti's attempts to turn back the clock of art history were 'absolutely opposed to [his] tastes and indeed [his] ideas about art', his art nonetheless exerted a strange fascination upon him.¹⁸ However, tracing the international dissemination of his literary and artistic reputation during his lifetime is a haphazard exercise, relying much on speculation to knit together sparse or no longer extant pieces of evidence.¹⁹

Examining the evolution of responses to Rossetti, and the growing engagement with

¹⁵ A pertinent example is the unsigned review in the *Illustrated London News*, which was typical in its conflation of biography and art and its equation of physical illness with moral downfall: 'Perhaps no man has ever lived in the past – in the world of his own imagination – so completely as Rossetti. But has the painter, or even the poet, the right to live wholly for himself in his own fancy, and not for his age and his fellows? Will not such infidelity bring penalties upon himself and his art too? As regards himself, the piteous story of Rossetti's later life – the febrile strain, with its unhealthy, morbid tendencies, resulting in insomnia, hardly relieved by inordinate doses of chloral – sufficiently answers the question. As regards a man's art, the answer is scarcely less plain.' 'Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Illustrated London News* (6 January 1883), p. 30.

¹⁶ Although he does not allude to it in his article, Duret, as a keen Japonist, probably admired Rossetti's appropriation of Japanese motifs (particularly in the Llandaff altarpiece), some of which predate Whistler's experiments. I am grateful to Laura MacCulloch for drawing my attention to Rossetti's

Japonisme.

¹⁷ 'Elle exerce une sorte de fascination, mais mêlée d'inquiétude; on aurait peur d'en approcher de trop près, on sent que si elle vous prenait dans ses bras, elle vous ferait craquer les os': T. Duret, 'Les Expositions de Londres: Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 18, (1 July 1883), p. 54.

¹⁸ 'Absolument opposés à mes goûts et à mes idées en fait d'art': T. Duret, 'Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor Gallery', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1881), pp. 555-56.

¹⁹ This is especially the case in trying to chart the growth of awareness of Rossetti's painting; as Saunier (2002), p. 74, has observed, few reproductions from before 1880 are known, and attempting to trace sources for extant early reproductions has proven difficult.

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him, first as a poet and then as a painter, reveals the formation of an artistic identity strikingly different from Rossetti's British persona. This 'French' Rossetti, the exotic 'Italien d'Angleterre',²⁰ I would argue, conditioned the attempts of his first (poetic) translators to render his verse into French and, more broadly, reshaped his identity, drawing him out of his self-imposed isolation and transforming him into a full-blown Symbolist.

Brief references to Rossetti occur in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in the 1860s;²¹ a French amateur eager to learn more generally had to rely on British art periodicals for further information. Given his aversion to exhibiting, and the fact that steady patronage meant he could afford to keep a low profile, Rossetti displayed a surprisingly keen interest in maintaining public interest in his painting, making certain that laudatory notices of his new work appeared in key periodicals – of course, it helped that his brother, William Michael, and his former Pre-Raphaelite Brother F. G. Stephens, were respected critics, both of whom wrote for the *Athenaeum* and other widely-read publications.²² The first traced article devoted solely to Rossetti to appear in a French periodical, though, was a review of his *Poems* in *La Revue britannique* in 1870. The critic, Amédée Pichot, was not wholeheartedly enthusiastic, but his article highlights aspects of Rossetti's work frequently dwelt upon by French commentators over the following decades: his status as an exotic outsider, his isolation from contemporary trends and his debts to medieval Italian poetry, his blending of mysticism and sensuality, his idealism and its roots in the material.²³ While noting

²⁰ H. Dupré, *Un Italien d'Angleterre. Le poète-peintre Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Paris, 1921); Dupré's title is informed by Ruskin's famous remark that Rossetti was 'a great Italian tormented in the Inferno of London'.

²¹ In 1859, 1865 and 1869, most notably in Burty (1869), pp. 52-54, who refers to him as 'Rossetti' and designates him as the founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but does not refer to any of his works; see S. Phelps Smith in Casteras and Faxon (1995), p. 61.

²² See, for example, 'Mr. Rossetti's New Pictures', *Athenaeum* no. 2581 (14 April 1877), pp. 486-87; 'Art Notes', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 1 (1878), p. v; and 'Art Notes', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 4 (1881), pp. xlvi-xlvii. All of these feature detailed descriptions, often in fulsome, florid language, of Rossetti's recent work; the first 'Art Notes' piece cited, a description of the newly completed *Blessed Damozel* (S.244) is a good case in point, beginning 'There are few more intense and perfect poems in the English tongue than "The Blessed Damozel," by Dante Gabriel Rossetti; and there must be thousands of persons who feel something more than mere curiosity to see the picture, founded on the poem and bearing its name, painted by the poet himself for Mr. William Graham'. Rossetti's zeal in crafting a positive self-image is apparent in a letter to Stephens chiding the latter for penning a critical article on his poems and asking him in future to refrain from writing about him entirely unless his intention was to praise: letter to F. G. Stephens, 15 November 1871, in Fredeman (2003), pp. 185-86.

²³ A. Pichot, 'Correspondance de Londres', *La Revue britannique*, vol. 3 (June 1870), pp. 560-61. He concludes: 'En peinture comme en poésie, M. Rossetti est idéaliste. Tantôt le symbole reçoit de lui-même une forme matérielle qui a la transparence d'un voile, et quand ses personnages ont réellement existé, il les transfigure et les divinise par des attributs mystiques' (p. 561).

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that the *Blessed Damozel* is 'a rather pagan saint', Pichot's review displays none of the moral outrage that marked much of the British response to Rossetti's poetry.

The first traced in-depth French analysis and translation of Rossetti's poetry appeared in 1872, coincidentally the same year that his nemesis Robert Buchanan expanded and reprinted his infamous polemic, 'The Fleshly School of Poetry', in pamphlet form.²⁴ Significantly, the article, by Emile Blémont, appeared in *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique*, one of the first *petites revues* to be born from the ashes of the Franco-Prussian War (itself a vital nexus for artistic exchange between Britain and France) and characterised by Ernest Raynaud as the precursor to the myriad Symbolist periodicals of the 1880s and 1890s.²⁵ Blémont's thoughtful examination of the Pre-Raphaelite school of poets, which focuses mainly on Rossetti, draws comparisons between them and the idealism of Gautier and Puvis and characterises Rossetti's *House of Life* as a blend of 'Italian delicacy and *morbidezza* united with the deep reverie of the North'. It includes two translations of Rossetti's poems: the whole of 'Lost Days' ('Les Jours perdus') from *The House of Life* and the first stanza of 'The Blessed Damozel'.²⁶ Despite Blémont's good intentions and his valiant attempt at a metrical (though unrhymed) rendering of Rossetti's verse, the French version of 'The Blessed Damozel' is flat, stilted; read aloud, it feels uncomfortable in the mouth, and meaning is distorted by his efforts to shoehorn the words into the correct number of syllables ('Her eyes were deeper than the depth / Of waters stilled at even' becomes 'Ses yeux savaient mieux le calme et l'ombre / Que les eaux dormantes du soir').²⁷

Even as Rossetti's complex, Dantesque prosody frustrated French translators, his Italian roots and his foreignness in the country of his birth seem, ironically, to have increased his appeal in France and smoothed the path for his acceptance. First and foremost, the allure of the exotic hovered about him; the son of a *carbonaro* born in

²⁴ Buchanan originally published 'The Fleshly School of Poetry' under the pseudonym 'Thomas Maitland' (*Contemporary Review*, October 1871, pp. 334-50). Motivated as much by professional envy (Buchanan was a decidedly second-rate poet) as by prudery, the article and its repercussions are widely considered to have precipitated Rossetti's nervous breakdown and increasing withdrawal from the world from 1872.

²⁵ Raynaud (1918), vol. 1, p. 9. Indeed, Raynaud credits Blémont with 'preparing the path for Symbolism' ([il] prépare les voies au symbolisme') with his articles on the Pre-Raphaelites. It is also worth noting that Blémont was a close friend of Fantin-Latour, who had visited Rossetti on one of his stays in London in 1864; Rossetti reciprocated the visit later that year.

²⁶ 'Les sonnets sur la Vie, l'Amour et la Mort, unissent la délicatesse, la *morbidezza* italienne à la forte rêverie du Nord': E. Blémont, 'Littérature étrangère: l'école préraphaélite', *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique*, no. 14 (27 July 1872), p. 107.

²⁷ Ibid.

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exile was a deeply romantic figure, and his French biographers and critics consistently identified him as such, rather than as an Englishman;²⁸ reproductions of his selfportraits,

highlighting his dark, liquid eyes, broad forehead and sensual lips,

frequently appeared in his biographies to emphasise the point. In an era of simmering (though never virulent) Anglophobia, Rossetti's Italianness was a point in his favour in France; not only did it make his status as an outsider fascinating rather than threatening, it simultaneously gave him, as a member of a Latin people, a degree of familiarity and belonging. Not least, his work's embrace of mysticism, the ideal, and the world of the imagination could be partly explained and justified by contemporary stereotypes about his nationality.²⁹

This point was taken to stupefying extremes by Péladan in the preface to the first (and only) translation of the whole of *The House of Life* in 1887. Declaring Rossetti the last (or latest) exponent of the Latin tradition, Péladan all but claimed him

as a reincarnation of the Neo-Platonic ideal as represented by Dante and Guido Cavalcanti.³⁰ But he went further still in his ultra-romantic characterisation of Rossetti (whom he compared to his other idol, Moreau), rhapsodising that ‘Rossetti’s charm is a woman’s charm, one must experience it without explaining it’.³¹ Such a bald declaration of the painter-poet’s androgyny (or effeminacy) would have been anathema in Britain; indeed, Rossetti’s defenders had had to go to great lengths to counter the assaults of the conservative press on the virility of Rossetti’s person and oeuvre, which, although at their harshest in the wake of ‘The Fleshly School’

²⁸ See Dupré (1921); M. Duclaux, *Grands écrivains d’outre-Manche* (Paris, 1901), p. 273 (‘Cet Italien qui a laissé sur l’art et la littérature d’outre-Manche une empreinte si forte et si personnelle, et dont l’influence est visible jusque dans les récents développements de la poésie française’); C. Dupouey, *Notes sur l’art et la vie de D.-G. Rossetti* (Paris, 1906), p. 4; G. Mourey, *D.-G. Rossetti et les Préraphaélites anglais* (Paris, 1909), p. 24; G. Sarrazin, *Poètes modernes de l’Angleterre – Walter Savage Landor, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Élisabeth [sic] Barrett Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne* (Paris, 1885) (hereafter Sarrazin 1885a), pp. 234–355 (‘Devenu Anglais par circonstance . . . l’artiste hérita le raffinement de sa race, et garda, chez ses nouveaux compatriotes, le pur esprit italien du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance’); O. G. Destrée, *Les Préraphaélites. Notes sur l’art décoratif et la peinture en Angleterre* (Brussels, 1894), pp. 25–26. This is far from an exhaustive list. Of course, none of these writers could have known about Rossetti’s almost comical, over-compensatory John Bullishness, frequently expressed in his letters.

²⁹ The definition for ‘imaginatif’ in P. Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e Siècle*, vol. 9 (Paris, 1873), p. 578, cites Jules Michelet: ‘L’Europe aristocratique se plait à confondre le peuple de France avec les peuples IMAGINATIFS et gesticulateurs, comme les Italiens, les Irlandais, Gallois, etc.’

³⁰ J. Péladan, preface to C. Couve, trans., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. La Maison de la vie* (Paris, 1887), pp. x and xlviii. However, Péladan expressed reservations about Rossetti’s place in this grand hierarchy, noting that the chief inspiration of his poetry was Dante’s most ‘earthly’ work, *La Vita Nuova*.

³¹ ‘Le charme de Rossetti est un charme de femme, il faut le subir et non l’expliquer’: *ibid.*, p. lii.

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controversy, had not abated following his death eleven years later.³² Péladan’s Rossetti, while wildly exaggerated, is characteristic of the persona created for him in France by Symbolist poets and critics – just recognisable from knowledge of the English version, but distorted as if by a curved mirror, the raw materials of his life and poetry shaped to fit the mould of a sensual-mystical French Symbolist poet-painter.³³ And what of Couve’s translation of *The House of Life* itself? The method she employed is unique in nineteenth-century translations of Rossetti’s poetry, in that she translated each sonnet twice: once ‘literally’ (in prose) and, on each facing page, ‘literarily’ (in verse).³⁴ The prose translations are nearly all significantly shorter than the poems, reducing them to two or three sentences conveying the bare bones of dramatic incident – the epitome of Benjamin’s notion of the bad translation, that which transmits information only. The verse translations, while not as shockingly blunt and spare, make no attempt to render Rossetti’s metre or rhyme scheme into French. Although marginally ‘poetic’, they display only a partial understanding of Rossetti’s vision or his unusual imagery. The translation of the first sonnet of ‘Willow-wood’ is a good case in point – the final couplet, ‘And as I stooped, her own lips rising there / Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth’, which sent Buchanan (who, typically, took the quotation entirely out of context) into apoplexies of disgust, is rendered as the rather more innocuous, conventional and awkward ‘Et tandis que je me baissais, les lèvres de ma Bien-Aimée émergèrent / Et inondaient mes lèvres d’un torrent de baisers’. The grand expectations of metaphysical, neo-Platonic poetry built up by Péladan’s introduction are disappointed by the inept translation.

³² Comyns Carr (1908), p. 65, admits that ‘The common impression of the time, which I indeed partly shared, was that Rossetti’s individuality, however finely it might be endowed with poetic imagination, was not of the most virile order’, adding that once he met Rossetti he realized that the artist’s reluctance to exhibit was ‘not due to any lack of masculine strength’. As Kate Flint has observed, conservative

critics in Victorian Britain employed adult male heterosexuality as the norm against which ‘unhealthy’ (for which read ‘effeminate’) art was judged and condemned: K. Flint, ‘Moral judgment and the language of English art criticism 1870-1910’, *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 6, no. 2 (1983), p. 64.

³³ An interesting comparison is G. Mourey, *Passé le détroit. La vie et l’art à Londres* (Paris, 1895), pp. 160-61. Echoes of Huysmans’s heated writings on Gustave Moreau are discernible in Mourey’s perfumed, highly romantic characterisation of Rossetti and his work; indeed, Huysmans was Mourey’s mentor and they seem to have discussed Rossetti and the other Pre-Raphaelites together.

³⁴ Apart from Blémont’s translation of ‘Lost Days’ in 1872, the major translation of selections from *The House of Life* was I. Cleveland, trans., ‘La Maison de la vie, Sonnets’, *La Revue contemporaine*, vol. 5, no. 1, June-July 1886, pp. 65-69 and no. 2, August-September 1886, pp. 216-19, which translated ‘Winged Hours’, ‘Heart’s Compass’, ‘The Soul’s Sphere’, “‘Retro me, Sathana!’”, and ‘The Vase of Life’. As I have found no references to Ianthe Cleveland elsewhere, I assume the name is a pseudonym, but have not been able to discover the identity of its user.

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While Couve’s attempts represent the nadir of French translations of Rossetti’s poetry, it underscores several crucial problems present in varying degrees in all of the published translations from the 1880s. Rossetti’s strikingly unusual turns of phrase were almost always rendered in French in a manner that made them either anodyne or nonsensical, and the flavour of his deliberate archaisms was lost as they were translated into current French. The hallmark of his verse, the union of the spiritual and the sensual that so disturbed his more conventional British readers, was muted and cooled; particularly in the case of Gabriel Sarrazin’s translation of ‘The Blessed Damozel’, the heated yearning and palpable fleshliness of the Damozel were rendered passive and wistful.³⁵ In effect, translating Rossetti into French uncoupled the spiritual from the sensual; what emerged were poems by a different poet in which the spiritual and the mystical took centre stage.

This is not to imply that Rossetti never found sympathetic and able translators in France. Not surprisingly, the most interesting (and freest) responses to his poetry came from other poets whose own work trod a similar path, but most of them remained unpublished until long after the demise of Symbolism. Albert Samain produced several translations of the *House of Life* sonnets. A first version dates from 1873, following a visit to London during which he evidently met Rossetti and visited his studio, and includes twenty-two of the sonnets as well as translations of ‘The Blessed Damozel’, ‘Eden Bower’, ‘Troy Town’ and ‘Love’s Nocturne’; Samain, more than any other French translator, made the most painstaking efforts to preserve the rhythms and euphony of Rossetti’s verse.³⁶ He returned to the task early in 1887, but as he confessed to his friend Raymond Bonheur, he felt the essence of Rossetti’s poetry elude his grasp the harder he tried to capture it, and in the end never published his translations.³⁷ Pierre Louÿs crafted a sensitive free-verse translation of ‘Willowwood’

in 1896 which Debussy considered setting to music (a project that never came to fruition), but which did not see the light of day until 1931.³⁸ Finally, Francis Viélé-

³⁵ G. Sarrazin, trans., ‘La Damoselle élue’, *La Revue contemporaine*, vol. 1, no. 3, 25 March 1885, pp. 373-78 (hereafter Sarrazin 1885b)

³⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, La Maison de vie, traduite de l’anglais par Albert Samain*, NAF 12856.

³⁷ A. Samain, *Des Lettres, 1887-1900* (Paris, 1933), pp. 1-6; see especially his letter to Bonheur of 30 April 1887, in which he laments, ‘Le texte ne se laisse pas violer commodément, d’autant plus qu’à la concentration hyper-elliptique de la forme s’ajoute la concentration quintessencielle de l’idée’.

³⁸ P. Louÿs, ‘La Saulaie’, *L’Esprit français* (10 April 1931). On the aborted project for ‘La Saulaie’, see F. Lesure, ed., *Claude Debussy. Lettres 1884-1916* (Paris, 1980), pp. 83 and 98-101, H. Bourgeaud, ed., *Correspondance de Claude Debussy et Pierre Louÿs (1893-1904)* (Paris, 1945), pp. 75-76 and 146-139

Griffin, the Franco-American Symbolist poet who had written admiringly of Rossetti

in an 1891 notice in *Entretiens politiques et littéraires*,³⁹ published a translation, in *beau livre* form, of ‘The Blessed Damozel’ in 1924. One could argue that the bilingual Viélé-Griffin had an unfair advantage over his peers; his translation, which took more liberties with Rossetti’s words than any other and even introduced a new metre and rhyme scheme, restored to it the musicality that preceding versions had leached out.⁴⁰

One feature common to the better part of French literary responses to Rossetti, despite – or perhaps because of – the appeal of his double works of art to Symbolist aesthetics, was the subsuming of his artistic production into his literary production, or, in the case of one of his most influential critics, Gabriel Sarrazin (who did have firsthand knowledge of Rossetti’s paintings)⁴¹, the imposition of a false division between the two halves of his oeuvre.⁴² Surprisingly, even that arch-supporter of the synthesis of the arts, Teodor de Wyzewa, had little time for Rossetti as a painter, considering his artistic production contrived, deficient in technique and inferior to his poetry.⁴³ Of course, this can be partly attributed to the difficulty of seeing Rossetti’s paintings and the inadequacies of reproductions, but it may also be symptomatic of the rivalries between writers and artists that characterised much Symbolist debate, with writers claiming the primacy of literature over the visual arts.⁴⁴ Or, as Dario Gamboni trenchantly encapsulates these attitudes, ‘fin-de-siècle *littérateurs* generally made no

³⁹ F. Viélé-Griffin, ‘Deux mots’, *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* (1891), pp. 215-17.

⁴⁰ F. Viélé-Griffin, *La Damoiselle élue* (Paris, 1924).

⁴¹ Sarrazin met William Michael Rossetti during a visit to London in 1878 and apparently saw some of his brother’s paintings; he was also friendly with Ford Madox Brown. For further discussion of Sarrazin’s links with London, see Brogniez (2003), pp. 90-97.

⁴² ‘Distinct, divisé, tour à tour maître des deux pôles opposés d’art, mystique, puis sensuel, traversé d’une ombre de sensualisme dans sa mysticité, et d’une vive lueur de mysticité dans son sensualisme, tel fut Rossetti’: G. Sarrazin, ‘L’École esthétique en Angleterre’, *La Revue indépendante*, vol. 2 (November 1884), p. 166.

⁴³ Wyzewa based his damning judgment of Rossetti on *Ecce Ancilla Domini* and *Beata Beatrix*, claiming that the latter ‘est le plus saisissant modèle que l’on puisse offrir aux Jeunes peintres pour leur faire sentir la nécessité d’apprendre leur métier’: T. de Wyzewa, *La Peinture étrangère au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1892), p. 158. He continued to disparage Rossetti as a painter in *Peintres de jadis et d’aujourd’hui* (Paris, 1903), pp. 284-85. (Both essays, according to the exhaustive bibliography in P. Delsemme, *Teodor de Wyzewa et le cosmopolitisme littéraire en France à l’époque du symbolisme*, Brussels 1967, were not published elsewhere previously).

⁴⁴ See Goddard (2004).

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secret of their conviction that the world, paintings included, had been made so as to result in a book’.⁴⁵

In this mass of verbal translations, only one poet – Paul Verlaine – stands out as having engaged with Rossetti’s pictorial work. Verlaine was commissioned by William Rothenstein to write an ekphrastic poem on Rossetti’s 1867 portrait of his patron Frederick Leyland’s wife, *Monna Rosa* [Figure 52, S.198] for the first issue of the short-lived, and actively internationalist British Symbolist journal *The Pageant* in 1896; it was one of the last poems he ever wrote and, as his response to Rothenstein makes clear, financial considerations loomed uppermost in the ailing poet’s mind.⁴⁶ While not one of his best poems, ‘Monna Rosa’ is worthy of closer attention than it has previously been accorded. Rossetti himself, apart from a pastiche quotation from Angelo Poliziano inscribed on the frame, had not, as was his usual practice, written a poem for the painting;⁴⁷ Verlaine’s effort may thus be seen as a collaborative postscript or a posthumous pendant. Notably, his poem makes no attempt to impose

any narrative or, indeed, any concrete meaning on this explicitly subject-less picture. Rather, the hypnotically repetitive cadences and fluid assonances combine to evoke aurally the dreamlike, sensual atmosphere of the painting. Just as Mrs Leyland, draped in the same white and gold damask robes in which Rossetti dressed his ‘stunner’ *Monna Vanna* (S.191), merges with her exotic Aesthetic surroundings as merely another swathe of sumptuous colour, so Verlaine takes obvious pleasure in the simple naming and suggestion of colour –

Elle est seule au boudoir
En bandeaux d’or liquide,
En robe d’or fluide
Sur fond blanc dans le soir
Teinté d’or vert et noir.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ ‘Les littérateurs fin-de-siècle ne faisaient généralement pas mystère de leur conviction que le monde, tableaux compris, était fait pour aboutir à un livre’: D. Gamboni, “‘Vers le songe et l’abstrait’: Gustave Moreau et le littéraire”, *48/14: La Revue du musée d’Orsay*, no. 9 (Autumn 1999), p. 56.

⁴⁶ Verlaine returned his poem to Rothenstein with the following note, dated 15 September 1895: ‘Voici vers [sic]: je les crois appropriés *ad-hoc*, “and the right lines of the right thing”. Si vous pouviez me les faire payer tout de suite, quelle reconnaissance!’ P. Verlaine, *OEuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. Y.-G. Le

Dantec and J. Borel (Paris, 1962), p. 1356. The poem was published in *The Pageant* in the original French.

⁴⁷ While Rossetti informed Leyland that the quotation (‘Con manto d’oro, collaria ed anelli, / La piace aver con quelli / Non altro che una rosa ai sua capelli’) was from Poliziano, according to William Michael it was actually his own work ‘in the style of’; he may have been flaunting his erudition at Leyland’s expense. Fredeman (2003), vol. 3, letter to Frederick Leyland, 18 June 1867, pp. 546-47.

⁴⁸ P. Verlaine, ‘Monna Rosa’, *The Pageant* (1896), p. 14.

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– a task given particular urgency by the fact that his readers only had access to the black-and-white reproduction which his poem, both literally and figuratively, framed.⁴⁹

The sensitivity of Verlaine’s poetic response to Rossetti’s pictorial work is, however, rare among his contemporaries. For a more satisfactory example of a Benjaminian ‘good’ translation – one that ‘is transparent; does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully’⁵⁰ – we must turn instead to Rossetti’s fellow visual artists, and to the work that resulted when a poet, a composer and a painter took on the task of translating his most talismanic double work, *The Blessed Damozel* [Figure 53, S.244].

A Total Work of Art: From *The Blessed Damozel* to *La Damoiselle élue*

In 1885, the 23-year-old Claude Debussy, about to depart for Rome for a two-year stint as a *pensionnaire* of the Académie Française, read ‘La Damoiselle élue’, Gabriel Sarrazin’s translation of ‘The Blessed Damozel’, in the *Revue contemporaine*. Although inspiration did not strike immediately, his reading sowed the seeds of a composition that germinated over his sojourn in Rome, emerging in 1887 as a cantata, based on Sarrazin’s translation, for female soloists and choir.⁵¹ Five years later, shortly before the work received its premier in Paris and the score was published by Edmond Bailly of the Librairie de l’art indépendant (a publisher and shop with links to the occult and Péladan’s Salon de la Rose + Croix), Bailly asked the young Nabi painter and theoretician, Maurice Denis, to provide the frontispiece [Figure 54, C.30] – a willowy white-gowned woman standing on a golden balcony, the stylised arabesques of her blonde tresses floating like flames against a starry sky.⁵² The resulting work, informed by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* theories formulated by Teodor de

Wyzewa in *La Revue wagnérienne*, exemplified the synthesis of the arts which had

⁴⁹ Presumably Rothenstein provided Verlaine with a verbal description of the painting's colour scheme.

⁵⁰ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' (1999), p. 79.

⁵¹ François Lesure speculates that Debussy's younger brother Alfred may have been a catalyst in the composition of *La Damoiselle élue*; Alfred published a translation of Rossetti's 'The Staff and the Scrip' ('Le Bourdon et le besace') in *La Revue indépendante* (November 1887) and the brothers probably discussed contemporary poetry together: F. Lesure, *Claude Debussy avant Pelléas ou les années symbolistes* (Paris, 1992), pp. 80-81.

⁵² Throughout my discussion of *La Damoiselle élue*, I shall be referring to the 1893 piano reduction published by Bailly, not the orchestral score (unless otherwise noted).

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become central to Symbolist aesthetics.⁵³ Yet, curiously, with a handful of important exceptions such as Richard Langham Smith's exploration of Debussy's creative debt to the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti himself often appears as a footnote in discussions of *La Damoiselle élue*.⁵⁴ Moreover, some of the literature on Denis's and Debussy's reinterpretation of Rossetti's *Blessed Damozel* discusses it as an 'improvement' on the original, to Rossetti's detriment.⁵⁵ This is, perhaps, not surprising given that Denis, both as a member of the Nabis, with their association with the radical aesthetic of Paul Gauguin, and as the author of the groundbreaking 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme' whose opening formula, 'Remember that a painting – before being a charger, a nude woman or some anecdote – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order' has been subjected to much misinterpretation as a manifesto of formalist abstraction, has always fitted more comfortably into high modernist narratives than has the 'retrograde', literary art of Rossetti.⁵⁶ I would like to propose a different, less normative reading that restores Rossetti to his rightful place in this Symbolist constellation and suggests that Denis's visual reinterpretation of the figure of the Blessed Damozel reveals a broader knowledge of, and deeper engagement with, Rossetti's oeuvre than has previously been acknowledged.

In temperament and in aesthetic preferences, Denis exhibited marked differences from his fellow Nabis and strong affinities with Rossetti almost from the beginning. As MaryAnne Stevens points out, Denis was unique among his peers in his fascination, verging on obsession, with women as ideal or sacred beings, a characteristic which allied him more closely to the subject matter and aesthetic of

⁵³ For further discussion of the role played by Wyzewa's articles, see J. Kearns, *Symbolist Landscapes: The Place of Painting in the Poetry and Criticism of Mallarmé and his Circle* (London, 1989), pp. 72-74. On Wyzewa's low opinion of Rossetti the painter, see n.43 above.

⁵⁴ R. L. Smith, 'Debussy and the Pre-Raphaelites', *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 2, Autumn 1981, pp. 95-109. It should be noted, however, that Smith errs in claiming that Debussy's interest in Rossetti and his decision to set *La Damoiselle élue* was 'clearly *avant l'heure*' and that there were few articles or translations until the 1890s (p. 96).

⁵⁵ The most extreme example is R. Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London, 1979), p. 22, who states that Debussy 'transcends Rossetti and restores to [him] his intention'; Guy Cogeval praises Denis's design as 'fort lointain de l'élégance morbide de Rossetti qui éternise un amour impossible par delà la barrière de la mort': G. Cogeval, 'Le ciel ne peut pas attendre. Maurice Denis et la culture symboliste', in G. Cogeval et al., *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943* (exh. cat., Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1994), p. 24.

⁵⁶ 'Se rappeler qu'un tableau – avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote – est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées': M. Denis ['Pierre Louis'], 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Art et critique* nos. 65 and 66 (23 and 30 August 1890), pp. 540-42 and 556-58, reprinted in M. Denis, *Le Ciel et l'arcadie*, ed. J.-P. Bouillon (Paris, 1993), p. 5.

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Rossetti and Burne-Jones.⁵⁷ His youthful tastes corresponded remarkably closely with Rossetti's. A reading of Denis's journal entries on his first visits to the Louvre and

Rossetti's letters home during his first visit to Paris, despite the difference in tone between the former's rapturous reverence and the latter's flippancy, shows that both were drawn to Fra Angelico's *Coronation of the Virgin* and Hippolyte Flandrin's frescoes at St-Germain-des-Prés, signalling the origins of a commitment to renew painting by keeping one eye fixed (selectively) on the past.⁵⁸ Furthermore – and crucially for his acquaintance with Rossetti's work – Denis sought and maintained much closer ties with literary Symbolists than did the other Nabis, attending Mallarmé's famed *mardis* from 1890. Not only did his affiliation with Mallarmé's circle expose him to intense discussions on the notion that painting should approach, in Pater's words, 'the condition of music' – Whistler and Arthur Symons were regular attendees – but also to reproductions of Rossetti's painting, which Mallarmé apparently made available at his gatherings.⁵⁹

Although unfortunately we are forced to rely in large part on anecdotal information concerning which reproductions Denis may have seen, and many of the reproductions that survive today were published too late to have informed his work in the early 1890s, we can attempt a speculative reconstruction of the convergence of his path with Rossetti. He may have seen photographs of Rossetti's paintings as early as 1889; the first version of *Mystère catholique* [Figure 55] bears an uncanny resemblance to *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* in terms of subject matter (moving the Annunciation into an overtly contemporary domestic setting), the deliberately

⁵⁷ Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 211-12.

⁵⁸ See M. Denis, *Journal*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1957), entries for 12 August 1885, p. 40, 20 August 1885, pp. 41-42, 5 January 1886, p. 63 (on Fra Angelico) and 18 August 1886, p. 66 (on Flandrin), and Fredeman (2002), vol. 1, letter to William Michael Rossetti, 4 October 1849, pp. 108-9 ('Now for the best. Hunt & I solemnly decided that the most perfect works, taken *in toto*, that we have seen in our lives, are two pictures by Hippolyte Flandrin [...] in the church of S. Germain des Prés. Wonderful! wonderful!! wonderful!!!'). Rossetti's enthusiasm for Flandrin has been dismissed by most scholars as an embarrassing error of youth, but there may be some significance in it previously overlooked: Driskel (1992), pp. 72-73, identifies Flandrin and other pupils of Ingres (including Eugène Amaury-Duval, whose frescoes in the church at St-Germain-en-Laye were among the first works of art to which Denis was exposed as a child) as representing a French form of Pre-Raphaelitism, in the sense that they were inspired by the work of Fra Angelico and subscribed to the belief that Raphael had 'declined after his first efforts' (in moving to pagan subjects, among other things), a central tenet of the aesthetics of ultramontaniam. For further discussion of Denis's dialectical relationship with the painting of Flandrin, see Driskel (1992), pp. 237-39; see also Marlais (1992), pp. 186-207, on the paradox of Denis's conservative modernity.

⁵⁹ G. Vaughan, 'Maurice Denis and the sense of music', *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 7, no. 1 (1984), pp. 38-40 and 42.

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awkward, flattened rendering of the figures and, most striking, the predominantly white palette, enlivened only by a few intense touches of red, blue and gold.⁶⁰

More central to the development of the imagery of *La Damoiselle élue*, however, were two engravings either published or exhibited in Paris in the early 1890s which exemplified Rossetti's perception of music's power to suggest the divine, a notion closely bound up with his interest in medievalism and his conception of the Gothic – strikingly different from the Ruskinian Gothic – as centring on the identification of flesh and spirit and on the importance of love.⁶¹ In 1891, an engraving by Eugène Gaujean after Rossetti's *Christmas Carol* [Figure 56] was exhibited at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Praised by Edouard Rod, who nevertheless expressed disappointment at the fact that Gaujean had not thus far made any engravings after Rossetti's most renowned works, '[those] admirable canvases that M. Leighland [sic] guards jealously',⁶² this image of a richly-dressed young woman lost in rapture as she sings a carol celebrating Christ's birth⁶³ must have struck

a chord with Denis, for whom music, the divine, and love had always been intimately related, whether in the psalms sung in church or, more recently, in the form of his fiancée Marthe Meurier, a talented musician. Outside of the Salon, Denis may have had access to another reproduction of one of Rossetti's musical subjects, which has thus far escaped scholarly attention: an engraving after *King René's Honeymoon* recently discovered in an undated magazine clipping in the archives of the Musée

⁶⁰ Denis is known to have painted at least six versions of the subject; this one, the second, bears the closest resemblance to *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*. The third and fourth versions, painted in 1890 (one of which was exhibited at the 1891 Salon des Indépendants), while retaining the same composition and white colour scheme, are painted in a pointillist style. For further discussion of the multiple versions of *Mystère catholique*, see Cogeval et al. (1994), pp. 125-29. K. P. Aichele, 'Maurice Denis and George Desvallières: From Symbolism to Sacred Art', Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College (1976), p. 25, also notes the similarities between *Mystère catholique* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, but expresses doubts over whether the inspiration was direct. However, an etching by Eugène Gaujean after *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, in the National Gallery from 1886, was published by Thomas Agnew in 1880 and could have been available in France: R. K. Engen, *Pre-Raphaelite Prints: The Graphic Art of Millais, Holman Hunt, Rossetti and their Followers* (London, 1995), p. 66. Moreover, Frederick Hollyer produced a coloured mezzotint of the painting in the 1880s (reproduced in McGann (2000), plate II).

⁶¹ On Rossetti's conception of the Gothic, particularly in relation to *The Blessed Damozel* see D. M. R. Bentley, "'The Blessed Damozel': A Young Man's Fantasy", *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 20, nos. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 1982), pp. 36-37.

⁶² '[Une] de ces admirables toiles que M. Leighland [sic] garde jalousement': E. Rod, 'Les Salons de 1891 au Champ-de-Mars et aux Champs-Élysées (2^e et dernier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July 1891), p. 33. For further discussion of Gaujean's reproductive prints of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, see Saunier (2002), p. 77, and Engen (1995), pp. 65-67.

⁶³ Rossetti inscribed on the painting's frame the first line of the carol, 'Jesus Christus hodie natus est de Virgine': Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 193.

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d'Orsay [Figure 57].⁶⁴ Although the source has proven impossible to trace, from the credit line 'Reproduit avec l'autorisation de J. H. Trist esquire' printed below the engraving, we may safely assume that it dates from before 1892.⁶⁵ Joanna Meacock suggests that this celebration of harmony in music and in love may be read as Rossetti's secular recasting of his earlier, and already highly sensual, *St Cecilia* in the Moxon edition of Tennyson's *Poems* [Figure 58]: as King René works the bellows of the Queen's portative organ, he becomes the force behind her music, creating a direct parallel with St Cecilia's reliance on the power of God, her spouse. Furthermore, the painting puns on the meaning of René's name ('reborn') to imply that physical love might somehow attain to the nature of the divine and become redemptive.⁶⁶

This shared interest in the intersection of music, love, and the sacred highlights another connection between Rossetti and Denis: a profound and, in Rossetti's case, complicated relationship with Catholic mysticism. Rossetti, although raised in the Anglican faith, displayed a strong predilection for Catholic ceremony and imagery, his interest whetted by the burgeoning Oxford Movement.⁶⁷ Although his early efforts at religious painting suffered a critical battering informed by the rabid anti-Catholicism of the early 1850s⁶⁸ and he would become disillusioned with religion in later life, a mystical spirituality continued to pervade his work to the end. As F. W. H. Myers, one of Rossetti's most sensitive critics, argued, this mysticism was inextricable from the sensuous appeal of his work and differentiated it from the hedonistic materialism espoused by Gautier and Baudelaire:

The pictures that perplex us with their obvious incompleteness, their new and haunting beauty, are not the mere caprices of a richly-dowered but wandering spirit. Rather they may be called (and none the less so for their shortcomings) the sacred pictures of a new religion; forms and faces which bear the same relation to that mystical worship of Beauty on which we have dwelt so long, as

the forms and faces of a Francia or a Leonardo bear to the medieval mysteries of the worship of Mary or of Christ.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Documentation du Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti box 1.

⁶⁵ J. Hamilton Trist's sale was held at Christie's on 9 April 1892: Surtees (1971), p. 101. Trist had commissioned the painting, a replica of Rossetti's panel from the King René's Honeymoon Cabinet (1862, London, Victoria and Albert Museum), in 1864.

⁶⁶ J. Meacock, 'Saintly Ecstasies: The Appropriation and Secularisation of Saintly Imagery in the Paintings and Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow (2001), p. 175. On the availability of the Moxon Tennyson in France and its mention by Gustave Kahn in the *Revue blanche*, see Chapter 2.

⁶⁷ On Rossetti's religious background and education, see Meacock (2001), pp. 19-38.

⁶⁸ See Bullen (1998), pp. 20-36, on the long-lasting implications of anti-Catholicism for the Pre-Raphaelites' critical fortunes in Britain.

⁶⁹ F. W. H. Myers, 'Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty', *Cornhill Magazine*, vol. 47 (February 1883), p. 219.

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But, as much as Myers stressed the moral dimension of Rossetti's mysticism, he could not efface completely the sensuous delight it took in beauty. We might fairly apply to him the oxymoronic label of 'materialist mystic', one whose insistence on, and devotion to, the sacredness of the physical put him at odds with both conventional Victorian Christianity and the body-denying austerity of the monastic ideal espoused by Walter Pater in *Diaphaneité*.⁷⁰ This would explain Rossetti's attraction to the writings of the Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, of whose work he is known to have owned several volumes, and the centrality of the Swedenborgian concept of the 'conjugal angel' – the divine being formed by the physical union of two ideal human partners – to the conception and symbolic programme of *The Blessed Damozel*.⁷¹

Even a cursory reading of Denis's early musings on religion reveals striking affinities with Rossetti's 'religion of beauty'. Denis, although a devout Catholic from an early age, was no ascetic. He unashamedly acknowledged the importance to his faith of the sensory delights of church ceremony – psalms, lights, incense⁷² – and at the age of fifteen, in the first flush of his passion for Fra Angelico, dreamed of founding a chapel-cum-art gallery in which he and his fellow artist-monks would hold masses and art exhibitions simultaneously.⁷³ His entry into the Académie Julian and subsequent initiation into the less exalted side of studio life precipitated a brief crisis of faith, or more accurately the loss of an ideal:

I used to say "the Nude is chaste, the Nude is beautiful", without knowing what it meant. Today I know it and I love it, but alas! why must it in fact be unchaste, and aesthetic pleasures necessitate immodesty?⁷⁴

However, meeting Marthe caused him to discard his callow notions of the opposition between the body and soul and to decide that indeed 'we must not give up on the reconciliation of what we call the flesh and what we call the spirit, that this

⁷⁰ W. Pater, *Diaphaneité* (1864), reprinted in *Miscellaneous Studies* (London, 1895), pp. 247-54.

⁷¹ On Rossetti's readings of Swedenborg, see Meacock (2001), pp. 202-5 and Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 192-93.

⁷² Denis (1957), p. 90, entry for 25 December 1891 ('Noël. Messe de minuit').

⁷³ 'Et alors – oh, que ce serait beau – je lui élèverais en plein Paris profane une somptueuse chapelle, que mes confrères et moi n'ingénieraient à orner de tableaux, de fresques, de tavoles, de prédelles, de lunettes... Oh! que ce serait beau. Et chaque année, notre société artistico-religieuse y viendrait entendre la messe avec sa toile sur le bras. La messe dite on accrocherait les envois – exclusivement religieux – dans un local *ad hoc*. L'exposition se terminerait par une seconde messe dans notre église!...' Ibid., p. 40 (12 August 1885).

⁷⁴ 'Je disais "le Nu est chaste, le Nu est beau", et je ne le connaissais pas. Aujourd'hui je le connais et je l'aime; mais, hélas! pourquoi faut-il qu'il ne soit point chaste en effet, et que les joies esthétiques

nécessitent des impudeurs ?' Ibid., p. 68 (18 March 1888).

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reconciliation is the object of our greatest endeavours'.⁷⁵ At the same time, what Sarrazin considered the hallmark of Pre-Raphaelitism – the fragile 'ange-femme'⁷⁶ – and the explicitly Marian nature of the Damozel's physical description⁷⁷ doubtless appealed to his insistent idealisation of Woman. This resolution of opposites spilled over into his art and theoretical writings and, in tandem with his well-documented interest in all things medieval, made him an apt and sympathetic pictorial translator of *The Blessed Damozel*.

The Blessed Damozel, apart from being possibly Rossetti's most renowned double work, occupies the unique position of forming the bookends of his career. Thus, it also carries the burden of encapsulating the trajectory from light to darkness which, in the heavily biographical view of most of Rossetti's posthumous critics, defined his life and work. Furthermore, it is the only one of Rossetti's double works in which word preceded image: more than twenty years separate the initial composition of the poem (1847) and the commission from William Graham for the painting (1871, but apparently not begun until 1873).⁷⁸ In that space of time, Rossetti's style had evolved from the archaisms (both verbal and visual), angular forms and fresh, jewel-like palette of his truly Pre-Raphaelite phase to the overripe colour and mannered arabesques of his late, and what was widely considered his decadent, style. Indeed, Sidney Colvin, one of his more insightful critics, considered it the embodiment of Rossetti's moral-cum-artistic decline and the squandering of his early promise, lamenting, 'What a decay of the colour-sense is shown in the unwholesome pink stars and haloes, the dusky hotness and livid shadows of the "Blessed Damozel"! what a change, in the whole cast and temper of the imagination, from the mood in which the poem itself had been written thirty years before!' ⁷⁹ For Duret, the Damozel had nothing of the delicacy and spirituality which characterised her poetic antecedent; he classed her among the other late female figures like *Astarte*

⁷⁵ 'Qu'il ne faut renoncer à rapprocher ce qu'on nomme la chair de ce qu'on nomme l'esprit, que cette conciliation est l'objet de notre effort essentiel': Ibid., p. 90 (25 December 1891).

⁷⁶ Sarrazin (1885a), p. 248.

⁷⁷ Bentley (1982), p. 38.

⁷⁸ Graham was not the first to request a painting after the poem *The Blessed Damozel*; Rossetti's patron Thomas Plint apparently expressed an interest in such a painting in 1856, but Rossetti turned down the suggestion, confiding to Ford Madox Brown that 'I think I shall stick to St. Cecilia', even though Plint would have been willing to pay half again as much for *The Blessed Damozel*: Fredeman (2002), vol. 2, letter to Ford Madox Brown, 18 December 1856, p. 151.

⁷⁹ S. Colvin, 'Rossetti as a Painter', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 6 (1883), p. 183. See also J. Comyns Carr, *Papers on Art* (London, 1885), pp. 207-9.

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Syriaca and *Pandora* (a half-length engraving of which illustrated his review) as 'a sort of sibyl, siren, or melusine'.⁸⁰

Indeed, the poem in its 'final', most explicitly sensual incarnation still sits uneasily with the even more overt, claustrophobic eroticism of the painting, with the compressed perspective of its background of embracing lovers threatening to burst into the foreground, overwhelming the Damozel.⁸¹ Walter Pater, discussing this last version of the poem, considered this marriage of opposites central not only to *The Blessed Damozel*, but to Rossetti's art as a whole: 'One of the peculiarities of [the poem] *The Blessed Damozel* was a definiteness of sensible imagery, which seemed almost grotesque to some, and was strange, above all, in a theme so profoundly visionary.'⁸² The unnerving quality of Rossetti's attempt at fusing heaven and earth, that is, extreme material specificity and visionary ideas, finds concrete expression in

his rendering of the Damozel's eyes and lips in the painting. Associating eyes with 'soul's beauty' and the mouth with 'body's beauty', as in so many of his late works, Rossetti enlarged and exaggerated the Damozel's hooded blue-green eyes and pouting Cupid's-bow lips to an almost grotesque degree, as if the celestial and the terrestrial are locked in an eternal struggle for dominance. Sarrazin seems to have been impelled by the unsettling carnality of this 'angelic siren' (the attention given to colour in his description of the painting indicates firsthand knowledge)⁸³ to change his translation of the title from *La Damoiselle bénie* in his first article on Rossetti to *La Damoiselle élue* in his translation of the poem. While both words do mean 'blessed', the choice subtly shifts the meaning from the holier, more conventionally religious overtones of 'bénie' (which can also be translated as 'consecrated') to the less literal 'élue' ('elect' or 'chosen', which accentuates the Damozel's humanity and physicality).

This, then, was the challenge facing first Debussy, then Denis – how to capture the tension between the erotic and the spiritual and find a way to resolve it, or at least allow them to exist harmoniously, without letting the two destroy each other.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ 'Sorte de sibylle, de sirène, de mélusine': Duret (1883), p. 54.

⁸¹ On the evolution of the poem from its first draft in 1847 through its published versions in *The Germ* (1850) and the 1870 and 1881 *Poems*, see Bentley (1982).

⁸² W. Pater, *Appreciations* (London, 1889), p. 230.

⁸³ 'l'angélique sirène': Sarrazin (1884), p. 166.

⁸⁴ It is difficult to determine how much, if any, creative control Debussy exercised over Denis. His only letter to Denis on the subject was written after the score was printed, and merely notes, 'Je viens de voir « la Damoiselle Elue ». Vous dire que c'est une très belle chose est encore mal dire ce que j'en pense. Soyez-en bien remercier' (Musée départemental Maurice Denis-Le Prieuré, Ms. 12390). This would seem to imply that Debussy had only just seen the final design for the first time.

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Debussy's solution was to make several cuts to Sarrazin's translation, excising all of the parenthetical interjections from the Damozel's lover. This may have been in part for practical reasons – he may have felt that including a male soloist would clutter the cantata. However, the removal of the lover's voice, which D. M. R. Bentley likens to a typographical equivalent of the painting's predella,⁸⁵ dramatically alters our experience of the geography of the poem and the painting. Rather than a bipartite altarpiece in which a disquietingly lush *horror vacui* of a Heaven dominates over a compressed yet more austere Earth, we are left with a Marian icon; in place of a reinvented medieval-Catholic conception of the universe in which Heaven and Earth are simultaneously knowable and spirit and flesh are one,⁸⁶ we find a Heaven populated by angelic female voices from which the existence of the earth and, crucially, all signs of men have been removed except from within the mind of the Damozel, bounded by empty space.

Debussy's effacement of the terrestrial realm does not, however, cool or stifle the eroticism of the celestial sphere described in *La Damoiselle élue*; indeed, by isolating the Damozel in her heaven he turns the sensuality in upon itself, transforming the longing of two souls for each other across an unbridgeable distance into the Damozel's voluptuous reverie. His musical language is visually evocative, in keeping with the synaesthetic concerns of Symbolism and bespeaking a unified response to the image and the text. As Smith points out, he uses three- and seven-note motives in the bars in which the choir describes the 'seven stars in her hair' and 'the three lilies in her hand'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the 'strangely ethereal registration of the chords' which open the cantata and recur throughout, with the high octave doublings often unsupported by a bass line, appears to mimic in sound the 'stained glass' effect of (early) Pre-Raphaelite painting, which often employed luminous unmixed colours on a wet white background to make them appear as if lit from behind,⁸⁸ while the

swaying yet oddly static opening section leads the listener into a realm where time ceases to exist. Julie McQuinn observes that the entrance of the Damozel herself is built up as if she were the Virgin herself.⁸⁹ Indeed, the strangely static major triads in which the choir frames her utterances could be considered the aural equivalent of the

⁸⁵ Bentley (1982), p. 39.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸⁷ Smith (1981), p. 102.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ J. McQuinn, 'Exploring the erotic in Debussy's music', in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. S. Trezise (Cambridge, 2003), p. 125.

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hieratism of a Byzantine icon. Yet in keeping with Debussy's emphasis on the ambiguity between the sacred and the profane, this stasis also creates a feeling of 'lush suspension'⁹⁰ in which is located the frustrated desire of the Damozel, a desire whose resolution is beyond the bounds of the text and which Debussy refuses to resolve musically, preferring to let it float. Significantly, most of her entrances are enclosed by silence, and her first is unaccompanied. Debussy often imbued silences with an intense erotic charge, and the stillness in which the Damozel dreams of being reunited with her lover is no exception.⁹¹

This combination of poetic, musical and visual concerns infuses Denis's frontispiece. One of its most striking aspects is the way the design floats on the white surface of the sheet as if suspended in space – an effect most noticeable in the set of prints made outside the edition in 1892, as in Figure 54; Denis uses the white space to evoke visually the silences of the cantata and the ellipses in the poem. As Gerard Vaughan observes, he almost certainly had access to a reproduction of Rossetti's painting, for the tilt of the Damozel's head, the disposition of her hands and the waves of hair billowing around her head recall the original almost exactly.⁹² Yet Denis, not having seen the much larger original, had no firsthand knowledge of the intimidating corporeality of the Damozel evoked by Duret. Moreover, the loss of colour and scale in the reproduction dampened the sultry atmosphere conjured by Rossetti's palette and hid the restlessness of his brushwork; just as in Sarrazin's translation of the poem, the spiritual and the physical were uncoupled by the limitations of black-and-white photogravure. However, Denis's decision to change the colour of the Damozel's hair from the auburn of the painting to blonde harks back to the poem ('the hair that lay along her back / was yellow like ripe corn'), indicating a close reading of the text and a desire to negotiate the gaps opened up by Rossetti between poem and painting. The attempt at a return to the more mystical, less physical text (which emerges as even more mystical in Sarrazin's translation) accords with Denis's religious concerns and the Byzantine aesthetic espoused in the 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme'. If Debussy's setting of the Damozel's entrance musically evokes the otherworldly hieratism of a painted icon, then Denis's lithograph borrows openly from the icon

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁹¹ Other examples include *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) and, most famously, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902), in which the protagonists declare their love in total silence.

⁹² Vaughan (1984), p. 43.

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tradition. Exhibiting the pure profile of Marthe, his own "'élue" par excellence',⁹³ the Damozel is preternaturally tall, dominating the image even more thoroughly than does Rossetti's, but her attenuated body, enveloped by her long-sleeved gown, is drained of almost all substance and transformed into a pale field delineated only by the dark heavens and their golden barrier. The only body parts to be given any real presence – again, following the conventions of icon painting – are her hands (not holding 'three

lilies' but, oddly, a book), her voluminous hair and her face, with eyes not lowered to shade a smouldering gaze but closed completely on some inner dream and lips not parted, as in the painting, as if about to speak, but closed, indeed scarcely defined.⁹⁴ Save for her hair and the tilt of her head, one could be forgiven for thinking that Denis had, after a brief glance, turned his back entirely on Rossetti.

Although the influence of medieval devotional painting and Japanese prints on Denis's rendering of *La Damoiselle élue* has become an article of faith,⁹⁵ and there is certainly much evidence to support this thesis, I would argue that in his 'translation' of *La Damoiselle élue* Denis also sought inspiration in reproductions of Rossetti's work in a more overtly mystical vein. Laurence Brogniez notes that Denis's syntheist vision displays more affinities with Rossetti's gold-backed (and therefore more explicitly iconic) initial version of the subject, *Sancta Liliis*,⁹⁶ which also focuses on the Damozel to the exclusion of her lover. However, it seems probable that Denis was also aware of Rossetti's most extreme essay in anti-illusionism, the two versions of *Dantis Amor* [Figures 59 and 60, S.117 and S.117A]. Seldom, if ever, cited in literature on the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites in France, the pen-and-ink preliminary version is included in a list of photographs after Rossetti's works available to order from William Michael from 1882.⁹⁷ Given William Michael's

⁹³ J.-P. Bouillon, *Maurice Denis* (Geneva, 1993), p. 43. The implications for Denis's conflation of his artistic and emotional lives will be explored further in the following section.

⁹⁴ It is worth noting, however, that this last detail also varies in Rossetti's two *Blessed Damozels*; in the second version now in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight (S.244 R1) the Damozel's lips are closed.

⁹⁵ See especially U. Perucchi-Petri, 'Les Nabis et le japonisme', in C. Frèches-Thory and U. Perucchi-Petri, eds., *Les Nabis, 1888-1900* (exh. cat., Zurich, Kunsthau and Paris, Grand Palais, 1993), pp. 33-59, and Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 24.

⁹⁶ Brogniez (2003), p. 233. She adds, 'La peinture de Denis apparaît comme une préraphaélisme libéré de toute contrainte formelle, ayant renoncé à la précision mimétique pour mieux laisser s'exprimer le symbole.' Frederick Hollyer photographed *Sancta Liliis* in 1874, so, assuming that the reproduction would have been available in France in the early 1890s, her suggestion is certainly plausible.

⁹⁷ For the price list of reproductions sold by William Michael Rossetti, see British Library, Add. 49525 (Dykes Campbell Papers), vol. 5, no. 78. The list is dated in pencil '1882-1890', presumably by William Michael himself; most of the reproductions he sold were of drawings rather than paintings, *Dantis Amor* (no. 36) listed as selling for seven shillings.

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acquaintance with Samain and Sarrazin, it seems plausible that the photograph may have made its way across the Channel. Even at first glance, the parallels between *Dantis Amor*, which McGann contends is Rossetti's most wholly visionary work in its utter disregard for the idea of representation,⁹⁸ and *La Damoiselle élue*, are arresting: the deliberate refusal of post-Renaissance perspective and the collapsing of the picture plane, the archaising background (if one can fairly speak of background in images which fly in the face of Albertian perspective) of conventionalised gold stars scattered on a cobalt field, recalling Trecento Sieneese painting, and the weightless, static angularity of the figures. Delving more deeply into Rossetti's mystical symbolism reveals further parallels and points of inspiration for Denis. The head of Beatrice, encircled by a crescent moon, takes the traditional place of the Virgin, glowing in the reflected light of Christ, the Son/the Sun (evoked by the visual pun of Christ's head haloed by the sun), alluding to her 'heavenly marriage',⁹⁹ while the separation of the two, presided over by the allegorical figure of Love, as drawn from the *Vita Nuova*, presents the two phases of Dante's love for Beatrice, earthly in the *Vita Nuova* and heavenly in the *Divine Comedy*, in cosmic unity.¹⁰⁰ This union of opposites, or at least the longing for it, is, as we have seen, central to *The Blessed Damozel* and, in different ways, to the ideals of both Rossetti and Denis. Rossetti conceptualises love

as the force that generates and drives the universe, underscored by the centrality and scale of the figure of Love (who here simultaneously draws together and holds apart the symbolic lovers) and by his inscription, in the drawing, of the final line of the *Divine Comedy* along the diagonal divide between the spheres, ‘the Love that moves the sun and other stars’. This seems to have emerged in Denis’s pictorial translation of *The Blessed Damozel*.

Yet if the frontispiece for *La Damoiselle élue* seems to draw more upon Rossetti at his most spiritual and immaterial, Denis preserves and reworks one of the original Damozel’s most sensual attributes – her luxuriant hair. His Damozel’s hair seems to have more weight and substance than her body as it swirls around her as if caught in a celestial wind. Despite its stylised appearance, it exudes a warm, restless physicality somewhat at odds with the ascetic flatness and angular lines of the rest of the design (and, indeed, with the text, which describes the Damozel’s hair as much

⁹⁸ McGann (2000), p. 115.

⁹⁹ Meacock (2001), p. 166.

¹⁰⁰ Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 160.

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more demurely ‘[lying] along her back’); it enfolds her in an ethereal envelope much as Debussy’s excision of the lover’s voice from the text turns the eroticism of the Damozel’s monologue inward. If its golden colour distances it from the seductive black hair celebrated by Baudelaire’s ‘La Chevelure’ and its length from Mélisande’s notoriously fetishised hair, ‘plus longs que moi’,¹⁰¹ it recalls Pater’s contention that the Damozel’s hair was one of the details most disruptive to the visionary cast of the poem. In the context of Debussy’s setting of the poem, however, the Damozel’s hair serves not only to suggest the blending of the mystical and the sensual, but to tie together the pictorial, the poetic and the musical. Her hair is essentially a series of decorative arabesques, a motif central to the aesthetic of Denis and his fellow Nabis, whose importance was not simply decorative but synaesthetic. Indeed, in the ‘Définition’, Denis identified the arabesque as the earliest and purest form of artistic expression, not least because it made no attempt at mimesis;¹⁰² he further qualified this as a recurring theme in all art forms, with the ability to express the emotional and spiritual in sensual form: ‘Even a simple pursuit of lines [...] has an emotional value. Even the Parthenon frieze, even, and especially, a great Beethoven sonata!’¹⁰³ The arabesques of the Damozel’s hair give visual form to the undulations of Debussy’s melodies, just as the cantata paints a picture in sound of the Damozel dreaming about her lover. This fusion of image, music and poem, of the sacred and the sensual, while not slavishly faithful to the letter (the mere ‘information’) of Rossetti’s original, was faithful to its spirit, reversing the splitting of his oeuvre into discreet halves by his previous translators.

The Blessed Damozel continued to haunt Denis for at least another year, but her next incarnation, while no less poetic, was in a wholly secular vein. Fittingly, she resurfaced in another total work of art which would eventually involve Debussy: the programme design for the 1893 premier of Maeterlinck’s play *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Lugné-Poe’s Théâtre de l’Oeuvre [Figure 61, C.68]. Smith contends that *Mélisande* is

¹⁰¹ M. Maeterlinck, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892), in *Théâtre complet* (Paris and Geneva, 1979), vol. 2, p. 25.

¹⁰² ‘A l’origine, l’arabesque pure, aussi peu trompe-l’oeil que possible’: Denis (1993), p. 13.

¹⁰³ ‘Même une simple recherche de lignes, [...] a une valeur sentimentale. Même la frise du Parthénon, même, et surtout, une grande sonate de Beethoven!’: *Ibid.*, p. 17. See also M. Denis (writing as ‘Pierre Louis’), ‘A Blanc et noir’, *Art et critique* 2, no. 76 (8 November 1890), p. 717, in which the synthesis of music and painting in the arabesque is made even more explicit: ‘deux thèmes de symphonies colossales, à peine éclos de l’imagination du Voyant et déjà somptueux au minimum d’arabesques qui

les exprime; déjà symboliques, sur la toile à peine effleurée, en rythmiques ondulations’.

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‘in many ways a younger sister to the Blessed Damozel’;¹⁰⁴ while he refers specifically to Debussy’s opera, which was first performed nine years later, his characterisation applies with equal aptness to the character in the play, for Maeterlinck was an avowed admirer of Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry and openly paraded its influence on his work. This common parentage is given striking form – not previously noted – in Denis’s lithograph for the programme, which displays much stronger compositional ties with *The Blessed Damozel* than did *La Damoiselle élue*. In the foreground, the figure of Mélisande, her face framed by her long blonde hair, lowers her eyes in a melancholy reverie. Behind her the climax of the drama plays out: she and Pelléas enfold each other in a last, despairing embrace – the pair bearing a remarkable resemblance to the lovers at left in the middle ground of *The Blessed Damozel* – while a ghostly, distorted Golaud looms above Pelléas to deal the fatal blow. The shift from the ethereal and the sacred to the claustrophobic sensuality played out in Rossetti’s poem and painting repeats itself in the frontispieces for *La Damoiselle élue* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Denis’s musical reimagining of *The Blessed Damozel* had come full circle.

Beata Beatrix, Sancta Martha: Icons of the Beloved

Denis continued his dialectical relationship with Rossetti, informed by the tension between the sacred and the secular inherent in *The Blessed Damozel*, throughout the 1890s. The most salient and intriguing element of this dialogue was his constant reworking of a recurrent trope in Rossetti’s oeuvre, that of the icon of the beloved or muse. Aptly nicknamed ‘le Nabi aux belles icônes’, Denis’s early work is rife with small-format female ‘portraits’ (I use the inverted commas advisedly, for many of them are not portraits in the conventional sense of a faithful likeness) which explicitly borrow from the language and practices of domestic devotional painting. This practice had informed Rossetti’s own ‘portraits’ to such a degree that it became a commonplace for critics to describe him as the high priest of a religion of beauty.¹⁰⁵ Equally commonplace in Denis scholarship is the assumption that his ‘icons’ were primarily expressions of a personal faith that revolved around and exalted the rhythms

¹⁰⁴ Smith (1981), p. 104.

¹⁰⁵ P. T. Forsyth, for example, accorded him a prominent place in *Religion in Recent Art: Expository Lectures on Rossetti, Burne Jones, Watts, Holman Hunt and Wagner* (London, 1901 (1889)); see also Myers (1883). On the broader social significance of the establishment of a ‘religion of beauty’ in late Victorian Britain, see Anderson and Wright (1994), pp. 9-16.

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of domestic life, nowhere more so than in his explicitly iconic casting of Marthe as her namesake saint, *Sancta Martha* [Figure 62].¹⁰⁶ It may seem a stretch to claim that such quiet, tender pictures, some of which border on the sentimental, display any bonds with Rossetti’s obsessive repertoire of ‘beautiful women with floral adjuncts’¹⁰⁷ in which the flesh so often appears to exist in an uneasy truce with the spirit. We must, however, bear in mind the uncoupling of the sensual and the spiritual occasioned by the reproductions which constituted Denis’s acquaintance with Rossetti. In fact, Rossetti’s fusion of the divine and the sensual is transformed in Denis’s icons, which, I argue, while more restrained and operating in a more explicitly spiritual register, are also more erotic and troubled than has been previously assumed. If no one has accused Denis of the near-pathological repetition decried by critics of Rossetti’s gallery of beauties, his cast of characters is in fact even more circumscribed than Rossetti’s, whose sister Christina’s declaration that ‘One face looks out from all his canvases’¹⁰⁸ is generally considered a description of his oeuvre.

While Rossetti, in the main, limited himself to a handful of models (Elizabeth Siddall, Fanny Cornforth, Alexa Wilding and Jane Morris) and his increasingly mannered concentration on certain salient features (hooded eyes, bow-shaped lips, lantern jaws, columnar necks and nervous hands) did indeed blur the distinctions between them, draining them of individuality and transforming them into what Griselda Pollock has termed ‘woman-as-sign’,¹⁰⁹ Denis, from 1891, rarely looked to any model other than Marthe, the touchstone of both his art and his life. Like Rossetti, and also like countless icon painters for centuries before him, Denis reduced Marthe to a set of stylised but still recognisable features, which, while far from the disquieting ideal formulated by the older artist, reveals the same drive towards abstraction and the displacement of the individual by the symbolic type. There is something of Pygmalion in the projects of both artists; Rossetti’s attempts to educate Elizabeth Siddall and reshape her identity are too well known to require reiteration here,¹¹⁰ while Marthe

¹⁰⁶ On *Sancta Martha*, see Thomson (2004), pp. 126-27, who notes the political implications of Denis’s creation of a religious-domestic idyll in the milieu of the *ralliément*, and Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 190.

¹⁰⁷ The term is William Michael’s: W. M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters, with a Memoir* (London, 1895), vol. 1, p. 203.

¹⁰⁸ C. Rossetti, *Poems*, ed. W. M. Rossetti (London, 1895), p. 114.

¹⁰⁹ G. Pollock, ‘Woman as sign: psychoanalytic readings’, in *Vision and Difference* (London and New York, 1988), pp. 120-54.

¹¹⁰ For a revisionist re-reading of the narrative of Rossetti’s relationship with Elizabeth Siddall, see Pollock (1988), pp. 91-114. My use of the original spelling of her surname, rather than the more common ‘Siddal’ (a deliberate misspelling by Rossetti) is informed by Pollock’s essay.

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privately lamented in 1892, the year before her marriage to Denis, ‘I have been distressed by the idea that he wants me to be very holy, more so than I ever can be’.¹¹¹ As Rossetti repeatedly cast Elizabeth in the role of his religio-poetic ideal Beatrice, Denis enacted a similar transformation of Marthe from flesh and blood to painted saint.

One of Denis’s most obvious compositional borrowings from Rossetti was the *Triple portrait de Marthe fiancée* [Figure 63], which, as several commentators have noted, bears the imprint of Rossetti’s watercolour *Rosa Triplex* [Figure 64, S.238].¹¹² Two versions of *Rosa Triplex* exist, both of which were known in France by the time Denis painted his triple portrait: the finished watercolour, modelled by May Morris, which was photographed by Frederick Hollyer in the 1880s, and an unfinished chalk drawing for which Alexa Wilding sat and after which prints were made and published in France [Figure 65]. The latter work was the subject of a short illustrated article by Cosmo Monkhouse in the *Magazine of Art* around the time of the retrospectives, in which the author predicted, presciently as it turned out, that the drawing was ‘likely to be the parent of a thousand copies and adaptations’.¹¹³ While by virtue of size and medium it was one of Rossetti’s more minor works, it was also one of his best known in France and, given the recurrence of triple figures in Denis’s early work,¹¹⁴ a significant precedent. Furthermore, because of its near-monochrome palette, the drawing suffered less in translation than did many of Rossetti’s paintings. While the parallels with the Holy Trinity no doubt appealed to Denis’s religious sensibilities, Rossetti’s repetition of the same face in three different aspects relies on the timehonoured

motif of the Three Graces as the personification of the aspects of beauty united in the person of Venus.¹¹⁵ This meditation on beauty also entered into Denis’s conception – with some significant modifications. Judging from the composition of the portrait, Denis was acquainted with both versions of *Rosa Triplex*, drawing the

¹¹¹ ‘Je m’affligeais de la pensée qu’il me désirait très sainte, plus que je ne puis l’être’; quoted in

Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 220, no source given.

¹¹² See Frèches-Thory and Perruchi-Petri (1993), pp. 162-63, and Bouillon (1993), p. 33-34.

¹¹³ C. Monkhouse, “‘Rosa Triplex.’ Drawn by Dante Gabriel Rossetti”, *Magazine of Art*, vol. 6 (1883), p. 272.

¹¹⁴ Important examples include *Soir Trinitaire* (1891, private collection), *Jeunes filles qu'on dirait des anges* (1892, private collection), and, most famously, *Portrait d'Yvonne Lerolle en trois aspects* (1897, Josefowitz collection). The Trinity was central to mystical theology, something of significance to both Denis and Rossetti.

¹¹⁵ Monkhouse, however, contended that ‘these maidens are not one and the same’, describing them as ‘three different but sympathetic faces’ (p. 272). Bouillon (1993), p. 34, also notes the possible inspiration of Puvis’s *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, which Denis admired when it was displayed in the 1887 exhibition at Durand-Ruel’s gallery.

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framing device of the vine-covered arbour from the rose trellis of the watercolour and the more simplified rendering of the figure from the drawing. Yet the expression of glazed, sensuous ennui imprinted on the faces of the ‘triple rose’ in both versions disappears in the portrait, replaced by the gentle, melancholy introspection of countless Renaissance Madonnas. At the same time, Denis renders the unity of the figures simultaneously less corporeal and more intimate. Where the intricately entwined hands of the three women in Rossetti’s pictures form the heart of the design, the three Marthes are depicted without hands, completely covered by robes which give no hint of the contours or the volume of the bodies underneath, in the manner of a medieval or Byzantine icon; instead, the flattened robes, with their stylised, nonnaturalistic

fold, enfold the three figures, making of them a single white rose of flesh and linen – an effect heightened by the fact that the faces are turned inward to form a circle, rather than gazing in different directions as they do in *Rosa Triplex*. From Rossetti’s subject-less trinity of beauties, Denis elaborated one which both tamed beauty and elevated it to the realm of the divine. Indeed, Jean-Paul Bouillon has suggested that the portrait represents Denis’s personal Trinity: Love, Art and Religion.¹¹⁶

As pertinent as *Rosa Triplex* is for the recurrence of tripling in Denis’s oeuvre (notably the far more unsettling *Soir trinitaire* and *Jeunes filles qu'on dirait des anges*), the crucial Rossettian influence appears to have been *Beata Beatrix*. On a purely practical level, *Beata Beatrix* was one of the most accessible of Rossetti’s pictures, with the original being one of the few in public collections, and the frequency with which it crops up in French writings on Rossetti, both in description and reproduction, suggests that it was one of the most readily available in reproduction. If Mauclair’s claim that ‘perhaps five hundred persons [in Paris] . . . had at home the *Beata Beatrix* of Rossetti, the *Saint Cecilia* of Burne Jones [sic], . . . and hung their bedrooms with friezes by Walter Crane’¹¹⁷ needs to be treated with caution, it does suggest the fame Rossetti enjoyed among a literary and artistic elite and the extent to which that painting was considered exemplary of his art. However, the reproduction of the painting, as in this example by Frederick Hollyer [Figure 66],

¹¹⁶ Bouillon (1993), p. 34.

¹¹⁷ ‘Cinq cents personnes peut-être . . . avaient toutes chez elles la *Beata Beatrix* de Rossetti, la *Sainte Cécile* de Burne Jones, . . . tapissaient leurs chambres de frises de Walter Crane’: C. Mauclair, *L’Art en Silence* (Paris, 1901), p. 173.

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is one of the most problematic.¹¹⁸ The painting’s pulsating eroticism, its conflation of death and sexual ecstasy, depends in large part upon the hot yet subtly modulated reds and velvety greens which dominate its palette, not least because of the symbolic values Rossetti assigned them (red corresponding to death and green representing life

and hope). The monochrome photograph not only evacuates the sensuousness of the colour from the image, it emphasises the misty, powdery quality of the facture – something of course already present in the painting but subdued by the lush hues – and the way in which the dying light limns Beatrice’s hands, thus etherealising the image and disconnecting the troubling bond between Eros and Thanatos established by Rossetti. The spiritualised Beatrice known to Denis through the photograph was thus no longer one of the terrifying goddesses evoked by Duret, nor an image imbued with the ‘conspicuous preference for the sad and the cruel’ which for Mario Praz constituted the defining characteristic of Rossetti’s art,¹¹⁹ but a beautiful saint and, by virtue of its reduced scale, a domestic icon.¹²⁰

The simultaneous domestication and spiritualising of *Beata Beatrix* begun by the reproductive process and completed by Denis is readily apparent in one of his earliest portraits of Marthe, *Le Menuet de la princesse Maleine (Marthe au piano)* [Figure 67]. Guy Cogeval has also noted in passing its formal parallels with Rossetti’s *The Day Dream* [Figure 68, S.259],¹²¹ and we may usefully draw out the comparisons with both. Not only is Marthe posed in the same three-quarter profile, with a similar introspective expression, as if lost in dreams inspired by the music before her (much as Rossetti’s dreamer has fallen into a reverie inspired by the book of poetry she holds) but both paintings also hinge on the interplay between word and image (and, in the case of *Le Menuet*, music). In *The Day Dream* this is made explicit by the poem inscribed on the frame describing, but not quite elucidating, the nature of the woman’s dream. In *Le Menuet* the literary reference, to Maeterlinck’s recent play *La princesse Maleine* (1890), is reduced to the title of the score (with a frontispiece by

¹¹⁸ Reproductions of *Beata Beatrix* were also produced by all of the major publishers on the Continent: Dietrich in Brussels, Hanfstaengl in Munich, Adolphe Braun in Paris, and the Berlin Photographic Company, among others. See McGann, web site, for the broadest selection.

¹¹⁹ Praz (1970), p. 228.
¹²⁰ This is supported by the performative devotion accorded by some of Rossetti’s patrons to his pictures, the best known example being George Rae’s wife, whom, as he reported to Rossetti, ‘It is my belief that she spends half the day before the picture [*The Beloved*] as certain devout Catholic ladies had used to do before their favourite shrines in the days of old’ (quoted in Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 78).

¹²¹ Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 165.

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Denis) for the play’s incidental music on the music desk.¹²² Cogeval has remarked that the contemplative mood of the painting is at odds with the play’s atmosphere of foreboding and violent denouement,¹²³ but perhaps the disjuncture is not so extreme. The fifteen-year-old princess Maleine, murdered on the eve of her wedding, her virginity thus preserved by death, is portrayed as too fragile and pure to exist in a corrupt world, and in a pivotal scene Maeterlinck has her appear illuminated and framed in a doorway in her wedding gown like an icon in an alcove.¹²⁴ The parallels with Dante’s Beatrice, another child bride cut down in all her purity by an early death, are revealing, particularly when we consider the childlike quality of Marthe’s beauty, insisted upon frequently by Denis both in his paintings and his journal.¹²⁵

While *Le Menuet*’s setting is clearly a contemporary bourgeois interior, and the subject of a woman playing or listening to music a common one at the turn of the century (although with particular resonance for the Nabis and other anti-naturalist artists),¹²⁶ Denis’s emphasis on the decorative and his adoption of certain of the conventions employed by Rossetti both in *Beata Beatrix* and *The Day Dream* (which also recall the conventions of icon painting) sanctify the domestic setting and elevate Marthe above its ordinariness. The most striking element of the painting’s facture is the pseudo-Divisionist rendering of the wallpaper, a technique exploited on a more delicate scale in Marthe’s hair and apron – almost as if the granular mistiness that

distinguished the reproduction of *Beata Beatrix* were writ large. The relative lack of
¹²² Pierre Cailler includes the frontispiece for Pierre Hermant's score in the catalogue raisonné of Denis's graphic work (P. Cailler, *Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre gravé et lithographié de Maurice Denis* (Geneva, 1968), C.4). However, given that no copy of the score has thus far surfaced, Vaughan (1984), p. 42, conjectures that the score depicted in *Le Menuet de la princesse Maleine* may have been a single handmade original, now lost.

¹²³ Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 165.

¹²⁴ The stage direction is 'The door opens slightly and we perceive, in the opening, Princess Maleine in the long white garments of a fiancée' ('La porte s'entr'ouvre et on aperçoit, dans l'entrebâillement, la princesse Maleine en longs vêtements blancs de fiancée'). M. Maeterlinck, *La princesse Maleine* (1890), in *Théâtre complet* (1979), vol. 1, p. 78. Also worth noting is the fact that Redon produced an etching of *La princesse Maleine* in 1892 (Mellerio 22), illustrated with the title *La Petite Madone* in A. Mellerio, *Odilon Redon, peintre, dessinateur, graveur* (Paris, 1923), p. 91.

¹²⁵ For example, 'Pour la rondeur puérile de ses bras, pour la parfum moite de sa chair, pour son sourire, pour l'étrange bonté de ses yeux': Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 86 (entry for 15 October 1891) and 'Et c'est après l'ecclésiastique caresse de ses mains dans les miennes, ses mains très douces, ses mains bonnes et blanches, ses mains enfantines': *ibid.*, p. 87 (entry for 16 October 1891). Furthermore, Denis and Marthe read *La princesse Maleine* together during their courtship, and both seem to have turned to it in moments of emotional turmoil, Denis noting that shortly before he announced their engagement to his parents, Marthe 'reread *La princesse Maleine* until two in the morning. She is pale, nervous, affectionate. Sorrows for me, and still more doubts. Always doubts. Never mind, that's life' ('Elle relit la *Princesse Maleine* jusqu'à deux heures de la nuit. Elle est pâle, énervée, caressante. – Des douleurs pour moi, et encore des doutes. Toujours des doutes. N'importe. C'est la vie'): *ibid.*, p. 87.

¹²⁶ See Vaughan (1984), pp. 41-42, and Bouillon (1993), p. 27, on *Le Menuet*'s precedents and contemporary counterparts.

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differentiation between Marthe's hair and the background, also in evidence in the way the curl of hair on the nape of her neck appears to be part of the pattern of decorative arabesques on the wallpaper, recalls both the dissolving of the (draped) body in *Beata Beatrix* and the interplay between the anti-illusionistic folds of the green robe and the convolutions of the leaves in *The Day Dream*. As Cogeval remarks, it 'enshrines her in a network of signs',¹²⁷ an enshrinement Denis verbalised in a veritable paean to Marthe written concurrently: 'SHE IS MORE BEAUTIFUL than all images, than all representations, than all subjective efforts! She exists, outside of me, I have not created her.'¹²⁸ This enshrinement in a network of decorative signs extends to the depiction of Marthe's body. Although Denis took evident trouble to represent 'the childish roundness of her arms' and 'her waist round as a tower',¹²⁹ her body lacks volume and any real sense of materiality, her contours and the lines of her dress and apron reduced to yet another set of arabesques. Only her face and her hands display any modelling and are given any real substance. Not surprisingly, the head and the hands have also long been the focal points of icons, the hands in particular as the site of healing and miracle-working power.¹³⁰ We have already seen how Rossetti centred the design of *Beata Beatrix* on Beatrice's ecstatic face, surrounded by a natural aureole, and open hands, highlighting their significance by outlining them with light, making them, rather than the ill-defined body hidden beneath heavy drapery, the carriers of the image's spiritual meaning and erotic charge. Likewise, the curiously insubstantial body of the dreamer in *The Day Dream* is literally thrown into the shade by the startlingly mannered gesture of her hands. Marthe's hands, the part of her depicted as most sensual and alive, are poised over the keyboard, but her sideways pose precludes her actually playing the minuet (whose score is, in any case, closed). Instead, the delicately stylised disposition of her hands evokes the gestures commonly used in icons of the Virgin, their downward turn suggestive of benevolence and blessing. And as the transport of Beatrice's soul is attended by the figures of Love and Dante, so is Marthe's entry into the divine realm of music (a metaphor for the

rapprochement of love and divinity which, as we have already seen, Rossetti

¹²⁷ Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 165.

¹²⁸ 'ELLE EST PLUS BELLE que toutes les images, que toutes les représentations, que tous les efforts subjectifs! Elle est, en dehors de moi, ce n'est pas moi qui la crée': Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 86 ('Dimanche de Notre-Dame du Rosaire').

¹²⁹ 'Sa taille ronde comme une tour – comme les Psyché de Raphaël': *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 90 ('Soirée du mardi 29 [December 1891]).

¹³⁰ See Belting (1994), pp. 36-41, for an explanation of the origins of the motif of the healing hand.

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favoured) accompanied by two allegorical guardian figures. The two female figures adorning the cover of the score have been interpreted as representing sacred love (the nude with raised arms) and human love (the clothed woman bending to gather flowers on the bank of the stream), the two inseparable facets, for both Denis and Rossetti, of love.¹³¹

Fittingly, it was in his suite of lithographs, *Amour*, commissioned by Ambroise Vollard in 1892 but not published until 1899, that Denis paid his greatest tribute to Rossetti.¹³² Regarded by his friend and advocate André Péroter as one of the masterpieces of Symbolism and the high-water mark of his graphic oeuvre,¹³³ the suite represents both the zenith of his Symbolist work and a farewell to those very ideals, as the Nabis disbanded to follow their separate paths and Denis devoted himself to the invention of a new classical order. Significantly, this was Denis's sole attempt at creating a double work of art; while he had often served as an illustrator for other writers (including Gide, Verlaine, Mallarmé and, of course, Rossetti), he had never created images inspired by his own writings. The twelve plates of *Amour*, all of which centre on either the figure of Marthe or a more generalised young girl who features in the more mystical scenes, deployed in natural or domestic settings, are captioned with fragments drawn from 'Les Amours de Marthe', his highly poetic and mystical account of his and Marthe's courtship.¹³⁴ Unlike Rossetti's poems, which were often inscribed in full upon the relevant pictures' frames, Denis's audience would not have had access to the original contexts of the captions; without knowledge of their personal meaning for the artist, the viewer would be compelled to discern or even create anew his or her own correspondences between word and image.

Moreover, the fact that the captions were printed on the stone and in coloured inks effectively makes them part of the lithographs, further breaking down the boundary between word and image. Indeed, even armed as we are today with Denis's *Journal*, the rapport between caption and picture is not always evident. Thus the private,

¹³¹ Bouillon (1993), pp. 27-28. This reading is open to interpretation and the reverse seems equally legitimate. The nude figure recurs several times in Denis's work, most significantly as the frontispiece of *Amour*.

¹³² François Fossier dates the creation of the suite to 1897-1899: F. Fossier, *La Nébuleuse nabis* (Paris, 1993), p. 100. However, at least three known preparatory drawings (private collection) have been tentatively dated to 1892-93, therefore, around the time of the events that inspired them.

¹³³ A. Péroter, 'Maurice Denis', *L'Art et les artistes* no. 41 (November 1923), p. 62. It is worth noting that Péroter contributed several articles as *correspondant d'Angleterre* to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in the 1890s, including a review of the 1897 Guildhall exhibition in which Rossetti's paintings featured.

¹³⁴ Denis (1957), vol. 1, pp. 85-101. Denis first met Marthe on 23 October 1890 (pp. 81-82); however, 'Les Amours de Marthe' only begins on 30 June 1891.

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personal narrative (or, to use Belting's term, *historia*) was transformed in the lithographs into discrete, generalised images whose fragmentary legends resisted reconstitution even as they suggested a new narrative.¹³⁵

Amour is ostensibly a celebration of courtship and marital love – the consummation of the latter underlined by the presence of a wedding ring on Marthe's

finger in the final plate, ‘Mais c’est le coeur qui bat trop vite’ [Figure 69, C.119] – but, with two exceptions (‘Sur le canapé d’argent pâle’ (C.117) and ‘Nos âmes en des gestes lents’ (C.116), Denis himself is absent from the lithographs, which posit a realm from which men are excluded and populated by angelic women, rather like that of *La Damoiselle élue* and very much in keeping with the hermetic feminine world of Rossetti’s ‘icons of beauty’. Even in ‘Ce fut un religieux mystère’ (C.111), which takes as its point of departure Denis’s rapture over their first kiss, an androgynous figure takes his place in bestowing the sacred kiss. Most discussions of *Amour* have viewed the album in purely biographical or formal terms, either seeking keys to their meaning in Denis’s journal or mapping the evolution of his style against his theoretical writings and concurrent artistic production.¹³⁶ Far from diminishing the interchange between Denis’s life and art, I would suggest instead that richer meaning may be mined from *Amour* when we consider the influence of Rossetti and the convergence of the two artists’ common concerns with the bonds between the sensual and the sacred.

François Fossier divides ten of the twelve plates of *Amour* into ‘solar’ and ‘lunar’ subjects, based mainly on the varying degrees of warmth of the palette and light but also on subject and the disposition of the figure.¹³⁷ Two lithographs, ‘Mais c’est le coeur qui bat trop vite’ and ‘Elle était plus belle que les rêves’ [Figure 70, C.114], one from each of these categories, exhibit particularly striking debts to

¹³⁵ This is particularly relevant in the case of ‘Le chevalier n’est pas mort à la croisade’ (C.112), whose title forms part of a parable which Denis recounts to Marthe (p. 87, entry for 23 October 1891), the telling of which is depicted in ‘Sur le canapé d’argent pâle’ (C.117) but which is represented literally.

¹³⁶ For the latter approach, see Pératé (1923), p. 62. Fossier (1993), pp. 97-104, whose examination of *Amour* is the most in-depth available, while he takes some biographical detail into account and acknowledges a few external influences (notably Japanese prints), does not stray much beyond these limits.

¹³⁷ Fossier (1993), p. 102. According to this schema, ‘Allégorie’ (C.108), ‘Les attitudes sont faciles et chastes’ (C.109), ‘Le Bouquet matinal, les larmes’ (C.110), ‘La vie devient précieuse, discrète’ (C.118) and ‘Mais c’est le coeur qui bat trop vite’ (C.119) belong to the ‘solar’ group and ‘Ce fut un religieux mystère’ (C.111), ‘Le Chevalier n’est pas mort à la croisade’ (C.112), ‘Les Crépuscules ont une douceur d’ancienne peinture’ (C.113), ‘Elle était plus belle que les rêves’ (C.114) and ‘Et c’est la caresse de ses mains’ (C.115) to the lunar. ‘Sur le canapé d’argent pâle’ and ‘Nos âmes en des gestes lents’ are excluded.

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Rossetti, but, if we also apply Fossier’s schema to their Rossettian precedents, *Beata Beatrix* (which, with its crepuscular atmosphere and overtones of sorrow, belongs to the lunar) and *Venus Verticordia* [Figure 71, S.173] (whose blazing hues and confrontational frontality place it firmly within the solar), we see Denis subverting both in his reworking of the images. Like *Beata Beatrix*, ‘Mais c’est le coeur qui bat trop vite’ portrays a beautiful woman, simultaneously carnal and chaste, in transports which blur the distinction between the celestial and the terrestrial. The resemblance of Beatrice’s expression – the straining throat, the parted lips and the closed eyes – to both sexual climax and a saint in ecstasy has often been remarked upon,¹³⁸ the eroticism paradoxically intensified by the fact that her body is modestly covered. Denis heightens the image’s sensuality by turning Marthe full-face and depicting her semi-nude. Her dress falls around her legs – an echo of the figure of sacred love, the nude stepping out of her drapery, on the frontispiece – as if undone by the sheer force of her too-quickly beating heart and her nudity is accentuated by the fact that she remains shod. Her blissful expression is reiterated by the sunburst, a symbolic expression of both mystical rapture and orgasm, visible through the window at right,

as if nature itself echoed and redoubled her ecstasy.¹³⁹ Yet at the same time, Denis's powdery facture, reminiscent of pastel and of the heightened haziness of the reproduction of *Beata Beatrix*, his use of soft colours and the perfunctory modelling of the body etherealise a figure whose voluptuous nudity is potentially far more erotic than that of her clothed antecedent. As well, exchanging Rossetti's indistinctly brushed garden setting for the homely interior of 'Mais c'est le coeur. . .' tames and domesticates the ardour of the flesh. In place of the lover removed from mundane existence by the transfiguring and sanctifying power of death, Denis presents us with a life-affirming physical passion tempered and hallowed by its domestication, an innocent and saintly carnality sanctioned within the bounds of marriage and the home.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ See for example Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 156, and Meacock (2001), pp. 168-69.

¹³⁹ This passionate vision appears somewhat at odds with the chaste and restrained original context of its caption, one of the first sections of 'Les Amours de Marthe': 'One feels more beautiful when one is in love. Attitudes are easy and chaste. Life becomes precious, discreet: the sunsets have the softness of old paintings. But it's the heart that beats too fast, in truth. One is good and merciful' ('On se sent plus beau quand on aime. Les attitudes sont faciles et chastes. La vie devient précieuse, discrète: les couchers de soleil ont une douceur d'anciennes peintures. Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite, en vérité. On est bon, et miséricordieux'): Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 85, entry for 30 September 1891.

¹⁴⁰ Indeed, following the formalising of their engagement, Denis's musings about Marthe take on a markedly more sensual character, and they seem to have indulged in physical intimacy before their

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Whereas 'Mais c'est le coeur . . .' both intensifies and reins in the sensuality of the sacralised secular subject of *Beata Beatrix*, 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' reworks one of Rossetti's most contentious amalgamations of the Christian and the pagan, *Venus Verticordia*. One of Rossetti's rare nudes, *Venus Verticordia* borrows attributes from the iconography of the classical goddess, Eve and the Virgin Mary to, at the time, scandalous effect.¹⁴¹ While he also produced two watercolour replicas in which Venus is posed before a parapet against a simpler background (S.173 R1 and S.173 R2), reproductions of both of which were available in France by the early 1890s, it would appear from the inclusion of a rosebush in 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' that Denis was referencing the oil.¹⁴² While Rossetti did have a legitimate classical precedent for giving his Venus a golden nimbus,¹⁴³ *Venus Verticordia* is essentially a highly contentious reworking of the Renaissance convention of portraying the Virgin with one breast exposed; his jocular reference to the painting as 'Mary with her Bubs' demonstrates that he thought of it in precisely these terms.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, while the painting is generally discussed in the context of Rossetti's 'Venetian' experiments, and its opulent colour and facture place it firmly within that strand of his career, its prototype, to which Denis may also have turned, may in fact be Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child* (the so-called 'Melun Madonna') [Figure 72], which marriage, as a discreet, elliptical journal entry from early 1892 hints: 'In the studio, the awakening of our flesh: I was ashamed . . .' ('A l'atelier, l'éveil de notre chair: j'avais honte'): *ibid.*, p. 92 (entry for 3 February 1892). Note that this 'awakening of the flesh' takes place in the site of artistic creation. The domestic character of 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' is underlined by the recent rediscovery of Denis's photography; Saskia Ooms notes that a blurry, luminous photograph of Marthe wearing a chemise and sitting in front of a window with her daughter Noële on her lap, taken in 1898, displays striking similarities with the composition and atmosphere of the lithograph (F. Heilbrun and S. Ooms, *La Photographie au Musée d'Orsay: Maurice Denis*, Paris 2006, p. 21). Although the composition of 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' dates from the early 1890s, it seems reasonable to assume some sort of interchange between the lithograph and the photograph. For further discussion of the role photography played in Denis's oeuvre, see N. Bondil, 'Maurice Denis photographe: "l'oeil mange la tête"', in J.-P. Bouillon, ed., *Maurice Denis* (exh. cat., Paris, Musée d'Orsay, Montréal, Musée des Beaux-arts and Rovereto, Museo di Arte Moderno e Contemporaneo, 2006), pp. 73-77.

¹⁴¹ Meacock (2001), p. 182, also notes the reference to St Teresa of Avila (a saint celebrated for her

quasi-erotic mystical visions) in the presence and position of the arrow.

¹⁴² *Venus Verticordia* was mentioned by Sarrazin as the most sensual of Rossetti's female figures, 'flaunting her tempting breasts' ('ses seins tentateurs'): Sarrazin (1884), p. 166.

¹⁴³ On 23 August 1864, in the midst of working on *Venus Verticordia*, Rossetti wrote to Ford Madox Brown, 'What do you think of putting a nimbus behind my Venus's head? I believe the Greeks used to do it': Fredeman (2003), vol. 3, p. 85. As Elizabeth Prettejohn points out, far from being an attempt to find some flimsy justification for an outrageous innovation, this is evidence of the extent of Rossetti's learning, for Pausanias did record a famous statue of Venus holding an apple and with a sphere around her head (Treuhertz et al. (2003), p. 189).

¹⁴⁴ Letter to Walter Theodore Watts-Dunton, 16 October 1877, O. Doughty and J. R. Wahl, eds., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Oxford, 1967), vol. 4, p. 1516.

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Rossetti probably saw on his visit to Antwerp in 1849.¹⁴⁵ The Virgin, widely believed to have been modelled on Charles VII's official mistress Agnès Sorel, presents what to a nineteenth-century eye must have seemed a bizarre melange of the timelessly conventional and the fashionably particular (especially the Virgin's shaven forehead and tiny waist). The use of Agnès Sorel, a woman whose status was defined in terms of her physical appeal and sexual availability, as model for the Virgin, which Johan Huizinga notoriously saddled with the charge of epitomising the breakdown of the boundary between the sacred and the erotic at the end of the Middle Ages,¹⁴⁶ would doubtless have been of interest to Rossetti's increasing tendency to secularise sacred subjects; it would have had a rather different resonance for Denis in his casting of his own beloved, Marthe, in that role. *Venus Verticordia* displays a similarly uneasy blend of the particular and the conventionalising, Rossetti having complicated the coarse sensuality of the nude bust by grafting onto it the classical but exaggerated features of Alexa Wilding.

From this potent and challenging clash of pagan and Christian, sacred and sensual, Denis distilled a no less erotic but altogether gentler icon of his wife. Again, the shortcomings of the reproductions available to him played a crucial role in these changes, with their effacement of the tactile, almost pulpy quality of Rossetti's facture and of the hot brilliance of the reds, pinks and gold. Marthe is posed in a similar manner – her hair loose and her shoulders and one breast bared, standing before a rose hedge in full bloom – but the confrontational frontality of Rossetti's Venus is attenuated by the choice of a more demure three-quarter profile. Ruskin, who so violently objected to Rossetti's overtly sexualised treatment of the flowers in *Venus Verticordia*, would have found fault with Denis's non-naturalistic roses on the grounds of style rather than eroticism. The flat, deliberately archaic nimbus is replaced by a warm golden mist that bathes the scene and etherealises the sensuous (more so than in 'Mais c'est le coeur. . .') handling of the flesh, a subsuming of the earthy into the spiritual even more striking when we consider that the origin of the lithograph's title was Denis's rhapsody, 'She was too beautiful in her virgin's veil and

¹⁴⁵ Although Rossetti makes no mention of Fouquet's painting in his letters home during his visit to Antwerp, the painting entered the collection of the Antwerp museum in 1843 and it may be reasonably assumed that it was on view when he visited.

¹⁴⁶ J. Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. R. J. Payton and U. Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996, first published 1919), pp. 181-82. The tradition that Agnès Sorel had served as the model, first recorded by Denis Godefroy, dates back at least as far as the seventeenth century, so it is possible Rossetti was aware of it.

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completely an other, completely unreal, more beautiful than dreams'.¹⁴⁷ This Marthe, standing in an unspoilt forest glade, is, like Rossetti's Venus but in a markedly different manner, a new Eve in no danger of falling, a ripely beautiful Virgin, a Venus who harkens back to the original meaning of the epithet *Verticordia* – that is, contrary

to Rossetti's creative misinterpretation, a guardian of marital fidelity, a turner of the hearts of married women towards their husbands.

Despite the abundant visual evidence of Rossetti's influence on his early work, mention of his name is conspicuously absent from Denis's writings, both private and public, from these years. When he finally encountered Rossetti's work in the flesh, during a visit to London in 1906, he succinctly expressed his disappointment and distaste: 'I saw again the Rossettis and the Burne-Joneses – absence of pictorial imagination and analysis and no feeling for nature'.¹⁴⁸ However, it is important to bear in mind that Denis's aesthetic and project had changed radically since the turn of the century and his search for a reinvigorated classicism was in many ways inimical to the *néo-traditionnisme* for which he had once so eloquently pleaded; his repudiation of his former models ought perhaps to be viewed in this light. Nevertheless, his work speaks for itself, revealing the constant return to and reworking of the concern he shared with Rossetti, the coexistence of the flesh and the spirit.

With Closed Eyes: Redon, Rossetti and the Inward Turn

Rossetti's fascination with mysticism, his dual career as a poet and painter, and his appropriation and transformation of Christian imagery held a considerable appeal for another artist whose mysticism was of a very different order – Odilon Redon. The assertion may seem bizarre at first glance; the fantastical creatures which populate the French artist's nightmarish *noirs* would appear far removed from Rossetti's lush gallery of beauties. Indeed, the apparently unbridgeable gulf between the two artists' oeuvres, exacerbated by Redon's all-too-successful expunging of references to other artists from his autobiography¹⁴⁹ and the care he took in crafting his image as an isolated genius immune to the influence of his contemporaries, has meant that, beyond

¹⁴⁷ 'Elle était trop belle en voile de vierge et tout à fait une autre, une d'irréel, plus belle que les rêves': Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 90 (entry for 29 December 1891).

¹⁴⁸ 'Je revois les Rossetti et les Burne Jones [sic], absence d'imagination pittoresque, analyse, et pas d'émotion de nature': Denis (1957), vol. 2, p. 40 (4 July 1906).

¹⁴⁹ Very few artists consistently receive positive mention in Redon's journal; the notable exceptions are Rembrandt, Delacroix and his mentor Rodolphe Bresdin: O. Redon, *A soi-même. Journal 1867-1915* (Paris, 2000).

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a few passing references to Redon's affinities with Rossetti (notably in Richard Hobbs's monograph), this avenue has remained largely unexplored.¹⁵⁰ Thanks to Douglas Druick's and Peter Zegers's careful deconstruction of the artist's painstaking self-mythologising with the aid of Redon's biographer André Mellerio's personal papers,¹⁵¹ we can finally begin to explore with a more critical eye Redon's connections with and responses to his contemporaries – not least, Rossetti.

Like Denis and Debussy, Redon's first contact with Rossetti's work was probably with his poetry.¹⁵² Perhaps not coincidentally, his album *Hommage à Goya* (Mellerio 54-59), his first public attempt to create a double work of art, was published in 1885, the year after Sarrazin's articles on the English Aesthetic School in the *Revue indépendante* and the same year that his translation of 'The Blessed Damozel' and *Poètes modernes d'Angleterre* were published. Richard Hobbs has argued persuasively that the captions of the prints in this album were written as a prose poem whose coherent continuity influences our reading of the images.¹⁵³ This practice represents a break with that of his earlier albums, such as *Dans le rêve* (1879), whose titles simply served to indicate the subject matter of the individual plates. While this was not the first time Redon, whom Mellerio characterised as a 'painter-writer',¹⁵⁴ had composed a prose-poem title for one of his albums – he had done so for *Les Origines* in 1883, but suppressed the captions for its first printing – the revelation of Rossetti's

project may have provided the necessary impetus for his making known his own literary aspirations.¹⁵⁵ However, given Redon's extraordinarily complicated relationship with contemporary literature and his not unreasonable anxieties about the possibility of his art being misinterpreted and co-opted by writers for their own

¹⁵⁰ This portion of the chapter is much indebted to Hobbs's research on Redon's acquaintance with Pre-Raphaelite painting and his attempts to break into the London art world. R. Hobbs, *Odilon Redon* (London, 1977), pp. 91-94.

¹⁵¹ D. Druick et al., *Odilon Redon, 1840-1916*, exh. cat. (Chicago, Art Institute, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum and London, Royal Academy, 1994).

¹⁵² Hobbs (1977), p. 91, also notes that he may have been acquainted with earlier Pre-Raphaelite painting as early as 1867, thanks to the British art displays at that year's Exposition Universelle.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-48. Redon continued this practice in his next album, *La Nuit* (1886), but thereafter renounced it, partly because, with the exception of *Songes* (1891), all of his subsequent albums were inspired by the work of other writers.

¹⁵⁴ A. Mellerio, 'Trois peintres écrivains. Delacroix, Fromentin, Odilon Redon', *La Nouvelle revue* (15 April 1923), pp. 304-314.

¹⁵⁵ Redon was also friendly with Samain, another possible factor in his acquaintance with Rossetti's poetry.

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ends,¹⁵⁶ Rossetti's pictorial oeuvre seems to have held greater appeal for him, and proved a greater influence on his own work.

Redon's interest in Rossetti seems to have burgeoned in the 1890s, the decade in which Symbolist critics began to embrace him as one of their leading lights and in which he began, after decades of *noirs*, to experiment with colour. Having attended the first performance of *La Damselle élue* in 1893, he was moved to offer Debussy one of his works by way of homage, a gesture reciprocated by Debussy's gift of a copy of Denis's illustrated score.¹⁵⁷ As a regular at the *mardis* from 1885, he probably saw the same reproductions discussed by Mauclair, and he was in contact with Arthur Symons from 1890. He may also have discussed Rossetti with Mellerio; Mellerio's working notes for his survey of anti-naturalist art, *Le Mouvement idéaliste en peinture*, show that early on he had considered including a chapter on the Pre-Raphaelites, with special reference the Rossetti, 'le plus ancien',¹⁵⁸ although the book in its published form was rather more reticent about the place of the Pre-Raphaelites in the idealist movement.¹⁵⁹ However, the primary source of his knowledge of Rossetti's oeuvre, apart from the expected media of reproductions, articles, and translations, was a personage and an exhibition society with whom he always had a tense relationship: Péladan and the Salons de la Rose + Croix.

Péladan, who courted Redon aggressively and unsuccessfully for inclusion in the first Salon de la Rose + Croix in 1892, evinced a great admiration for the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti in particular.¹⁶⁰ Jean da Silva has noted that, the outrageousness of the Sâr's programme aside, the Salon was the first international exhibition of Symbolist art¹⁶¹ (albeit a very narrowly and crudely defined brand of Symbolism), and

¹⁵⁶ For a thorough examination of Redon's relationship with literature and writers, see D. Gamboni, *La Plume et le pinceau. Odilon Redon et la littérature* (Paris, 1989).

¹⁵⁷ A. Redon and R. Bacou, eds., *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Mallarmé, Verhaeren... à Odilon Redon* (Paris, 1960), p. 228.

¹⁵⁸ André Mellerio Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago, Series X, Box FF.12:5, I.65. This box also contains pages transcribed from Gustave Geffroy's *La Vie artistique* (second and third series) and Destrée's *Les Préraphaélites*.

¹⁵⁹ Mellerio only mentions the Pre-Raphaelites as a 'possible' influence on the *mouvement idéaliste*: 'Peut-être le Préraphaelisme Anglais a-t-il été aussi de quelque enseignement, sinon comme influence picturale directe, du moins comme tendances à la hauteur intellectuelle et morale, formation du caractère de l'artiste'. A. Mellerio, *Le Mouvement idéaliste en peinture* (Paris, 1896), p. 67.

¹⁶⁰ See n.30 above.

¹⁶¹ J. da Silva, *Le Salon de la Rose + Croix (1892-1897)* (Paris, 1991), p. 5. Huysmans expressed the

hope – never realised – to Mourey that the publication of *Passé le détroit* might encourage the Pre-Raphaelites to stage a group exhibition in Paris, implying that this would be far superior to the diluted ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’ on view at the Salons: ‘ce serait un vrai service que vous nous rendriez à tous – sauf aux foetus du Rose-Croix – ça serait vraiment l’heure!’ Letter from Huysmans to Mourey, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Fonds Lambert, Ms. 50.

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Péladan’s regard for its British exponents was apparent in his list of potential exhibitors in 1891. When his intent to include Burne-Jones and Watts ‘and the five other Pre-Raphaelites’ in the first Salon came to nothing, he exhibited photographs of paintings by Burne-Jones and Rossetti instead. While the choice of photographs is unfortunately lost to posterity – they receive no mention in the catalogue – it seems reasonable to surmise that one of the photographs exhibited was *Beata Beatrix*. Indeed, the Salon abounded with Dantean imagery and themes, not least the angelic figure of Beatrice, especially in Edmond Aman-Jean’s poster for the 1893 Salon [Figure 73].¹⁶² Aman-Jean’s Beatrice is a distant relation of Rossetti’s, with her willowy, weightless body borne off by an angel as she passes a lyre to an unseen Dante whose presence is signified solely by the laurel wreath in the lower right corner. Sapped of the least suspicion of corporeality, she evokes the centrality of the neo-Catholic revival to Péladan’s aims and the inseparability of religion from the aesthetic ideal he promulgated.

Redon himself may have been privately sceptical of both the neo-Catholic and occult strands of this enterprise, both on religious and artistic grounds (he had, after all, been an exhibitor in the Salon des Indépendants, which Péladan despised)¹⁶³, but he found it expedient to remain on good terms with the neo-Catholic writers who promoted and patronised him.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, although he would not allow Mellerio to mention their accolades in his biography, he numbered several esoteric mystics associated with the Salon de la Rose + Croix, including Antoine de la Rochefoucauld and Elémir Bourges, among his acquaintance, and most significantly, from 1890 Bailly had sold his albums through the Librairie de l’art indépendant – the publisher, we should recall, of *La Damaoiselle élue*.¹⁶⁵ If Redon did not buy into their wilder beliefs and practices, he was clearly intrigued, his interest sparked by his fascination with idealist philosophy in the 1870s and 1880s. His interest in hermetic mysticism found its clearest expression in a recurrent subject in his 1890s work, that of the

¹⁶² On Aman-Jean’s contribution to the second Salon, see R. Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose + Croix* (New York and London, 1976), p. 150.

¹⁶³ Redon had exhibited paintings, drawings and lithographs at the Salon des Indépendants from 1884 to 1887.

¹⁶⁴ On Redon’s relationships with figures in the Catholic revival, see M. Stevens, ‘Redon and the transformation of the Symbolist aesthetic’, in Druick et al. (1994), pp. 205-10.

¹⁶⁵ Redon’s ties to esoteric mysticism are discussed in greater depth in F. Leeman, ‘Redon’s spiritualism and the rise of mysticism’, in Druick et al. (1994), pp. 215-36.

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mystic head. These mysterious figures, shown in austere, firmly drawn profile or full face with eyes lowered or closed, show Redon’s clearest debt to Rossetti’s art. One of the earliest and most emblematic of these mystic heads was *Yeux clos* [Figure 74]. A subject Redon repeated several times to satisfy collectors, this imposing androgynous head with closed eyes, either rising out of or sinking into the sea, was in an earlier version (1889) haloed like a saint or Christ and entitled *Au ciel*, which clearly suggests a religious interpretation. (It was also painted in the year of publication of Péladan’s *L’Androgyne*, which hailed androgyny as the apotheosis of humanity.) Like *Beata Beatrix*, it originated as a portrait of the artist’s wife, the traits generalised to reduce the face’s particularity.¹⁶⁶ The powdery, diffuse quality of the

paint, applied to the loosely-woven canvas like pastel, recalls the dreamlike atmosphere and ethereal haze surrounding Rossetti's Beatrice. Here, however, the head's closed expression diverges from Rossetti's image of divine ecstasy in revealing ways. Where Beatrice's closed eyes are directed upward in rapture, her body and soul overpowered by an external force, the 'gaze' in *Yeux clos* is both downward and inward, utterly self-contained as if its owner has achieved an absolute knowledge of ideal truth and is about to voluntarily leave the world behind for a state of hermetic perfection.

Yeux clos, with its nod toward naturalistic drawing and colour, characterised by Redon's Belgian admirer Edmond Picard as 'art that mixes reality and mysticism', was soon superseded by mystic icons that took anti-naturalism, the dematerialisation of the body and the inward turn to extremes.¹⁶⁷ *La Cellule d'or* [Figure 75] and *Sita* [Figure 76] were both exhibited in Redon's retrospective at Durand-Ruel's gallery in 1894, the exhibition that consolidated his reputation as a poet's painter. The former, a fusion of the esoteric imagery of *Yeux clos* with a Byzantine aesthetic (flattened, hieratic forms and unnatural colours – lapis lazuli and gold – with heavy symbolic import) and Christian iconography, pushes the icon-like qualities of *Beata Beatrix* and similar works to their limits, the head appearing to float, disembodied and completely spiritualised, within a grainy golden aureole. *Sita*, while usually considered an early example of Redon's growing fascination with Eastern mysticism, also appears a generalised and etherealised response to Rossetti's secular (or non-Christian) saints.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 227. Edmond Picard was the first to point out the face's resemblance to Camille Redon, a claim dismissed by Redon, who later admitted that while the likeness had not been intentional, he used few life models so the faces in his work were bound to reflect those of his intimate acquaintance.

¹⁶⁷ E. Picard, 'Yeux clos', *L'Art moderne* (28 December 1890), p. 142.

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Redon also borrowed one of Rossetti's favoured tropes, the use of symbolic accessories to both suggest a narrative and frustrate its interpretation. *Sita*, the wife of Rama in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, was abducted by her husband's rival Ravana and, as he carried her off through the skies, she threw down her jewels to indicate the direction of her flight to Rama. In the pastel, *Sita*, reduced to a haloed bust in profile against a starry sky, floats above a shower of falling forms which could be variously interpreted as jewels, blossoms or lights. To a viewer unfamiliar with its literary source, this syncretic image might have seemed an exotic icon of a saint or a highly original reading of the Assumption of the Virgin. The rich, velvety iridescence of the colour further recalls that of *Beata Beatrix*, as if Redon had imaginatively recreated the palette invisible to him in the available monochrome reproductions.

However, Redon was finally to encounter the genuine article when he visited London in October 1895 as a guest of his key British patron, Dr Albert Edward Tebb. Although the artist makes no mention of the painting in his correspondence during his visit – indeed, with the exception of a few ecstatic lines on the Elgin Marbles, he merely referred to 'beautiful museums which I have only thus far seen in rapid glances'¹⁶⁸ – it seems reasonable to assume that he saw it in the National Gallery. The impression it made upon him emerged the following spring, when Ambroise Vollard solicited his participation in his second album of original prints. *Béatrice* [Figure 77, Mellerio 168], his first colour lithograph, although neither his first use of Dantean imagery nor his first 'portrait' of Beatrice,¹⁶⁹ is his first overtly Rossettian interpretation of the subject. Although he based the design on his own pastel by the same name made in 1885 [Figure 78], around the time when he first seems to have become acquainted with Rossetti's work, the differences between the two are telling. In the pastel, Redon draws a hard line in charcoal around the figure, firmly delineating

her individual features – especially her pensive, down-turned eyes – and the circlet of flowers garlanding her head. In 1896, probably with *Beata Beatrix* fresh in his mind's eye, Redon preserved the basic elements of the composition but radically dematerialised

the head, retaining the profile (now demarcated only by fields of pale, diaphanous colour) and, removing all but the slightest hint of modelling and effacing

¹⁶⁸ 'Beaux musées dont je n'ai vu encore que de rapides aperçus': letter to Maurice Fabre, 8 October 1895, M.-A. Leblond, ed., *Lettres d'Odilon Redon, 1878-1916* (Paris and Brussels, 1923), pp. 25-26.

¹⁶⁹ Redon produced several charcoal drawings of Dante and Virgil in the 1860s (perhaps thanks to Delacroix's example); an 1892 charcoal drawing of Beatrice, portrayed standing and full-face (Art Institute, Chicago) differs significantly in composition and mood from the lithograph.

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Beatrice's eyes and mouth.¹⁷⁰ Deprived of eyes and outward vision, this Beatrice is the most extreme example of Redon's inward turning of Rossetti's imagery.

Although he had by this time seen Rossetti's work in colour, Redon was to pay one more tribute to the other artist's influence in one of the last *noirs* he produced before turning definitively to colour. *Tête d'enfant aux fleurs* [Figure 79, Mellerio 169], while on its surface a meditation on the fragility of childhood innocence, bears an unsettling resemblance, not previously noted, to Rossetti's subjectless female portraits: with her weary, heavy-lidded gaze and an ill-defined cluster of flowers at her shoulder and tangled in her hair, Redon's child could be a 'stunner' in miniature. In fact, an entry in *À soi-même* in 1900, which appears to relate to the lithograph, describes a quasi-mystical childhood encounter with a beautiful little girl while en route to his first communion in terms reminiscent of Dante's first meeting with Beatrice:

The first time in the garden of the house where I was born (in Bordeaux, in the allées d'Amour). She was blonde, with large eyes and her hair in long curls that fell upon her muslin dress, which brushed against me. I felt a shiver, I was twelve, I was on my way to make my first communion. And chance willed it that she was near me on the retreats, at church, under the mystery of the vaults of Saint-Seurin. What emotions blended therein: all the art as much as the surroundings. Blessed hours, will you ever return in the mystery of the Unknown?¹⁷¹

This oft-overlooked print, perhaps more than anything else in Redon's oeuvre, ties together the various strands that bind and differentiate the two artists: the blending of aesthetic pleasure and divine, or mystical transport. But Redon, even more so than his younger colleague Denis, was firmly on the side of the spiritual, and in a form that Rossetti, despite his far-ranging interest in mysticism, could never have imagined. Some elements of Rossetti's poetry and paintings were bound, by their very nature, to be lost in translation. Yet the reinterpretations of his work by his French counterparts allowed, at their best, for new light to be cast upon it.

¹⁷⁰ In the first impression, however, Redon remained closer to the original pastel.

¹⁷¹ 'La première fois, dans le jardin de la maison où je suis né (à Bordeaux, allées d'Amour). Elle était blonde, avec de grands yeux et les cheveux en longues boucles tombant sur sa robe de mousseline, qui me frôla. Je connus un frisson, j'avais douze ans, j'allais faire ma première communion. Et le hasard voulût qu'elle fût près de moi lors des retraites, à l'église, sous le mystère des voûtes de Saint-Seurin. Que d'émotions s'y mêlèrent : tout l'art aussi de ce décor. Heures bénies, reviendrez-vous jamais dans le mystère de l'Inconnu ?' Redon (2000), p. 100.

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Chapter 5

From *Salomé* to *Salome*: Gustave Moreau's reception and influence in Britain,

1877-1898

Two months after Gustave Moreau's death in April 1898, the *Magazine of Art* carried the following terse obituary:

M. Gustave Moreau has recently died at the age of 72. He was born in Paris; became the pupil of Picot at the École des Beaux Arts, and began exhibiting at the Salon in 1852. His "Cantiques des Cantiques" [sic] (1853) is at the Dijon Museum; "Oedipus and the Sphinx" (1864) obtained a medal, and "Man and Death" (1865) a medal of a higher class. "Orpheus torn in pieces by the Maenads" (1866) was acquired for the Luxembourg. His "Jupiter and Europa" (1869) was awarded a first-class medal, and "The Sphinx's Riddle Solved" a second-class medal at the Universal Exhibition of 1878. Besides these he painted many decorative pieces. He succeeded to the seat of Boulanger in the Académie des Beaux Arts in 1888, and was appointed *chef d'atelier* at the École in 1892.¹

Moreau's career, as outlined in this mainstream art periodical, is reduced to a skeleton of official honours and successes. No mention of his triumphant return to the Salon in 1876 with his two most notorious works, *Salomé* and *L'Apparition*, images which established and sealed his standing as one of the patron saints of Decadent and Symbolist literature; no reference to his appearances at the 1880 Salon or the 1889 Exposition Universelle; and, bizarrely, no allusion to the exhibition of his art in Britain, either his participation in the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition or the monographic show of his illustrations for the *Fables* of La Fontaine at the London galleries of Boussod and Valadon in 1886. To take this obituary at face value is to gain the impression that Moreau was a conventional history painter whose career was conducted within the respectable confines of the Académie and played out at a safe remove from Britain, on which it had no discernible impact.

This reticence may stem from reasonable causes: Moreau's general abstention from public exhibitions during the last two decades of his life kept him largely off the radar of all but his most vehement advocates, and confined awareness of his activities to specialist publications, and a magazine which had, two years previously, published a virulently Francophobic rant against Aubrey Beardsley and 'other Decadents'² would almost certainly not have wished to stress his association with the Decadence.

¹ 'The Chronicle of Art – June', *Magazine of Art* (June 1898), p. 456.

² M. Armour, 'Aubrey Beardsley and the Decadents', *Magazine of Art* (November 1896), pp. 9-12.

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However, it prefigures a lacuna in scholarship on Symbolism that has persisted to this day. While comparative readings of the work of Moreau and Burne-Jones multiply at a steady pace, and indeed form a keystone of studies of internationalism in antinaturalist

art, they have tended to focus on the perception of Burne-Jones in France as an 'English Moreau' (or Moreau in Britain as 'the French Burne-Jones') and have commented either only in more general terms on Moreau's reception and influence on other artists outside his own country, or have ignored the issue entirely.³ No doubt this single-mindedness of approach is an outgrowth of the numerous comparisons drawn between Burne-Jones and Moreau by critics during their lifetimes, an association crystallised by Léonce Bénédict in the pamphlet he published shortly after the deaths of both artists, *Deux idéalistes: Gustave Moreau et E. Burne-Jones*. Even when both artists' critical fortunes were at their lowest ebb, in 1940, Robin Ironside kept this correlation alive in his influential reappraisal of their work.⁴ While I do not want to downplay the significance of the interchanges between Moreau and Burne-

Jones, discussed in the preceding chapters, a significant part of the story remains thus far unexplored. As his *Magazine of Art* obituary suggests, Moreau was, if not a household name, then at least a regular presence in the British art press from the beginning of his Salon career, giving the lie to Pierre-Louis Mathieu's erroneous claim that 'outside France, Moreau's work remained little known, without any exhibitions, books or articles dedicated to him'.⁵ In fact, although the level of attention paid to his work fluctuated considerably over his lifetime, Moreau's reception in Britain underwent several significant changes which not only broadly reflected shifting British perceptions of French art and culture, from angry xenophobia to tentative interest, but also led to his elevation by an artistic elite in the 1890s to a position approximating the one given him by Huysmans and his followers in France. My aim in this chapter is twofold. Firstly, I wish to trace Moreau's critical reception in Britain over the last three decades of the nineteenth century, with particular attention paid to the exhibition of his watercolour illustrations to *Les Fables de La Fontaine* at Goupil's London galleries in November 1886 and to the role of photographs and reproductive prints in disseminating his oeuvre. Secondly, I wish to

³ For example, Dubernard-Laurent (1996); Casteras and Faxon (1995) and, more recently, R. Rapetti, *Symbolism* (Paris, 2005).

⁴ R. Ironside, 'Burne-Jones and Gustave Moreau', *Horizon* 1, no. 6 (June 1940), pp. 406-24, reprinted as 'Gustave Moreau and Burne-Jones', *Apollo* 101 (March 1975), pp. 173-82.

⁵ Mathieu (1994), p. 243. Mathieu mentions Gleeson White's 1897 article on Moreau in *The Pageant* in a footnote but makes no reference to any other points of contact with Britain.

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explore the influence of his work on Aubrey Beardsley – an influence remarked upon in passing ever since the beginning of the revival of Moreau's reputation in the 1960s, but never explored in any depth⁶ – and Beardsley's subversive reworking of Moreau's vision of Salome through the lens of Japonisme. In so doing, I hope to uncover the range of Moreau's influence in Britain, above and beyond Burne-Jones.

'Weird compositions' or 'the classical ideal'? Moreau in the British press, 1877-1900⁷

When Moreau exhibited six oils and five watercolours in the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition Universelle, most French broadsheets and art periodicals acknowledged his appearance, treating him, in the main, as a noteworthy anomaly. The consensus held that, while his art was of considerably greater interest than much of the stale, retrograde academic canvases that dominated the exhibition, his outré renditions of mythological and Biblical subjects either defied interpretation or were too idiosyncratic to herald a sea change in history painting.⁸ The view from Britain requires rather more effort to discover. As I have noted above, Moreau's appearance in the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition, the first time one of his pictures was on public view in Britain, seems to have done little to raise his profile. Indeed, almost the only reference to his work that year came in an *Athenaeum* review, not of the Grosvenor exhibition but of the 1877 Salon; the author, commenting unfavourably on *Herodias Dancing*, a painting by Adrien Moreau, complained, 'the rest of the picture is simply contemptible, and devoid of the flashy attractions of M. Gustave Moreau's picture which decorates the Grosvenor Exhibition, and bears the head of Christ (?) in the centre of chromatic coruscations'.⁹ Moreau's distinctive use of colour is singled out as his defining characteristic; there is nothing unusual in this by itself, for French critics often dwelt upon it. But for the *Athenaeum*'s critic there is something strange, unsettling, foreign and above all morally suspect (perhaps because foreign) about it – 'flashy attractions' calls to mind the tawdry decoration of a music

⁶ See, for example, R. von Holten, *L'Art fantastique de Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 1960), p. 58 and

Mathieu (1994), p. 244.

⁷ I exclude reactions to Moreau's submissions to the 1880 Salon and the 1889 Exposition Universelle, which I discussed in Chapter 3.

⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹ 'The Salon, Paris (second notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2586 (19 May 1877), p. 647. The head in Gustave Moreau's picture was, of course, that of John the Baptist rather than Christ. Furthermore, Adrien Moreau did not exhibit a painting by this title at the 1877 Salon; the critic seems to have misidentified *Les Tziganes* (no. 1541) as such.

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hall and the entertainment on offer there. Apart from this instance of damnation with faint praise, most critics held their tongues; not mentioning a work of art at all, as Kate Flint has noted, marginalizes it more effectively than a negative notice,¹⁰ confirmation of the truth of Oscar Wilde's remark that the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about. Sir Coutts Lindsay's intention to advertise the international nature of his new gallery by hanging the first room with advanced continental art seemed to have come to naught.

A preliminary perusal of British reviews of the French Fine Art section at the Exposition Universelle the following year gives the impression that Moreau's work remained effectively invisible. Although the first article in the first number of the newly launched *Magazine of Art* was devoted to the Exposition, the anonymous author of the review of French art devoted the lion's share of the piece to the academic triumvirate of Cabanel, Bouguereau and Gérôme (who did, after all, occupy a disproportionate amount of space in the exhibition), and Moreau went unmentioned.¹¹ This trend continued in other major general-readership periodicals such as the *Times*, the *Athenaeum* and the *Saturday Review*. However, the *Art Journal*, as well as the one-off *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* published in Britain throughout the duration of the Exposition both made reference to Moreau, with varying degrees of scepticism and perplexity. The *Art Journal*'s reviewer was considerably more complimentary about the problem-fraught French section as a whole than many of his peers, claiming that even under such unfavourable circumstances France demonstrated 'eloquently and convincingly that she is the greatest living Art School in the world',¹² but became noticeably less eloquent himself when describing Moreau:

G. Moreau, who delights in Biblical and mythological subjects, has much of the brilliant colouring of the English Etty, with rather a heavy black element running through it. His 'Moses exposed on the Nile' (660) and 'Hercules and the Hydra' (656) afford indications of this tendency.¹³

The incongruous comparison of Moreau's scintillating jewel-like palette with Etty's smoky, overripe one is less than happy and suggests the critic's urgent groping for a means of making sense of such extraordinary images by anchoring them in a more familiar context.

¹⁰ Flint (1983), p. 60.

¹¹ 'French Fine Art at the Late Paris International Exhibition', *Magazine of Art* 2 (1879), pp. 15-18.

¹² 'International Art at the Universal Exposition, Paris', *Art Journal* 17 (1878), p. 197.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

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The reviewers in the *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* wrote in a more dismissive vein, perhaps not surprisingly considering the proudly nationalist tone taken by the publication as a whole. The first mention of Moreau appeared on 18 June, when the author simply stated that 'M. Gustave Moreau has his "Sphinx," which created much controversy some years since, and several later works'.¹⁴ This critic appears to have possessed some prior knowledge of Moreau's oeuvre, but clouded by the passage of time: the "Sphinx" shown at the Exposition was not the *OEdipe et le*

Sphinx (Mathieu 75) with which Moreau made his name at the 1864 Salon and in which the figures of Oedipus and the Sphinx dominate the canvas, but a new work, *Le Sphinx deviné* [Figure 80, Mathieu 203], painted in his mature style, in which the small figures are enveloped in a misty atmosphere and dwarfed by the menacing Leonardesque landscape.¹⁵ Moreau's watercolours were mentioned in passing in the next number,¹⁶ but the lengthiest commentary came from 'a Lady in Paris' who contributed a running report, in a more animated tone than her male counterparts,¹⁷ on the Exposition to the journal:

The first pictures the visitor notices on entering the long gallery to the right are some of Moreau's weird compositions. There are quaint renderings of Biblical subjects: – a 'Moses among the Bulrushes,' with flames darting from his forehead; a 'Jacob and the Angel,' standing out against a limpid evening sky; and 'The Daughter of Herodius [sic],' dressed in airy gauze and flaming jewels; besides 'Hercules doing battle against the Hydra' and 'The Secret of the Sphinx divulged.'¹⁸

In writing off Moreau's style as 'weird' and 'quaint', this critic not only provides inadvertent confirmation of the artist's dictum that 'a work of art is especially beautiful when it can never please imbeciles',¹⁹ she (or he) also devalues the seriousness of his intent and of the status of his work as high art. Although Moreau's subjects are biblical, for a conservative British critic his 'weird' technique infringes upon their potential didactic value. Moreover, the unflattering national stereotypes

¹⁴ 'French Art at the Exhibition', *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* no. 7 (18 June 1878), p. 77.

¹⁵ *Le Sphinx deviné* was, incidentally, the painting Zola dwelt upon most in his review of the 1878 Exposition, despite (or, considering his lack of sympathy for Moreau's style and subject matter, because of) its being the weakest of Moreau's exhibited works.

¹⁶ 'Fine Arts at the Paris Exhibition', *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* no. 8 (29 June 1878), p. 89.

¹⁷ It is possible that 'a Lady in Paris' was actually the creation of a male journalist looking to mock feminine reactions to the Exposition's attractions.

¹⁸ 'French Art – II. [From a Lady in Paris]', *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition*, no. 27 (9 November 1878), p. 317.

¹⁹ 'Une oeuvre d'art est surtout belle quand elle ne peut jamais plaire aux imbéciles': Cooke (2002), vol. 2, p. 219.

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invoked in the criticism of Moreau's colour – flashy, gaudy, vulgar, and so forth – were a common tactic in conservative British art criticism at the time: moral impurity was considered to go hand in hand with colouristic excess (while, inversely, a muted palette was seen as denoting restraint and modesty), and if such pictures were produced by a foreign brush, so much the more dangerous.²⁰ Even a more broadminded and formalist critic like D. S. MacColl, writing of Moreau's pictures, which included *Salomé*, in the retrospective exhibition at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, was not immune to this tendency, describing them as 'gaudy tinsels [hung] on models from Chassérian [sic]'.²¹

While this mode of 'blind and dumb criticism' typified the mainstream British press's response to Moreau in 1878,²² matters began to change in the Exposition's aftermath. This may partly be explained by the gradually increasing availability of reproductions of Moreau's paintings. A photogravure produced by Goupil after *Salomé* featured in the souvenir volume *Les chefs-d'oeuvre d'art à l'Exposition Universelle de 1878*, while an etching by Gaujean after *L'Apparition* was published in *L'Art* (which, as we will recall, had a London office and important ties with the Grosvenor Gallery) in 1878.²³ Goupil seems to have played the chief role in publishing reproductions of Moreau's work, especially important as they had an office and gallery in London; the photograph of *Galatée* published after the 1880 Salon is a

case in point.²⁴ However, Goupil's most significant part in Moreau's reception in Britain was not to occur until 1886, when it hosted the London showing of Moreau's watercolour illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine*.

The sixty-four watercolours constitute the most under-studied segment of Moreau's oeuvre, not least because all but one have been in private hands since the

²⁰ See Flint (1983), pp. 61-62.

²¹ D. S. MacColl, 'Art at the Paris Exhibition – I', *Saturday Review* 90 (15 September 1900), p. 327. Flint (1983), p. 62, considers MacColl's reaction symptomatic of the lingering effects of the xenophobic aspect of British art criticism, but I would suggest that his unflattering description may also stem from the fact that by 1900 Moreau's star, and that of Symbolism as a whole, had faded. In other words, by this time Moreau's style and choice of subject may really have seemed bizarre and outmoded to a forward-thinking Modernist critic.

²² The term is Barthes's, which he defines as, instead of the critic honestly acknowledging his own incomprehension, '[elevating] one's blindness and dumbness to a universal rule of perception, and to reject from the world [that which is not understood]: "I don't understand, therefore you are idiots."' R. Barthes, 'Blind and Dumb Criticism', in *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers (London, 1972), pp. 34-35.

²³ G. Lacambre, 'La diffusion de l'oeuvre de Gustave Moreau par la reproduction au XIXe siècle', *Bulletin de la Société J.-K. Huysmans* no. 94 (2001), p. 30. Lacambre's article is the only in-depth study thus far of the role of reproduction in diffusing Moreau's reputation, but it is not exhaustive and, as with much of her work on Moreau, is concerned almost entirely with documentation.

²⁴ See Chapter 3.

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1930s and the owners have steadfastly refused to allow scholars access or to lend them to exhibitions.²⁵ Currently, only two serious studies of them have been attempted – a thesis on Moreau's iconography, and an article by Dominique Lobstein on the commission for the watercolours by Moreau's patron Antony Roux – and both, doubtless hindered by lack of access to the pictures, are primarily documentary.²⁶ However, uncovering the story of their creation, their exhibition on both sides of the Channel, and their eventual reproduction is key to understanding the extent of Moreau's reception and influence in Britain.

In 1879, the Marseillais banker Roux began to commission a series of watercolours illustrating La Fontaine's *Fables* from Moreau and several other leading artists, including Gustave Doré, Ferdinand Heilbut, Elie Delaunay and Giuseppe de Nittis, in an endeavour that recalls earlier schemes in Britain such as Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Dalziel Brothers' Bible Gallery. The watercolours were displayed in a group exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit in May of 1881.

Unfortunately, no catalogue was produced, and we have no way of ascertaining which twenty-five of Moreau's watercolours were exhibited; however, the show received numerous press notices, many of which were clipped and preserved by Moreau and his mother.²⁷ The French periodicals were all but unanimous in their low opinion of the watercolours of the other artists, but most praised Moreau's as the most original on view, even if this originality was inextricable from his tendency to err on the side of the grotesque. This unsigned review in *L'Art moderne* is typical:

We are not admirers of this bizarre and fantastical painting, whose personages with greenish flesh and smelling of mud move about in a strange world dripping with gems and shimmering with brocades: a real jeweller's hallucination. But despite what is false and conventional in this art, despite the inevitable heaviness produced by repeated retouching, we must recognise that the artist has got out of a rut and produced an ensemble which is personal, powerful, new in its ideas and clever in its execution: perhaps the most complete there is in the Salon of the rue Laffitte.²⁸

²⁵ The sole watercolour in public ownership, *Le paon se plaignant à Junon* (Mathieu 224), belongs to the Musée Gustave Moreau.

²⁶ M. Beynel, 'Iconographies du XIXe siècle: les *Fables* de La Fontaine vues par Gustave Moreau et Gustave Doré' (DEA thesis, Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, 1989) and D. Lobstein, 'Antony Roux, Gustave Moreau et les *Fables* de La Fontaine', *Paragone Arte* 28 (November 1999), pp. 75-88.

²⁷ This dossier (Musée Gustave Moreau, Recueil d'articles, INV.14581) includes articles by Charles Blanc (*Le Temps*), Marie Raffalovich (*La Vue*), Ary Renan and Judith Gautier (source unknown). Gautier, predictably given her place in Symbolist literary circles, wrote the most positive critique. Marie Raffalovich's relationship with Moreau will be discussed in more detail below.

²⁸ 'Nous ne sommes pas admirateur de cette peinture bizarre et fantasque, dont les personnages aux chairs verdâtres et sentant la vase s'agitent dans un monde inconnu où ruissent les pierreries, où chatoient les brocarts: une vraie hallucination de joaillier. Mais malgré ce que cet art a de faux et de
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Included in the dossier is a single article in English, excerpted from *The Parisian*, a broadsheet that catered to the city's Anglophone community. The reviewer, whose name has not been preserved, in contrast to his French counterparts showers unreserved praise on Moreau:

No modern painter has a more brilliant palette than Mr. Gustave Moreau, and, if we did not know it already, the twenty-five water-colours which he exhibits in the Rue Laffitte would prove that he has an imagination with which no other living artist's can be compared. Each of his compositions has the brilliancy of a casket of jewels, and in imaginative power each seems to surpass the other. [...] The few pictures by Mr. Gustave Moreau which we have seen from time to time at the Salon had made us acquainted with a rare colourist and poet; the water-colours of which we are now speaking have revealed to us a varied and inexhaustible imagination beyond all our dreams.²⁹

Most of the recurring complaints about Moreau's oeuvre – the febrile colour, the tendency toward a *horror vacui* of bejewelled detail, the preference for the fantastic – are turned on their head. One could argue that the watercolours, by virtue of their fairytale subjects and medium, had less power to offend than the large-scale, encrusted canvases of myths and Biblical subjects played out in an atmosphere of exoticism and dread (although this critic appears to be full of praise for Moreau's Salon paintings as well). Furthermore, watercolour was considered the British medium par excellence, so there exists the possibility of condescension on the part of a British reviewer towards a French painter making a foray into unfamiliar territory – but this is belied, at least in the review in question, by the tone of genuine enthusiasm. In any event, whether because of a more anodyne choice of subjects or because of a shift in taste, at least a few British viewers were becoming more receptive to Moreau's art.

Roux was of the same mind as most of the critics, ultimately deciding in 1882 to give the entire commission for sixty-five watercolour illustrations to Moreau. All of Moreau's watercolours were exhibited together at the Goupil gallery (owned by the dealers Boussod et Valadon) in Paris from March to May 1886, and then at Goupil's convenu, malgré la lourdeur inévitable que produisent des retouches répétées, il faut reconnaître que l'artiste sort de l'ornière et produit un ensemble d'oeuvres personnelles, puissantes, neuves comme idées et habiles comme exécution : c'est peut-être ce qu'il y a de plus complet au Salon de la rue Laffitte': 'Nouvelles Parisiennes. Les fables de La Fontaine illustrées par aquarellistes', *L'Art moderne* no. 14 (5 June 1881), p. 111.

²⁹ Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, dossier of press clippings related to *Les Fables de La Fontaine* (1881), INV. 14582.

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London branch in November of the same year. These were the artist's only one-man shows during his lifetime in either city.

Before I address the exhibition of Moreau's La Fontaine watercolours in 1886 in London and Paris, however, two important developments which prepared the ground for his (re)introduction to Britain need to be discussed. Much Moreau

scholarship labours under the assumption that his work again remained out of the public eye between 1881 and 1886. This is true if we restrict ourselves to *original* work, but it overlooks the increasing importance of reproduction to keeping Moreau's reputation alive when he could not or did not choose to exhibit. As Geneviève Lacambre has demonstrated, Moreau, notwithstanding the image of the 'hermit in the midst of Paris' who cared nothing for the opinion of the masses promulgated by Huysmans, had taken a keen interest in the reproduction of his paintings ever since his first Salon appearance in 1852.³⁰ He was deeply concerned with the limitations of available techniques and their potential impact upon the presentation of his paintings. From the first, his technique of choice was photography because of its superior fidelity to the original over the more commonly used engraving, and his favoured photographer was his neighbour in the rue de la Rochefoucauld, the British photographer Robert Bingham. It is unclear whether Bingham's photographs of Salon paintings such as *OEdipe et le sphinx*, *Jason* and *Orphée* were ever sold in Britain, but they were exhibited as works of art in their own right³¹ and were available commercially in Paris; indeed, his photographs and those of his successors, Ferrier et Lecadre (who purchased his archive of negatives following his death in 1870), became a sought-after item in the 1880s and 1890s for amateurs unable to obtain Moreau's paintings for themselves. However, in 1883 Moreau began a fruitful professional relationship with a printmaker who was at the forefront of the original print revival and who was to have probably the most decisive impact upon the spread of his international reputation, Félix Bracquemond.

The dealer Georges Petit apparently commissioned an etching after *David* [Figure 81, Mathieu 201], one of the paintings Moreau exhibited at the 1878

³⁰ Lacambre (2001), p. 33.

³¹ Bingham exhibited a photograph of *Oedipe et le sphinx* at the 1865 Salon française de photographie: *ibid.*, p. 35.

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Exposition, from Bracquemond late in 1882 or early in 1883.³² Although only three letters from Bracquemond to Moreau concerning the project survive, they reveal that Bracquemond worked closely with the artist on the realisation of the etching, requesting meetings to discuss the project and to obtain Moreau's opinion (and, if necessary, corrections) on his work in progress.³³ The etching [Figure 82], which was published in Paris by Petit and in London by Obach, was exhibited at the 1884 Salon, thus not only renewing awareness of Moreau's work in an official venue at a time when the newly published *À rebours* was exciting interest in his work in Decadent circles, but also – very unusually – earning the only *médaille d'honneur* awarded a work in any medium at that Salon. Although Bracquemond was careful to attribute his success to the quality of the original,³⁴ the award heralds a dramatic change in both the status of printmaking in general and reproductive prints in particular. As with Rossetti, reproductions – especially those made by printmakers recognised as artists in their own right – became acceptable and sought-after substitutes for the original work. No doubt thanks to Bracquemond's success at the Salon, Boussod and Valadon chose him to produce a series of etchings after Moreau's illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine* in 1886, despite not being associated themselves with the movement to revive the original etching.³⁵

Before Moreau's work made its second appearance in London, however, another important development occurred. Claude Phillips, who had written the first serious study of Puvis to appear in a British art periodical earlier in 1885,³⁶ published a comparable article on Moreau in the *Magazine of Art* later the same year. Phillips, who concurrently served as the *correspondant pour l'Angleterre* for the *Gazette des*

Beaux-Arts, was the most openly Francophile critic in Britain in the 1880s and became instrumental in raising the profile of both Puvis and Moreau in his own country.

³² Bracquemond wrote to Moreau on 20 February 1883 to inform him that he had just finished preparations for the engraving after *David*: Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Bracquemond correspondence, letter dated 20 February 1883.

³³ Letter cited in n.32 above and a letter from Bracquemond to Moreau dated 5 February 1884 ('Voulez-vous me dire quand je pourrais avoir l'honneur de vous voir ? Je voudrais vous soumettre une épreuve de ma gravure d'après votre tableau et vous demander vos conseils avant de mettre la dernière main à mon travail').

³⁴ 'Permettez-moi de vous dire, qu'une grande part vous revient dans le succès que j'obtiens. J'ai en imitant votre oeuvre bénéficié des combinaisons de formes et de couleurs que vous avez imaginées': Bracquemond correspondence, letter dated 28 May 1884.

³⁵ On the commission for Bracquemond's *Fables de La Fontaine* etchings, see Sabine du Vignau, 'Michel Manei et Goupil & Cie: 1882-1915', *État des lieux (I)*, exh. cat. (Bordeaux, Musée Goupil, 1994), p. 120.

³⁶ See Chapter 2.

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Notably absent from Phillips's thoughtful analysis, which covers Moreau's publicly exhibited paintings from 1864 to 1880, is any hint of the moralising and xenophobia that pervaded earlier British criticism. Indeed, while acknowledging the increasing spate of comparisons between Moreau and Burne-Jones in the French press, he not only declares the parallel simplistic, but implies that Moreau is the better and more original artist and that Burne-Jones would do well to learn from him:

[Moreau] . . . makes everything – drawing, style, and technique – subservient to his efforts to render his conceptions concrete and visible. In this quality, though in this alone, he perhaps resembles Blake more closely than any other creative artist, though his art remains essentially that of the painter, and does not, like that of the Englishman, become a symbol only. [...] Moreau not so much merely imitates the outward characteristics and mannerisms of his prototypes the Quattrocentists, as he seeks to transfuse them into himself, and possess himself of the spirit with which they conceived and painted.³⁷

The article is illustrated with two reproductions, one after *Orphée* and the other after *David* (not Bracquemond's etching, which Phillips mentions as having renewed interest in Moreau, but an inferior engraving which renders the picture's jewelled surface flat and leaden). In fact, Phillips subjects *David* to a lengthier scrutiny than any of the other paintings he discusses, seeming to delight in describing the 'barbaric profusion and splendour' of the king, the angel and their exotic surroundings in terms somewhat reminiscent of, though more restrained than, those used in the infamous passages in *À rebours*.³⁸ Interestingly, Phillips only refers in passing to the by this time notorious *Salomé* and *L'Apparition*, for which he evinces little regard and expresses regret that it is, thus far, the only work by Moreau to have been exhibited in Britain, where his art is 'little known and less understood'; the latter is, in his estimation, 'in all respects one of Moreau's most fantastic and least successful works, one, indeed, on which it would not be fair to found any appreciation of his powers'.³⁹ Phillips's wish that Moreau be represented in Britain with stronger and more varied work was to be fulfilled the following year when the solo exhibition of his *Fables de La Fontaine* watercolours staged by Boussod and Valadon in Paris opened in the company's London galleries in November. When the show was staged in Paris in May, it was accompanied by the publication of six etchings by Bracquemond [Figures 83-88] and attracted numerous plaudits, not least from Moreau's friend, the

³⁷ C. Phillips, 'Gustave Moreau', *Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), p. 233.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

Symbolist writer Henry Cazalis. Cazalis's review, illustrated with etchings after *Le Génie du fable*, *La Fortune et le jeune enfant*, and *Le Loup et l'agneau*, appeared, probably not coincidentally, in Boussod and Valadon's bimonthly *Les Lettres et les arts*.⁴⁰ Cazalis, in summing up Moreau's achievement, drew on the growing vogue for the synthesis of the arts, declaring him an 'astonishing symphonist' in his handling of line and colour and that 'he communicates sensation, emotion, and intense reverie as the equal of a poet or a musician'.⁴¹

When the exhibition crossed the Channel, it excited considerably greater interest than Moreau's previous outing at the Grosvenor, attracting coverage in the *Athenaeum*, the *Magazine of Art* and the *World*. These three articles offer a telling cross-section of the evolution (or the lack thereof) of Moreau's reception in Britain. The *Athenaeum*'s review, while it accorded Moreau more column inches than he had ever received in that periodical, retained more than a trace of the disapproval and condescension of the recent past. While praising *Phoebus and Boreas* and *The Dragon of many Heads and the Dragon of many Tails* as 'not unworthy of Breughel, and combining charms of colour with peculiar wildness of invention', and *The Man who ran after Fortune* as '[epitomising] all the romance, beauty, and vigour of his invention and technique', the anonymous critic deployed the familiar vocabulary of moral censure for *Le Singe et le chat* [Figure 83], which 'approaches Decamps in its sumptuousness and its weird luxury; but the luxury is overdone, and the sentiment of the design, however romantic and spirited it may be, is sensuous, while the colour, though splendid and harmonious, is more showy than fine', a condemnation that reaches its acme in his conclusion that 'the artist possesses superb and powerful natural endowments, which, more from wilfulness and self-indulgence than any other cause, have been allowed to run to seed.'⁴²

Claude Phillips, however, writing in the *Magazine of Art*, paid homage to Moreau's qualities as a 'painter-poet' (an echo of the positive inter-artistic comparisons set up by Cazalis which were to prove a double-edged sword for Moreau's reputation in France), and opined that his genius was better suited to watercolour than to oils and praised his handling of Persian and Indian motifs (those

⁴⁰ The identity of the etcher has not been preserved, but they do not appear to be the work of Bracquemond.

⁴¹ 'Étonnant symphoniste'; 'La sensation, l'émotion, la rêverie intense, il les communique à l'égal d'un poète ou d'un musicien': H. Cazalis, 'Gustave Moreau et les Fables de La Fontaine', *Les Lettres et les arts* 2 (1 April 1886), p. 65.

⁴² 'Minor Exhibitions', *Athenaeum* no. 3080 (6 November 1886), p. 606.

which had been denounced in the *Athenaeum* as 'weird luxury').⁴³ Yet, despite Moreau's reputation as a painter-poet, Phillips underlined the fundamental independence of the watercolours from their literary source material: 'his variations, it may be urged, are so dazzling and so little like the themes upon which they are built, that, to appreciate their singular charm, only the mere outline of the latter must be borne in mind, and their aim and spirit banished, as much as possible, from our thoughts.'⁴⁴ Particularly interesting in this regard is the brief notice of the exhibition written by George Bernard Shaw for the *World*. Shaw not only commended Moreau for not falling into the trap of slavish 'mere illustration' of the Fables, but, in tune with Cazalis and other advanced French critics, added that 'he has the insight of a poet, and the true painter's faculty of mixing his colours with imagination. He uses the palette as a good composer uses the orchestra'.⁴⁵ In drawing this comparison, Shaw may, of course, have had in mind Walter Pater's contention that 'all arts aspire to the condition

of music', but it is also worth bearing in mind that he was almost certainly aware of concurrent discussions of cross-fertilisation between the arts, and particularly music and painting, in the influential *Revue wagnérienne*, which had begun publication in 1885.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, despite the advocacy and admiration of cosmopolitan critics such as Phillips and Shaw, enthusiasm for Moreau in Britain remained a minority taste, as evidenced by the poor sales of Bracquemond's *Fables* etchings.⁴⁷

Moreau's appearance at the 1889 Exposition Universelle – the final exhibition of his work during his lifetime – and concurrent studies of his oeuvre by Paul Leprieur and Ary Renan⁴⁸ seem to have been the primary point of exposure for key figures of the Decadent Nineties such as Arthur Symons.⁴⁹ Indeed, Symons, as the key promoter of French Symbolist literature and antinaturalist art in Britain in numerous articles

⁴³ The 'Persian' qualities of Moreau's post-1870 oeuvre were frequently remarked upon by contemporary critics. For a thorough exploration of the extent of Moreau's debt of inspiration to Persian and Indian art, see A. Okada, G. Lacambre and M. Maucuer, *L'Inde de Gustave Moreau* (exh. cat., Paris, Musée Cernuschi and Lorient, Musée de la Compagnie des Indes, 1997).

⁴⁴ C. Phillips, 'The Fables of La Fontaine by Gustave Moreau', *Magazine of Art* 10 (1887), p. 102.

⁴⁵ G. B. Shaw, 'What the World says', *The World* 644 (3 November 1886), p. 14.

⁴⁶ Interchanges between music and the arts will be explored further in Chapter 6.

⁴⁷ The London exhibition catalogue advertised sets of the six etchings for £25 (proofs on parchment) or £15 15/- (proofs on Japanese). They seem not to have sold well in either London or Paris, for Bracquemond wrote to Roux in December 1888, 'La persistance de Monsieur Bousod à se débarrasser de nos gravures est étonnante'. Musée Gustave Moreau, Roux correspondence, letter from Félix Bracquemond to Antony Roux, 5 December 1888 (letter forwarded to Moreau by Roux).

⁴⁸ P. Leprieur, 'Gustave Moreau', *L'Artiste* 119 (March-June 1889), pp. 161-80, 338-59, 443-55.

⁴⁹ Symons devoted a chapter to Moreau in *Studies in Seven Arts* (London, 1906) which suggests close study of his paintings over a number of years, but he gives no clues as to when or how he first became acquainted with the artist's work.

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throughout the 1890s and books including *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) and *Studies in Seven Arts* (1906) and, crucially, as a collaborator of Aubrey Beardsley, may be seen as a bridge for artistic reputations between the two countries.⁵⁰ However, despite the obvious attractions of Moreau's work for British anti-naturalist and Decadent writers and artists, written evidence during the period remains frustratingly sparse. Confirmation of the high regard in which he was held by these circles exists primarily in an article by the critic Gleeson White that appeared in 1897 in the second (and final) volume of the *Pageant*, Britain's most design-conscious and cosmopolitan analogue to the Francophone Symbolist *petites revues*.⁵¹ Even putting to one side White's contribution, this volume, which features reproductions of Moreau's work (*OEdipe*, *Hercule et l'hydre de Lerne*, and *L'Apparition*) alongside Puvis, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts, and its art editor Charles Shannon, validates Moreau's place in an anti-naturalist artistic pantheon which was by this point venerated on both sides of the Channel. Still, White insisted that Moreau must be appreciated on his own terms, deploring the fatuity of his now-ubiquitous characterisation as 'the French Burne-Jones'. Rather, he argued that, although the art of both 'may [be] traced to the same fountain-head', Moreau should be seen as representing the classic ideal and Burne-Jones the romantic.⁵² (Indeed, Jean Lorrain had introduced a similar dichotomy in his 1887 volume *Les Griseries* when he dedicated his poems 'Printemps Classique' and 'Printemps Mystique' to Moreau and Burne-Jones, respectively.) Although White focused his discussion on Moreau's major Salon paintings, particularly *Oedipe*, *Orphée*,⁵³ *Salomé* and *L'Apparition*, he also refers to numerous lesser-known, privately owned works, which suggests that he may have paid visits to the relevant collections in Paris. In fact, Charles Hayem and Edmond Taigny, two of Moreau's most important patrons, were both noted for their

⁵⁰ On Symons's promotion of Redon in Britain, see Chapter 6.

⁵¹ The 1897 volume of the *Pageant* also featured works in translation by Maeterlinck ('The Seven Princesses') and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam ('Queen Ysabeau') as well as a commentary on Jules Barbey d'Aureville by Edmund Gosse; the 1896 volume published in the original French Verlaine's poem 'Monna Rosa', discussed in Chapter 4, and Maeterlinck's 'Et s'il revenait'.

⁵² G. White, 'The Pictures of Gustave Moreau', *The Pageant* 2 (1897), pp. 3-4.

⁵³ White quotes (without naming) another English critic on *Orphée*: 'It is against skies flushed by the aftermath of sun that recall for their touches of orange and bands of brooding purple these words, *Quelles violettes frondaisons vont descendre* – words so expressive of that hush in nature become strange in expectation of some countersign pregnant for the future – it is against a sky like this than an all-persuasive figure moves away; the head of Orpheus lies between her hands, and we scarcely know if her fastidious dress, decked with so many outlandish things, has been clasped to her waist and chaste throat in real innocence of the burden she holds so mystically; but this hint of sentiment is too slight, too fugitive, in the picture to become morbid'. I have not been able to discover the identity of this critic, but it does not appear to be Symons.

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generosity in allowing amateurs access to their collections, so it is certainly possible that White could have examined their contents.⁵⁴ Most significant, though, was White's insistence on the suggestiveness and ultimate resistance to exegesis of Moreau's oeuvre – terms which had, by this time, become standard in Symbolist criticism of Moreau in France. Finally, on the eve of his death, Moreau's reputation in Britain – at least, within a rather recherché, elite milieu – seemed to have achieved a degree of parity with that of his following in France.

Upon the publication of the second volume of the *Pageant*, Aubrey Beardsley, then convalescing in Boscombe, wrote to his patron André Raffalovich to thank him for sending a copy. He was especially taken with 'two of the Moreaus (*Oedipus* and the *Hercules*) [which] are perfectly ravishing', adding, 'I often think of *your* Moreau, one of his most beautiful works'.⁵⁵ Raffalovich's 'Moreau' was the 1872 watercolour *Sapho* [Figure 89, Mathieu 155], evidently a gift from his mother Marie and at this date the only work by Moreau in a British collection.⁵⁶ Beardsley's rapturous response indicates a longstanding acquaintance with Moreau's work, one which has been little explored and, I would argue, began even before his involvement in the creation of the most infamous illustrated book of the 1890s, Oscar Wilde's controversial play, *Salome*.

'Intensely decorative cruelty': Décadence, Japonisme and Beardsley's *Salome*

Wilde's displeasure with Beardsley's illustrations for *Salome* is notorious.

The reasons most often cited for his condemnation of the younger man's work are Beardsley's mischievous inclusion of unflattering caricatures of Wilde as the Woman in the Moon, Herod, and the sinister dramaturge/carnival barker in *Enter Herodias* [Figure 90, R.285], and his outrageous deviation from the text of the play in his addition of extraneous scenes (*The Peacock Skirt*, *The Black Cape* and *The Toilet of*

⁵⁴ Hayem donated his collection of works by Moreau to the state in 1899, on which occasion they were exhibited in the Musée du Luxembourg; see J. Lorrain, *Poussières de Paris* (Paris, 1902), pp. 22-23, for an account of the exhibition.

⁵⁵ Letter to André Raffalovich, 29 November 1896, H. Maas, J. L. Duncan and W. G. Good, eds., *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley* (London, 1970), p. 218.

⁵⁶ Marie Raffalovich purchased *Sapho* from Moreau in June 1872; the date at which it passed into André's possession is unrecorded, but presumably he owned it by 1895, when he first took Beardsley under his wing. See my article, 'Gustave Moreau and the Raffalovich family: new documents for *Sappho*', *Burlington Magazine* 148 (May 2006), pp. 327-31, for further discussion of Mme Raffalovich's patronage of Moreau.

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Salome), now considered a central element of Beardsley's ironic critique of the text.⁵⁷ Yet it seems that Wilde's most fundamental objection to Beardsley's decorations was

that their restless whiplash lines and Japanesque tendencies flouted the spirit of his Byzantine text and, even worse, its pictorial sources:

‘My Herod is like the Herod of Gustave Moreau – wrapped in his jewels and sorrows. My Salomé is a mystic, the sister of Salammbô, a Sainte Thérèse who worships the moon; dear Aubrey’s designs are like the naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes on the margins of his copybooks.’⁵⁸

In Wilde’s eyes, it would seem that the most heinous crime ‘dear Aubrey’ committed was his impish infidelity to Moreau, whose vision of Salome had coloured and shaped Wilde’s own ever since he read the newly published *À rebours* on his Paris honeymoon in 1884. However, Wilde’s complaint, probably as much the product of the clash of two enormous egos as of genuine artistic disagreement, unwittingly reveals his short-sightedness. For Beardsley was probably not only better acquainted with the work of Moreau (who himself had more than a passing interest in Japonisme) than Wilde, he used this knowledge, as I shall demonstrate, allied with the inspiration of Japanese prints, to create a bold and subversive rereading of Moreau’s vision of Salome.⁵⁹

Tracing Beardsley’s contacts with Moreau’s work prior to the creation of the illustrations for *Salome* is not a straightforward task, made still more difficult by large gaps in his correspondence in the early 1890s.⁶⁰ As we have already seen, he discussed and looked at Moreau’s work with André Raffalovich, who, thanks to his mother’s patronage, had enjoyed privileged access to Moreau’s atelier from an early age, but such conversations are unlikely to have taken place much before 1895.⁶¹ The

⁵⁷ My approach to Beardsley as artist-critic of Wilde’s text is informed by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra’s examination of the *Salome* illustrations as parody: L. J. Kooistra, *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 130-46.

⁵⁸ Quoted in J. P. Raymond and C. Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* (London, 1932), pp. 51-52. It should be noted that Charles Ricketts was a rival of Beardsley for Wilde’s favour, having illustrated all of his works up to 1894, most famously *The Sphinx*, also published by John Lane.

⁵⁹ Beardsley’s Japonisme in general has been discussed in K. Berger, *Japonisme in Western Painting from Whistler to Matisse*, trans. D. Britt (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 250-57, and, at greater length, in L. G. Zatlín, *Beardsley, Japonisme and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁶⁰ No letters are known survive between early January 1890 and July 1891, and 1892 is patchy.

⁶¹ Some time after André had moved to London in 1882, Marie Raffalovich wrote to Moreau, ‘Voulezvous

nous permettre, à mon fils André (qui est venu passer quelques jours avec nous) et à moi de vous rendre visite dans votre atelier? Il serait désireux d’emporter avec lui à Londres le lumineux souvenir de cette vision’. Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Raffalovich correspondence, undated letter. On another occasion, Mme Raffalovich invited him to dinner at her house on 6th January, noting that André was visiting for a few days and ‘il serait fort heureux également de vous voir’ (ibid., no year given).

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Bracquemond etchings after *David* and the *Fables* may well have still been available in London by the time Beardsley became a clerk in a City insurance office in 1889 and began to frequent nearby second-hand bookshops and print dealers, but we have no proof of his having seen them at this point; if he was indeed aware of the *Fables* illustrations, Moreau’s Persian-influenced fantasies, worlds apart from the quaint moralistic tales of La Fontaine, could have provided him with a model for his transgressive approach to illustrating *Salome*. He met Wilde by chance when he visited Burne-Jones at his studio and showed him some drawings in July 1891, but it seems rather unlikely that Wilde, despite his initial friendliness to Beardsley, would have discussed Moreau or *Salome* with a young upstart.⁶² More significant, no doubt, was Beardsley’s first visit to Paris in June 1892, during which he met Puvis, then the president of the Salon du Champ de Mars, ‘who introduced [him] to one of his brother

painters as “un jeune artiste anglais qui fait des choses étonnantes!”⁶³ In another letter he added that ‘the new work was regarded with no little surprise and enthusiasm by the French artists’.⁶⁴ Although we have no way of determining the identity of the ‘artists’ or of Puvis’s ‘brother painter’, it is tempting to speculate that the artist in question was Moreau, who was friendly with Puvis and by this time a member of the Académie. Even if this were not the case, though, Beardsley could certainly have seen *Orphée* at the Musée du Luxembourg or even have sought out Moreau’s work in the collections of Hayem, Taigny or others; the resemblance of the Thracian maiden in her exotic garb, tenderly cradling the severed head of Orpheus, to Salome contemplating the head of John the Baptist had long been remarked upon, and would not have been lost on Beardsley.⁶⁵ As well, we must not forget Beardsley’s fluency in

⁶² See Beardsley’s letter to A. W. King, 13 July 1891, in Maas et al. (1970), pp. 21-23, for a description of his visit to Burne-Jones and the older artist’s appraisal of his work.

⁶³ Letter to E. J. Marshall, autumn 1892, in Maas et al. (1970), p. 34. Beardsley repeats this news almost verbatim in a letter to his school friend G. F. Scotson-Clark, ca. 15 February 1893. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁴ Letter to A. W. King, 9 December 1892, *ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶⁵ When the painting was exhibited at the 1866 Salon, Théophile Gautier remarked on the similarity of Orpheus’s severed head to ‘that of John the Baptist on a silver charger in Herodias’s hands (‘celle de Saint Jean-Baptiste sur son plat d’argent aux mains d’Hérodiade’): T. Gautier, ‘Salon de 1866’ (*Le Moniteur universel* 135, 15 May 1866), p. 576. Chesneau noted in 1868 that ‘she is reminiscent of the Salome of the scriptures, who also contemplated, with a quite different gaze, the severed head of Saint John the Baptist’ (‘Elle rappelle la Salomé des livres saints qui contemplait, elle aussi, mais de quel autre regarde, la tête coupée de saint Jean-Baptiste’): E. Chesneau, *Les Nations rivales dans l’art* (Paris, 1868), p. 203. Lacambre (1998a), p. 98, speculates that Chesneau’s comparison of the two themes may have been prompted by conversations with Moreau, although the artist’s interest in Salome may not have developed until the early 1870s. I am grateful to Luke Houghton for reminding me of the parallels between the two subjects.

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French and his voracious and catholic taste for French literature; although the only references to Huysmans in his letters appear long after *Salome*, it seems plausible that Wilde may have encouraged him to read not only *À rebours* but sources that influenced Moreau’s picturing of Salome such as Flaubert’s *Salammô* – sources which the playwright claimed as having moulded *his* Salome in turn.⁶⁶

Wilde’s text – which, we should bear in mind, was originally written in French – could be considered an attempt to render in words the lapidary qualities of Moreau’s painted *Salomé*. The ritualistic repetition of certain phrases has the contradictory effect of underscoring the clashing, all-powerful obsessions that rule all the characters, and of draining them of humanity, of any hint of flesh-and-blood realism. Under these cascades of bejewelled language, which blasphemously rework the extravagant prose of the *Song of Songs*, Salome, Herod, Herodias, Iokanaan, even relatively minor characters like Narraboth and the Page harden into ciphers, their movement and development limited by envelopes of verbal ornamentation. This was precisely the effect Moreau himself desired when he created Salome’s costume; rejecting ‘old classical Greek frippery’ as inappropriate for ‘the figure of a sibyl and religious enchantress with a mysterious character’, he ‘conceived of a costume like a shrine’.⁶⁷ Nowhere is this enshrinement (or imprisonment) of a character in layers of language more apparent or effective than in Salome’s litany of desire for Iokanaan, the climax of which is worth quoting at length:

It is thy mouth that I desire, Iokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of

kings, and make afraid the enemy, are not so red. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press. It is redder than the feet of the doves who inhabit the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found

⁶⁶ As early as 1890 Beardsley boasted to King that ‘I can read French now almost as easily as English’ (letter to A. W. King, 4 January 1890, in *ibid.*, p. 18). André Raffalovich seems to have tried to interest Beardsley in Huysmans’s novels, even attempting to engineer a meeting which appears never to have taken place (letter to André Raffalovich, 13 April 1897, in *ibid.*, p. 302), but with little success, Beardsley finally confessing that ‘I never like Huysmans’ (letter to André Raffalovich, 21 February 1898, *ibid.*, p. 434). However, Beardsley’s dislike may have been reserved for Huysmans’s later, neo-Catholic writings such as *La Cathédrale*, which seem to have been part of Raffalovich’s arsenal in his attempts to convert Beardsley to Catholicism.

⁶⁷ ‘Je suis obligé de tout inventer, ne voulant sous aucun prétexte me servir de la vieille friperie grecque classique. [...] Ainsi, dans ma Salomé, je voulais rendre une figure de sibylle et d’enchanteuse religieuse avec un caractère de mystère. J’ai alors conçu le costume qui est comme une chasse’: Cooke (2002), p. 99.

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in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings!... It is like the vermilion that the Moabites find in the mines of Moab, the vermilion that the kings take from them. It is like the bow of the King of the Persians, that is painted with vermilion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth... Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.⁶⁸

This ‘enshrinement’ of the body of Iokanaan in metaphorical jewels, this tension between eroticism and decorative artificiality exemplified here is also, according to Arthur Symons, one of the defining characteristics not only of Moreau’s *Salomé*, but of his portrayal of women in general: ‘[Salomé] is not a woman, but a gesture, a symbol of delirium; a fixed dream transforms itself into cruel and troubling hallucinations of colour; strange vaults arch over her, dim and glimmering, pierced by shafts of light, starting in blood-red splendours, through which she moves robed in flowers or jewels, in hieratic lasciviousness’.⁶⁹ Yet Wilde subverts the male artist’s prerogative to imprison the body of a desired woman in a jewelled shrine by endowing Salomé herself with the power the Moreau claimed over her.

Beardsley’s response to Moreau’s image and Wilde’s text is a complex and uneasy mixture of allegiance and parody, further complicated by the fact that elements of Wilde’s text are themselves parodic (notably Salomé’s rhapsody of desire, which parodies the Song of Songs). The textual parody has already been explored extensively, with sometimes contradictory conclusions, by Linda Gertner Zatin and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, and I shall only touch upon it briefly here.⁷⁰ Beardsley comes closest to out-and-out caricature of Moreau’s tendency to encrust every surface, human and architectural, with gems in the title page and border for the list of pictures [Figures 91, R.274 and 92, R.276], in which imbricated, stylised, highly sexualised roses are substituted for stones, swarming over every surface; the parody is most grotesque in the looping of garlands of roses across the chest of the chortling herm – possibly a twist on the statue of Diana of Ephesus looming in the shadows behind Herod’s throne in Moreau’s *Salomé?* – to whom Beardsley has given extra eyes in place of nipples and navel.⁷¹ Indeed, the self-consciously excessive decorativeness of the *Salomé* illustrations, coupled with a greater familiarity with Moreau’s stylistic

⁶⁸ O. Wilde, *Salomé* (London, 1894), p. 53.

⁶⁹ Symons (1906), p. 76. Symons was ultimately critical of Moreau’s vision, considering it sterile and repetitive, but conceding that ‘at least he lived his own life, among his chosen spectres’ (p. 86).

⁷⁰ Kooistra (1995), pp. 130-46; L. G. Zatin, *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 90-96.

⁷¹ Zatlin (1997), p. 65, also notes the possible influence of another Moreau (the 18th-century engraver Moreau le Jeune) on the roses in *Salome*.

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quirks, may help to explain why Beardsley's reputation blossomed so quickly in France, with remarkably little of the lag that characterised the cross-Channel spread of the reputations of some of his contemporaries.⁷² Conversely, Beardsley's emphasis on the theatrical and the grotesque appears to amplify, to the point of parody and subversion, conservative British (mis)perceptions of Moreau's art. French and Belgian critics as early as 1893 singled out the decorative nature of Beardsley's work for praise, rather than condemning it as frivolous grotesquery devoid of moral or philosophical import.⁷³ Gabriel Mourey, one of the most influential advocates of antirealist

British art in the 1890s, went still farther to characterise the essence of Beardsley's work as 'intensely decorative cruelty', making the interesting assertion that this was a product of Beardsley's North-European origins.⁷⁴

Mourey's emphasis on the foreignness of Beardsley's elegantly grotesque art represents the flipside of the attacks of the conservative British press on Beardsley's perceived 'Frenchness'. Matei Calinescu has pinpointed the notion of otherness or foreign origin as central in perceptions of the origins of Decadence; nowhere is this better illustrated than in evolving French and British perceptions thereof.⁷⁵ As early as 1856, Delacroix was musing on the inherent tendency toward decadence in England and the Nordic countries and praising Shakespeare as the acme of refinement in times of decadence, presaging Mourey's comments on Beardsley.⁷⁶ Yet Beardsley, in his native country, was frequently the victim of xenophobic hostility; although such attacks increased, not surprisingly, following Wilde's disgrace and his involuntary entanglement therein, he and his work (inseparable in moralising Victorian criticism) were judged dangerously foreign, for which read French or Francophile. Harry Quilter vilified Beardsley as a harbinger of evil foreign influence in his attack on the

⁷² See J. Lethève, 'Aubrey Beardsley et la France', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (December 1966), pp. 343-50, for an outline of Beardsley's reception in France during his lifetime, and more recently, J. H. Desmarais, *The Beardsley Industry: the Critical Reception in England and France, from 1893 to 1914* (Aldershot, 1998).

⁷³ See for example 'L'Image', *Le Livre et l'image 2* (August 1893), pp. 47-64, and G. Combaz, 'Aubrey Beardsley', *L'Art moderne* (1 April 1894), pp. 101-103.

⁷⁴ 'Une cruauté intensément décorative dans sa manière de s'exprimer, le dénote septentrional': Mourey (1895), p. 269.

⁷⁵ M. Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC, 1987), pp. 167-69.

⁷⁶ Delacroix wrote: 'On the need of refinement in times of decadence. The greatest spirits cannot avoid it. . . . The English, the Germanics have always pushed us in that direction. Shakespeare is very refined. Painting with a great depth of feeling which ancient artists neglected or did not know, he discovered a small world of emotions which all men in all times have experienced in a state of confusion' (*Journal*, ed. A. Joubin, Paris 1932, p. 439, cited in Calinescu (1987), p. 167).

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latest wave of anti-realist art, 'The Gospel of Intensity';⁷⁷ most famously, Margaret Armour, after savaging the 'ugliness' and 'corruption' of Beardsley's drawings and forecasting in them Britain's impending moral downfall, proposed the following novel solution: 'Why not hoist the Decadents altogether off our shoulders and saddle them on to France? She has a nice broad back for such things, and Mr. Beardsley won't be the last straw by many.'⁷⁸ Beardsley's warmer reception in France – perhaps bolstered by the parallels between his work and that of Moreau, an artist both sanctioned by the Académie and the darling of Decadent and Symbolist circles – unwittingly gives credence to her recommendation.

Japanese art was viewed with as much, if not more, suspicion as French by conservative British critics,⁷⁹ and Beardsley's open and diverse borrowing of its motifs and technique has often been considered part of his project to *épater les bourgeois*.⁸⁰ Yet the Japoniste flourishes on which Beardsley prided himself – and to which Wilde strenuously objected – represent not so much a riposte to Moreau's ornamental eclecticism as a means of entering into a dialogue with the painter's work and ultimately destabilising it. For Moreau, while not an enthusiastic collector of Japanese objects like some of his contemporaries, had also absorbed some of the lessons of Japanese art, and although it only seems to have overtly informed his work during a relatively brief period in the late 1860s and early 1870s, some of what he had learned filtered into his later work in subtler form. His eyes were opened to Japanese woodblock prints by the displays at the 1867 Exposition Universelle, and shortly thereafter he purchased an album of Edo-period prints, *Ô Yamato Azuma Nishiki-e*, from the noted Parisian Japanese art dealer Desoye.⁸¹ He only made two direct watercolour copies after prints, in 1869; significantly, given his fascination with androgynous figures, the images he chose to copy were a portrait of a male Kabuki

⁷⁷ H. Quilter, 'The Gospel of Intensity', *Contemporary Review* 67 (1895), pp. 777-78. Quilter was a notorious bugbear of avant-garde British artists over the last quarter of the nineteenth century and himself a victim of Whistler's barbs.

⁷⁸ Armour (1896), p. 11.

⁷⁹ On Victorian anxiety over the perceived 'indecent' of Japanese art, see T. Watanabe, *High Victorian Japonisme* (Bern, 1991), pp. 146, 161-62. One of the harshest detractors of Japanese art in Britain was the American James Jackson Jarves, who, in an article in the *Art Journal*, not only deplored 'the obscene Art of Japan' but went so far as to claim that such obscenity was a logical result of 'wrong culture' and the primitivism of the Japanese people who had 'no true sense of the beautiful': J. J. Jarves, 'Japanese Art', *Art Journal* 7 (June 1869), p. 182. The parallels with contemporary culturally based criticism of French art scarcely need be pointed out.

⁸⁰ It was certainly seen as such during Beardsley's lifetime; the 'Japanee-Rossetti girl' on his poster for *A Comedy of Sighs* was derided in verse ('Ars Postera') by Owen Seaman in *Punch* (April 21 1894).

⁸¹ Paris, Grand Palais and Tokyo, National Museum of Western Art, *Le Japonisme*, exh. cat. (1988), p. 149.

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actor [Figure 93] and two *onnagata*, or female impersonators [Figure 94].⁸² Yet the album seems to have led to the lightening and brightening of his palette, which up to this point had more or less bowed to academic dictates and had avoided pure, unmixed colour. His debt to Japanese prints is clearest when we place *Sapho*⁸³ alongside a print from the album by Kunisada, *Genji taking the air in summer on the Sumida* [Figure 95]. As Lacambre has noted, Moreau adapted the red-and-blue floral kimono of the woman in the foreground and the graceful, mannered pose and gesture of the woman in the boat in the middle distance for *Sapho*,⁸⁴ conflating classical subject, Renaissance setting and Japanese motifs. While examinations of Moreau's Japonisme normally cease with *Sapho*, I would argue that undercurrents continue to be felt in some of his later work, most significantly in *L'Apparition*. Salome's highly artificial posture – the torso twisted towards the viewer, the head bowed in profile, the arm extended sideways – is a modification of the pose of the woman in the middle ground in Kunisada's print, a pose which appears in various forms in Edo prints and, while often the province of women, was not reserved solely for them, as is the case for the servant boy in this illustration by Sukenobu [Figure 96].⁸⁵ Beardsley, the devotee of *ukiyo-e*, could well have been cognisant of the same sources as Moreau and have perceived their influence on his work.

The prevalence of androgynous figures in both Moreau's representations of Salome and in the Japanese art on which he and Beardsley drew provides a useful lens

through which to view Beardsley's responses to Moreau's figuration of the narrative and character of Salome. The role of costume in revealing or disguising a figure's sex is crucial in all three cases. As Zatlin notes, the fact that both men and women wore kimono and the subtle differences between male and female hairstyles meant that for the uninitiated Western viewer (and even some initiated ones), it was all but impossible to distinguish between male and female figures.⁸⁶ Although the androgynous qualities of Moreau's male figures has received some attention, the

⁸² Both sheets are inscribed at the bottom, 'Exposition japonaise – Palais de l'Industrie'; the originals are unknown, but may be the work of Utagawa Kunisada: *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁸³ Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Raffalovich correspondence, letter dated 9 September 1873; see also Sloan (2006), pp. 328 and 331. *Sapho*, incidentally, was the first of Moreau's works to be subjected to the attentions of a *litterateur* when its first owner, Marie Raffalovich, wrote a florid, morbidly romantic fairy tale after it

⁸⁴ Lacambre (1998a), p. 113.

⁸⁵ On Sukenobu's influence on Beardsley, see Zatlin (1997), p. 123.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-67. This does not, of course, apply to shunga (erotic prints) in which both men and women are depicted with outsize genitalia (a feature adopted by Beardsley in his illustrations for *Lysistrata*).

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capacity of costume and ornament to denote, disguise or even blur gender also informs *Salomé* and *L'Apparition* to a degree heretofore little examined. This is perhaps a consequence of the blinding power of Huysmans's virtuoso description of the paintings in *À rebours*, which Peter Cooke has justly described as their 'literary prison'.⁸⁷ We may assume, however, that Beardsley, who would have known both the paintings (if only in reproduction) and *À rebours*, would have been alive to the inconsistencies in Huysmans's vision, and his *Salomé* illustrations suggest that he eagerly seized on these contradictions. Place both pictures alongside the celebrated passage, and the degree of license taken by Huysmans is remarkable:

(on *Salomé*:) With a withdrawn, solemn, almost august expression on her face, she begins the lascivious dance which is to rouse the aged Herod's dormant senses: her breasts undulate, the nipples hardening at the touch of her whirling necklaces; the strings of diamonds glitter against her moist flesh; her bracelets, her belts, her rings spit fiery sparks . . .

(on *L'Apparition*:) With a gesture of horror, Salome tries to thrust away the terrifying vision which holds her nailed to the spot, balanced on the tips of her toes; her eyes dilate, her right hand claws convulsively at her throat. She is almost naked . . . A gorgerin grips her waist like a corselet, and like an outsize clasp a marvellous jewel sparkles and flashes in the cleft between her breasts; lower down, a girdle encircles her hips . . . finally, where the body shows bare between gorgerin and girdle, the belly bulges out, dimpled by a navel which resembles a graven seal of onyx, with its milky hues and its rosy fingernail tints.⁸⁸

Huysmans not only deliberately eroticises Salome's body and gestures, he introduces details and actions from his own imagination inimical to Moreau's principles of *belle inertie* (beautiful inertia) and anti-theatricality.⁸⁹ Moreau's Salome, first of all, does not actually dance; her static pose and blank expression, as well as being anti-theatrical, suggests the continuing influence of Japanese prints. She is instead depicted in a hieratic and physically impossible pose, almost floating on the tips of her toes, her drapery hovering behind her as if frozen rather than as a result of

⁸⁷ Cooke (2003), p. 131. Symons was also wary of Huysmans, suspecting him of latching onto Moreau's work because he was 'the painter of all others best suited to evoke his own eloquence' (Symons, 1906, pp. 72-73).

⁸⁸ Huysmans (1884), pp. 143, 147.

⁸⁹ My use of this term is informed by Michael Fried's essay 'Art and Objecthood' (*Artforum* 5, Summer 1967, pp. 12-23); although Fried's arguments centre on Minimalist sculpture, his location of 'theatricality' in the ability of a work of art to both distance and confront the viewer is equally applicable in the case of Moreau. For a discussion of the origins of the anti-theatrical in Moreau's work, see Cooke (2003), pp. 104-110.

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whirling movement;⁹⁰ although her dance is the painting's ostensible subject, its choreography is left to the imagination and only suggested symbolically. We should recall that Wilde also tells us nothing of the Dance of the Seven Veils – the central action of the play – beyond the fact of its performance.⁹¹ Secondly, this majestically hieratic figure enshrined in her jewels and opaque, metallic veils is far from being the voluptuous feminine ideal described by Huysmans. Not only are her breasts chastely concealed by her costume (so much so that her torso appears flat), her arms and shoulders are as muscular as those of the executioner, although significantly paler – Moreau apparently nodding to the archaic convention of giving women fairer skin than men – and almost as solidly columnar as the pillars supporting Herod's palace. Her face is a smooth, impassive mask, with a faint suggestion of melancholy, not unlike that of the Thracian maiden in *Orphée*. Its counterpart in Beardsley's *Salome* is not to be found in any of the depictions of Salome herself, but in the face of the ephobic, homosexual Page in *A Platonic Lament* [Figure 97, R.284], mourning over the body of Narraboth who had killed himself out of unrequited love for Salome. That the dead Narraboth is supported by a jester who appears to be masturbating with his free hand while casting a lewd glance at the viewer neatly implicates the reader as voyeur and subverts expectations of the nature of the object of desire.⁹²

If Salome-by-way-of-Huysmans exists at all in Beardsley's world, she appears not in the guise of Salome herself, but as the ferociously brazen but ultimately pathetic Herodias. By rotating the figure from profile to full face, the decorous selfcontainment of Moreau's Salome gives way to aggressive confrontation. Beardsley inflates the rigid hieratism of *Salomé* to an outrageous degree in Herodias's columnar, phallic body, jewel-studded hair and haughty expression; the 'jewelled gorgerin' described by Huysmans as emphasising Salome's breasts is given to her instead to support the outsize globular breasts whose appearance corresponds more closely to

⁹⁰ In most of Moreau's studies from life for the dancing Salome, the model is shown supporting her weight on one or both flat feet; due to the impossibility of posing a model on point for any length of time, he fashioned a wood and wax model in that pose and seems to have used it not only in the 1876 *Salomé* but in the later variants in which she appears on point (Lacambre, 1998a, p. 160).

⁹¹ See Kooistra (1995), pp. 144-45, on the symbolic significance for Wilde of the invisible dance; it is worth noting that in March 1893 (the month before Beardsley's homage to the play, *J'ai baisé ta bouche Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche*, was published in the inaugural issue of *The Studio*), he inscribed a presentation copy of the original French edition, 'For Aubrey: for the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance' (cited in *ibid.*, p. 131).

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 135, notes the prevalence of the technique in the *Salome* illustrations, which includes the caricature of Wilde in *Enter Herodias*, the putti in *The Eyes of Herod*, and the lute player in *The Stomach Dance*.

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Huysmans's overheated portrait than to Moreau's depiction. (Even in *L'Apparition*, when Salome is shown semi-nude, her breasts and belly are devoid of the sensuous modelling on which Huysmans dwelt at length and which on close examination seems to be the product of wishful thinking.) Yet, as Kooistra points out, Herodias's power is revealed, on close examination, to be illusory: armless and apparently legless, she depends on the foetal grotesque, who tugs at the outlines of her sleeve as if upon the strings of a marionette, for support;⁹³ the effeminate page's noticeable lack of arousal in the first, suppressed, version of the scene undermines her sexuality, the only power

she and her daughter wield in a patriarchal society. The image functions as an ironic critique of Moreau's self-conscious, wooden hieratism, Huysmans's overwrought prose, and Wilde's portentous drama at once.

Of course, Beardsley's clearest reworking of *Salomé* and *L'Apparition* comes in his renderings of the same scenes, *The Stomach Dance* [Figure 98, R.280] and *The Climax* [Figure 99, R.286]. As much as Wilde may have objected to Beardsley's deliberate dashing of the reader's expectations of a mystical, symbolic ritual dance by substituting the more earthbound 'Stomach Dance', the illustration in fact serves as proof that Beardsley understood Wilde's text and its departure from the tradition represented by Moreau. One of Wilde's most shocking innovations was to transform Salome from the pawn of Herodias who dances to fulfil her mother's desire, as recounted in the biblical tale and adhered to by artists for centuries, into an independent woman who acts on her own terms, motivated by her own sexual desires.⁹⁴ Beardsley reflects this paradigm shift in *The Stomach Dance* by substituting for Moreau's full-profile pose, which, in tandem with her lowered eyelids, deprives Salome of agency and reduces her to being the object of the dual gaze of Herod and the viewer of the painting, a confrontational frontal pose which places Salome in control and a steely, passionless glare that confounds Herod's, and by extension the viewer's, impulse to objectify her. Yet Beardsley has chosen to retain and amplify several features of Moreau's image, most notably the motionlessness of Salome's body and her unnatural pose, not merely balanced on the tips of her toes but apparently floating, possibly inspired by the prevalence of floating figures in Japanese

⁹³ Ibid., p. 139. Zatin (1990), p. 87, conversely sees Herodias as a figure of power and nonconformity, but one whose use of her body to control Herod brings her no pleasure.

⁹⁴ Indeed, Wilde also portrays Herodias with greater sympathy, or at least with greater ambiguity, showing her not only refusing to collude with Herod's lust for Salome but actively discouraging her from dancing for him (pp. 80-90).

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prints; the only suggestion of movement is in the outward thrust of her stomach and the single outswung veil. For whom, or what, is this Salome dancing? For dominance over her hated stepfather, for the right to his power? For the achievement of her vengeful desire for Iokanaan's head? For her own pleasure? Although the veil projecting from between her thighs and apparently spouting a stream of roses has been likened to an erect penis ejaculating,⁹⁵ her frozen attitude, her cold, almost unappealing semi-nudity and her stony expression belie any enjoyment of pleasure. She remains as enigmatic, albeit in different terms, as Moreau's Salome.

The Climax, however, represents an explicit challenge to the rigid antitheatricity of *L'Apparition*. Although one might balk at my describing the latter work as anti-theatrical, given the dramatic event depicted, I would argue that Salome's expression of horror, while more emotive than that which Moreau usually gave his female protagonists, remains mask-like and conventional, the blood coating the floor as much a part of the scene's decorative scheme as the wall mosaics. Beardsley again opts for an exaggeratedly weightless Salome, this time suspended in midair, and retains Moreau's unorthodox depiction of the head of John the Baptist afloat rather than resting on a silver charger; the treatment of the streaming blood is, if anything, even more boldly decorative. Yet his Salome, rather than recoiling from the head in horror, grasps it in both hands as a cruel smile distorts her features. Significantly, in contrast to the unveiled, semi-naked Salome of *L'Apparition*, sexualised by her immoral actions, this Salome is draped neck to ankle, all indications of gender effaced, the consequence of her being stripped of her sexuality – or at least, the means of satisfying it – at the moment she achieves her revenge. Indeed, Beardsley goes a

step further than Moreau in the final image, the supremely ironic *cul-de-lampe* [Figure 100, R.283]. Depicted as literally the direct result of Herod's terse order, 'Kill that woman!', the image is positioned directly beneath the stage direction 'The soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields Salome, daughter of Herodias, princess of Judea' and is, significantly, the only time Salome is shown completely naked. This is also the only time her body conforms to contemporary notions of beauty (or at least to Symbolist notions thereof, with her slender limbs, small breasts and abundant hair in snail-shell curls); as Zatlin suggests, it makes a mocking commentary on Victorian sexual politics, in that Salome's beauty and femininity, sacrificed when she insisted on

⁹⁵ I. Fletcher, *Aubrey Beardsley* (Boston, 1987), p. 87.

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assuming power, are only legitimised by the total passivity of death.⁹⁶ Perhaps not even Moreau would have dared go as far.

Symons, paying tribute to Beardsley, declared that 'in the *Salome* drawings, in most of *The Yellow Book* drawings, we see Beardsley under this mainly Japanese influence; with, now and later, in his less serious work, the but half-admitted influence of what was most actual, perhaps most temporary, in the French art of the day'.⁹⁷ While he never specified what French art had shaped Beardsley's oeuvre, it seems fair to assume, given his own knowledge of the Symbolist and Decadent literary and artistic milieu, that he detected in Beardsley's catholic borrowing and rebellious, mould-breaking intermingling of disparate sources a debt to Moreau's art greater than he might ever have been willing to acknowledge.

⁹⁶ Zatlin (1990), p. 95.

⁹⁷ A. Symons, *From Toulouse-Lautrec to Rodin, with Some Personal Impressions* (London, 1929), p. 189.

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Chapter 6

The Condition of music: Fantin-Latour, Redon, Beardsley and Wagnerian prints

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it.¹

In 1890, Henri Fantin-Latour exhibited one of his most important paintings inspired by Wagner's operas, *Scène première de l'Or du Rhin* [Figure 101], at the Royal Academy.² To judge from the mass of press notices assiduously assembled by Fantin's wife, Victoria, it met with the approval, albeit the misunderstanding, of the majority of London critics, as epitomised by this notice from the *Athenaeum* which praised his painterly skill but dismissed the picture as a mere representation of a theatrical scene:

Full of beautiful colour and tone, vigorous, and graceful, but not quite innocent of the theatre (for this the subject may be responsible), is M. Fantin-Latour's *Première Scène du 'Rheingold' de R. Wagner* (1109). The nymphs are disporting themselves in the richly toned light and shadow of the rocky bank above the Rhine, as they hover over the concealed treasure and glitter in the golden beams of sunlight slanting from above; the evil genius watches them from below.³

This was not the first time Fantin had displayed work inspired by Wagnerian themes in London; he had been quietly submitting prints to the annual Black and White Exhibitions at the Dudley Gallery since 1877, the year after he first began to devote himself seriously both to the technique of transfer lithography and to subjects drawn from Wagner's oeuvre. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, notice in the British press

was consistent but limited, and, as Michel Hoog has remarked, is better used as a barometer of Fantin's position on the critical radar rather than as an indicator of a growing acceptance or appreciation of his programme.⁴

¹ Pater (1986), p. 86; original emphasis.

² Fantin occasionally titled his Wagnerian pictures with the original German; otherwise he translated the titles into French. I have preserved these idiosyncrasies.

³ 'The Royal Academy (Third and Concluding Notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 3265 (24 May 1890), p. 678. It is worth bearing in mind that more progressive commentators, such as Arthur Symons, concurred with this reviewer in their dissatisfaction with the inability of Fantin's imaginative subjects to totally transcend any suspicion of theatricality; Symons lamented that 'the lithographs snatch a filled cup too hastily and part of the music is spilled' and '[they are] rarely, I think, on a level, as pictorial invention, with the music which [they] set [themselves] to interpret': A. Symons, *Studies on Modern Painters* (New York, 1925), pp. 31-32.

⁴ The single greatest compendium of contemporary criticism of Fantin is to be found in the three volumes of press cuttings assembled by his wife Victoria, now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale 201

If Fantin's Wagnerian subjects were deemed interesting oddities by mainstream British observers among the portraits and floral still lifes that served as his bread and butter,⁵ their significance, along with those of Odilon Redon, was not lost on British art's only noteworthy Wagnerite, Aubrey Beardsley. Beardsley's fascination with Wagner dates from the outset of his brief career; his letters attest to the dedication with which he attended performances at Covent Garden and, tellingly, one of his earliest surviving drawings, heavily influenced by his then-mentor Burne-Jones, depicts a despairing Tannhäuser struggling toward Rome and the hope of absolution [Figure 102, R.19]. However, subsequent renderings of Wagnerian subjects, especially scenes drawn from *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhäuser* and *Das Rheingold* show Beardsley moving away from the meticulously detailed medievalism of Burne-Jones towards a new aesthetic that reveals the influence of the French Wagnerites Fantin and Redon.

Beardsley's Wagnerian pictures have occupied a crucial place in recent monographic studies.⁶ Yet remarkably, the most comprehensive study of his Wagnerism to date, Emma Sutton's *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (2002) makes virtually no reference to either Fantin or Redon, or to the debates on Wagner, music and the visual arts that galvanised the French avant-garde in the 1880s and 1890s.⁷ The blame for this lacuna does not lie entirely with Beardsley scholars. Redon's presence and reception in Britain remains little studied, and as for Fantin, although his crucial sojourns in London in the 1860s have been a topic of scholarly discourse ever since the publication of Adolphe Jullien's biography in 1909, his links with Britain in later life – that is, after Wagnerian and other musical subjects de France (henceforth BNF ACP). For Hoog's comments on its usefulness, see Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 22.

⁵ As with other French antinaturalists, Claude Phillips was more open to Fantin's art than most of his peers, although, in common with many French critics, he complained that Fantin's later musical subjects lacked inspiration and conviction; see for example C. Phillips, 'The Salons. Salon of the Champs Elysées', *Magazine of Art* 17 (1894), p. 327. It is also interesting to note that at least two British critics considered Fantin's imaginative works similar but inferior to those of Watts; see BNF ACP vol. 2, cuttings from *Fashions of Today* (1886) and *The Times* (1886), p. 234.

⁶ See for example M. Heyd, *Aubrey Beardsley: Symbol, Mask and Self-Irony* (New York, 1986), pp. 169-90, Zatlin (1990), pp. 75-79 and 195-201, and C. Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley: Dandy of the Grotesque* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 33, 139-41, 166-68.

⁷ Sutton mentions Fantin twice in passing, Redon and the *Revue wagnérienne* only once (E. Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s*, Oxford 2002, pp. 4, 12, 182). While I do not wish to demean Sutton's discoveries and arguments, which have been invaluable to my research for this chapter, I contend that her exclusion of French Wagnerism from her discussion impedes a fuller contextual understanding of Beardsley's Wagnerian pictures and prose.

began to occupy more and more of his production – have received far less attention.⁸ Furthermore, the protean nature of his oeuvre and the impossibility of pigeonholing it – naturalist? Symbolist? Realist? proto-Impressionist? conservative? avant-garde? – has meant that modernist readings of his work have focused on the portraits and still lifes, which conform more closely to notions of ‘progress’, to the exclusion of the apparent aberrations of the imaginative works. Likewise, recent scholarship on Beardsley’s Wagnerism, although it serves as a corrective to the Francocentric outlook that has coloured the standard accounts of Wagner’s role in the development of Symbolism,⁹ unintentionally echo the prejudices and parochialism of British critics in the 1890s by concentrating on the relationship of Beardsley’s work to British debates on Wagner and on Germany, the performance of Wagner’s operas in London, and Victorian sexual politics, with little reference to the impact of French Wagnerism on this most ardently Francophile of British artists.

Although I do not wish to discount the importance of these issues in shaping Beardsley’s response to Wagner’s operas, I would argue that his Wagnerism needs to be viewed through the lens of concurrent developments in France to be fully understood. With his voracious appetite for French art and literature, his extensive contacts in Parisian artistic and literary circles and his close working relationships with key ambassadors of the French avant-garde such as Arthur Symons, Beardsley almost certainly absorbed his Wagnerism coloured by French concerns, assumptions and debates. Moreover, his adoption of a French Rococo style for both some of his Wagnerian images and for his unfinished retelling of *Tannhäuser*, *Under the Hill* resulted, as I aim to demonstrate, as much from the influence of Fantin’s favoured mode for his own imaginative subjects and the embrace of the eighteenth century by the French avant-garde as it did from Beardsley’s own explorations in this field. This chapter does not attempt to present either an exhaustive survey of Wagnerism in France and Britain, or of Wagnerian imagery in either artist’s oeuvre. Instead, my intention is to examine some points of interaction between Beardsley and France in

⁸ A. Jullien, *Fantin-Latour: sa vie et ses amitiés* (Paris, 1909), pp. 11-40 and 91-103, is particularly important in respect to Fantin’s links with Britain in the 1860s in its inclusion of correspondence from this period. Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 212-14, discuss several of Fantin’s Wagnerian pictures (including *Scène première de l’Or du Rhin*) in relation to Beardsley’s work, but not in much depth.

⁹ See for example C. Morice, *Demain, questions d’esthétique* (Paris, 1888), pp. 26-27, and idem, *La littérature de toute à l’heure* (Paris, 1889), pp. 195-200; Mauclair (1901), pp. 171-73; and Lehmann (1968), pp. 195-96. Raynaud (1918), vol. 1, pp. 117-18 and vol. 3, pp. 166-68, discusses both the centrality of British Aestheticism and Wagner to the development of Symbolism in France, but makes no mention of Wagner’s influence across the Channel.

general, and Beardsley, Fantin and Redon, in order to throw more light on the complex mixture of political, social and aesthetic discourses that informed all three artists’ interest in the intersection of music and the visual arts and their Wagnerian pictorial languages. I have limited my discussion primarily to images inspired by *Tannhäuser* and *Das Rheingold*. By exploring several elements of this interchange – the shifting political ramifications of Wagner’s operas on both sides of the Channel from the 1870s onward; theoretical debate on the synthesis of the arts; performance practices; the impact of innovations in printmaking technique and the dissemination of artistic reputations through prints – and culminating with a case study of Fantin’s and Beardsley’s reworking of eighteenth-century motifs in their interpretation of *Tannhäuser*, I hope to demonstrate the significance of French Wagnerism to Beardsley’s own.

A Composer for all seasons: Wagner in French and English

As I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, artists and their work sometimes undergo ‘translation’ in foreign countries. Yet if the French perception of Rossetti was fairly benign, Wagner outside his own country prompted an altogether more visceral response, and a corresponding need to mould him in the image of whatever cause he was perceived to serve.¹⁰ Yet any survey of Wagnerism in France and, to a lesser extent, in Britain, uncovers a bewildering variety of cultural and political factions who embraced (or rejected) Wagner for wildly varying reasons.¹¹ How – and why – did the same composer inspire Fantin’s nebulous lithographs and Georges Rochegrosse’s spectacularly vulgar 1894 Salon showpiece *Le Chevalier des fleurs* [Figure 103], provide the soundtrack for both the first Salon de la Rose + Croix and the decidedly more earthbound setting of the bourgeois salon, provoke Baudelaire’s paean to the voluptuous and orgiastic paganism of *Tannhäuser* and P. T. Forsyth’s earnest tribute

¹⁰ My outline of the politics of Wagnerism in France is much indebted to G. D. Turbow, ‘Art and politics: Wagnerism in France’, in D. C. Large and W. Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca and London, 1984), pp. 134-66.

¹¹ Two such surveys on Wagnerism in the arts in France are M. Kahane and N. Wild, eds., *Wagner et la France* (exh. cat., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1983) and Paris, Musée du Petit Palais and Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, *Marianne et Germania, 1789-1889. Un siècle de passions francoallemandes*

(exh. cat., 1997). The only comparable survey of Wagnerism in England is A. D. Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (London, 1979), which is chiefly concerned with Wagner’s sociopolitical significance rather than his impact on the visual arts (perhaps not surprisingly, given that Wagnerian art in Britain had a sole serious practitioner, Beardsley).

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to Wagner as a herald of the return of Christianity to art?¹² And how did a nation which accorded Wagner such a shabby reception during his lifetime come to be the crucible of Wagnerian art and theory?

It is my contention that the flowering of Wagnerian art and criticism in France over the last quarter of the nineteenth century constituted a means of neutralising Wagner’s revolutionary and, in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, dangerously German qualities. This depoliticising of Wagner led to the gradual disappearance of Wagner the composer, subsumed into a collection of conceptual tenets that could be, and were, co-opted by an avant-garde that became increasingly conservative as the century drew to a close. It is worthwhile reviewing Wagner’s reception and shifting political significance in France from the 1840s, charting against it some of the landmarks of his adoption by artists and writers.

Against the turbulent backdrop of the revolutions of 1848 and 1851, Wagner paradoxically enjoyed the support not only of Napoléon III and his circle, but also of revolutionaries and republicans – much discussed at republican salons such as Juliette Adam’s, he was even dubbed ‘the Courbet of music’ by Champfleury.¹³ However, at this point his operas had yet to receive a full-scale production in Paris, and his supporters were in essence backing a composer whose works they knew either on paper, in the form of chamber performances for which they had never been intended, or not at all. The composer himself, during his 1859-1861 sojourn in Paris, had conducted a concert, attended by Fantin and apparently well received, of extracts from *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Lohengrin*;¹⁴ buoyed by this success, his hopes of Parisian acclaim were dashed by the disastrous staging of *Tannhäuser* in 1861, which was greeted with jeers and brawling and was forced to close after only three performances. Wagner’s ill fate in France might have been sealed if not for the passionate advocacy of Baudelaire, whose article ‘Richard

¹² Baudelaire’s comparison of the overtures of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* is notable for his use of an analogy to painting, perhaps the first in French criticism: ‘dans la partie voluptueuse et orgiaque de

l'ouverture de *Tannhäuser*, l'artiste avait mis autant de force, développé autant d'énergie que dans la peinture de la mysticité qui caractérise l'ouverture de *Lohengrin*' (Baudelaire, 1992, p. 466).

¹³ Turbow (1984), pp. 140-46.

¹⁴ V. Bajou, *Fantin-Latour et ses musiciens*, *La Revue de la musicologie* 76, no. 1 (1990), p. 46. The concerts took place 25 January, 1 and 8 February 1860 at the Théâtre des Italiens. Michèle Barbe claims that Fantin in fact first heard Wagner's music (the Wedding March from *Lohengrin*) at one of Padeloup's *concerts populaires*, either 3 January or 13 February 1861: M. Barbe, 'Fantin-Latour et la musique' (Ph.D. thesis, Université de Paris IV, 1992), vol. 1, p. 63. In any case, we may safely assume that Fantin had heard Wagner's music performed before the disastrous premier of *Tannhäuser* on 13 March 1861.

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Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris' appeared in the 1 April issue of the *Revue européenne* and, with its explication of Wagner's theory of the total work of art informed by his own vision of the synthesis (not the union) of the arts in his 1857 poem 'Correspondances', mediated most subsequent Symbolist responses.¹⁵ Fantin apparently had bought a ticket to the cancelled fourth performance.¹⁶ The following year, never having attended a full production of the opera and having only heard a few further extracts from the above-mentioned operas at Jules Etienne Padeloup's recently inaugurated *concerts populaires*, he chose as the subject of his first attempt at lithography the second scene of the first act of *Tannhäuser*, reworking the scene in a large-scale oil shown at the 1864 Salon [Figure 104].¹⁷ Largely ignored by critics – partly because overshadowed by the controversial *Hommage à Delacroix* but also, one suspects, because of the anti-Wagnerian sentiment still aroused by memories of the 1861 debacle¹⁸ – the painting was purchased by Alexander 'Aleco' Ionides, brother of the forward-thinking collector Constantine Alexander Ionides and, perhaps more importantly in the present instance, brother-in-law of the German musician Edward Dannreuther, a key promoter of Wagner in Britain and, in the 1870s, a recipient of Fantin's Wagnerian lithographs. Thus, from the outset of his career as a Wagnerian artist, Fantin was implicated as much in the evolution of Wagnerism in Britain as in France.

Such associations were to deepen in the 1870s and 1880s, although not without considerable struggle. Following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Wagner's music was banished from Parisian concert halls, not least thanks to the fiercely Francophobe composer's rubbing of salt in French wounds with the 1870 publication of his malicious screed 'A Capitulation'; even in 1876, a performance of excerpts at one of Padeloup's concerts was roundly booed.¹⁹ Yet if Wagner's *music* met with a frosty reception in the wake of the defeat, his *theories* – or to be more accurate, interpretations thereof – were fast gaining ground. Translation into French

¹⁵ Morice (1889), pp. 196-98, lamented Wagner's emphasis on a union, rather than a synthesis, of the arts, no doubt informed by a Baudelairean paradigm, but he seems to have been motivated by a concern to keep poetry, rather than music, at the top of the hierarchy of the arts ('C'est le malheur de l'Art qui a voulu que Wagner fût plus musicien que poète').

¹⁶ Bajou (1990), p. 46.

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the painting's genesis and initial reception, see Druick and Hoog (1982), pp. 159-60.

¹⁸ On perceptions of *Tannhäuser* in 1864 and Fantin's response to Wagner's brand of 'realism', see J. House, 'Fantin-Latour in 1864: Wagner and Realism', in P. Andraschke and E. Spaud, eds., *Welttheater. Die Künste im 19. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 1992), pp. 248-53.

¹⁹ Turbow (1984), pp. 155-56.

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of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* in the 1870s provided not only an alternative vision to the materialism and positivism of Comte and Taine, but a basis for understanding Wagner's theory of the total work of art.²⁰ Schopenhauer posited a hierarchy of the arts, through which man passed in his temporary escape

from the tyranny of the Will, with music at the top; whereas the other arts expressed ideas (the objectification of the Will), only music directly expressed Will itself. Pater propounded an essentially Schopenhauerian hierarchy, with each art form 'aspiring' to the state of the increasingly abstract one above it, in 1877, when he added 'The School of Giorgione' to the second edition of *The Renaissance*.²¹ Wagner's

Gesamtkunstwerk, although reliant upon this tradition, challenged it by insisting on the fusion of the different arts at the point at which their individual limits coincided. Yet a full-fledged attempt to formulate a theory of Wagnerian painting would have to wait until the gradual depoliticising of Wagner in the 1880s which paved the way for the founding of the *Revue wagnérienne* in 1885.²²

When Teodor de Wyzewa used his review of the 1885 Salon as a platform on which to propound a definition of Wagnerism in the visual arts, his decision to crown Fantin as the standard-bearer of the new painting was hardly surprising. Rejecting the mass of official Salon painting as hollow and un-Wagnerian, Wyzewa declares, M. Fantin-Latour has consoled us in this misery: first of all, he is a conscious Wagnerist, he knows, admires and celebrates the Master, but above all he has the extreme glory that alone, today, he has resolutely understood the double work possible to the painter: in his great paintings, each of which represents a new victory, he has reproduced, more exactly than all others and more entirely, the objective, real and total life of forms: and he has, in beautiful drawings, written a poem of plastic emotion, communicating strangely gentle and mild emotions to the soul, through a fanciful combination of lines and tints.²³

²⁰ On the significance of Schopenhauer to the development of Wagnerian theory in France, see Kearns (1989), pp. 67-68.

²¹ Pater's essay would probably have been read by key exponents of Wagnerism in France; Mallarmé is recorded as an admirer. See also Chapter 3 on Pater's reception in France.

²² Turbow (1984), pp. 155-56, dates this shift to around 1880; however, Fantin, as I shall discuss further on, returned to Wagnerian subjects several years earlier. That Wagner's music had not entirely lost its controversial charge is demonstrated by the cancellation of a Paris production of *Lohengrin* (only the third production of a Wagner opera in Paris before 1900) in 1887 after a single performance due to fears that it would fuel Boulangist unrest. For a discussion of the *Revue wagnérienne*'s position within the ever-changing constellation of Symbolist *petites revues*, see F. Lucbert, *Entre le voir et le dire. La critique d'art des écrivains dans la presse symboliste en France de 1882 à 1906* (Rennes, 2005).

²³ 'M. Fantin-Latour nous a consolé de cette misère: celui-là, d'abord, est un Wagnériste conscient, connaît, admire, célèbre le Maître, mais il a, surtout, cette extrême gloire, que seul, aujourd'hui, il a résolument compris la double tâche possible au peintre: il a, dans de grands tableaux, dont chacun montre une victoire nouvelle, reproduit, plus exactement que tous et plus entièrement, la vie objective, réelle, totale des formes: et il a, en d'adorables dessins, écrit le poème de l'émotion plastique, communiquant aux âmes des émotions étrangement douces et tièdes, par une combinaison fantaisiste

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Although his definition of Wagnerian painting is embedded in a Salon review, it is interesting to note that all of Wyzewa's Wagnerian artists are French and, for the most part, avant-garde and anti-naturalist: 'a new pastel by M. Degas . . . a painting by M. G. Moreau, the symphonist of refined emotion, or some horrifying drawing by M. Redon, or the exhibition of Old Masters at the Louvre . . . are Wagnerian acts'.²⁴ As James Kearns remarks, 'the tradition which anticipates modernity is a familiar manoeuvre in modernist criticism', and Wyzewa's analysis is a case in point.²⁵ But Wyzewa did more than merely attempt to ground the new painting in a time-honoured tradition. His claiming of Wagner for French painters and, by extension, France, can be seen as an attempt to not only neutralise the nationalistic controversy stirred by Wagner's music and theory (in itself a political move), but also to sideline Wagner the man and the composer, leaving a set of concepts to be appropriated and, indeed, improved upon by French artists and writers; as A. G. Lehmann put it, 'Wagner's

reputation thrive on the absence rather than on the presence of his works in France'.²⁶ This subsuming of Wagner and his music proved the start of a trend, as the *Revue wagnérienne*, over the course of its print run, devoted increasing column inches to poets and critics whose work scarcely pertained to Wagner and laid itself open to charges that it had become a mouthpiece for Symbolism rather than Wagnerism. Wagner's political significance, when raised at all, was only discussed in the most abstract terms.

If Wyzewa's understanding of Fantin's art and his motives for promoting it were shaped by his own agenda, the *Revue wagnérienne* was crucial in consolidating Fantin's reputation as an anti-naturalist painter-printmaker and in bringing this still little-understood portion of his oeuvre to the attention of an avant-garde audience. While Fantin had been exhibiting his lithographs at the Salon and the Dudley Gallery since 1876, and, as the album of press cuttings makes clear, they had begun to attract critical attention, the size of the Salon and the bias of most mainstream reviews des lignes et des teintes'. T. de Wyzewa, 'Peinture wagnérienne: le salon de 1885', *Revue wagnérienne* 1 (8 July 1885), p. 155.

²⁴ 'Un pastel nouveau de M. Degas . . . un tableau de M. G. Moreau, le symphoniste des émotions affinées, ou quelque dessin épouvantant de M. Redon, ou cette exposition des vieux Maîtres ouverte au Louvre . . . sont des faits Wagnériens': Ibid.

²⁵ Kearns (1989), p. 73. In 1886 Wyzewa went still further, identifying as Wagnerians 'avant la lettre' Leonardo, Rubens, Rembrandt, Watteau, Delacroix, Puvis, Degas and (surprisingly) Albert Besnard, further extending Wagnerism's French credentials: T. de Wyzewa, 'Notes sur la peinture wagnérienne et le Salon de 1886', *Revue wagnérienne* 2 (8 May 1886), pp. 100-113.

²⁶ Lehmann (1968), p. 195.

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towards oil paintings meant that it was difficult to appreciate them as part of an ongoing body of work.²⁷ However, the magazine not only used Fantin's Wagnerian lithographs as *hors-texte* illustrations, the 8 December number also advertised nineteen of Fantin's lithographs, which, although not intended to be purchased as a group, conveyed a more complete conception of Fantin the Wagnerian, and Fantin the innovative graphic artist,²⁸ a strategy augmented by Adolphe Jullien's decision to use his lithographs to illustrate his biography of Wagner published the following year in Paris and London.

The *Revue wagnérienne*'s British connections have received little attention, but they are worth highlighting to demonstrate the laying of the groundwork for a cross-Channel exchange in this arena. Two of the periodical's founding members were the music critic Houston Stewart Chamberlain (who happened to be Wagner's son-in-law) and the playwright Louis N. Parker, the latter of whom contributed a regular column charting Wagner's fortunes in Britain. In his first column, Parker lamented the current unfashionability of Wagner's operas in his country, which he considered musically backward: 'as for musical drama, it is twenty years behind the times here'. However, he hailed, in distinctly revolutionary terms, the salutary effect he anticipated Wagner would have on British musical life once his music had been disseminated to all those souls sensitive enough to appreciate it:

As for musical drama, here it is twenty years behind the times. We find ourselves in a state of transition; we endeavour to push forward into the light, but we are held back by a crowd of feuilletonists, organists and choir-masters who know only too well that their reign will cease as soon as we are emancipated. What is most encouraging is that the taste for Wagnerian music begins to be disseminated among the real people. [...] The English people have for Wagner a high respect mixed with a shy curiosity, and a great desire to become acquainted with his work.²⁹

²⁷ Many of the press clippings from the 1870s and early 1880s characterise Fantin's prints as 'fanciful' or 'charming', the implication being that they are minor works (BNP ACP, vol. 1, passim).

²⁸ The lithographs advertised for sale at the offices of the *Revue wagnérienne* were as follows: *Le Vaisseau fantôme, scène finale* (H.60); *Tannhäuser: Scène du Venusberg* (H.1), *Elisabeth* (H.), *L'Etoile du soir* (H.65) and a variation thereof (H.); *Lohengrin: Prélude* (H.39); *Le Rheingold: Les Filles du Rhin* (H.69), *Scène finale* (H.18); *La Walküre: Scène première* (H.23), *Scène finale* (H.24); *Siegfried: Erda* (H.20, H.54, and H.57); *Götterdämmerung: Siegfried et les filles du Rhin* (H.31 and H.72); *Parsifal: Evocation de Kundry* (H.73), *Klingsor et Kundry* (H.43), *Parsifal et les Filles-Fleurs* (H.59); and an allegorical composition, *Musique et poésie*.

²⁹ 'Quant au drame musicale, il est ici de vingt ans en arrière. Nous nous trouvons dans un état de transition; nous nous efforçons de pénétrer plus avant dans la lumière, mais nous sommes retenus par une foule de feuilletonistes, d'organistes et de maîtres de chapelle qui ne savent, que trop bien, que leur règne cessera dès que nous nous serons émancipés. Ce qu'il y a de plus encourageant, c'est que le goût pour la musique wagnérienne commence à se disséminer parmi le vrai peuple. [...] Le peuple anglais a, 209

Following the demise of the *Revue wagnérienne* in 1888, Parker and Chamberlain helped to found a British Wagnerian review, the *Meister* (1888-1895), which like its French precedent devoted as much space to Wagner's philosophy as to his music.³⁰ Chamberlain published a definitive and lavishly illustrated biography of Wagner in German in 1896; the English translation (1897) found its way into Beardsley's collection of Wagneriana, which included a vocal score of *Tristan*, four volumes of the English translation of Wagner's prose works, a copy of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzifal* (the text on which Wagner based his opera) and, significantly, a French collection of illustrated libretti.³¹ Although Beardsley does not mention Jullien's biography or the *Revue wagnérienne* in his letters, there is no reason to suppose that, as an avid Wagnerite and frequenter of book and print shops in both London and Paris, he would not have encountered either the biography, back issues of the magazine, or Fantin's lithographs.

To understand Fantin's own appropriation of Wagner for a French milieu, and the significance of Fantin's Wagnerian imagery on Beardsley, we need to cast our gaze back to 1876. This year proved a turning point for Fantin for three different, but closely intertwined reasons: he first saw a staged production of the *Ring* cycle at the first Bayreuth festival, he married his longstanding fiancée Victoria Dubourg, and he began to experiment with, and soon adopted, a new lithographic technique. All three events would converge to create the Wagnerian artist lauded by Wyzewa a decade later, a contradictory amalgam of cultural conservatism and formal innovation whose originality would in turn inspire Beardsley's work.

Fantin was keenly aware of being one of the few Frenchmen in the audience at Bayreuth, but his awe in the face of his first full-blown experience of Wagner's operas quickly trumped any political misgivings.³² Having only heard excerpts performed at Padeloup's and Lamoreux's concerts, he found the performance of *Das Rheingold* a revelation:

pour Wagner, un haut respect mêlé d'une curiosité timide, et un grand désir de connaître ses oeuvres': L. Parker, 'Correspondance – Angleterre', *Revue wagnérienne* (14 March 1885), pp. 53-54.

³⁰ For an outline of the journal's history, see Sessa (1979), pp. 38-44. Volume 6 (1893) mentions the Wagnerian etchings of Ricardo de Egusquiza, a Spanish artist associated with the Salon de la Rose + Croix, which were apparently selling well in London; perhaps Fantin's lithographs had set a precedent for him?

³¹ Maas et al. (1970), pp. 164, 351, 372, 380. According to Sutton (2002), p. 6, n. 18, the French volume in question was *Quatre poèmes d'Opéras: 'Le Vaisseau Fantôme', 'Tannhaeuser', 'Lohengrin', 'Tristan et Iseult', Précédés d'une lettre sur la musique de Richard Wagner* (Paris: A. Durand et fils et Calmann Lévy, 1893).

³² Jullien (1909), p. 115.

There is nothing in my memory more fairy-like, more beautiful, more complete. The movement of the Rhinemaidens swimming about and singing is perfect. The Alberich who climbs up and steals the gold; the lighting, the glimmer of the gold in the water, everything is ravishing. There, as in all the rest, it is the sensation, not the music, not the scenery, not the subject, but something that grips the spectator, or perhaps I should say the listener – although that's not the word either, it is all that, mixed together.³³

Not the least startling element of the experience was something that would seem to an opera-goer today so commonplace as not to merit a mention: Wagner insisted that the house lights be lowered before the performance began, sweeping away mundane reality and enveloping the audience in the music and drama. Much, however, as Fantin would have liked to believe that, in the darkened theatre, 'The house no longer exists; the men and women next to us don't count; . . . even the Kaiser himself is forgotten',³⁴ he discovered to his bitter surprise that in Paris Wagner's music lacked the power to transcend the still-raw wounds of 1870 when, shortly after his return from Bayreuth, he attended the *concert populaire* at which excerpts from several operas were roundly booed. Although he understood that this hostility was the result of political tensions rather than philistinism, Fantin's response was to retreat: as he explained to his friend, the German painter Otto Scholderer, he felt 'a desire to go and live alone, away from all artists, as I don't feel I am like them'.³⁵ His marriage to Victoria Dubourg, a talented pianist who also happened to be fluent in German, allowed him to do precisely this. From this point onward, his experience of Wagner's music shifted from the concert hall and theatre to the privacy of his home.³⁶ This shift from the public and expansive to the domestic and intimate paralleled Fantin's search for a new method of marrying music and the visual.

The first work to emerge from the trip to Bayreuth was a lithograph of the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* [Figure 105, H.8]. The choice of lithography was in itself unusual: etching had been established as the technique of choice for the artist-
³³ 'Je n'ai rien dans mes souvenirs de plus féérique, de plus beau, de plus réalisé. Le mouvement des Filles du Rhin qui nagent en chantant est parfait. L'Alberich qui grimpe, qui ravit l'or ; l'éclairage, la lueur que jette l'or dans l'eau, tout est ravissant. Là, comme dans tout le reste, c'est de la sensation. Pas la musique, pas le décor, pas le sujet ; mais un empoignement du spectateur. Ce n'est pas le mot qu'il faut que spectateur, ni auditeur non plus, c'est tout cela mêlé': Ibid., p. 112.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Fantin to Scholderer, 3 November 1876, quoted in Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 275.

³⁶ Fantin became increasingly reclusive following his marriage, eventually curtailing his concert-going entirely. Jacques-Emile Blanche recounted an episode (presumably in the 1890s) when the artist decided at the last minute to miss a performance of *Les Troyens* for which he had booked tickets, because 'la nuit, le froid, la chaleur, la foule, tout le troublait, dans la perspective de cette sortie inusitée': J.-E. Blanche, *Propos de peintre de David à Degas* (Paris, 1919), p. 37.

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printmaker for the past two decades. Lithography, which had experienced a heyday in France in the 1830s in the hands of caricaturists such as Daumier and Gavarni, was regarded as outmoded by the artistic establishment and treated with suspicion, if not scorn, by many artists because of its popular and commercial roots.³⁷ Furthermore, Fantin was almost certainly aware that the process had been invented by a German, Aloys Senefelder; whether or not he was conscious of it, he was not only taking on German subject matter but a German medium, with the same impulse toward transformation and appropriation. For his next Wagnerian print, a revisiting of his 1862 lithograph *Tannhäuser: Venusberg* [Figure 106, H.9], Fantin turned to an unorthodox variant – transfer lithography. Although the technique of drawing on a specially prepared paper which, when transferred to the lithographic stone, precluded

the age-old problem of the reversal of the image in the finished print, had been employed since the 1860s, its use had been limited to the reproduction of drawings and it was not considered worthy of exploiting for its own innate qualities.³⁸ However, Fantin immediately recognised elements of the process which uniquely suited it to musical subjects. If laid on a textured surface, the thin transfer paper picked up the underlying pattern, and he discovered after experimenting with placing heavy laid paper under the transfer paper before drawing on it that he could combine multiple textures – the fine parallel lines of the laid paper and a coarse and a fine granular texture that could subtly convey the modelling of flesh. Moreover, once the design was transferred to the stone, it remained open to change, and Fantin took advantage of this mutability by further developing the images on the stone with crayon, stump and scraper. Thus, although the lithographs were printed by a master printer, Fantin not only retained control of the image up until its printing, but his chosen process privileged the Romantic ideals of spontaneity of inspiration and artistic autonomy. This affinity with the Romantic trope of genius and inspiration was recognised and reinforced by commentators such as Léonce Bénédite, who attributed Fantin's preference for the lithographer's crayon to the fact of 'the brush [being] too

³⁷ The 'artificial flavour of 1830' of Fantin's lithographs was in fact a frequent target of unsympathetic British critics; see for example 'Current Art', *Magazine of Art* 10 (1887), p. 110 and 'Current Art', *Magazine of Art* 11 (1888), p. 111. On the status of lithography relative to etching in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Bann (2001), pp. 66, 87, 92-93.

³⁸ According to Germain Hédiard (1906), p. 18, Fantin had first been introduced to transfer lithography by Belfond, Lemercier's master printer. However, he probably first became acquainted with the possibilities of the thin transfer paper supplied by Lemercier for twelve transfer lithographs of Corot's drawings in 1872, and would have been aware of Alfred Robaut's use of the technique for a series of reproductions of Delacroix's drawings, 1864-1870; see Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 283.

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slow today for his hand, impatient to fix instantly to canvas or paper these tender and vibrant improvisations, the continuous dreams of his mind'.³⁹

Still more significantly, the richly varied textures and tonal gradations achieved by this new method gave Fantin the means to pursue a synaesthetic union of music and image.⁴⁰ Gustave Geffroy was one of the first to recognise the importance of his innovations, when Fantin exhibited another scene from *Tannhäuser*, *L'Etoile du soir* [Figure 107, H.48], along with three other musical lithographs, at the 1884 Salon: The artist has attempted the union of the two arts; he has sought by means of the vibrations obtained with black and white to represent scenes he has glimpsed in the harmonies of the musicians he likes; he can be said to have often succeeded; some of these sketches create a musical impression for those who enter into this mysterious world, where feminine figures emerge and evaporate, where heroes suddenly appear. The artist's method is simple: large areas covered in hatching, with tonal gradations and highlights; very smooth transitions between transparent blacks and pure whites. The dream figures appear in the shadows and in the light; they tremble, move, fade away like the musician's languid phrases; they stand out against brilliant backgrounds and suggest . . . an impression of ringing short notes; some of them are as serene and pure as the penetrating melodies of Wagner; others have the sorrowful charm of certain phrases of Berlioz. They represent an astonishing transposition of art, and it required all the skill of Monsieur Fantin-Latour to accomplish it.⁴¹

Geffroy's mixing of musical and painterly metaphors indicates the success of Fantin's efforts, but it is worth looking more closely at these three lithographs to discover the extent of the 'correspondances' between image and music. The 'vibrations obtained

by black and white' not only correspond to Wagner's description of the Rhine in the opening scene with its three levels of sunlit water, dark water and gloomy depths, they

³⁹ 'Le pinceau est trop lent aujourd'hui à sa main impatiente, ces tendres et vibrantes improvisations, qui fixent à chaque instant sur la toile ou sur le papier les rêves continus de son cerveau': L. Bénédite, 'Artistes contemporains: Fantin-Latour', *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* (10 January 1899), published in *Fantin-Latour* (Paris, 1903), p. 21.

⁴⁰ That Fantin considered transfer lithography the province of Wagnerian and other music subjects is borne out in Hédiard's catalogue of his lithographs; out of 193 lithographs, all but a handful (one still life and a few figure groups) are musical subjects.

⁴¹ 'L'artiste a tenté l'union des deux arts; il a voulu représenter par les vibrations obtenues à l'aide du noir et du blanc, les scènes entrevues par lui dans les harmonies de musiciens qu'il aime; on peut dire qu'il y a souvent réussi; certaines de ces esquisses donnent une impression musicale à qui pénètre dans l'air mystérieux où naissent et s'évaporent les formes féminines, où surgissent les héros. Le travail de l'artiste est simple; de grandes surfaces couvertes de hachures, avec des dégradations et des éclaircies; des transitions très douces entre des noirs transparents et des blancs purs. Les figures du rêve apparaissent dans ces ombres et dans ces lumières; elles tremblent, se meuvent, s'effacent comme les phrases alanguies du musicien; elles se profilent sur des fonds éclatants et font... songer aux appels des notes brèves; quelques-unes ont la sérénité et la pureté des mélodies aiguës wagnériennes; d'autres disent le charme souffrant de certaines phrases de Berlioz. C'est là une étonnante transposition d'art, et il a fallu toute la maîtrise de M. Fantin-Latour pour la réaliser.' G. Geffroy, 'Salon de 1884: Treizième article – dessins, aquarelles, pastels', *La Justice* (23 June 1884).

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give visual form to the quivering vibrato of the string sections. One of Wagner's major innovations had been the use of the leitmotif to denote certain characters or milieus; Fantin's awareness of this technique and his desire to create an optical equivalent is apparent in the broken, diffuse, feathery lines echoing the watery leitmotif that pervades the scene. Interestingly, a single drawing in Beardsley's surviving oeuvre – a portrait study in red chalk of the actress Réjane [Figure 108, R.265] – suggests that he may have made a half-hearted stab at imitating Fantin's feathery, oscillating touch. However, this seems to have been a one-off experiment, and the broken, blurred strokes were inimical to Beardsley's elegantly linear style. But Beardsley's technique, if not identical to Fantin's in the letter, reveals similarities in the spirit. Like Fantin, his preferred medium – the line block – was one previously little exploited by artists, and he was the first British artist to use it with a thorough understanding of its capabilities and its differences from wood engraving. Although the line block did not allow for the illusion of shading produced by the conventional method of hatching, it had the advantage of transferring the artistdesigner's

lines from drawing to print with virtually no alteration to the original appearance; the problem of artistic intention mediated by the hand of the engraver, endemic to wood engraving, was thus sidestepped. Thus, despite the fact that Beardsley, from very early on in his career, tailored his drawings to the limitations of the line block, he paradoxically found liberation in its constraints. Although he had used the technique for a vast array of subjects, it is worth noting that his discovery of the full potential of the line block (particularly the possibility of introducing 'tones' of grey with the aid of patterns of lines and dots) reached its full flower in 1896, when Wagnerian subjects took centre stage in his work. And if the printing process itself seems clinically precise, Beardsley's drawing practice, as described by Robert Ross, appears to have tapped into the same Romantic sensibility as Fantin:

He sketched everything in pencil, at first covering the paper with apparent scrawls, constantly rubbed out and blocked in again, until the whole surface became raddled with pencil, indiarubber, and knife; over this incoherent surface he worked in Chinese ink with a gold pen, often ignoring the pencil

lines, afterwards carefully removed. So every drawing was invented, built up, and completed on the same sheet of paper.⁴²

Of course, Beardsley overlaid this Romantic procedure with the self-consciously decadent practice (albeit originally the product of necessity, when his only free time

⁴²R. Ross, *Aubrey Beardsley* (New York, 1909), pp. 38-39.

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for drawing was at night) of working in a dark room by the light of a single candle, drawing together both the high-flown idealism embodied by his subject matter and the pessimistic decadence which Wagner was perceived by conservative commentators to embody.⁴³

Beardsley's greatest stylistic debt to Fantin appears to have been in the latter's use of line to reproduce both the aural experience of Wagner's music and its appearance on the page. Both artists' experience of Wagner's music, we should recall, was shaped as much by reading scores or transcriptions as by concert- and opera-going. In the spiralling upward procession of the gods in one of his earlier Wagnerian lithographs, *Finale du Rheingold* [Figure 109, H.18], Fantin skilfully merged the tendency toward transposing sound into form with the more literal rendering of the patterns of the notes on the staves in that scene's key leitmotif.⁴⁴ Significantly, Beardsley's most formally experimental Wagnerian images were his unfinished suite of illustrations for a projected 'Comedy of the Rhinegold'. The frontispiece [Figure 110, R.450] displays the most overt borrowing from Fantin. As Victor Chan notes, Beardsley's *Rhinegold* drawings are distinguished by the softening of the harsh angularity of his Japoneseque early style in favour of a 'new classicism' characterised by flowing curves.⁴⁵ Much as Fantin had done in his renderings – print, pastel and painting – of the opening scene, Beardsley eschews straight lines in all parts of the design apart from the borders and lettering, evoking with undulating lines and carefully graded blacks and whites both the watery leitmotif and the libretto's description of the scene. The marriage of musical and visual line is made still more explicit in the *Third* and *Fourth Tableaux of 'Das Rheingold'* [Figures 111, R.430 and 112, R.438]. The velvety, closely packed pattern of lines that composes the background of the underground world of Nibelheim in the *Third Tableau* appear to be the most overt homage to Fantin's characteristic vibrating textures. While the swirling, heavily stylised lines of Loge's hair and garments and Alberich's dragon

⁴³ Beardsley's nocturnal working habits also seem to have been knowingly modelled on the practices of Des Esseintes; combined with his adoption of Huysmans's protagonist's colour scheme of orange and black for the decoration of the house he shared with his sister Mabel in Pimlico, he vividly illustrates Praz's contention that Decadence was the logical outcome of Romanticism.

⁴⁴ Indeed, Fantin saw fit to transcribe the Valhalla theme (which is also Wotan's leitmotif) on the stone, below the image; see Barbe (1992), vol. 2, p. 138. Fantin seems to have taken an interest in the correspondence not only of line to sound, but of colour; the palette of *Tannhäuser: Venusberg* (1864) corresponds to the tonal colours of the orchestration of the related scene (ibid., vol. 2, p. 157).

⁴⁵ V. Chan, 'Aubrey Beardsley's Frontispiece to "The Comedy of the Rhinegold"', *Arts Magazine* 57 (January 1983), p. 89. Chan attributes this 'new classicism' to the influence of Charles Ricketts and Jan Toorop; strangely, Fantin barely merits a mention in passing in the entire article.

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body are often cited as precursors of Art Nouveau's hallmark whiplash curves,⁴⁶ a comparison of the pictures with the corresponding musical passages reveals a deliberate attempt to match the stroke of lines in ink to lines of music. Loge's extraordinary flame-shaped chest hair in the fourth tableau contains an even more explicit reference to its corresponding leitmotif. This motif has generally been interpreted biographically, as both a visualisation of the torment of Beardsley's ravaged lungs and as evidence of his identification with the mischievous, amoral fire

god.⁴⁷ Yet, as Sutton points out, the flames form a graphic counterpart to the flickering chromatic semi-quavers which characterise Loge's leitmotif in this scene.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Loge's flames may be read as bringing together a self-referential alignment of artist and subject, an attempt to translate musical language into graphic expression, and an allusion to Pater's notorious injunction to the aesthete 'to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame' – a connection reinforced by Beardsley's ironic comment to a friend, 'I never wear an overcoat, I am always burning'.⁴⁹ However, Pater's spirit, whether knowingly or not, suffuses Beardsley's *Rheingold* images as much as it does Fantin's. When Pater speaks of painting 'aspiring to the condition of music', one possible reading is that painting aspires to slough off its material form. Both Fantin and Beardsley, in their Wagnerian images, seek to translate, or at least transpose, form – especially the human form – into sound by dematerialising it. Their superficial differences of approach would appear to give the lie to this assumption, and both Sutton and MaryAnne Stevens fall into this trap when they assert, respectively, that 'in contrast to the impressionistic mythic Wagnerian images . . . of Fantin-Latour's work, hailed . . . as a realisation of "Wagnerian painting", the *Rheingold* drawings are an idiosyncratic fin-de-siècle exploration of a "Wagnerian" (i.e. leitmotivic) style of composition'⁵⁰ and that 'unlike the somewhat etiolated linear style of Beardsley's Wagnerian renderings which seem to dwell . . . specifically upon the narrow, sinister aspects . . . Fantin's more fully modelled forms capture the vast dimension of the human drama which Wagner lays out in his tetralogy'.⁵¹ Yet this draws a false distinction between the artists' work and obscures a common goal accomplished by divergent means. It is certainly difficult to

⁴⁶ See for example Reade (1967), p. 358.

⁴⁷ For examples of this reading, see Reade (1967), p. 357, and Snodgrass (1995), p. 33.

⁴⁸ Sutton (2002), p. 181.

⁴⁹ Cited in Snodgrass (1995), p. 33.

⁵⁰ Sutton (2002), p. 182.

⁵¹ Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 213.

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deny that Fantin's gods, mortals and nymphs are rendered with softly rounded bodies and limbs, delicately modelled by the play of light and shadow; their apparent corporeality initially appears the polar opposite of Beardsley's wraithlike figures who seem composed less of flesh and blood than of empty space precariously moulded into human form by a few exquisitely economical strokes of the pen. But the corporeality of Fantin's figures seems just as tenuous as that of Beardsley's; the pulsating interplay of light and shadow, of pattern against solid, renders his figures' existence perhaps even more contingent and insubstantial than that of Beardsley's, amorphous forms that detach themselves temporarily from the protean flow of the music before melting once again into the background.

While characteristic within the broader context of antinaturalism, this shared concern with dematerialisation and abstraction in Wagnerian images also indicates an underlying ambivalence towards contemporary, and more specifically German, operatic performance practice. Concurrent, more literal, representations of Wagnerian opera scenes indicate that the jocular stereotype of the stout, buxom Teutonic goddess in armour and horned helmet had its origins in the productions of the day.⁵² Not only would the overt nationalism of such aspects of the staging have presented a conflict of loyalties for a French artist (even an ardent lover of German culture such as Fantin) tackling Wagner so soon after *l'année terrible* of 1870, but the earthbound aspect of the performers and sets gave rise to the sort of slavishly literal, narrative-bound renderings (of which Rochegrosse's *Parsifal* is an extreme) at odds with the

transcendent music. Indeed, Fantin's account of the performance at Bayreuth tellingly devotes the most space to the least tangible aspect of the staging – the lighting.⁵³ His figures are, for the most part, clad in flowing classical drapery rather than Germanic costume, as if in an attempt to (re)inscribe Wagner's music into a Latin tradition.

Of all of Wagner's operas, *Tannhäuser*, and especially the episode of the Venusberg, was the subject which most captured Fantin's imagination and compelled him to seek a solution to the seemingly intractable dilemma of being a French artist taking on Wagnerian subject matter. His rather unorthodox solution was to recast Wagner in a distinctively French and apparently inimical style – the Rococo. While

⁵² See for example the illustrations of the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* (1876) reproduced in Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 281.

⁵³ Jullien (1909), pp. 111-19. Such was Fantin's fascination with the play of coloured light in the Bayreuth production of *Das Rheingold* that he printed several impressions of *Scène première du Rheingold* on different coloured papers so as to capture the sensations of the performance (Druick and Hoog, 1982, p. 283).

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Fantin's vision of the Venusberg, in the 1862 lithograph and the 1864 oil, invokes the Romantic discourse on the choice between the temptations of Life and the rigours of Art by means of the melancholic figure of Tannhäuser resting a hand on his lyre and glancing away from the reclining Venus,⁵⁴ his deviation from Wagner's description of the setting muddies the moral struggle. Rather than place his figures in the dark grotto specified in the libretto, Fantin shifts the scene into a verdant, sunlit meadow.

Although the 1876 lithograph retains the same composition as the earlier versions of the subject, Tannhäuser's resistance to Venus's charms is subtly diminished by the change in the position of his head and the direction of his gaze; the nymphs dancing around him seem to have emerged from one of countless Rococo prints of bathers in a landscape, their generously fleshed but strangely weightless bodies devoid of the moral menace of the fin-de-siècle femme fatale. In place of a Christian knight and poet, torn between shouldering his moral and artistic responsibilities and abandoning himself to the pleasures of the senses, we are presented with a scene of pure, frivolous merrymaking suffused with a breath of melancholy, an image whose composition and mood owe explicit debts to Watteau's *fêtes galantes* and especially *The Embarkation for Cythera* [Figure 113].⁵⁵ Tannhäuser was far from the only Wagnerian subject Fantin treated in a Rococo manner. The mischievous Rhinemaidens in the various permutations of the first scene of *Das Rheingold*, particularly the 1888 oil version, echo another favourite Rococo trope, that of the young woman on a swing watched admiringly (and often lasciviously) by her reclining lover; Fantin has substituted water for a swing and the threatening, semi-concealed Alberich for the more usual swain, but the similarities with a painting such as Fragonard's *The Swing* [Figure 114] are arresting – not least in Fragonard's blurred, almost visionary treatment of the foliage and Fantin's parallel dematerialised rendering of the water and riverbed.

Even in London in 1892, where the politics underpinning Wagner's operas were, at least on the surface, a less sensitive issue, Beardsley had little time for the conventional and typically German theatrical trappings. Although, unlike Fantin, he evinced as great an interest in the spectacle of the audience and the behind-the-scenes mechanics of performance as in the operas themselves, almost from the start he took

⁵⁴ Druick and Hoog (1982), pp. 153-54.

⁵⁵ Fantin did in fact spend time in the Louvre copying *The Embarkation for Cythera* (as well as Titian's *Concert champêtre*) in preparation for the painting *Tannhäuser: Venusberg* (Druick and Hoog, 1982, p. 160). His Tannhäuser subjects also exhibit more general similarities with the popular Rococo theme of female bathers in a landscape; relevant examples would be too numerous to list here, but one with which both Fantin and Beardsley would have been conversant is Fragonard's *Bathers* of 1765 (Louvre).

telling liberties with the representation of actual performers. His ‘portrait’ of the Hungarian soprano Katharina Klafsky in the role of Isolde [Figure 115, R.28] does bear a superficial resemblance to publicity photographs of the singer,⁵⁶ but he transforms her voluptuous presence into a lean, hieratic apparition with a profile that hovers between sensitive and severe, all but enveloped in kimono-like robes; as Zatlin has demonstrated, the result displays greater affinities with a Japanese kakemono than with anything likely to be seen onstage at Covent Garden.⁵⁷

This tension between a faithful, literal record of a performance and a desire to transcend conventional theatricality comes to the fore in Fantin’s and Beardsley’s approaches to *Tristan und Isolde*. Fantin’s very choice of *Tristan* as a subject implies his adoption of a common strategy of French Wagnerians for defusing political controversy, that of privileging the operas drawn from Franco-Celtic rather than Teutonic legend.⁵⁸ *Signal dans la nuit* [Figure 116, H.67] takes as its point of departure a scene from the second act of *Tristan*, one of the less obviously dramatic episodes in the opera; no hint of the stirring emotion of scenes such as the drinking of the love potion or the celebrated *Liebestod*. Rather than bathe the figure of Isolde in a dramatic spotlight, Fantin engulfs her in shadow, her contours barely delineated by the faint glow of moonlight; the viewer must work to pick her out of the gloom. The deliberate anti-theatricality is reinforced by the fact that Isolde is shown from the back, thus concealing any display of emotion; indeed, without knowing the print’s title, Isolde could be any young woman standing alone in a moonlit night and it would be all but impossible to identify it as a scene from any opera, let alone *Tristan*.

Beardsley takes the opposite tack: rather than effacing theatricality, he heightens it to almost to the point of parody. *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* [Figure 117, R.105], although conceived as an illustration for Thomas Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, is unswervingly Wagnerian in its inspiration.⁵⁹ The episode illustrated is arguably the most suspenseful in the opera; Tristan has agreed to drink a draught of poison offered by Isolde in atonement for slaying her lover as Isolde, torn

⁵⁶ Heyd (1986), pp. 171-72. Klafsky sang Isolde in the 9 July performance of *Tristan* in 1892 at Drury Lane, which Beardsley attended; a photograph of her in that role was published in the *Illustrated London News*, 23 July 1892 (p. 102).

⁵⁷ Zatlin (1997), p. 34.

⁵⁸ *Parsifal*, whose origins can be traced to *Le Chanson de Roland*, was also considered ‘safer’ and more congenial in France, particularly among composers; Debussy, for example, incorporated elements of the song of the Flower Maidens into *La Damaïsselle élue* (see Holloway, 1979, pp. 36-37).

⁵⁹ For further discussion of the Tristan and Isolde designs for *Le Morte d’Arthur*, see Sutton (2002), pp. 40-44.

between desire and hatred, looks on, both of them unaware that her maid Brangäne has replaced the poison with a philtre that will cause them to fall into each others’ arms. As Sutton observes, Beardsley has substituted for Malory’s description of the setting as the cabin of the ship Wagner’s specification that the action occurs in a ‘tentlike

apartment on the fore-deck of a ship, richly hung with tapestries’,⁶⁰ and the background at first glance appears to adhere to this description, with the sun setting over the deck visible through a gap between two ornately embroidered tapestries. However, the utter disregard for modelling and the creation of an illusionistic threedimensional

space calls attention to the flatness and artificiality of the scene; the floorboards on which Tristan and Isolde tread are as much the joists of a stage as they are the planks of a ship’s deck, the hangings as much flats and drop-curtains as they

are tapestries. Yet in this parodistically theatrical setting, Tristan and Isolde, with their identical sensual yet ascetically hard profiles, are curiously frozen; if their gazes crackle with psychological tension, more of the scene's nervous energy resides in the writhing tendrils and flowers crawling around the border. By exposing the scene designer's conjuring tricks, Beardsley both subtly ridicules Wagnerian theatrical practice and privileges the static and the visual over the music-drama's forward impetus of narrative and music.⁶¹

If Fantin's Wagnerian prints, and his negotiation of the pitfalls of literal representation of performance, provided Beardsley with an apposite model, the uncanny stasis of the figures and their austere, enigmatic, androgynous profiles in *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* seem utterly foreign to Fantin's diaphanous classicism. They suggest that Beardsley found in France another source of inspiration whose fascination with androgyny and sense of the grotesque paralleled his own – Odilon Redon.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 41-42; R. Wagner, *Tristan and Isolde* (London, 1993), p. 52.

⁶¹ Beardsley adopted this tactic more overtly in his *Rheingold* drawings by entitling them *tableaux*, a word guaranteed to evoke the popular entertainment of *tableaux vivants*. However, as Sutton observes, even the *tableau vivant* suffered from a split personality by the 1890s, alternately derided by forwardthinking

critics for its simplistic melodrama and appreciated for its proto-Symbolist qualities by avantgarde playwrights and directors; furthermore, the tactic of performing Wagner's operas as a series of static images was favoured by Cosima Wagner from 1883 until 1906 (Sutton, 2002, pp. 190-91).

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Austerity and the Grotesque: Redon in London

Redon's impact on anti-naturalism in Britain, and specifically on Beardsley, remains surprisingly understudied. With the exception of one conspicuous instance of Beardsley more or less directly lifting the motif of the monstrous spider from Redon's repertoire of grotesques for his early drawing *La Femme incomprise* (R.257), the affinities between the two artists' work has been little remarked upon, and possible points of contact scarcely mentioned.⁶² However, Beardsley's brief career coincided with Redon's most protracted effort to raise his profile in Britain, and if Redon was a rather reluctant Wagnerian in comparison to Fantin, both his small output of Wagnerian subjects and several of the core themes of his oeuvre seem to have informed Beardsley's own.

In 1890, Charles Morice wrote to Redon to introduce him to 'an English poet of no mean talent . . . who desires the honour of your acquaintance, with the goal of writing a study of your work for an English review'.⁶³ The poet in question was the apostle of French Symbolism in England and Beardsley's future collaborator and biographer, Arthur Symons, and his article appeared in the *Art Review* in July of that year.⁶⁴ Symons, no doubt informed by the contemporary penchant for drawing comparisons between British and French artists, introduced Redon to his readers as 'a French Blake', perhaps in an effort to ground Redon's seemingly outlandish vision in a recognisable tradition;⁶⁵ the better part of the text, possibly informed by Huysmans's meditation on *Hommage à Goya* in *Croquis parisiens* (1886), is devoted to an explication of Redon's second suite of lithographs inspired by Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint-Antoine* and illustrated with two of the plates, *La Chimère* and *Saint Antoine: ... à travers ses longs cheveux qui lui couvraient la figure, j'ai cru reconnaître Ammonaria*... [Figure 118, Mellerio 95]. Although not a Wagnerian subject, the scene would probably have struck a chord with Beardsley, who was likely to have been

⁶² Snodgrass (1995), p. 309, is one of the few exceptions, noting that Beardsley is likely to have seen Redon's prints both on his visits to Paris and when Redon exhibited in London in 1893.

⁶³ 'Un poète anglais d'un beau talent . . . désire l'honneur de vous connaître, dans le but de faire sur

votre oeuvre une étude pour une revue anglaise': A. Redon and R. Bacou, eds., *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren . . . à Odilon Redon* (Paris, 1960), letter from Charles Morice, 1890, p. 198.

⁶⁴ Symons's piece should be considered the first *successful* attempt to publicise Redon's art in a British periodical. Huysmans worked briefly and disastrously with Harry Quilter on the *Universal Review* in March 1888; his plans to write and publish an illustrated survey of Redon's work came to naught. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶⁵ Symons did, however, stress the differences between Redon and Blake, particularly the fact that Redon's universe was 'a lower heaven than [Blake's] where the morning stars sing together': A. Symons, 'A French Blake: Odilon Redon', *Art Review* (July 1890), p. 207.

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familiar with the literary source; as well, the sinuous lines of Ammonaria's hair and the torturer's flail appear to presage those of the *Rheingold* illustrations. Symons continued to promote Redon's work in later writings, and if he despaired of the artist's continued obscurity on both sides of the Channel, which he attributed to his refusal to 'conciliate the average intelligence',⁶⁶ it seems reasonable to assume that he would have discussed Redon with colleagues likely to appreciate him, not least Beardsley. Redon's profile continued to rise, albeit with less fanfare in Britain than in France and Belgium, over the next five years. In 1891 the Belgian critic Jules Destrée published a catalogue raisonné of his *noirs*, bringing together a previously scattered production and introducing a new audience to the complete body of Redon's work. The catalogue may have contributed to Redon's discovery by three British collectors, Albert Edward Tebb, Campbell Dodgson and Mortimer Mompes; Mompes, a printmaker and student of Whistler, met Gauguin in Brittany in 1894, asking him to request of Redon 'the complete collection', regardless of cost, which suggests that he had seen the catalogue,⁶⁷ while Tebb was so taken with Redon's prints that he visited the artist in both Paris and Peyrelebade to buy new work.⁶⁸ The enthusiasm of these amateurs gave Redon hope of critical and commercial success in Britain; as he wrote to his Dutch patron Andries Bonger in 1894, he was counting on an exhibition in London the following year and 'I have been advised to set my sights on that side [of the Channel], I sense a success in England'.⁶⁹ His high hopes were to be disappointed, for when he exhibited four lithographs at Dunthorne's Rembrandt Head Gallery in November 1895, the few critics who chose to write about the show responded with alarm and perplexity.⁷⁰ The gallery, however, was around the corner from the offices of the Bodley Head, and although Beardsley makes no mention of the exhibition in his letters, it is certainly possible that he could have seen Redon's prints there.

⁶⁶ A. Symons, *From Toulouse-Lautrec to Rodin, with Some Personal Impressions* (London, 1929), p. 170.

⁶⁷ Redon and Bacou (1960), p. 196, letter from Gauguin to Redon, April/October 1894. Although Gauguin cautioned Redon that Mompes's motives may have been commercial as well as connoisseurial ('Pour votre gouverne je crois vous dire que cet artiste les achètera dans un but de spéculation ayant lui-même

pour ses eaux-fortes un éditeur à Londres'), Redon sold Mompes an edition of *Songes* plus thirteen other lithographs for 150 francs in October 1894.

⁶⁸ 'Depuis votre lettre, un amateur de Londres vint *ici* me trouver, et il m'acheta même. Voilà un fait tout nouveau dans ma vie': S. Lévy, *Lettres inédites d'Odilon Redon* (Paris, 1987), p. 31, letter to Andries Bonger, 15 September 1895.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18, letter to Andries Bonger, 9 June 1894. Redon wrote to Bonger again on 5 June 1895, 'On me fait des risettes de l'Angleterre et même de l'Amérique' (p. 28).

⁷⁰ For further discussion of Redon's reception in Britain and his efforts to promote himself there, see Hobbs (1977), pp. 91-97.

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Beardsley thus had multiple opportunities to encounter Redon's oeuvre, and there is evidence to suggest that it did. But what of Redon the Wagnerian? Redon

had never embraced Wagner as wholeheartedly as Fantin and, although his correspondence indicates that he regularly attended performances of the composer's music (such as the Concert Lamoureux), his response to the production of *Die Walküre* he saw during his stay with Tebb in London was decidedly lukewarm: 'the actors are too theatrical, without really being actors; no sense of scene, but a sense of drama which seems to me innate, even in the extras'.⁷¹ He evinced an even lower regard for Fantin's Wagnerian art, deriding the 'vague Germanic sentimentalism' of his 'limp blond sketches' and questioning the validity of attempting to transpose music into painting: 'no colour can translate the musical world, which is uniquely and completely internal and has no hold on the natural world'.⁷² Redon's disdain for Fantin should probably be read at least partly as a pose, as integral to his reluctance to align himself with any of his contemporaries; this discomfort was amplified by the fact that Redon found himself, from 1878, very much in the older artist's debt, as it was Fantin who introduced him to the process of transfer lithography, which remained his preferred technique for his *noirs*.⁷³ Redon was also drawn into the orbit of the *Revue wagnérienne*, which advertised his (unrelated) lithographic albums, and for which he produced his first Wagnerian subject, *Brünnhilde* [Figure 119, Mellerio 68]. Two further explicitly Wagnerian images, *Brünnhilde (crépuscule des dieux)* [Figure 120, Mellerio 130] and *Parsifal* [Figure 120], followed after the periodical's demise. Although Redon employed the same medium as Fantin for his Wagnerian subjects, he used it for very different ends. Where Fantin's lithographs evoke the agitated movement of musical phrases, Redon's suggest a hushed interior stillness and, in common with much of his 1890s work, a hermetic mysticism, sometimes – particularly in the case of *Parsifal* – imbued with Christian overtones. *Parsifal*, incidentally, enjoyed a vogue among British Wagnerians in the 1890s, touching as it

⁷¹ 'Des acteurs qui le sont trop, sans l'être; aucun sens de la scène, mais un sens du drame, qui me semble inné, même chez les figurants': Leblond (1923), p. 26, letter to Maurice Fabre, 8 October 1895.

⁷² 'Vague sentimentalisme german'; 'blondes et molles esquisses'; 'nulle couleur ne peut traduire le monde musical qui est uniquement et seulement interne et sans nul appui dans la nature réelle': Redon (2000), pp. 156-57.

⁷³ Redon and Fantin had met in the salon of Berthe de Rayssac in 1877, where Fantin introduced him to the transfer process either that year or in 1878 (letters to Mellerio in 1898 and Bonger in 1909 suggest different dates). See Mellerio papers, Series XIII, Fox FF.15.7 ('Fantin-Latour me donna l'excellent conseil de les reproduire à l'aide du crayon gras, il me passa même, de bonne grâce, une feuille de papier report, pour le calque').

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did on the considerable overlap between the Wagnerian movement and the Christian revival.⁷⁴ Beardsley never took up Wagner's last opera as a subject – no doubt the story of a holy fool's redemption of sinners held little appeal for him⁷⁵ – but the serene, androgynous visage of Redon's portrayal of its hero, and of his two versions of *Brünnhilde*, may have struck a chord. Both *Brünnhildes* owe as much to Redon's allencompassing fascination with the 'ethereal profile' as they do to the character from the *Ring* cycle, and it has been frequently noted that the 1894 version betrays a strong Pre-Raphaelite influence;⁷⁶ in contrast to the hazy, generalised faces of Fantin's Rhinemaidens and Valkyries, the sensitive yet rigid profiles of Redon's *Brünnhildes* convey a forceful, conflicted personality not unlike Beardsley's Isolde. The androgyny of Beardsley's Tristan and Isolde also seems an echo of Redon's *Brünnhilde* and *Parsifal*; both artists' depiction of these characters taps into the fascination with 'female-dominated androgyny' that not only informed much antinaturalist art, but has also been identified by musicologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez as integral to Wagner's symbolic use of tonality.⁷⁷ However, Beardsley seems unable to

resist the temptation to parody Redon's example. *Flosshilde* [Figure 122, R.446] flaunts the same austere, androgynous profile (albeit fixed in a cynical smirk) as Brünnhilde, but in endowing the clever, flirtatious, manipulative ringleader of the Rhinemaidens with the same cast of feature as the noble, self-sacrificing Brünnhilde, Beardsley punctures the mystical pretensions of the French artist.

Conversely, Beardsley saw fit to borrow with greater reverence from Redon's more grotesque imagery. Brian Reade has compared *Alberich* [Figure 124, R.451] to Caliban, a comparison which aptly suggests the dwarf's combination of human and animal characteristics and his ability to inspire both revulsion for his bestiality and malevolence and pity for his victimisation by more powerful characters.⁷⁸ What he did not add (and may not have known) is that Beardsley may have had a specific

⁷⁴ On *Parsifal*'s appeal to religiously-minded British Wagnerians, see Sessa (1979), pp. 118-39.

⁷⁵ The sole reference to *Parsifal* in Beardsley's oeuvre is the apparently asexual orchestra conductor Titirel de Schentefleur in *Under the Hill*, almost certainly intended as a parody of the opera's (and its champions') promotion of platonic love and the renunciation of the self.

⁷⁶ See for example Hobbs (1977), p. 54. M. H. Spielmann used it illustrate an article on the lithography revival on the Continent, suggesting that it was 'a possible origin of some of Mr Aubrey Beardsley's lineal eccentricities' but criticising Redon for '[losing] his art in extravagant fancies' and 'always straining after an idea which he does not so often succeed in communicating': M. H. Spielmann, 'Original Lithography. The Revival on the Continent', *Magazine of Art* 20 (January 1897), p. 150.

⁷⁷ J.-J. Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne: A Study in Interpretation*, trans. S. Spencer (Princeton, 1993), pp. 294-98.

⁷⁸ Reade (1967), p. 358.

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Caliban in mind – Redon's [Figure 124]. Alberich and Caliban are almost mirror images of each other, with their seated poses and raised arms and their not-quitehuman

heads grafted onto hirsute animal bodies, but the similarities are accompanied by intriguing oppositions. Redon's Caliban, with his preternaturally huge eyes and pensive smile, seems at one with his surroundings; this is probably a prelapsarian Caliban, at peace in his natural surroundings before the arrival of Prospero. Alberich, bound, grimacing and cursing, could just as easily be Caliban subdued and enslaved. Numerous commentators have pointed out the possibility of Beardsley's autobiographical identification with the grotesque, gargoyle-like yet peculiarly compelling Alberich, whose name, by a curious coincidence, is the German form of Aubrey.⁷⁹ In Redon's sympathy for the devil, he doubtless found a kindred spirit, whether that devil was Shakespearean or Wagnerian.

Redon's contribution to Beardsley's formulation of a Wagnerian aesthetic was clearly more significant than has generally been assumed, although their shared interest – and sympathy with – the grotesque and the mysterious would on the surface appear to make Redon a more obvious source of inspiration than Fantin. However, Beardsley's most ambitious Wagnerian project, *Under the Hill*, his unfinished retelling of *Tannhäuser*, not only reveals an even greater debt to Fantin and to French Wagnerism in general, it represents one of the strangest and most subversive attempts to appropriate Wagner for France, through the lens of a style whose perceived frivolity was seemingly inimical to the entire Wagnerian project – French Rococo.

'Wagner's brilliant comedy': *Tannhäuser* and the Rococo turn

Under the Hill has suffered a split personality since its conception: it has been characterised as a 'romantic novel' (Beardsley), a 'Rabelaisian fragment' (Yeats), a 'spoof of pornography' (Zatlin) and, most recently, 'a parody of *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism, and of antiquarianism' (Sutton). To this list I would add: an exercise in Francophilia that simultaneously mocks the political foibles of French Wagnerism and

colludes with its efforts to enact a cultural revenge. While Sutton argues persuasively that *Under the Hill* skews and subverts British conceptions of the respectability and

⁷⁹ See for example B. Brophy, *Black and White: A Portrait of Aubrey Beardsley* (London, 1968), p. 64; Chan (1983), pp. 92-93; and Sutton (2002), p. 184, all of whom have noted the similarities between Alberich's profile and Beardsley's. It is also worth noting that another variation of Aubrey ('elf-king') is Oberon; Beardsley was probably aware of his kinship with the fairy king of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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erudition of Wagner and German culture as a whole by recasting it in the ostensibly antithetical mould of the French Rococo, it is my contention that *Under the Hill* is, on another level, a homage-cum-parody of the project of French Wagnerism and its own, little-discussed, alignment with the aesthetic and political concerns of the eighteenth century.

Few studies of Beardsley fail to comment on the eighteenth-century flavour of his mature style;⁸⁰ the underlying assumption of most of these discussions is that this stylistic shift resulted from the disastrous aftermath of the Wilde trial and that Beardsley's attempts to distance himself from Wilde and the *Yellow Book* and his new association with Symons and the *Savoy* led to the disavowal of his earlier, Japoneseque style and its replacement with a new classicism. However, Beardsley had shown an interest in the Rococo and especially, and significantly, in Watteau, from at least 1893.⁸¹ That his experimentation with a style informed by the art of eighteenth-century France coincided with the period of his most intense Wagnerian activity – the writing and illustration of *Under the Hill* and the semi-related *Rheingold* drawings – invites further examination. For although *Under the Hill* is riddled with references to the literature and *objets d'art* of incongruous styles, national schools and periods (itself a parody of the eclecticism that characterised both Aestheticism and mainstream Victorian culture, as well as Wagner's aesthetic), it is the French Rococo that predominates. Beardsley sprinkles his text with self-consciously archaic French turns of phrase to both heighten the decadent mood and attenuate the outrageous nature of the novella's polymorphous sexual activity,⁸² lampoons the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* by having Tannhäuser bathe with his homosexual attendants in a bathroom straight out of 'the well-known engraving by Lorette that forms the frontispiece to Millevoye's "Architecture du XVIIIe Siècle"', and hangs the Chevalier's bedroom with erotic Rococo prints which demonstrate his wide-ranging knowledge of the genre (the print described in most detail resembling Fragonard's notorious painting of a girl playing not-quite-innocently with a puppy, *La*

⁸⁰ For example, Symons (1929), pp. 188-89 and Chan (1983), p. 89. I use the term 'mature' advisedly in reference to an artist whose career and life were over before his twenty-sixth birthday; it is generally acknowledged that the extraordinary pace of Beardsley's stylistic evolution allows for the identification of a 'mature' phase.

⁸¹ 'I have just found a shop where very jolly *contemporary* engravings from Watteau can be got quite cheaply': Maas et al. (1970), p. 54, letter to William Rothenstein, September 1893.

⁸² It is worth noting that this is an idiosyncrasy that carries over from Beardsley's personal correspondence; many of his letters to Leonard Smithers yield the odd snatch of 'franglais'.

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Gimblette).⁸³ In the longest and most explicit allusion to Wagner, Tannhäuser retires to bed with the score of *Das Rheingold*, reading it in a manner strongly informed by his surroundings:

Tannhäuser had taken some books to bed with him. One was the witty, extravagant *Tuesday and Josephine*, another was the score of *The Rheingold*. Making a pulpit of his knees he propped up the opera before him and turned over the pages with a loving hand, and found it delicious to attack Wagner's

brilliant comedy with the cool head of the morning. Once more he was ravished with the beauty and wit of the opening scene; the mystery of its prelude that seems to come up from the very mud of the Rhine, and to be as ancient, the abominable primitive wantonness of the music that follows the talk and the movements of the Rhine-maidens, the black, hateful sounds of Alberich's love-making, and the flowing melody of the river of legends. But it was the third tableau that he applauded most that morning, the scene where Loge, like some flamboyant primaeval Scapin, practises his cunning on Alberich. The feverish insistent ringing of the hammers at the forge, the dry staccato restlessness of Mime, the ceaseless coming and going of the troupe of Nibelungs, drawn hither and thither like a flock of terror-stricken and infernal sheep, Alberich's savage activity and metamorphoses, and Loge's rapid, flaming, tonguelike movements, make the tableau the least reposeful, most troubled and confusing thing in the whole range of opera. How the Chevalier rejoiced in the extravagant monstrous poetry, the heated melodrama, and splendid agitation of it all!⁸⁴

The slyly self-referential quality of the episode aside – most of the scenes described are those treated by Beardsley in the illustrations – one of the most striking aspects of Tannhäuser's reading is its strong emphasis on the visual. Although it is stated that the Chevalier is reading a musical score, the description of his perusal of it, particularly the reference to a 'tableau', gives the impression that he is instead poring over an album of prints – if not by Beardsley, perhaps by Fantin. The 'primaeval' splendour and sweep of Wagner's drama is consistently undercut by reference to its 'wit', extravagance, and exquisitely bijou qualities; this recalls not only Nietzsche's perverse characterisation of Wagner as 'our greatest *miniaturist* in music',⁸⁵ but also shifts Wagner's work from the realm of the public and collective experience to that of the private, the interior and the dilettantish, qualities which the Rococo was widely considered to embody.⁸⁶ I would argue, however, that Beardsley was guided in his

⁸³ A. Beardsley, *Under the Hill and Other Essays in Prose and Verse* (London, 1904), pp. 54-55.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

⁸⁵ F. Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *'The Birth of Tragedy' and 'The Case of Wagner'*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York, 1967), p. 171, original emphasis.

⁸⁶ A further instance of Beardsley's Rococo-inflected interpretation of Wagner may be found in comparing his dandyish *Abbé* (R.423) with its possible prototype, Watteau's *Gilles* (Louvre). The exquisite, delicate costumes of Gilles and countless other male figures in Watteau's oeuvre would have

recasting of Wagner's drama into a Rococo aesthetic as much by Fantin's precedent, discussed above, as by his interest in the French avant-garde's contemporaneous cult of the Rococo and his well-documented enthusiasm for Watteau.⁸⁷

Embedding Wagnerian subjects in the aesthetic of a lost aristocratic regime is also, however, a loaded political choice, especially when one is working within the framework of a republic or a constitutional monarchy, and Beardsley seems to have been very much alive to the contradictions of cloaking an artistic revolution in politically (and artistically) retrograde forms. The curious interdependence of aesthetic avant-gardism and political conservatism that so profoundly informed antinaturalism

as a whole holds a special significance for both the Rococo revival, Wagnerism, and their eventual intertwining, especially by the 1890s. By the time Beardsley came to write *Under the Hill*, Wyzewa had transformed himself into one of the breed of arch-conservatives typical of 1890s France – railing against the Third Republic, endorsing elitism and the neo-Catholic revival, and yearning for a return to

the values of the Ancien Régime.⁸⁸ Even Fantin, although no political animal – characteristically, during the Franco-Prussian War he neither fled to London nor fought for France, but hid in his father’s house in the middle of Paris – revealed his artistically conservative bent when the Salon split in 1890; rather than exhibit with the more progressive Salon du Champ de Mars, he remained staunchly loyal to the conservative Salon des Champs Elysées, showing his musical and imaginative subjects (which critics came to see as increasingly trite) in decidedly conventional company. Beardsley’s creation of a hermetic, amoral, over-aestheticised and, ultimately, trivial setting for his retelling of the tale of Tannhäuser may be just as ironic a comment on the conservative impulse of the Rococo revival and French Wagnerism as an attempt to *épater les bourgeois anglais* by reformulating the high moral seriousness and metaphysical pretensions of Wagner – and of British Wagnerism – in terms bound to be seen as decadent and degrading by a Francophobic British public.

I would suggest a further contemporary French rereading of the Rococo as vital influence on Beardsley’s reinterpretation of *Tannhäuser*. The Rococo did not flounder in the face of Victorian notions of masculinity in dress, no small attraction to Beardsley, whose fascination with androgyny and desire to shock his audience went hand in hand.

⁸⁷ On the Rococo revival in France, and especially the role of the Goncourt brothers, see Silverman (1989).

⁸⁸ On Wyzewa’s conservatism, see Marlais (1992), pp. 55 and 103.

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capture only the imaginations of painters, designers and art critics; poets caught the bug as well, and none more so than Verlaine. Beginning in the late 1860s, he wrote the suite *Fêtes galantes*, inspired by, but not directly imitative of, Watteau’s paintings. Verlaine’s conception of Watteau was very much of his time, not only in its highlighting of the paintings’ delicate artificiality and melancholy but in its emphasis on the interchange of image and sound, its conflation of colour and musical harmony. ‘Mandoline’ is the most explicit instance of this approach and is worth quoting at length:

Les donneurs de sérénades
 Et les belles écouteuses
 Echantent des propos fades
 Sous les ramures chanteuses.
 [...] Leurs courtes vestes de soie,
 Leurs longues robes à queues,
 Leur élégance, leur joie
 Et leurs molles ombres bleues
 Tourbillonnent dans l’extase
 D’une lune rose et grise
 Et la mandoline jase
 Parmi les frissons du brise.⁸⁹

Music pervades every element of the poem – the singers, the mandolin, the trees, even the evening breeze. But most significantly, music engenders dematerialisation: the poem’s personages dissolve into ‘soft blue shadows’ whirling in the moonlight to the tune of the mandolin, insubstantial clouds of colour and sound. This is, moreover, emphatically not the bombast of the opera house, but the silvery, ephemeral melodies in a minor key suited to the drawing room or the garden. It was precisely this effect sought – and not always achieved – by Wagnerian painting, and which Beardsley, who was not only conversant with Verlaine’s poetry, but with the man himself,⁹⁰ seems to have aimed for in the ‘romantic dream’ and ‘brilliant comedy’ that was

Under the Hill.

⁸⁹ Verlaine (1962), pp. 115-16.

⁹⁰ Beardsley met Verlaine in London in November 1893 and, with his characteristic blend of archness and admiration, described him as ‘a dear old thing’: Maas et al. (1970), p. 58. The text of the lecture Verlaine gave, along with his account of his travels in England, was published in the *Savoy* in January 1896.

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Beardsley may have found in Wagner’s reputation and pretensions a ripe target for brilliant satire, but his relationship with Wagner’s *music* was considerably more nuanced. Concealed and complicated by layers of irony and mischievous subversion lay a sincere admiration and respect that seemed to increase with the growing inevitability of his approaching death. Writing to Leonard Smithers from his first extended exile in vain search of recovery, he confessed with unwonted seriousness that ‘Wagner alone consoles me somewhat’,⁹¹ and in an interview published in the *Idler* in March 1897, the author juxtaposed the blunt observation that ‘according to medical opinion, he has not long to live’ with the statement that ‘Beardsley had two grand passions in life. One was for Wagner’s music, and the other . . . for fine raiment’.⁹² Even when he found himself in dire financial straits in the last six months of his life and was forced to ask Smithers to sell most of his library, he requested that his copies of Wagner’s prose be kept back.⁹³ Fittingly, in light of his Rococo-tinted vision of the composer, Watteau, in the form of Adolf Rosenberg’s illustrated biography given him by André Raffalovich, became his other great source of comfort.⁹⁴ Beardsley may well, as I have argued, have arrived at this re-visioning of Wagner through the work of Fantin-Latour, of Redon, of Verlaine. But he did as much as any of these Frenchmen in reclaiming Wagner – for France.

⁹¹ Maas et al. (1970), p. 171, letter to Leonard Smithers, 26 September 1896.

⁹² A. H. Lawrence, ‘Mr Aubrey Beardsley and his Work’, *Idler* 11 (March 1897), pp. 189-90.

⁹³ Maas et al. (1970), p. 380, letter to Leonard Smithers, 22 October 1897.

⁹⁴ Beardsley wrote to Raffalovich, ‘I can’t tell you how much pleasure the little Watteau has given me [...] I really feel better since I opened the parcel’. *Ibid.*, p. 232, letter of 24 December 1896.

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Conclusion

In the two decades covered by this study, antinaturalism mounted a serious challenge to the perceived separateness of British and French art. This paradigm shift took place most visibly in the 1878 and 1889 Expositions Universelles and, to a lesser extent, in exhibitions at private galleries such as the Grosvenor, Georges Petit, and Goupil. The opportunity of seeing original works by artists such as Burne-Jones and Moreau juxtaposed stimulated a critical reappraisal – albeit more in France than in Britain – of the links and rivalries between the two countries and, despite the fact that as late as 1895 a leading critic like Sizeranne insisted that British art was inherently independent from its continental counterparts, the acknowledgment of complex cross-Channel dialogues and interchanges between antinaturalist artists. Moreover, the ways in which Burne-Jones, Watts, Moreau and Puvis positioned themselves – consciously or not – within these exhibitions established common goals of resistance to the socio-political norms of the Third Republic and of Victorian Britain.

Of course, many fruitful exchanges also took place outside the major exhibitions; many of these highlight the centrality of relationships between the arts, particularly between painting and literature, painting and music, or all three. Some were the result of writers’ interest in particular artists – Symons in Moreau and Redon, Rod in Burne-Jones, and Sarrazin in Rossetti, to name only a few – and were inevitably coloured by contemporary perceptions of a hierarchy of the arts in which

literature took precedence over painting. Others were more reciprocal, as in the case of Denis's collaboration with Debussy in their reinterpretation of *The Blessed Damozel*, while some occurred in a spirit of parody and subversion, as in the case of Beardsley's responses to Moreau, Fantin and Redon.

Throughout this thesis, I have insisted on the role played in these dialogues by reproductions and translations. Sometimes, as with Burne-Jones, Watts or Moreau, reproductions functioned as they were meant to – as substitutes for original works of art – whereas with Rossetti, given the inaccessibility of his work, they became an end in themselves. Reproductions are, by their very nature, imperfect renderings of the original, and this distortion is an essential characteristic of the cross-Channel dialogue, not least because it paved the way for creative reinterpretations on both sides. These are dialogues based as much upon misunderstanding as upon common ground, but they resulted, however briefly, in rapprochement and the pursuit of shared objectives.

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Coda

1900: Towards a new internationalism

The past is never dead; it's not even past.¹

As the Exposition Universelle of 1900, the last and largest of the nineteenth century, opened, still incomplete, on 14 April, the walls of the newly-built Grand Palais provided the backdrop for the final encounter of a different sort. This was the last time new works by Moreau, Puvis, Burne-Jones, Watts and Fantin would be exhibited together,² and commentary from critics on both sides of the Channel was flavoured by a contradictory blend of the valedictory and the contemptuous, shaped by the events of two years previously. 1898 had been antinaturalism's *année terrible*. Within less than twelve months of each other, Burne-Jones expired in Rottingdean; Puvis, mourning the Princesse Cantacuzène, and Moreau, putting the last arrangements in place for his house-museum, died in Paris, along with Mallarmé; Beardsley, fittingly for an artist who wore his allegiance to France on his impeccable sleeves, breathed his last in Menton. Fantin and Watts would both live on until 1904, Watts to produce the startling *Sower of Systems* [Figure 125] while Fantin, who had long since given up Wagnerian subjects, soldiered away at increasingly backwardlooking

soft-focus scenes of nymphs and bathers. Of the other survivors, Redon remained loyal to his antinaturalist objectives, although as the new century dawned he definitively turned away from the dark dream world of his *noirs* toward vibrant visions of intense colour; Denis, meanwhile, announced his new allegiance to the renewal of a classicism whose impersonal gravitas rejected the highly individual, mystical antinaturalism tinged with the medieval that had dominated the first decade of his career. The major publishers of reproductions – Dietrich, Braun, Hanfstaengl, Swann – continued to print and sell monochromes after Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Moreau, but demand was dwindling. This wave of deaths, coupled with the new avenues sought by the survivors, only served to reinforce the general sentiment that an

¹ W. Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (1951).

² Burne-Jones exhibited *The Dream of Lancelot, Cupid's Hunting Fields* and seven watercolours, including *The Prioress's Tale*. Watts was represented by a *View of Naples*, and Beardsley by a single drawing, *Venus and Tannhäuser*. In the Centennale, Fantin was represented by his first imaginative subject, *Féerie*, as well as *Coin de table, La Famille Dubourg, La Brodeuse*, a self-portrait and a sketch (*La Tapisserie*); Moreau by *Salomé, Vénus, Enlèvement de Déjanire, Saint Sébastien* and *Jason*; and Puvis by *La Toilette, La Famille du pêcheur*, a reduced version of *Pro patria ludus* and *La Vigilance*. None of them showed work in the Décennale (although Emile Sulpis showed two reproductive etchings of Moreau's paintings), despite all being eligible to exhibit there.

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era had drawn to a close and, if anything, antinaturalism's obituary had been in the writing for at least the last five years, as capricious former defenders like Jean Lorrain turned against it and commentators across the spectrum began to grouse that the new work of its elder statesmen was hackneyed, reactionary and obsolete. Burne-Jones's wearily resigned summing-up of his destiny could, at least on the surface, aptly be applied to the fate of antinaturalism as a whole by 1900: 'I must be prepared for public weariness about me. I've had a good innings . . . the rage for me is over'.³

If it seems perverse to conclude this study of antinaturalist painting by looking at an event two years after its ostensible date of death, my choice of the last of the great Expositions – the ultimate manifestation of the positivism that powered the nineteenth century and against which antinaturalism had always rebelled – is deliberate. It is my contention that the state of the art world in 1900, and particularly as exemplified by the displays and debates of the Exposition Universelle, provides a vital insight into the legacy of antinaturalism and of the cross-Channel dialogues which were essential to its development. We must look beyond the common assumption of modernist histories of art that 1900 represents a period of rupture which saw the definitive triumph of the giants of the new order over the old and the outworn; the reality was much less clear-cut. Robert Rosenblum's exhortation to reconsider the artistic production of turn of the century as embodying flux rather than rupture, when the old, the new and the in-between rubbed shoulders, acquires particular urgency in the case of antinaturalism.⁴ A consideration of multiple aspects of the Exposition, including but not limited to the fine art displays, reveals that if many of antinaturalism's original French and British adherents had died, they left heirs in unexpected places. Perhaps the most noticeable example was Moreau's star pupil and the inaugural curator of the Musée Gustave Moreau, Georges Rouault, whose *L'enfant Jésus parmi les docteurs* [Figure 126], exhibited in the Décennale, fused Moreau's penchant for fantastical architecture with his own tendency toward anatomical exaggeration and expressive ugliness. Another case in point was the Belgian Fine Art section, almost universally lauded for its freshness and vitality; among the obvious avant-garde names like Emile Claus, Théo van Rysselberghe, Eugène Laermans and Henri Evenepoel (the last another student of Moreau) were the antinaturalists Fernand

³ G. Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, p. 323.

⁴ R. Rosenblum, 'Art in 1900: Twilight or Dawn?', in R. Rosenblum, M. Stevens and A. Dumas, *1900: Art at the Crossroads* (exh. cat., London, Royal Academy and New York, Guggenheim Museum, 2000), pp. 27-53.

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Khnopff, an artist who made no secret of his Anglophilia and admiration for Burne-Jones in particular, and Jean Delville, whose paintings were markedly *not* victims of the accusations of backwardness heaped by British and French critics alike on their fellow countrymen.⁵ Not coincidentally, Belgium had been a major crucible of artistic exchange since the 1880s, most obviously in the international exhibitions of Les XX and La Libre Esthétique to which many French and British antinaturalists (including Watts, Beardsley, Denis, Fantin and Redon) contributed but just as significantly in its position as a centre in the reproductive print trade. Jean Clair's argument that Belgium should be considered the true international crossroads of Symbolism⁶ can be further honed by adding that it was specifically the crossroads of the cross-Channel exchange.

Nor was the demarcation between the antinaturalism of the nineteenth century and the ineluctable march of new 'isms' the unbridgeable gap that High Modernist histories would have us believe. Both inside and outside the Exposition, albeit more perceptibly in Paris and on the Continent than in Britain, the young artists of the

avant-garde selectively absorbed the lessons of their antinaturalist predecessors. Puvis's influence on Matisse and Picasso is now more or less a given, but his effect on British modernists such as Augustus John and Stanley Spencer has only recently begun to be discussed,⁷ doubtless due to the long shadow cast by the deep-seated disdain for antinaturalism of the Bloomsbury critics. The young Picasso's attraction to Burne-Jones is occasionally mentioned in passing but rarely discussed in depth; as Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone rightly point out, echoes of this fascination, possibly spurred by seeing Burne-Jones's work in the flesh at the Exposition, can be traced in the pale profiles and all-pervading blue atmosphere of some of his Blue Period portraits.⁸ Further confirmation of the continuing influence of French and British antinaturalism can be found in the work of Hodler, Klimt, and Munch, to name

⁵ Indeed, Khnopff, who served as a correspondent for the *Magazine of Art* in the late 1890s, had published a eulogy to Burne-Jones therein: F. Khnopff, 'A Tribute from Belgium', *Magazine of Art* (August 1898), pp. 520-26.

⁶ See Introduction.

⁷ The most wide-ranging survey to date of Puvis's influence on modern art is Lemoine (2002), although Lemoine's insistence that Puvis was not a Symbolist/antinaturalist (pp. 17-47) needs to be treated with suspicion, especially in light of Lemoine's general antipathy toward nineteenth-century art. Robert Upstone's essay in the same volume, 'Echoes in Albion's Sacred Wood: Puvis and British Art' (pp. 277-90) is one of the few in-depth discussions to date of Puvis's influence, both contemporary and posthumous, on British art. To Upstone's study I would add that, ironically, considering Bloomsbury's hostility toward antinaturalism, some of Duncan Grant's *Bathers* betray a strong hint of Puvis's classical idylls.

⁸ Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 32-33, 272.

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only a few. In an era when the avant-garde was increasingly questioning the representational, 'antinaturalism' becomes a particularly slippery term, but if the naturalism against which antinaturalism had originally rebelled had also waned, aspects of the antinaturalist impulse – the fascination with dream and myth, the rejection of narrative and exterior reality – retained their relevance for the new generation.

However, to uncover the most powerful evidence of antinaturalism's staying power in the new century, we need to leave behind the fine art displays in the Grand Palais and move toward the displays of the decorative arts. One need only look at the pavilion given over to Art Nouveau Bing [Figure 127], the bizarre, amorphous, writhing walls of Loïe Fuller's pavilion [Figure 128] and the displays of glass, ceramics and metalwork to see that many of the shared guiding principles of antinaturalism – the impulse toward a fusion of the arts, the collapse of the boundary between the 'fine' and 'decorative' arts, the rejection of the quotidian in favour of the spiritual and the mystical, and the undertones of masochism in the decorative – had simply passed into the realm of three-dimensionality. Indeed, some Art Nouveau objects made explicit allusions to antinaturalist paintings. Charles van der Stappen's *Sphinx mystérieux* [Figure 129], with its ivory flesh encased in a swirling silver garment and its air of impenetrable enigma, is a clear descendent of Burne-Jones's beggar maid, down to the undercurrents of masochistic idolatry. The impact of both Britain and France on the direction taken by this overtly international style has been frequently acknowledged, but perhaps because of the deeply entrenched, though (at least in the present situation) false distinction drawn by art historians between fine and decorative art, the role of antinaturalist painting and graphic arts in the development of Art Nouveau has not been fully explored.⁹ However, if we consider Art Nouveau as a continuing manifestation of the antinaturalist impulse, the notion, increasingly commonplace in recent studies, that antinaturalism was driven underground in 1900

by the impulse to formalist abstraction, only to re-emerge around 1920 in the guise of Surrealism, is ripe for reassessment. Alan Bowness's characterisation of Symbolism/antinaturalism as the bridge between Romanticism and Surrealism

⁹ An important exception to this rule is P. Greenhalgh, ed., *Art Nouveau: 1890-1914* (exh. cat., London, Victoria and Albert Museum and Washington, D. C., National Gallery of Art, 2000), which not only emphasises the overt internationalism of Art Nouveau but includes essays on the influence of painting generally, and British painting (with special attention to Rossetti and Whistler) in particular.

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remains valid,¹⁰ but, taking Art Nouveau into account, this bridge extends all but unbroken up to the eve of the First World War.

Given the centrality of the Expositions and their politics to the development of cross-Channel artistic dialogues, it seems only fitting to bring this study to an end with a brief examination of contemporary commentary on the health of the arts as represented – or not – at the Grand Palais. A perusal of much of the press coverage, at all points on the spectrum, is likely to give us a strong feeling that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*: the grumbling that the displays resembled an 'odious bazaar',¹¹ the ceaseless wrangling over the allotment of exhibition space to the various nations, the carping by critics of all nationalities (including French!) that France had, once again, allocated the best part of the exhibition space for itself, the furious debates about the primacy of French art, could just as easily belong to 1878 or 1889 as to 1900. Yet a new note of internationalist rapprochement crept into the reviews of some of the more forward-thinking observers. Although in 1878 the British journalist George Augustus Sala had acerbically cautioned the Exposition-goer against 'yield[ing] to the pleasing hallucination that International Exhibitions have anything to do with politics',¹² one could legitimately argue that the Expositions had played a significant role in the creation of artistic internationalism. The breakdown of boundaries between national schools was not always greeted as a positive development, and the perceived French monopoly on every aspect of the visual arts – from education to the market – was often blamed for the homogenisation of contemporary art; as Arsène Alexandre noted, 'internationally, we observe that the peculiarities of style are little by little dwindling and melting away in the most diverse countries. Even the tyro can nowadays at a glance distinguish between an old Italian and a Flemish or a German painting; but it is by no means certain that the most practised eye will hereafter be able to make a distinction between a German, a French and a Flemish work of our own time'.¹³ But perhaps the best summation of the

¹⁰ See Introduction.

¹¹ The description is Camille Pissarro's, cited in M. Stevens, 'The Exposition Universelle: "This vast competition of effort, realisation and victories"', in Rosenblum, Stevens and Dumas (2000), p. 59.

Gustave Geffroy's criticism of the Exposition took the form of a debate between two imaginary philosophers, of whom the negative one also chose to characterise not only the Exposition, but Paris as a whole, as 'nothing more than a bazaar': G. Geffroy, 'Revue des idées: L'Exposition de 1900 et les Expositions: Plaidoyers pour et contre', *Revue encyclopédique* 10, p. 610.

¹² G. A. Sala, *Paris Herself Again in 1878-9* (London, 1879), vol. 1, p. 192.

¹³ A. Alexandre, 'Continental Pictures at the Paris Exhibition', *The Paris Exhibition 1900, Art Journal* (London, 1901), p. 323.

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international situation in 1900, with all its optimism and doubts, is provided by the Belgian poet and critic Emile Verhaeren:

[Ever since the time of David], France has monopolised the vast production of art. There is only the École, unique and always the same, whether in London, Berlin, Brussels [...] Modern painting, on the contrary, lives on blues and violets; it breaks down sombre or dazzling light according to time of day and

the movement of clouds and sun, it favours a delicate and vibrating facture. It has been adopted by all who wish to emancipate themselves from routine, it has won over Europe and even Asia and America. One paints, in accordance with this style, in Tokyo as well as in New York. But in time, precisely because it has been adopted by painters lacking in genius, it has become as banal as it is universal. Notwithstanding those great individuals who have amplified it, it has yet to inspire other masters. [...] Uniformity reigns supreme. And truly, covering the kilometres of carpet which determine the route through the Grand Palais . . . always the same from room to room, country to country, one finds the emblematic representation of the monotonous art of our time.¹⁴

Verhaeren's and Alexandre's fears that the dissolution of national difference augured the rise of bland uniformity were to prove unfounded, but their pinpointing of the increasing irrelevance of national schools to modern art is worth dwelling on. In the years immediately following the exhibition, slotting the younger generation of artists – for whom fertile dialogues with their counterparts in other countries were vital – into national schools became increasingly inappropriate, the inevitable outcome of the endless tug-of-war between nationalism and internationalism that coloured every aspect of life in the later nineteenth century. The rich and contentious dialogues between antinaturalist artists in Britain and France discussed herein can be viewed both as a microcosm of this paradigm shift and as one of its causes. In their wake, Europe's artistic landscape would never again be the same.

14 'Dès ce moment, la France monopolise la grosse production de l'art. Il n'y a que l'école, unique et toujours la même, qu'elle soit à Londres, Berlin, Bruxelles [...] La peinture moderne, tout au contraire, vit de couleurs bleues et violettes; elle décompose la lumière sombre ou éclatante suivant les heures et la marche des nuages et du soleil, elle affectionne la facture menue et vibratile. Elle est adoptée par tous ceux qui veulent s'émanciper des routines, elle a gagné l'Europe et même l'Asie et l'Amérique. On peint, suivant son mode, à Tokyo aussi bien qu'à New York. Mais à son tour, précisément parce qu'elle est adoptée par des peintres sans génie, elle devient aussi banale qu'universelle. A part les individualités hautes qui l'ont magnifiée, elle n'a point encore suscitée ailleurs d'autres maîtres. [...] L'uniformité règne partout. Et vraiment, à parcourir le tapis kilométrique qui fait le tour du Grand Palais . . . toujours la même de salle en salle, de pays en pays, on y trouve la représentation emblématique de l'art monotone de notre temps.' E. Verhaeren, 'Chronique de l'Exposition', *Mercur de France* (June 1900), reprinted in E. Verhaeren, *Ecrits sur l'art (1893-1916)*, ed. P. Aron (Brussels, 1997), pp. 779-81.

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**Cross-Channel Dialogues:
Antinaturalism in Britain and France, c. 1878-1898**

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Abstract

Symbolism was the first overtly international artistic movement, in the broadest sense of the word. To date, however, much Symbolist scholarship, shaped by the seminal Modernist accounts of Chassé, Goldwater and Lövgren, has focused on the achievements of French artists and writers to the exclusion of the equally significant contributions made by artists from other countries. British artists in particular have been sidelined, despite frequent contemporary acknowledgment of the importance of key artists such as Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts and Beardsley. Unfortunately, recent attempts to redress this imbalance, notably the 1997 Tate Gallery exhibition *Symbolism in Britain*, have erred toward the opposite extreme, claiming that Symbolism had first evolved in Britain, only to be appropriated by France. Furthermore, the retroactive application of the term Symbolism to British artists is problematic. By adopting the broader definition of antinaturalism and creating a series of case studies focusing on pairs or trios of artists whose interactions highlight important aspects of this cross-Channel exchange, this thesis aims to look anew at a major strand of cultural thought that transcended national boundaries.

This thesis seeks to recover an understanding of both the mutually beneficial, if occasionally contentious, cross-Channel dialogue and the mechanisms that made it possible. In the first half of the thesis, I consider the role of international exhibitions, especially the 1878 and 1889 Expositions Universelles, in promoting dialogue and disseminating artistic reputations, with particular emphasis on Burne-Jones, Watts, Moreau and Puvis de Chavannes. The second half considers antinaturalist exchange in the private sphere, with particular attention to the importance of reproductive and original prints in the reception and interpretation of artists and their work on both sides of the Channel. I also examine the role played in this exchange by poetry and music and the impulse toward a synthesis in the arts, with special emphasis on Debussy as a mediator between Rossetti and Maurice Denis and on the Wagnerian prints of Fantin-Latour, Redon and Beardsley. Returning once again to the arena of the Exposition Universelle, my thesis concludes with a consideration of critical perceptions of a new internationalism in the Exposition's fine art displays, and an assessment of the impact of the cross-Channel antinaturalist exchange in this development.

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Figure 86. Félix Bracquemond, etching after *Le Lion amoureux* by Gustave Moreau, 1886. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.

Figure 87. Félix Bracquemond, etching after *L'Homme qui court après la fortune et l'homme qui l'attend dans son lit* by Gustave Moreau, 1886. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.

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Figure 118. Odilon Redon, *Saint Antoine: ... à travers ses longs cheveux qui lui couvraient la figure, j'ai cru reconnaître Ammonaria...* (*A Gustave Flaubert: Tentation de Saint-Antoine, 2eme série*) (Mellerio 95), 1889, transfer lithograph, 55 x 35.8 cm. Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kroller-Müller.

Figure 119. Odilon Redon, *Brünnhilde* (Mellerio 68), 1885, transfer lithograph, 24.6 x 15.8 cm. Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kroller-Müller.

Figure 120. Odilon Redon, *Brünnhilde (crépuscule des dieux)* (Mellerio 130), 1894, transfer lithograph, 61.9 x 45 cm. Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kroller-Müller.

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Figure 124. Odilon Redon, *Caliban sur une branche*, 1881, charcoal and black chalk, 49.9 x 36.7 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

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Introduction

Cross-Channel Dialogues

At the conclusion of his exhaustive history of Symbolism, *La Mêlée symboliste*, the critic Ernest Raynaud made the following surprising claim: Charles Morice is wrong to claim that the Symbolist movement was French in origin. It was no more so than Romanticism, of which it is a variety, and like Romanticism, of Anglo-German origin. [...] Aestheticism signified the cult of the form, with all concern for teaching and utilitarianism banished. It signified a spiritualised art, absolute art, art for art's sake, as understood by our poets inspired by them, Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire; these were the fundamentals of what we have since called the religion of beauty. All the refinements of Symbolism were implied in this formula: the hatred of the vulgar and the common, the search for rare sensations, the taste for the precious, archaisms, neologisms, unusual and coruscating words. In this order of ideas, the English aesthetes had anticipated everything.¹

Raynaud's vision of Symbolism, albeit largely centred upon its evolution in France, acknowledges the fundamental role that British writers and artists played in its development. Nor was he alone among his contemporaries in recognising the importance of international, and more specifically cross-Channel, exchanges to Symbolism's growth. Camille Mauclair's *L'Art en silence* (1901) paid frequent tribute to the impact of artists such as Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti on the Symbolist imagination, while two decades earlier, Joris-Karl Huysmans had paid ironic but genuine homage to the visionary paintings of George Frederic Watts in *À rebours* and Gabriel Sarrazin had devoted much ink in *La Revue indépendante* (1884) and in a monograph on English poetry (1885) to the parallels between the goals of the 'Aesthetic School' and his fellow Symbolists. Meanwhile, in London, Henri Fantin-Latour, who had been quietly exhibiting imaginative lithographs at the Dudley Gallery's Black and White Exhibitions since the 1870s, began to garner praise in the 1880s and 1890s for the Wagnerian subjects he showed at the Royal Academy, while

¹ 'Mais Charles Morice a tort de prétendre que le mouvement symboliste fut d'origine française. Il ne le fut pas plus que le romantisme dont il est une variété. Il est, comme lui, d'origine anglo-germaine. [...] L'esthétisme, cela signifiait le culte de la forme, tout souci d'enseignement et d'utilitarisme écarté. Cela signifiait l'art spiritualisé, l'art absolu, l'art pour l'art, tel que l'entendirent chez nous les poètes inspirés d'eux: Théophile Gautier et Charles Baudelaire; c'étaient les fondements jetés de ce qu'on a appelé depuis: la religion de la beauté. Tous les raffinements du symbolisme étaient impliqués dans cette formule; la haine du vulgaire, du commun, la recherche des sensations rares, le goût du précieux, des archaïsmes, des néologismes, des mots insolites et coruscants. Dans cet ordre d'idées, les esthètes anglais ont tout prévu.' E. Raynaud, *La Mêlée symboliste* (Paris, 1918-1920), vol. 3, pp. 166-68. All translations from the French are mine, unless otherwise noted.

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Odilon Redon was making a bid to break into the London art market at a gallery near the offices of the influential publisher John Lane. Meanwhile, Aubrey Beardsley was not only praising the art of his French contemporaries to Arthur Symons and André

Raffalovich, but also boasting of his contacts with such luminaries as Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. Over the last three decades of the nineteenth century, an era during which the impulse towards international rapprochement and dialogue coexisted uneasily with rising militarism and competing nationalisms, artistic exchange formed a vital, if frequently contentious, backbone in the evolution of a Symbolist aesthetic, and its importance was repeatedly, albeit sometimes grudgingly, acknowledged by commentators on both sides of the Channel.

This was not, however, the account of Symbolism put forward by the object of Raynaud's criticism, Charles Morice. Morice, in his 1889 treatise *La Littérature de toute à l'heure*, claimed that Symbolism's origins were 'Baudelairean and Verlainian' and thus wholly French and that its purity was only lately being polluted by the deleterious influence of foreigners.

Jean Moréas, a Greek; Jules Laforgue, long influenced by English and German poetics; Gustave Kahn, a Semite: to these foreign origins I attribute this neglect of the French, Latin genius, which, more than all others, loathes this systematic neglect of natural laws.²

It has been said that the ability to name something carries with it the privilege of ownership. Symbolism is a powerful case in point. It was arguably the first ever overtly international artistic movement – and I use the word 'artistic' in the broadest sense possible – yet it has suffered a curious fate at the hands of history and scholarship. In part because it was first formally named and its principles set forth by Jean Moréas in his 1886 'Manifeste de Symbolisme', and many of its most vocal and articulate practitioners were French, much subsequent scholarship on Symbolist literature and art has been strongly Francocentric, to the detriment or, on occasion, exclusion of the contributions of other countries. However blatantly nationalistic Morice's views were, his Francocentrism and that of many of his colleagues set the prevailing tone in the historiography of Symbolism for the greater part of the

² 'Jean Moréas, grec; Jules Laforgue, longtemps influencé par les poétiques anglaise et allemande; Gustave Kahn, sémite: à ces origines étrangères j'attribue cet oubli du génie français, latin, qui, plus que tout autre, répugne à cet oubli systématique des lois naturelles': C. Morice, *La Littérature de tout à l'heure* (Paris, 1889), p. 316. He adds in a note that 'c'est une des singularités du mouvement dit décadent que, si français par son origine baudelairienne et verlainienne, il fut, en ces derniers temps de sa plus retentissante période, comme capté par des écrivains jeunes de races étrangères à la nôtre' (p. 319).

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twentieth century. Nowhere does this hold truer than in the case of the France's beloved enemy, Britain. Yet the idea that French Symbolism engaged in a monologue rather than a dialogue with other nations is nowhere more erroneous than in regard to its longstanding cross-Channel rival. The eclipse of the contributions of British artists and writers has only recently begun to be challenged. It is my aim, in this thesis, to recover a deeper understanding of the dialogues, in word and image, conducted by Symbolist artists on both sides of the Channel, and in so doing reveal a more balanced and complex relationship between the two countries than has previously been acknowledged.

Why has the international, and more specifically the Anglo-French, character of Symbolism been so consistently sidelined? A number of factors have shaped the entrenchment of French pre-eminence. British insularity, on the part of both artists – notably those who dominated the New English Art Club (ironically, those very painters who promoted a British brand of Impressionism) at the turn of the century – and critics must surely bear part of the blame. However, the ascendancy of littérateurart

critics such as Morice gave rise to two apparently contradictory problems that have long dogged efforts to re-evaluate Symbolism's position as a cultural phenomenon and art historical current. In a major artistic centre in which decades of institutional upheaval had contributed to the ascent of a dealer-critic system as best suited to the interests of the avant-garde, the art critic had accumulated tremendous influence; nowhere did this hold truer than in Symbolist circles, in which affiliations between poets and painters were prevalent and exceptionally strong, and it was the rare poet or novelist who did not practice art criticism at some point in his career.³ The eloquence and dominance of literary critics in France ensured the entrenchment of a new aesthetic hierarchy: in place of the hierarchy of genres that had reigned over the Salon and, to a lesser extent, the Royal Academy exhibitions, a pecking order of the arts arose, with music, the least mimetic, at the top, followed by poetry, with painting, deemed inextricably tied to the material world, at the bottom.⁴ Painting and the

³ For explorations of the changing role of art criticism in 19th century France, see C. and H. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York, 1993); J.-P. Bouillon, ed., *La critique d'art en France 1850-1900* (Saint-Etienne, 1989); and M. Orwicz, ed., *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France* (Manchester, 1994).

⁴ My discussion here and throughout this thesis of debates on the relative merits and objectives of literature and the visual arts is informed by Linda Goddard's investigation of inter-arts rivalries in France at the fin-de-siècle: L. Goddard, 'Aesthetic Hierarchies: Interchange and Rivalry Between the Visual Arts and Literature in France, c. 1890-c. 1920', Ph.D. thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art (London, 2004).

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graphic arts were consistently subordinated to literature, with the implication that where poet-critics led, painting simply followed and conformed to their aesthetic objectives. Most significantly, the authority of Symbolist critics has meant that the appropriateness of the very term Symbolism – a concept coined to define a nascent current in literature, rather than the visual arts – as a framework for thinking about this strand of late-nineteenth century art has, as I shall argue below, too long gone unquestioned and has considerably obstructed attempts at reassessment.

In turn, the 'literary' nature of Symbolist art, and its ostensible dependence on both literary subject matter and exegesis, has earned the distrust and neglect of Modernist critics. Combined with its bewildering stylistic diversity, its 'perverse' embrace of the past, its apparent flouting of the High Modernist doctrines of flatness and the drive to abstraction formulated and enforced by powerful critics like Clement Greenberg, and the dominance of France as the norm against which all modern art was judged (and often found wanting), this has long ensured that when Symbolism was studied at all, it was treated selectively and, ultimately, misleadingly.⁵ Earlier surveys of Symbolism, such as those by Charles Chassé (1947), Sven Lövgren (1959), and Robert Goldwater (1979), focus not merely on France, but on the formal innovations of a few avant-garde heroes such as Paul Gauguin, the Pont-Aven group and the Nabis, whose non-representational art conforms to Modernist notions of artistic progress.⁶ Given the normative position of French art, British antinaturalism, which could boast no obvious counterparts to Gauguin, was bound to suffer in comparison.⁷

Although in the 1950s Jacques Lethève and Robert Rosenblum both wrote seminal
⁵ Several of the artists I examine did, in fact, push the boundaries of representation, although the ends to which they applied such innovations are in themselves often controversial. Maurice Denis's conservative *nouveau classicisme* is a well-documented case in point, and the status of Gustave Moreau's so-called 'abstract' paintings, although frequently cited by apologists alongside his position as the teacher of Matisse, Rouault and Marquet as a key Modernist credential, is open to debate; see C. Scassellati Cooke, 'The ideal of history painting: Georges Rouault and other students of Gustave Moreau at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 1892-1898', *Burlington Magazine* 148, no. 1238 (May 2006), pp. 332-39, for a penetrating re-evaluation of such assumptions.

⁶ While Goldwater does extend his discussion to include Belgian, Dutch and Norwegian artists, British artists occupy a decidedly marginal position in his arguments. The Belgian art historian Robert Delevoy proposed a somewhat more pan-European view in *Journal du Symbolisme* (Geneva, 1977), but his arguments still focus on the Francophone nations.

⁷ Dianne Sachko Macleod has cogently argued that British modernism must be assessed on its own terms, as a product of its political and cultural milieu, rather than measured against a French yardstick; her emphasis on the impact of Britain's political stability under Victoria's reign on the development of a modern idiom, versus the effect of periodic revolution in France on the French avant-garde, has informed my discussion, particularly in Chapters 1-3 (D. S. Macleod, 'The dialectics of modernism and English art', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, no. 1, 1995, pp. 1-14).

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analyses of its reception and influence in France, such advocates were the exception rather than the rule.⁸

As scholarly interest in Symbolism began to revive in the 1970s, awareness of its manifestations beyond France and the need for a reassessment that took them into account grew. Writing in the catalogue of the 1972 Arts Council exhibition of French Symbolist painting, Alan Bowness called for a reconsideration of Symbolism as an 'alternative tradition' that functioned as a bridge between Romanticism and Surrealism and existed alongside Impressionism in opposition to academic norms, rather than as a retardataire aberration.⁹ However, the most dramatic challenge to the traditional view of France as the source and centre of Symbolism, around which other nations orbited as satellites basking in its reflected light, was not mounted until 1995, in the form of the exhibition organised by Jean Clair, *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*.¹⁰ Casting its net to cover Symbolisms from Spain to Russia, the exhibition considered their development from a bewildering array of angles. However, the vast size of the undertaking guaranteed that breadth trumped depth and relatively little was added to an understanding of cross-Channel artistic interchange. The most recent survey of Symbolism, by Rodolphe Rapetti (2005), takes a similarly pan-European approach and, although Rapetti accords British artists more attention than many of his predecessors, he tellingly categorises Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Watts as 'guiding spirits' rather than key players.¹¹ At the same time, scholars of Victorian art began to shake off the parochialism that had long prevailed in the field with investigations into the impact of Pre-Raphaelitism (an equally problematic term which I shall address below) on the Continent; however, many of them continued to adhere to the conventional line that the British artists had inspired their European peers without

⁸ J. Lethève, 'La connaissance des peintres préraphaélites anglais 1855-1900', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (May-June 1959), pp. 315-28; R. Rosenblum, 'British Painting vs. Paris', *Partisan Review* 24 (Winter 1957), pp. 95-100.

⁹ A. Bowness, 'An Alternative Tradition?', in *French Symbolist Painters: Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, Redon and their Followers* (exh. cat., London, Hayward Gallery and Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, 1972), pp. 14-20.

¹⁰ J. Clair, ed., *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe* (exh. cat., Montreal, Musée des beaux-arts, 1995).

Clair runs counter to tradition by identifying the centre of Symbolism as Belgium, rather than France, on the basis that, by virtue of geography and culture, it is the crossroads of Latin and Germanic Europe.

¹¹ R. Rapetti, *Symbolism*, trans. D. Dusinberre (Paris, 2005), pp. 21-32. Rapetti also claims that 'points of contact [between British and Continental artists] were few and far between' (p. 21), an assumption which, this thesis will demonstrate, is groundless.

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themselves absorbing any lessons from their contemporaries,¹² and focused study of France's impact on British art has lagged behind.¹³

The most significant, and certainly the most public, challenge to the longestablished perception of France as leader and Britain as follower was mounted by the 1997 Tate Gallery exhibition *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism*

in Britain, 1860-1910.¹⁴ Although its stated goal – to restore the imaginative, antirealist strand of Victorian art to its rightful place in a European context and to correct the longstanding bias toward France – was admirable, the exhibition’s title alone inadvertently lays bare the numerous problems with which it and its thesis were fraught. By expanding Symbolism’s accepted lifespan of the last two decades of the nineteenth century more than twofold, the curators not only lost focus but, more alarmingly, simply subverted the old formula, implying that Symbolism had in fact originated in Britain decades before its traditional birth date and had been appropriated by the French. Not only are several of the essays and catalogue entries suffused with a palpable John Bullishness,¹⁵ the representation of major French artists by either one or two minor works, if at all, reinforced the misleading impression that where Britain led, France merely followed. More troubling was the authors’ insistence on imposing a narrow and simplistic definition upon a movement – or, to be more accurate, a current – that was characterised from the start by its nebulousness, by its ability to elude classification and by its key players’ elliptical pronouncements;¹⁶ if they opened out Symbolism’s timeframe, the corresponding constriction of its import closed off avenues to a real reassessment of Britain’s place in the Symbolist constellation. And most troubling of all was their imposition of the term ‘Symbolist’ on British art.

Edmund Wilson claimed, in 1931, that ‘the battle of Symbolism was not fought out in English’, and, as MaryAnne Stevens points out, his remark is largely

¹² See, for example, S. P. Casteras and A. C. Faxon, eds., *Pre-Raphaelite Art in its European Context* (London, 1995) and T. Tobin, ed., *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism* (New York, 2004).

¹³ Edward Morris’s encyclopedic study, *French Art in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, was only published in 2005. Its approach is almost exclusively documentary and, while invaluable as a survey of the whole century, contains relatively little material on Symbolism.

¹⁴ A. Wilton and R. Upstone, eds., *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910* (exh. cat., London, Tate Gallery, Munich, Haus der Kunst and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1997).

¹⁵ A notable exception is MaryAnne Stevens’s essay, ‘Symbolism: a French Monopoly?’, in *ibid.*, pp. 47-63.

¹⁶ Indeed, A. G. Lehmann opens his study of Symbolist literature in France with the admission that it is far easier to say what Symbolism is not than to define what constitutes it: A. G. Lehmann, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 14-18.

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justified.¹⁷ Furthermore, as Caroline Arscott suggests, the application of a term with a French pedigree to British art is perhaps more an expression of critical insecurity regarding its stature in comparison with its continental rivals than a legitimate revisionist reading.¹⁸ The first significant study of Symbolism in English, Arthur Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, was only published in 1899, and centred on French Symbolism, Symons admitting that ‘France is the country of movements, and it is naturally in France that I have studied the development of a principle’.¹⁹ If literary Britain lagged behind France in giving rise to, much less acknowledging, a native Symbolist movement – the countless *petites revues* put out by rival cénacles that proliferated in Paris in the 1880s only found their analogue in Britain in the 1890s in such short-lived publications as *The Pageant* and *The Savoy* – then the British art world lagged still further. A thorough survey of art periodicals covering the last two decades of the nineteenth century does not turn up any instances in which British artists who were admired and emulated by French Symbolists, such as Burne-Jones and Rossetti, are termed ‘Symbolist’. A corresponding survey of French art criticism, both mainstream and avant-garde, is similarly fruitless. Burne-

Jones, Rossetti, Watts and sometimes Beardsley are often mentioned in the same breath as, and praised (or derided) for the same qualities as, their French counterparts, but even thoroughgoing Anglophiles such as Robert de la Sizeranne and Gabriel Mourey never acknowledged them as Symbolists, preferring the term 'Pre-Raphaelite' and terming them instead 'idealist' or 'imaginative' artists.²⁰ Clearly, any attempt to re-categorise the artists more popularly known as Pre-Raphaelites as Symbolists in the French sense is at best retroactive and at worst wishful thinking. Although they were recognised – at least in France – as having a similar objective and aesthetic as 'Symbolist' painters, they were never, for a variety of reasons, regarded in their own day as Symbolists.

¹⁷ E. Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York, 1931), p. 32, cited by Stevens in Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 47.

¹⁸ C. Arscoff, 'Signing off', *Tate* 13 (1997), p. 88.

¹⁹ A. Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London, 1899), p. 5.

²⁰ 'Pre-Raphaelite' is, of course, just as slippery a term as 'Symbolist', considering its frequent misapplication and the radical differences between the hyper-realistic, socially engaged art of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the sensuous, allusive imagery developed by Rossetti and his followers after the disintegration of the Brotherhood; see E. Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 87-131, for a thorough discussion of the origins and mutations of the term in Britain. The term is even more problematic in a nineteenth-century French context, as critics tended to use it with little understanding, to the extent that it sometimes served as a blanket term for all contemporary British art. I have tried to restrict my usage of the terms 'Pre-Raphaelite' and 'Pre-Raphaelitism' to quotations from historical sources.

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Indeed, the validity of Symbolism as a term for the visual arts as a whole is ripe for reconsideration. It is worth rehearsing its etymology here. Although Jean Moréas is widely credited with inventing the term in the notorious manifesto published in *Le Figaro* on 18 September 1886, as well as with defining its central tenet as 'cloth[ing] the Idea with a sensible form which, nevertheless, would not be a goal in itself but, at the same time as it served to express the Idea, would remain subject to it', this was not in fact the first time it had been applied to either poets or artists, not least by Moréas himself.²¹ The previous year, in a riposte to Paul Bourde's article on Decadent poets, he had urged that Mallarmé, Verlaine, Laurent Tailhade, Charles Vignier, Morice and, not least, himself instead be grouped under the heading 'symbolists'.²² In both cases, his definition of Symbolism gave primacy to literature, although the principle of 'subjective deformation' was later co-opted by Maurice Denis in his own manifesto, significantly not on Symbolism but *néo-traditionnisme*. One could argue that Moréas had not genuinely broken with centuries of precedent in defining Symbolism in literary terms: Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire Universel* (1876) included exhaustive entries on symbol and symbolism, but in the mass of examples, drawn from literature, rhetoric, chemistry, religion and mythology, the sole reference to pictorial symbolism came at the end of the entry in a brief discussion of Egyptian art.²³

'Symbolism', with a lower-case s, was apparently used for the first time to characterise an artist's style in the same year, when Emile Zola, reviewing the 1876 Salon, grumbled that 'Gustave Moreau has launched himself into symbolism', while the critic Léonce Duboscq du Pesquidoux noted in his review of the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition Universelle that it had become a commonplace to accuse Moreau of 'wanting to practice philosophical symbolism'.²⁴ As with Louis Leroy's 'impressionism', its purpose was decidedly derisive. In the hands of the committed Naturalist Zola, implicit in the condemnation is that Moreau practiced a literary, rather than painterly art, concerned with the fantastical to the exclusion of the

grit and grime of modern life. Although in the 1880s, Symbolist writers forged strong

²¹ J. Moréas, 'Le Symbolisme – Manifeste de Jean Moréas', *Le Figaro* (18 September 1886).

²² Idem, 'Les Décadents – réponse de Jean Moréas', *XIXe siècle* (11 August 1885).

²³ P. Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle*, vol. 14 (Paris: 1876), pp.1310-12.

²⁴ 'Gustave Moreau s'est lancé dans le symbolisme': E. Zola, 'Salon de 1876', in *Emile Zola Salons*, ed. F. W. J. Hemmings and R. Niess (Geneva, 1959), p. 187. 'M. Moreau veut-il faire du symbolisme philosophique, comme on l'en a accusé?': L. Dubosq du Pesquidoux, *L'Art au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1881), vol. 1, p. 81.

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links with painters whose aesthetic they considered commensurate with their own principles, particularly Moreau, Puvis and Redon, pictorial Symbolism only received a thorough theoretical treatment in 1892 – the year after Symbolism had both been crowned the victor over Naturalism in Jules Huret's compilation of interviews with writers, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, and pronounced dead by none other than Moréas²⁵ – when the controversial young art critic Gabriel-Albert Aurier published his seminal tract, tellingly titled 'Le Symbolisme en peinture – Paul Gauguin'.²⁶ Aurier's definition, although it acknowledged the debts owed by painters like Gauguin and followers such as Emile Bernard to the previous generation (including Moreau, Puvis and the Pre-Raphaelites), hinged specifically on the radical formal innovations of Gauguin and largely excluded other forms of pictorial Symbolism.²⁷ To confuse the matter still further, Aurier's contemporary, André Mellerio, published *Le Mouvement idéaliste en peinture* four years later, in which most of the artists mentioned by Aurier were grouped under the heading of 'Idealists', while in the intervening years the critic Henri Mazel went on record with the declaration that 'Symbolism is foreign to the plastic arts', on the basis that painting could never transcend the confines of material reality.²⁸ Given the frequent highhandedness of Symbolist writers with regard to the visual arts, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the French artists associated in the public and literary imagination with the movement actively resisted the label. There were of course exceptions, like Denis. More typical, however, was Moreau, adulated by Symbolist and Decadent writers from Huysmans to Robert de Montesquiou, Francis Poictevin and Joséphin Péladan, but whose lack of reciprocal admiration is attested to in the countless autographed editions of Symbolist poetry and prose in his library with the pages uncut, while Redon was, with good reason, compulsively suspicious of writers' attempts to appropriate his oneiric imagery for their own ends. Given the inadequacy of Symbolism as a label for the visual arts and the fact that most of the artists most deeply involved in the cross-Channel nexus of 'Symbolism' would either have not recognised or refused outright the label

²⁵ J. Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (Paris, 1891).

²⁶ Aurier had, in fact, planned to publish the article in 1889, to coincide with Gauguin's exhibition at the Café Volpini.

²⁷ For an exhaustive study of Aurier's art criticism and relations with artists, see J. Simpson, *Aurier, Symbolism and the Visual Arts* (Bern, 1999).

²⁸ 'Le symbolisme est étranger à l'art plastique': 'Saint-Antoine' [Henri Mazel], 'Qu'est-ce que le symbolisme?', *L'Ermitage* (June 1894), p. 335. Henri Peyre echoes Mazel's point in his study of the same name: H. Peyre, *Qu'est-ce que le symbolisme?* (Paris, 1974), pp. 212-28.

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'Symbolist', and that it is patently mistaken to suppose that such a current did not exist before the advent of Moréas, Aurier et al., it makes sense to seek a more openended

term that allows us to look anew at the vast, protean current that exercised such a strong influence over the second half of the nineteenth century and to better understand the channels of influence and artistic interchange that evolved between Britain and France. Michael Marlais has suggested grouping the artists variously

classed as Symbolists, Synthetists, Idealists and Idéistes under the broad category of antinaturalism, used as a blanket concept for the intellectual mood that resisted naturalism's predilection for the material, the factual and the ordinary and embraced the imaginative and the intangible.²⁹ I have adopted antinaturalism as a means of stripping away the baggage long associated with Symbolism and Pre-Raphaelitism, in order that we might look with fresh eyes at an important strand of cultural thought that transcended national boundaries. I have also found antinaturalism a useful means of extricating the visual from the dominance of the literary that is sustained by two of the most recent investigations, by Annie Dubernard-Laurent (1996) and Laurence Brogniez (2003), of Symbolism in Britain and France.³⁰ While an inquiry into the fertile and contentious bonds between writers and artists forms a significant portion of my study, close visual analysis informs my arguments just as strongly.

My investigation of cross-Channel exchanges among antinaturalist artists is not intended as a comprehensive historical survey; an attempt at an exhaustive study of such a protean movement within the scope of a doctoral thesis would privilege breadth over depth and ultimately contribute little to an understanding of this rich and complex international nexus. Rather, I have chosen to structure my enquiry as a series of six case studies focusing on key elements in this cross-Channel dialogue. In so

²⁹M. Marlais, *Conservative echoes in fin de siècle Parisian art criticism* (University Park, 1992), p. 6. Marlais contends that Symbolism and the revival of idealism should be seen as 'two sides of the same coin'. I should add that my use of the term 'antinaturalism' must not be taken as typifying a polar opposition between antinaturalism and naturalism; as Sharon L. Hirsh demonstrates in her social history of Symbolism, Symbolists were motivated by many of the same sociopolitical concerns, such as urban decay, mental illness, the power of the crowd and feminism, as their Naturalist counterparts: S. L. Hirsh, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (Cambridge 2004).

³⁰Dubernard-Laurent's thesis covers the period 1855-1900 and, in fact, her most innovative arguments centre on the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites at the 1855 Exposition Universelle and their influence on the realism of Courbet; her coverage of Symbolist exchange at the end of the century is primarily a rehearsal of much of the information covered in *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts* (A. Dubernard-Laurent, 'Le Pré-Raphaélisme en Angleterre, les arts et les lettres en France. Essai d'étude comparative', Ph.D. thesis, Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, 1996). Brogniez broadens her focus to include Belgium and her exploration of the role of writers in promoting British painters on the continent is extremely detailed, but her approach is primarily literary (L. Brogniez, *Préraphaélisme et Symbolisme. Peinture littéraire et image poétique*, Paris 2003).

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doing, I have necessarily been obliged to delimit both a time frame and my selection of contributors to the exchange. While compelling arguments have been advanced for setting the birth date of antinaturalism either, as Bowness does, as early as 1856, hard on the heels of the death of Théodore Chassériau³¹ and a year before Baudelaire penned his celebration of synaesthesia, 'Correspondances', or as late as 1886, as Clair does,³² and evidence of exchanges, albeit sparse and sporadic, between French and British artists certainly exists from the mid-1850s, I have chosen to take as my starting point the first significant point of contact between France and the so-called second wave of Pre-Raphaelitism, the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris, and to bring my study to a conclusion in 1898, upon the deaths of many leading antinaturalist figures and at a time when the critical consensus assumed that antinaturalism/Symbolism had run its course.³³ I have also limited the artists under discussion to those who participated most in this exchange of ideas, whether on the strength of written or visual evidence, and whose work displays noteworthy affinities with their cross-Channel counterparts. The reader will therefore only find Gauguin in these pages as a go-between for Redon and his London patron Mortimer Menpes; other luminaries such as Sérusier, Bernard and van Gogh are absent. I have chosen to discard the commonplace but ultimately facile Modernist division of Symbolist/antinaturalist

artists into two camps, followers of Moreau (those who clothed new subject matter in traditional forms) and followers of Puvis (those who recognised that new subject matter demanded a new visual vocabulary), for although some of the artists I examine here (Moreau, Rossetti, Burne-Jones) clearly fall into the former category and others (Puvis, Redon) are superficially allied with the latter,³⁴ others, like Watts, Beardsley and Fantin-Latour, are difficult to categorise, while Denis, whose anti-literary emphasis on form in his 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme' at first glance marks him as an obvious follower of Puvis, displays remarkable affinities with Rossetti and Burne-Jones in his interest in poetry and mysticism and his quasi-devotional idealisation of women.

³¹ Bowness (1972), p. 14.

³² Clair (1995), p. 17.

³³ These chronological boundaries are somewhat fluid, particularly with respect to my discussion of Rossetti, whose career reached its apogee long before 1878 and whose influence in France was by and large posthumous; see Chapter 4.

³⁴ M. Stevens, 'Towards a definition of Symbolism', in J. Christian, ed., *The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art* (exh. cat., London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1989), p. 35.

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Contrary to conventional accounts of Symbolism, which treat it as aspiring to an ivory-tower isolation from the turmoil of contemporary society, the first half of this study seeks to uncover the role of the public arena in the evolution of a cross-Channel dialogue. My first chapter focuses on the reception of Burne-Jones and Watts's painting at the 1878 Exposition Universelle – its first outing in France – and sets it within the wider context of the Exposition and contemporary debates concerning the state and relative positions of French and British art in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. Studies of cross-Channel antinaturalism traditionally give primacy to the 1889 Exposition as a site of artistic exchange but, I contend, the enthusiastic reception which Burne-Jones and Watts found in Paris in 1889 could not have occurred without the initial discovery of 1878. My examination of the consequences of the earlier Exposition sets the stage for the second and third chapters, the first of which investigates the position occupied by antinaturalism in the physical and political milieu of the 1889 Exposition and focuses on the display of paintings by Puvis and Watts. I argue that, rather than representing a retreat from the Exposition's crass materialism and triumphalist politics, Puvis and Watts engage with the fantasy vision of the Third Republic promoted by the Exposition's organisers by delivering a stinging critique and offering an alternative dream. The last chapter in this sequence is a case study of Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and Moreau's *Galatée*; in addition to analysing their significance in the context of the 1889 Exposition, where both were exhibited, I consider the affinities between Burne-Jones and Moreau, beginning with the genesis of both works, and examine their mutual use of Renaissance prototypes to the end of creating a new and perverse type of religious art.

Of course, many important exchanges occurred beyond the exhibition hall, and the second half of my thesis tracks the flow of influence in the more private milieux of personal connections, specialist periodicals and the print trade. The dissemination of artistic reputations between Britain and France through reproductive prints and the corresponding problems of visual mistranslation engendered by technological limitations remain a little-studied area but, while the evidence is necessarily anecdotal, my contention is that it proved a vital channel of influence. The importance of reproductions and their inherent limitations particularly informs my fourth chapter, which looks at the posthumous reputation and influence of Rossetti in France, as both

poet and painter, and more specifically on Denis's and Redon's responses to
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reproductions of his art, as well as on Denis's collaboration with Claude Debussy on a musical setting of Rossetti's poem 'The Blessed Damozel'. I suggest that the Rossetti who was known and emulated in France was the product of translation and would, in some ways, have been unrecognisable in his native Britain. Conversely, in the fifth chapter I examine the British response to Moreau, especially to the exhibitions of his work in London at the Grosvenor Gallery (1877) and the offices of the art publisher Goupil, and I explore the impact of his depictions of Salome on Beardsley, whom Oscar Wilde accused of flouting his own Moreau-influenced conception of this character but whose engagement with Moreau's Salome in fact informed his apparently parodic illustrations for the play *Salome*. My final chapter explores the spread of Wagnerian imagery in Britain through the medium of Fantin-Latour's and Redon's transfer lithographs and their influence on the Wagnerian imagery of Beardsley, the only major British artist to participate in this aspect of antinaturalism, as well as Fantin's role in transmitting a Rococo-inflected Wagnerian aesthetic to Beardsley. Finally, my coda considers the state of antinaturalism and cross-Channel artistic exchange around 1900, and suggests that reports of antinaturalism's death have been greatly exaggerated.

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Chapter 1

'Strange but striking poetry': the reception of British antinaturalist painting at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1878

In 1867 the English school . . . was in the midst of indecision. The Pre-Raphaelites stopped, and another branch, still enclosed in the secret of a bud, was preparing to burst from the trunk . . . A fog hovered over English art, hiding its imminent transformations, which we see today.¹

When the 1878 Exposition Universelle opened its gates, some observers scoffed that it was but a pitiful shadow of its glittering elder sisters. Subsequent scholarship on the Expositions has followed suit. The Expositions of 1855, 1867, and especially 1889 and 1900 have benefited from in-depth studies, while the 1878 Exposition has languished in relative obscurity.² Most attempts to explore the Exposition's problems and complexities have tended to be founded on erroneous assumptions about its political backdrop and to treat the 1878 Exposition as a minor event in comparison with its predecessors and successors, as a sort of insignificant lull. This oversight has likewise affected study of the Expositions' contribution to the development of the fine arts in Europe. What critical attention the 1878 Exposition's displays of fine art have received has focused almost wholly on the French section, with little significant attention thus far given to the involvement of other participating nations, particularly Britain.

At first glance, this lacuna may not seem exceptional. The 1878 Exposition Universelle was the most troubled of the Expositions organised under the aegis of the
¹'En 1867 l'école anglaise . . . était en pleine indécision. Les préraphaélites s'arrêtaient, et un autre rameau encore renfermé dans le secret du bourgeon, se préparait à s'élancer du tronc. . . . Une brume planait au-dessus de l'art anglais, cachant de prochaines transformations, celles que nous voyons aujourd'hui.' E. Duranty, 'Exposition Universelle: Les écoles étrangères de Peinture. Troisième et dernier article: Belgique et Angleterre', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1878), p. 298. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the French are my own.

² Exceptions to this reluctance to discuss the events of 1878 include J. M. Roos, 'Within the "Zone of Silence": Monet and Manet in 1878', *Art History* 11, no. 3 (1988), pp. 374-407, and L. Straarup-Hansen, 'French Painting at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, 1878' (MA dissertation, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 2002). Paul Greenhalgh and Raymond Isay both include the 1878 Exposition

in their broader discussions of the phenomenon of Expositions Universelles and similar events, but neither gives it as much importance as its cousins: P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: the Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions, and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 115-16; R. Isay, *Panorama des Expositions Universelles* (Paris, 1937), pp. 137-75. Miriam R. Levin also touches on the 1878 Exposition in *Republican Art and Ideology in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Ann Arbor, 1986); however, her refusal to attach any importance to the fact that the Republicans were not in full control of the government before 1879 and her underlying assumption that the 1878 Exposition took place more or less under similar political circumstances to that of the 1889 Exposition are highly problematic.

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Third Republic;³ Daniel Halévy's characterisation of the Third Republic as 'a regime of discord tempered by festivals' has more than a grain of truth in it.⁴ Furthermore, despite the pomp and glitter of the opening festivities and the general air of desperate gaiety which reigned over the duration of the Exposition,⁵ the French Fine Art section could not be said to show French artistic achievement at its acme. For a variety of reasons, including political infighting, aesthetic conservatism, and the packing of the selection committee with Academicians and other official artists who acted in their own interests, the distinctly unrepresentative French Fine Art exhibition gave the general public and art critics alike the impression that the best France had to offer was stale, backward-looking history painting.⁶ French art critics were unanimous in voicing despair at what they saw, as well as fear that France had been irreparably weakened by the recent loss of so many great artists and the ordeals it had suffered during the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune.⁷ France's artistic supremacy, which it and other European nations had for so long taken for granted, seemed for the first time to be under genuine threat.

France's temporary fall from its pedestal had an unexpected but significant side effect. Artists and critics were suddenly compelled to look more closely and with a more open mind at the art of other nations, not least at that of its neighbour on the other side of the Channel. 1878 was not, of course, the first time that contemporary British painting had had a forum in France. Constable had found numerous admirers when he exhibited at the Salon in the 1820s and was acknowledged as a key influence on the Barbizon painters; the British Fine Art section at the 1855 Exposition, particularly the works by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, had caused a great stir, with critics struck by the Pre-Raphaelites' acid colour and insistence on

³ For summaries of the political situation in France during the first decade of the Third Republic, see J. P. T. Bury, *France 1814-1940*, 5th ed. (London and New York, 1985); *idem*, *Gambetta and the Making of the Third Republic* (London, 1973); G. Chapman, *The Third Republic of France: The First Phase, 1871-1894* (London, 1962); J. Chastenet, *Histoire de la Troisième République: L'Enfance de la Troisième* (Paris, 1952); and D. Halévy, *La République des ducs* (Paris, 1937).

⁴ D. Halévy, 'Après le Seize Mai. Une année d'Exposition: 1878', *La revue universelle* 16 (1936), p. 423.

⁵ For contemporary accounts of the opening festivities, see especially R. Delorme, ed., *L'art et l'industrie de tous les peuples à l'Exposition Universelle de 1878* (Paris, 1878), pp. 11-15, and L. Gonse, 'Coup d'oeil à vol d'oiseau sur l'Exposition Universelle', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1878), pp. 481-3.

⁶ Straarup-Hansen (2002), pp. 50-1. For a discussion of differences between 'academic' and 'official' painting, see A. Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 1986), pp. 15-21.

⁷ See, for example, P. Mantz, 'Exposition Universelle: La Peinture française', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (October 1878), pp. 417-20 (hereafter Mantz 1878a).

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near-microscopic detail.⁸ However, in both 1855 and 1867, British painting, Pre-Raphaelite in particular, was generally treated more as a curiosity distinguished by its quaint naïveté than as a school of art worthy of consideration on a level with its

French counterpart. As well, as Edmond Duranty pointed out in his review of the British section at the 1878 Exposition, the intervals of eleven or twelve years between Expositions were bound to produce a disjointed view of the changes and progress occurring in the British school.

However, 1878 was to be different from British painting's previous outings in Paris. Over the previous eleven-year interval, after what critics generally agreed had been a disappointing exhibition in 1867, Edward Burne-Jones and George Frederic Watts had emerged as stars of the secessionist Grosvenor Gallery and talents to be reckoned with; the 1878 Exposition Universelle marked the first exhibition of their works in France.⁹ In fact, the so-called second Pre-Raphaelite school was represented in force in the British section, with contributions from many painters considered followers of Burne-Jones, including Grosvenor regulars John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, Marie Spartali Stillman, Walter Crane, Albert Moore, and Thomas Armstrong. Critics were struck by, and consistently remarked on, these artists' strong group identity and idiosyncratic common points, namely, a preference for literary and imaginative subjects, an emulation of early Renaissance style and technique, a disregard for academic correctness in drawing, and an emphasis on atmosphere and suggestion at the expense of concrete narrative.

I do not want to fall into the anachronistic trap of dubbing Burne-Jones and Watts 'Symbolists', not least because, as noted in the Introduction, this primarily literary term is generally acknowledged to have been coined, and its principles elucidated, in Jean Moréas's 1886 'Manifeste du Symbolisme', well after the Exposition. Yet subjecting painting to the same rule as literature obscures the

⁸ For French critical judgments of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings displayed at the 1855 Exposition Universelle, see for example C. Baudelaire, 'Salon de 1859', in *idem, Critique d'art* (Paris, 1992), p. 269, which specifically praises John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*; E. Chesneau, *La peinture anglaise, 1730-1882* (Paris, 1882), Duranty (1878), and E. Rod, 'Les Préraphaélites anglais (1^{er} article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1887), pp. 177-95. Note that the term 'Pre-Raphaelite' could be used very loosely, and sometimes without much understanding, by French critics in the nineteenth century; sometimes it was used as a blanket term to refer to all English painting from 1850 onward.

⁹ Edward Burne-Jones was born Edward Burne Jones and only began to hyphenate his surname in 1886, eventually formalising the change in 1894 when he received his baronetcy. For the sake of consistency, I shall refer to him as Burne-Jones, except in direct quotations. This is particularly important in cases where uncertainty about the correct spelling highlights a critic's lack of familiarity with the artist.

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divergent development of a Symbolist, or rather antinaturalist, tendency in visual art. In fact, the first traced use of the term 'symbolism' in relation to painting occurs in Emile Zola's complaint in 1876 that 'Gustave Moreau has launched himself into symbolism'.¹⁰ The committed Naturalist Zola did not intend this as a compliment, and repeated his disparaging remarks in his review of Moreau's 'symbolist' paintings at the 1878 Exposition. On a more positive note, the Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn, apologist for Moréas and an important art critic in his own right, took 1878 as the starting point of his biographical sketch of the movement, 'Les Origines du Symbolisme'. While Kahn devoted relatively little space to the visual arts in his account, he noted that the brightest hopes for a movement that could emerge from the crushing domination of the Naturalists and the Parnassians were to be found in the painting of the Impressionists and the quintessential French antinaturalist painter, Moreau:

'Painting was the impressionists exhibiting wonders in vacant apartments for three months. It was, at the Exposition of 1878, a marvellous panel by Gustave Moreau, opening onto legend a door worked in niello, damascening

and gold . . .'¹¹

Symbolist-penned histories of the movement are notorious for painting conflicting pictures of its origins and for giving personal rivalries and one-upmanship free rein; Kahn's version is rather unusual in locating Symbolism's origins almost as much in painting as in literature, although the visual arts quickly cede their place in his account to fellow poets.¹²

Conversely, while Symbolism may never have boasted the spokesmen or the articulated programme in Britain that it enjoyed in France, it is worth pointing out that the critic Frederick Wedmore, in his *Studies in English Art*, published in book form in 1880, wrote of Burne-Jones that 'in some sense it is to his disadvantage that he has set himself so especially to the art of symbolism, and the realisation of classic or mediaeval story'.¹³ Although Wedmore noted that Burne-Jones's 'symbolism' alienated many viewers, he maintained that it also set him apart from the stale

¹⁰ 'Gustave Moreau s'est lancé dans le symbolisme'. Zola (1959), p. 187.

¹¹ 'La peinture c'était les impressionnistes exposant des merveilles dans des appartements vacants pour trois mois. C'était, à l'exposition de 1878, un merveilleux panneau de Gustave Moreau, ouvrant sur la légende une porte niellée et damasquinée et orfèvrée . . .' G. Kahn, 'Les Origines du Symbolisme' (1900), in *idem*, *Symbolistes et Décadents* (Geneva, 1977, 1936), p. 17.

¹² See Goddard (2004) for an in-depth discussion of Symbolist debates on the position of the visual arts in relation to literature.

¹³ F. Wedmore, *Studies in English Art: Second Series* (London, 1880), pp. 210-11.

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conventionalism of many of his peers. Furthermore, Burne-Jones and Watts were embraced by Symbolist poets and critics in France after 1886 and comparisons were frequently drawn between their work and that of French antinaturalist painters, in particular Moreau and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. Tellingly, the Anglophile writer Robert de la Sizeranne noted in the introduction to *La Peinture anglaise contemporaine* (1895), unfortunately without indicating a date for the beginning of this trend, that 'for a long time, at meetings of symbolists, the names of Watts and Burne-Jones have been pronounced with reverence, and many accept them and repeat them as magic words whose virtue requires no explanation'.¹⁴ Although they were not recognised as Symbolist artists per se by their contemporaries, their work was acknowledged as displaying a kinship with the French antinaturalist artists embraced by Symbolist writers.

Curiously, the importance of the appearance of Burne-Jones and Watts at the 1878 Exposition, and its impact on the establishment of a dialogue between antinaturalist artists in Britain and France, have been either ignored or downplayed in favour of the 1889 Exposition, almost from the start. As early as 1898, Sizeranne, arguably the chief contemporary chronicler of British Symbolism in France, dismissed Burne-Jones's works at the 1878 Exposition as 'an attraction to critics, but not to the public';¹⁵ this assessment was echoed six years later by Georgiana Burne-Jones in her biography of her late husband.¹⁶ The classic starting point of twentieth-century scholarship on the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites in France, Jacques Lethève's 'La Connaissance des peintres préraphaélites anglais 1855-1900',¹⁷ ascribes little importance to 1878, and most subsequent studies have followed suit.¹⁸

¹⁴ 'Depuis longtemps, dans les cénacles symbolistes, on entend prononcer avec recueillement les noms de Watts et de Burne-Jones, et beaucoup les acceptent et se les transmettent comme on fait d'un vocable magique dont la vertu dispense de tout éclaircissement'. R. de la Sizeranne, *La Peinture anglaise contemporaine* (Paris, 1895), pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ R. de la Sizeranne, 'In Memoriam: Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Bart. (Born Aug. 28, 1833; Died June 17, 1898.) A Tribute from France', *Magazine of Art* (August 1898), p. 513.

¹⁶ G. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, (London, 1904), vol. 2, p. 85.

¹⁷ Lethève (1959), pp. 318-19.

¹⁸Two such studies are C. Allemand-Cosneau, 'La fortune critique de Burne-Jones en France', in J. Munro, ed., *Burne-Jones, 1833-1898: Dessins du Fitzwilliam Museum de Cambridge* (exh. cat., Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts and Charleroi, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1992), pp. 69-80, and L. des Cars, 'Burne-Jones and France', in J. Christian and S. Wildman, eds., *Edward Burne-Jones, Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (exh. cat., New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Birmingham, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and Paris, Musée d'Orsay 1998), pp. 25-39. Both authors cite Charles Blanc's evaluation of *The Beguiling of Merlin* but say little else about contemporary critical reactions to Burne-Jones's work in 1878.

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The continuing disregard of the 1878 Exposition Universelle has, unfortunately, hindered a deeper understanding of this cross-Channel dialogue. The Francocentrism of most previous analyses has unjustly obscured the complex, and above all, cosmopolitan nature of the exhibitions. While British antinaturalism, represented in this instance by Burne-Jones and Watts, excited noticeably less attention in 1878 than it did in 1889, it would be incorrect to view the outpouring of enthusiasm for their work at the later Exposition as an Athena-like phenomenon, sprung fully formed from nowhere. Rather, as I hope to demonstrate here, not only did the political circumstances in 1878 provide favourable conditions for it to take root, the appearance of British antinaturalist painting at the Exposition Universelle was vital to the generation of an exchange of ideas between Britain and France.

'Great tranquilliser' or temporary nepenthe? The organisation of the French Fine Art Section

In announcing the new International Exposition to the world, France affirms her confidence in her institutions; she declares her willingness to persevere in the ideas of moderation and wisdom that have inspired her politics over the last five years; she proclaims that she wants peace, which alone has the power to render human activity truly fecund in giving it security.

– Teisserenc de Bort, 1876¹⁹

The erroneous assumption common to most studies of the 1878 Exposition Universelle is that the Exposition had been an overwhelmingly, if not purely, Republican project from its very beginnings. Even two of the more even-handed examples, Daniel Halévy's 'Après le Seize Mai. Une année d'Exposition: 1878'²⁰ and Jane Mayo Roos's 'Within the "Zone of Silence": Monet and Manet in 1878', fall victim to the conviction that the Exposition's creation represented a triumph by the Republicans over their conservative detractors. In fact, the intent to hold an Exposition had been declared on 4 April 1876, more than a year before the Seize Mai crisis and when the government's overall composition still merited Halévy's label 'the Republic of dukes'. The decree was signed on 13 April by none other than the

¹⁹ 'En annonçant au monde la nouvelle Exposition internationale, la France affirme sa confiance dans les institutions qu'elle s'est données; elle déclare sa volonté de persévérer dans les idées de modération et de sagesse qui ont inspiré sa politique depuis cinq ans; elle proclame qu'elle veut la paix, qui a seule le pouvoir de rendre l'activité humaine vraiment féconde en lui donnant la sécurité'. Teisserenc de Bort, Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, in his 1876 proposal for the 1878 Exposition Universelle, quoted in Delorme (1878), p. 3.

²⁰ Halévy (1936), p. 423.

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President, Maréchal MacMahon, a staunch monarchist.²¹ Furthermore, although the Exposition's commissioner, Jean-Baptiste-Sébastien Krantz, was a committed Republican, Teisserenc de Bort, the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce under MacMahon, who was also closely involved in the Exposition's planning, had also served under Thiers and tended towards conservatism.

Given the potential of the Exposition to act as a 'great tranquilliser' on a France still recovering from the twin nightmare of the Franco-Prussian War and the

Commune and on a government characterised by ceaseless party struggles,²² politicians of all stripes stood to benefit from involving themselves with the Exposition. Hence, strong emphasis was placed upon the new, hard-won peace and on values such as moderation and wisdom – values that presumably did not already come clothed in specific ideological colours, and which could easily be tailored to suit either end of the political spectrum. Indeed, Teisserenc de Bort's favourable reference to France's politics 'over the last five years' could well be understood as advocating the repression that characterised the governments of Thiers and MacMahon.

Promoting moderation and trumpeting peace and prosperity might have made good political sense for the Exposition as a whole, but it did not necessarily translate into good policy in the selection of paintings for the French Fine Art section.

Although the exhibition was intended to portray the official state of the modern French school, with no work dating from before the last Exposition in 1867 admitted,²³ restrictions placed upon the types of work selected prevented the creation of a complete survey of the decade. One of the most troubling constraints was a ban on all images of the Franco-Prussian war or, indeed, any contemporary military subjects.²⁴ Furthermore, the opening notice in the official exhibition catalogue was essentially a celebration (a premature one, as it turned out) of the rehabilitation of history painting in the grand tradition.²⁵ Glossy, highly finished historical canvases by

²¹The decree is reprinted in *Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners for the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878, to the Queen's most excellent Majesty*, (London, 1880), vol. 1, p. 151. For a summary of the events surrounding the so-called Seize Mai crisis, see Bury (1973), pp. 398-417.

²²Chapman (1962), p. 189.

²³P. Vaisse, *La troisième république et les peintres* (Paris, 1995), p. 125.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 56-57. The list of excluded works is kept in the Archives nationales, Versement de la direction des Beaux-Arts au ministère de l'Instruction publique: F21 524. Military paintings were given a small exhibition at the private Galerie Goupil, concurrent with the Exposition.

²⁵'Notice Sommaire', *Exposition Universelle internationale de 1878, à Paris: Catalogue officiel, publié par le Commissariat Général. Tome I: Groupe I, Oeuvres d'Art, classes 1 à 5*, (Paris, 1878), p. 5.

Vaisse (1995), p. 125, surmises that the author of the unsigned notice was Philippe de Chennevières, the current Director of Fine Arts for the Third Republic and a notorious conservative, both in politics

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leading Academicians such as Cabanel, Delaunay, and Bouguereau held sway in the French section; many more innovative artists whose work fell outside these boundaries found their works rejected by the jury. A major case in point is the Barbizon School. While their deliberately mundane and naturalistic depictions of the French countryside had garnered critical acclaim and state support in the 1860s,²⁶ they were poorly represented at the Exposition; work by three of the most illustrious Barbizon painters, Théodore Rousseau, Jean-François Millet, and Narcisse Diaz de la Peña, was not included at all. Other 'independents', including Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Henri Fantin-Latour, abstained from submitting, choosing to send their work to the Salon instead.²⁷ In effect, the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition verged on conservatism in its ostensible desire to appear apolitical; in its attempt to turn the clock back eleven years, it acted as a nepenthe on the eyes and minds of its audience, wiping away the troubles – and the innovations – of the intervening years. Paul Greenhalgh has asserted that the centrality of the visual arts at this Exposition was vital to France's presentation of itself as having fully recovered from the defeat of 1871;²⁸ if this was so, then, judging by the content of the French Fine Art section and the critical response, the ploy failed miserably.

This shunning of current trends toward realism and contemporary subjects produced one unintended and little-noted side effect. While the selection of paintings in the French section seemed on the whole to privilege historical painting, in the sense

of depictions of actual historical events (so long as they were far enough in the past not to dredge up painful memories), the selection committee's distaste for realistic and contemporary subjects left the door open for imaginative subjects – images based on literature, on people and events which had never existed except in the imagination or on the page. Collective trauma often awakens a need to escape the present and the

and in art; his arrogant mismanagement of the French Fine Art exhibition at the Exposition ultimately resulted in his dismissal. See also P. Mainardi, *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 47-48.

²⁶For a discussion of the French state's attitudes toward landscape painting as reflected in its purchasing policy, see J. M. Roos, 'Herbivores versus herbiphobes: landscape painting and the State', in J. House, ed., *Landscapes of France: Impressionism and its Rivals*, (exh. cat., London, Hayward Gallery and Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), pp. 40-51.

²⁷Fantin exhibited one group portrait (*The Dubourg Family*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and four musical subjects in pastel and lithograph at the 1878 Salon (D. Druick and M. Hoog, *Fantin-Latour*, exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, and San Francisco, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, 1982, p. 356). Puvis sent two panels of his Panthéon murals to the 1878 Salon (S. Lemoine, ed., *Toward Modern Art: From Puvis de Chavannes to Matisse and Picasso*, exh. cat., Venice, Palazzo Grassi, 2002, p. 536).

²⁸Greenhalgh (1995), p. 116.

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immediate past by effacing the contemporary with images of the distant past or the imaginary; the milieu of the first post-war Exposition was no exception.²⁹ Thus it was that a 'literary painter' such as Gustave Moreau, whose fantastical mythological and Biblical scenes had proved as perplexing to critics as they were difficult to ignore, found his way into the French section with no less than eleven works.³⁰ Although Moreau presumably scraped in under the rubric of history painting, pictures such as *L'Apparition* [Figure 1, Mathieu 186] and *Salomé* [Figure 2, Mathieu 184] bore little resemblance to the fussy meticulousness of detail and readily deciphered narrative that characterised much of the 'grande peinture' in the French section. Paul Mantz declared him the most imaginative and fascinating painter in the entire section, although he confessed bewilderment as to their meaning.³¹

The irony, of course, is that four of Moreau's submissions to the Exposition were profoundly informed by the Franco-Prussian War and its after-effects. While *Salomé*, *Hercule et l'Hydre de Lerne* (Mathieu 176) and *L'Apparition* had already marked his triumphant return to the Salon in 1876, he had in the intervening years conceived a cycle of biblical subjects – *Moïse exposé sur le Nil* (Mathieu 202), *Jacob et l'Ange* (Mathieu 199), and *David* (Mathieu 201) – intended to symbolise both the ages of man and contemporary circumstances in France. As Moreau explained his intentions to his friend Alexandre Destouches, 'The [angel in] *Jacob* would be the guardian angel of France, checking her in her idiotic course toward the material', while Moses represented 'the hope of a new law represented by this tender and innocent infant raised by God' and David, 'the sombre melancholy of the past age of tradition so dear to great spirits weeping over the great modern decay, the angel at his feet ready to inspire him if there should be an agreement to listen to God'.³² A large-

²⁹My argument here is informed by Adrian Rifkin's account of the effects of the Occupation on Parisian popular song and cinema: A. Rifkin, *Street noises: Parisian pleasure, 1900-1940* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 25-26. Although Rifkin deliberately excludes 'high culture' from his discussion, I contend that his reading offers an effective approach to the jury's apparently 'escapist' (mis)interpretation of Moreau.

³⁰On Moreau's struggles with the label of 'literary painter', see P. Cooke, 'Text and Image, Allegory and Symbol in Gustave Moreau's *Jupiter et Sémélé*', in P. McGuinness, ed., *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin de Siècle: French and European Perspectives*, (Exeter, 2000), pp. 122-3.

³¹Mantz (1878a), pp. 427-28.

³²'Le Jacob serait l'ange de la France l'arrêtant dans sa course idiote vers la matière. Le Moïse,

l'espérance dans une nouvelle loi représentée par ce mignon d'enfant innocent et poussé par Dieu. Le David, la sombre mélancolie de l'âge passé et la tradition si chère aux grands esprits pleurant sur la grande décomposition moderne, l'ange à ses pieds prêt à rendre l'inspiration si on consent à écouter Dieu'. P. Cooke, ed., *Ecrits sur l'art par Gustave Moreau* (Fontfroide, 2002), vol. 1, p. 111. Moreau apparently wrote this explanation between 1876 and 1877. See also G. Lacambre, ed., *Gustave*
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scale watercolour depicting the fall of Phaëton (Mathieu 205) reflected even more explicitly Moreau's disillusionment with early Third Republic society. Phaëton, having recklessly driven the chariot of the sun (the State) too close to the sun, plunges with his terrified horses into a dark abyss out of which surges the grotesque and triumphant serpent Python. Python's head is a fusion of serpent and bird of prey – a none-too-subtle reference to the eagle of Prussia. Indeed, *Phaëton* could be viewed as a macabre and fantastic counterpart to Puvis's 'real allegory' *Le Pigeon* of 1871, in which a woman clutches a dove protectively to her breast while trying to ward off the menace of the Prussian eagle. Moreau's rage over the current state of affairs in France is palpable. Indeed, this was not his first attempt to give artistic vent to his anger; almost immediately after the French defeat in 1871, he began to plan a vast polyptych entitled *France Vanquished*. He abandoned it after making some preliminary sketches, however, probably regarding the project as excessively allegorical. Instead, he cloaked his indignation in the academically-sanctioned forms of mythological and religious painting and in the dazzling colour and welter of jewelled detail that had by this date become his hallmarks. Hoodwinked by Moreau's esoteric and exotic style, and lulled by his evident adherence to officially accepted subjects, the jury allowed social commentary, so heavily veiled in symbolism as to be almost illegible, entrance to an otherwise 'apolitical' and 'ahistorical' exhibition.

Whatever the intention of the exhibition's commissioners, and despite the triumphalism in evidence on numerous broadsheet front pages on opening day, critics were less than impressed with the results. Those who were tied more closely to the planning of the French Fine Art section found themselves scrambling to put a good face on things; the aforementioned notice in the official catalogue was at pains to point out that despite the deaths of many leading lights of French painting since 1867, artistic production had nonetheless been increasing at a steady rate, unintentionally vaunting quantity over quality.³³ Charles Blanc, who, for political reasons completely opposed to those of Chennevières, was an ardent promoter of grand-tradition history painting, proffered perhaps the most creative (or far-fetched) explanation for the weakness of the present French school: 'Painting isn't an indigenous art in our *Moreau: between epic and dream* (exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais, Chicago, Art Institute and New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), pp. 179-82 (hereafter Lacambre 1998a).

³³*Catalogue officiel* (1878), p. 5

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country, as it is in Italy. . . . The French have always been better sculptors and architects than painters and musicians'.³⁴

Others were less ready to offer excuses. Paul Mantz, a respected moderate critic who reviewed the French painting exhibition for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, opened his exposé with a three-page-long tirade against not only the sorry state of French painting at the Exposition, but the inferiority of the exhibition spaces to those of other countries; he pronounced the prevailing spirit of the exhibition to be 'a certain sadness . . . an art whose spirit does not flourish freely.'³⁵ Bertall, a caricaturist notorious for his parodies of pretentious academic paintings in the *Journal amusant*, went even further, urging readers in a piece published in *L'Artiste* to visit the concurrent *Exposition retrospective de tableaux et dessins de maîtres modernes* at the

Galerie Durand-Ruel instead. He claimed that this exhibition, which featured the work of Courbet, Corot, and the Barbizon painters, was more representative of the French school and more interesting than anything to be found in the galleries of the Champ de Mars besides.³⁶ Even Blanc, before making his implausible apology for current French painting, found himself gazing wistfully at the Austro-Hungarian Fine Art section, envying its ‘youth, abundance, sap, greenness which are not found at all in our [art].’³⁷

Blanc was not alone in casting a resentful (and, perhaps, fearful) eye at the fine art exhibitions of other nations at the Exposition. France might welcome other nations to display their art at its Expositions, so long as they did not threaten its acknowledged superiority in that sphere. Not all critics were as alarmist as one writing under the pseudonym ‘Lord Pilgrim’, who issued this dire warning:

No one can fail to notice the decadence of the French school if one judges it by the Exposition Universelle of 1878. . . . But let [the artists] beware. The foreign schools, so self-effacing in 1855, scarcely alive in 1867, are on the point of taking first place.³⁸

³⁴ ‘La peinture n’est pas chez nous ce qu’elle est en Italie, un art indigène. . . . Les Français ont été toujours plus sculpteurs et plus architectes qu’ils n’étaient peintres et musiciens’. C. Blanc, *Les Beaux-Arts à l’Exposition Universelle de 1878* (Paris, 1878), pp. 183-4.

³⁵ ‘D’une certaine tristesse . . . d’un art où le coeur ne s’épanouit pas librement’. Mantz (1878a), p. 420.

³⁶ Bertall [Albert d’Arnoux], ‘La Tribune de l’école française’, *L’Artiste* (September 1878), p. 155.

³⁷ ‘Une jeunesse, une abondance, un suc, une verne qui ne sont point dans la nôtre’. Blanc (1878), p. 177. It is probably not coincidental that the country to which Blanc chose to compare France is Germanic.

³⁸ ‘Nul ne peut nier la décadence de l’école française si on en juge par l’Exposition Universelle de 1878. [...] Mais qu’ils y prennent bien garde. Les écoles étrangères, si effacées en 1855, à peine vivantes en 1867, sont sur le point de prendre le haut du pavé . . .’ ‘Lord Pilgrim’, ‘Premier avertissement aux artistes’, *L’Artiste* (September 1878), p. 149.

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However, one thing was becoming clear, and was grudgingly acknowledged: France could no longer afford to dismiss the artistic production of her neighbours³⁹ – including that of Britain, long a political and economic rival, but up until this point taken for granted as an artistic inferior. Little did it realise that the innovations, both in art and in exhibition policies, that had been fomenting for the past two years in London were not in line with what it had been primed to expect by the two previous Expositions.

Britain: a cross-Channel rival

In France, the State is ever-present, even in the arts, but there are countries where the State is nowhere to be seen, and in the arts even less. [...] England, which we may invoke as an example of what can be accomplished in large part due to private initiative, has given us an illustration of a response of this type.

– Charles Tardieu, 1877⁴⁰

The Belgian critic Charles Tardieu’s 1877 contribution to the debate on the level of government involvement in the arts, an increasingly hot topic in the decade leading up to the demise of the Salon, was far from original in using Britain’s relative dearth of state support for the arts as an opposing model to the French paradigm. While Tardieu concluded that neither system was perfect,⁴¹ and each country’s envy of the benefits of the other’s model exemplified the tendency to covet what one did not have, his choice of France and Britain to illustrate the argument was telling. Guy Chapman characterised Franco-British relations throughout the first decades of the Third Republic as ‘never friendly, rarely splenetic’.⁴² Wilhelmine Germany presented a much greater source of anxiety to France in the wake of the Franco-Prussian defeat; Britain was not so much feared as alternately envied and

disdained. While the two nations had not been in open conflict with each other since the fall of Napoleon I, a simmering resentment continued to colour France's relations

³⁹Literally, as Antonin Proust, who became the Minister of Fine Arts under Jules Grévy, warned in an address to the Chamber of Deputies on the state of the arts, particularly the decorative arts, after the close of the Exposition (see Mainardi 1993, p. 64).

⁴⁰'En France, l'État est partout, même en art, mais il est des pays où l'État n'est nulle part, et en art moins que partout ailleurs. [...] L'Angleterre, dont nous avons raison cependant d'invoquer l'exemple pour montrer ce que peut dans une large mesure l'initiative privée, l'Angleterre nous a donné le spectacle d'une réaction de ce genre'. C. Tardieu, 'L'Art et l'État', *L'Art* 8 (1877), p. 159.

⁴¹Tardieu ultimately came down on the side of state intervention in the arts, for the novel reason that, if nothing else, it inspired and fuelled rebellion, which ultimately kept art vital ('Elle crée l'opposition, c'est-à-dire la lutte, c'est-à-dire la vie'): *ibid.*, p. 160.

⁴²Chapman (1962), p. 345.

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with Britain. The peace, imperial power, and economic dominance that Britain had enjoyed while France first succumbed to Prussia's armies, then struggled to rebuild itself, as well as its apparent disregard of other European nations, stirred the latter's jealousy.⁴³ Some of the French envy of Britain was a case of the grass being greener on the other side, for the view within Britain in the 1870s was considerably less green, with the first signs of the diminution of its economic might and imperial strength, and the spectre of the Russo-Turkish War in 1876.⁴⁴ Still, 'egotistical England,' to borrow Gambetta's unflattering nickname,⁴⁵ however disliked it might have been on the other side of the Channel, was difficult to ignore.

The relative political stability certainly seems to have contributed to the far smoother organisation of the British section of the Exposition Universelle. There appears to be no evidence of wrangling over finances or of any shortages of cash; in fact, the British section as a whole occupied a much greater space on the Champ de Mars (21,826 square metres) than that allotted to any other foreign country (Belgium came a distant second, with 9,494 square metres of exhibition space),⁴⁶ and no expense was spared on the Fine Art section, despite the fact that it ultimately cost five times the original estimate.⁴⁷ Although we have no record of how much space was allotted to the fine arts within the British section, the fact that the size of Britain's art exhibition (726 works in total) vastly exceeded that of all other foreign countries, and that critics consistently praised the spacious hang, would suggest that the exhibition space was generous.⁴⁸ In contrast to the French art exhibition, the Fine Art committee, which had been appointed not by an elected official but by the Prince of Wales, was not only much smaller, but, as might be expected in a nation in which involvement in the arts was still largely a private affair, only half of its members were

⁴³On Anglophobia in the French press, 1871-77, see Bury (1973), pp. 340-1.

⁴⁴On British foreign policy in the 1870s, see D. Read, *The Age of Urban Democracy: England 1868-1914* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 189-200. It is worth noting that the Russo-Turkish War marked what seems to have been the only period of political activity in the life of Burne-Jones, although apparently he had to be spurred into action by William Morris; G. Burne-Jones (1904), pp. 83-4.

⁴⁵Bury (1973), p. 340.

⁴⁶*Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners* (1880), p. 32.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁸The official catalogue of the Exposition gives the categorical breakdown of the British Fine Art section as 283 oils, 191 paintings and drawings in other media, 46 sculptures, 170 architectural drawings and models, and 36 engravings and etchings. The French Fine Art display comprised 2,071 works, and the Belgian section, the second-largest foreign exhibition, contained 431 works. Most other European nations contributed between 100 and 300 works.

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artists; the remainder were aristocratic amateurs.⁴⁹ All of the former, except the

architect Charles Barry, were academicians; this also held true of the three-man jury for Paintings, which consisted of Frederick Leighton, Edward Armitage and William Dobson.⁵⁰ Considering the presence of academicians on both the jury and the committee, one might have expected an exhibition as dominated by academic painting as the French Fine Art section; however, this did not prove to be the case. To be sure, the work of academicians and other painters who regularly graced the walls of the Royal Academy, such as Leighton, Millais, and Herkomer, formed a sizable portion of the exhibition, but artists who either could not or chose not to exhibit at the Royal Academy received stronger representation than did their French counterparts.

Notably, one of the members of the Fine Art committee was Sir Coutts Lindsay, the wealthy amateur and founder of the recently opened Grosvenor Gallery [Figure 3]. Unfortunately, no record of his exact contribution to the final shape of the British Fine Art section survives, but given the parallels between his own venture and the nature of the British art exhibition in Paris, we can surmise that he was at least partly responsible for its more innovative aspects.⁵¹ Although the British galleries were probably not decorated in the lavish Aesthetic style of the Grosvenor, French critics' praise of the galleries' calm and lack of clutter and the sympathetic hang of the pictures would suggest that his insistence, revolutionary at the time, on treating paintings as aesthetic objects worthy of contemplation in harmonious surroundings, informed the display. More importantly, it was likely due to his influence, and to his probable desire to do for his preferred British artists abroad what he had done for foreign artists at home,⁵² that a goodly number of the artists whose work he had

⁴⁹ The members of the Fine Art committee were the Duke of Westminster (chairman), the Lord de l'Isle and Dudley, Sir Coutts Lindsay, Sir Richard Wallace, Sir Francis Grant, P.R.A., Sir John Gilbert, R.A., Colonel Arthur Ellis, Charles Barry, Sir Frederick Leighton, R.A., and W. Calder Marshall, R.A. (*Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners*, 1880, p. 54).

⁵⁰ Ibid. Originally four artists and one architect – Sir John Gilbert, Sir Frederick Leighton, W. Calder Marshall, Charles Barry, and Sir Francis Grant – were on the 10-member committee. Grant died in 1877, decreasing the total to four.

⁵¹ In the last decade Sir Coutts Lindsay and the Grosvenor Gallery have attracted increasing attention; the foremost studies include S. P. Casteras, ed., *The Grosvenor Gallery: a Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1996); C. Denney, 'The Role of Sir Coutts Lindsay', in Casteras and Faxon (1995), pp. 61-80; and *idem*, *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890* (London, 2000). Unfortunately, none of them discuss Lindsay's role in the organisation of the 1878 Exposition, although all three highlight the overt internationalism of his own exhibition policies.

⁵² Lindsay's support of foreign artists exhibiting in London was groundbreaking for its time; the Grosvenor played host to a significantly more cosmopolitan roster of artists throughout its existence than any other exhibition venue in London. See B. Bryant, 'G. F. Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery: "poems painted on canvas" and the new internationalism', in Casteras (1996), pp. 117-21, for further discussion.

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personally selected for the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition the previous year were invited to contribute to the British Fine Art section. Thus, Burne-Jones was represented by the most admired of the eight works with which he had made his 1877 reappearance at the Grosvenor Gallery, *The Beguiling of Merlin* [Figure 4]⁵³ – incidentally, a depiction of an episode in a French, rather than an English, Arthurian romance – as well as by two large watercolours, *Love among the Ruins* [Figure 5] and *Love Disguised as Reason*.⁵⁴ Watts was represented by a much wider range of work – in addition to six portraits, one Biblical scene, and one sculpture, he sent *The Three Goddesses* [Figure 6]⁵⁵ and, most notably, his star picture from the first Grosvenor exhibition, *Love and Death* [Figure 7].⁵⁶ Although no photographs of the British galleries have surfaced thus far, the schematic layout published in the illustrated catalogue gives a fair idea of Lindsay's probable influence over the hang. One of his

innovations at the Grosvenor had been to group all works by a single artist together, thus privileging the artist as a singular creative talent.⁵⁷ He also insisted that at least six, and preferably twelve, inches of space be left between pictures to alleviate the visual cacophony prevalent in conventional hanging practice; this had the added benefit of further privileging the individual work of art as an autonomous aesthetic object worthy of contemplation in and of itself. Although the hang in the British galleries at the Exposition was rather denser than Lindsay would have favoured at the Grosvenor, he almost certainly had a hand in choosing prime locations in the display for the artists he championed; *The Beguiling of Merlin* hung almost dead centre on the

⁵³Exhibited at the Exposition under the title *Merlin et Viviane* (no. 121).

⁵⁴*Love Among the Ruins* (no. 84) was the only one of Burne-Jones's works to have its title translated literally. I have chosen to focus my discussion of Burne-Jones on *The Beguiling of Merlin* and *Love among the Ruins*, as *Love Disguised as Reason* (c. 1870, Cape Town, South African National Gallery; listed in the Exposition catalogue as *L'Amour docteur*, no. 85) barely figures in most reviews. For a complete listing of works by Burne-Jones and Watts exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, see C. Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁵⁵Exhibited at the Exposition as *Pallas, Junon et Vénus* (no. 265). Duranty, however, refers to it as *Le Jugement de Paris*, despite the absence of the figure of Paris, and when it was first exhibited at Deschamp's Gallery in 1876, it went by the title *The Three Graces*. See Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 114, for a complete history of the painting's title.

⁵⁶Watts painted multiple versions of *Love and Death* (no. 267), and which version was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery and in the Exposition Universelle is a matter of some uncertainty. The canvas now in the Whitworth Gallery at the University of Manchester, reproduced here, is generally accepted as the 1878 painting; however, Colleen Denney argues that the earliest version (1875), now in the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, was the painting exhibited, based upon records in that museum's archives (Denney 1995, p. 79). While this version may have been the one shown in Paris, I doubt that it was exhibited at the Grosvenor, as it lacks the dove in the lower right corner remarked upon by several critics, in particular Oscar Wilde in his review of the exhibition in the *Dublin University Magazine*, and present in the Whitworth's version.

⁵⁷Denney (2000), pp. 50-51.

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end wall of the large central gallery, with *Love and Death* above it to the left and the rest of Watts's paintings nearby.⁵⁸ While it would be an exaggeration to claim that Lindsay managed to transport the Grosvenor's aesthetic and programme wholesale to the Exposition – certainly, he would have been obliged to bow to the wishes of other committee members and accept the work of Academicians inimical to the Gallery's aesthetic – it would be fair to say that he was able to preserve crucial elements of its spirit in both the selection and the hang. The reverence for the individual artist as creative genius, the preference for literary and mythological subjects guaranteed to appeal to an elite audience, and the formation of an identifiable group of artists with common concerns translated remarkably well in Paris.

Initial French reactions to Britain's presence at the Exposition gave little indication that attitudes were on the cusp of change. The Rue des Nations (the 'international main street' to which most of the nations represented at the Exposition had contributed façades intended to represent typical national architecture), in which Britain was represented by a row of Tudor-revival houses, provided Charles Blanc with an opportunity to scoff at the lack of originality in British architecture. He attributed this to Britain's being 'the land of individualism,' which, in his estimation, meant that the only area of innovation in which Britons were capable was domestic architecture. Moreover, he asserted that most of what was best about British architecture had actually been imported from France.⁵⁹ On a more light-hearted note, the cartoonist Cham, who had made a speciality of lampooning Paris's Salons and other exhibitions, made a single, telling reference to Britain in his collection

L'Exposition pour rire [Figure 8]: captioned, in English, 'SHOCKING!', it skewered stereotypical British prudishness in the shape of a heavily clothed and bonneted matron shrinking in horror in front of a display of meerschaum pipes in one of the Industrial Arts sections with the caption 'British modesty lowering its eyes before pipes without trousers!' ⁶⁰ However, once inside the British Fine Art section, it proved more difficult for critics to find ready targets for mockery. Not only did they consistently comment favourably on the spaciousness, comfort, and attractiveness of

⁵⁸ H. Blackburn, *Exposition Universelle, Paris 1878. Catalogue illustré de la section des beaux-arts: école anglaise* (Paris, 1878), p. 3.

⁵⁹ Blanc (1878), pp. 43-47.

⁶⁰ 'La pudeur britannique baissant les yeux devant les pipes qui ne sont pas culottées!' Cham, *L'Exposition pour rire*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1878). The double meaning of 'pipe' (slang in French for penis) would have made Cham's caption especially risqué for his French readership.

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the gallery itself, especially in comparison to its French counterpart,⁶¹ they found themselves confronted with what, to eyes whose last sight of British painting had been eleven years past, was something new and strange. They were witnessing, several years behind Britain, what Pierre Bourdieu has termed a period of rupture, during which a new grammar of form is devised and a consequent demand for a new critical vocabulary, and the great variation in responses indicates the sort of a challenge it presented.⁶²

'A slightly strange but striking poetry': Burne-Jones at the Exposition Universelle

We French turned [for inspiration] more willingly to the Flemish primitives, to the van Eyck brothers, to Holbein. But the English found [in the Italian Primitives] a derivative of their poetic fantasy – *fancy* – that is sharper and bolder than our own. We don't have *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in our theatre, and a French brain couldn't conceive of a creature as spiritually mad as Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. – Philippe Burty, 1869⁶³

While the 1878 Exposition Universelle marked the first occasion on which the works of Burne-Jones and Watts were displayed in France, neither artist was an entirely unknown quantity in that country. The first known mention of Burne-Jones in a French periodical appeared in Philippe Burty's review of the 1869 Royal Academy summer exhibition, in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*; Watts was discussed in the same article, although as a frequent exhibitor at the Royal Academy throughout the 1860s it was probably not the first time his name had figured in the pages of the *Gazette* or other French art periodicals. However, both artists had more recently found a much stronger ambassador and advocate in the shape of Joseph Comyns Carr, exhibitions assistant at the Grosvenor Gallery and *directeur pour l'Angleterre* for the new periodical *L'Art*.⁶⁴ Carr had contributed a three-part review of the first Grosvenor

⁶¹ See for example Gonse (1878), p. 492.

⁶² P. Bourdieu and A. Darbel, *The Love of Art*, trans. C. Beatty and N. Merriman (Cambridge, 1991), p. 43.

⁶³ 'Nos Français sont allés plus volontiers aux primitifs Flamands, aux van Eyck, à Holbein. Mais les Anglais ont trouvé là un dérivatif à leur fantaisie poétique – *fancy* – qui est plus aiguisée, plus hardie que la nôtre. Nous n'avons pas dans notre théâtre le *Songe d'une nuit d'été*, et un cerveau français ne saurait pas concevoir un être aussi spirituellement fou que le Mercutio de *Roméo et Juliette*'. P. Burty, 'Exposition de la Royal Academy', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July 1869), p. 53. Note that 'fancy' appears in English in the original text.

⁶⁴ On the role of Comyns Carr as a promoter of Burne-Jones and Watts in France, see B. Bryant, 'G. F. Watts and the Symbolist Vision', in Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 65-82 and *idem*, 'G. F. Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery: "Poems Painted on Canvas" and the New Internationalism', in Casteras (1996), pp. 109-28.

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Gallery exhibition to *L'Art* in 1877, in which he eloquently praised Burne-Jones and Watts, devoting particular attention to *The Beguiling of Merlin* and to *Love and Death*.⁶⁵ Although none of Watts's work was illustrated, the third instalment featured an excellent etching by Adolphe Lalauze after *The Beguiling of Merlin* [Figure 9]. It seems reasonable to assume that the major critics – Blanc; Duranty and Alfred de Lostalot, whose reviews appeared in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*; Paul Mantz, who covered the foreign fine art sections for *Le Temps*; Arsène Houssaye, writing in *L'Événement*; and Ernest Chesneau, writing in *Le Moniteur universel* – who reviewed the British Fine Art section would have come across Carr's articles and the engraving. It is a truism that a picture is worth a thousand words; nevertheless, the decision to commission a reproduction of a work by a then-unknown artist by a leading engraver suggests how much Lindsay and Comyns Carr staked on establishing Burne-Jones's reputation in France. That out of the profusion of different techniques then available they chose etching, one of methods most highly regarded in France, even as it was being superseded by newer, cheaper, quicker processes, speaks volumes.⁶⁶ Still, no matter how finely wrought, a small black-and-white etching could only give a bare idea of the impact of the paintings themselves in their true size and colours.⁶⁷

Within all of the above-mentioned reviews of the British section lay the implicit acknowledgment that British painting, in particular the strand represented by Burne-Jones and Watts, required a different critical vocabulary. The words *poésie* and *poétique* were, at this date, seldom applied to the visual arts, with the important exception of Corot's late work; Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e Siècle* in 1874 lists numerous literary definitions and contexts for *poétique*, but only one example, at the end of the entry, of usage in the context of the visual arts.⁶⁸ These observers could well have been using the word literally, as Burne-Jones's paintings, to name one of the more obvious examples, were largely inspired by poetry and made no

⁶⁵ J. Comyns Carr, 'La Saison d'art à Londres: la "Grosvenor Gallery"', *L'Art* 9-10 (1877), pp. 265-73, 3-10, 77-83.

⁶⁶ Although Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay is a useful point of entry into the problems of reproductive prints, it envisions reproductive technique as evolving in a lockstep fashion and emphasises photography at the expense of other methods: W. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in idem, *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn (London, 1999), pp. 211-44. Stephen Bann has presented a convincing case for examining the rivalries between multiple, concurrent methods of reproduction: S. Bann, *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 8-11.

⁶⁷ One of the etching's flaws is a slight alteration in the direction of Nimuë's gaze from that in the painting, lessening the intensity of the confrontation between Nimuë and Merlin.

⁶⁸ 'Poétique des beaux-arts, Exposition de ce qu'il y a d'élevé, d'idéal dans les beaux-arts'. P. Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e siècle*, vol. 12.2 (Paris, 1874), p. 1245.

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overt reference to contemporary life. However, most of them imply that it captures a quality of British painting that sets it apart from its Continental cousins: 'a slightly strange but striking poetry,' for Duranty, summed up the efforts of the second wave of Pre-Raphaelites.⁶⁹ Houssaye went even further, declaring that '*Messieurs les Anglais* are restless men and poets', breaking down the heretofore implied separation of the roles of painter and poet.⁷⁰

Indeed, issues of nationality and national characteristics were running themes in the majority of the reviews. The notion of British artists' technical inferiority to the French, and their mediocre training, received frequent attention.⁷¹ Alfred de Lostalot, a notoriously conservative critic who reviewed the Drawings and Watercolours section for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, was the most scathing in his assessment, scornfully remarking of *Love among the Ruins*, 'It's a curious work, but we seek

vainly to understand why the painter entrusted a subject of this size to paper rather than to canvas, because it multiplied the difficulties for no good reason', and finally conceding, rather patronisingly, of the entire British section of watercolours, that while they possessed a certain naïve charm, they were 'perhaps without eminently plastic qualities, but one can't have everything.'⁷² Ironically, Ernest Chesneau transformed the evident ignorance of technique and disregard for orthodox methods of 'M. Jones Burne' into a positive virtue, claiming,

⁶⁹'Une poésie un peu bizarre mais d'accent très net'. Duranty (1878), p. 299.

⁷⁰'Messieurs les Anglais sont des inquiets et des poètes'. A. Houssaye, 'Les Beaux-arts à l'Exposition Universelle (V): Messieurs les Anglais', *L'Événement* (4 October 1878).

⁷¹Indeed, Burne-Jones, who was almost entirely self-taught, apart from some lessons in drawing from Rossetti, received no formal training whatsoever. Watts's case is slightly different: while he was briefly a student at the Royal Academy Schools as a teenager (and was ultimately elected an academician in 1867 on the strength of his portraits), he received almost no teaching and his attendance was desultory. A subsequent informal apprenticeship to the sculptor William Behnes constituted the remainder of his training. See W. Blunt, *'England's Michelangelo': a biography of George Frederic Watts, O.M., R.A.* (London, 1975), pp. 7-10, for a more thorough, if rather anecdotal, account of his early years and education.

⁷²'C'est cependant un curieux travail que l'*Amour dans les ruines* de M. Burne Jones, mais nous cherchons vainement à comprendre pourquoi le peintre a confié au papier plutôt qu'à la toile un sujet de cette taille, car c'était accumuler à plaisir les difficultés'; 'Ce ne sont peut-être pas des qualités éminemment plastiques, mais on ne peut pas tout avoir': A. de Lostalot, 'Exposition Universelle: aquarelles, dessins et gravures', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (October 1878), pp. 644-5. Lostalot was not the only Frenchman to be baffled by Burne-Jones's unorthodox working methods; *Love Among the Ruins* was badly damaged in a Paris photographer's studio in 1893 because the photographer's assistants mistook it for an oil painting and gave it an egg white wash in preparation for photography. Burne-Jones subsequently produced a replica in oils (now in the Bearsted Collection, Wightwick Manor).

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Moreover, here, – and it must be said in general, about all English painting, – the process isn't governed by law as it is in France, the methods of facture are not limited, the medium isn't valued at much, only the result counts for something. Is the desired effect obtained? *All right*. So much the better.⁷³

The English physiognomy, particularly as embodied by Burne-Jones's gaunt, lantern-jawed Vivien, drew snide criticism from Duranty:

The lean type with large hollow eyes that M. Burne-Jones and M. Richmond have given the Vivien of the Middle Ages and the antique Ariadne is yet again an English type, the type of poetic souls *par excellence*, but still with the strongly accentuated jaw that is fond of rare meats and a hard undercurrent of fierceness that makes itself felt even from afar.⁷⁴

Yet he also conceded that the English type had its saving graces, chiefly 'the beauty and height of the forehead, the nobility of the nose and the penetrating firmness of the gaze,' remarking, not without a hint of envy, that such traits could not but reflect the power and intelligence of the English race.⁷⁵ Blanc (who persisted in referring to the artist as 'Burnes Jones' throughout his review) took a more charitable view, but dodged the issue of the 'English type' by describing the figure of Vivien as a fusion of the styles of Mantegna and Prud'hon.⁷⁶

Duranty's somewhat jaundiced take on the peculiarities of Burne-Jones's 'Englishness', while echoed by other critics, may to an extent reflect his discomfort with a type of painting at odds with his own preferences – he is best remembered as a champion of the Impressionists and an habitu  of Manet's circle at the Caf  Guerbois. The two most sympathetic reviewers, Chesneau and Mantz, instead ascribed the *merits* of *The Beguiling of Merlin* to its creator's nationality. Chesneau went even further, writing that '[Burne-Jones's] adoration of the true, when placed at the service

of a high imagination, brings to the things it interprets thus a singular appreciation, an emotion, a poetic transfiguration, alas! sought in vain from the “truth” of young French painters which comes from academic traditions which are nothing but studio

⁷³ ‘D’ailleurs, ici, – et il faut le dire en général, de toute la peinture anglaise, – le procédé n’a pas de lois comme en France, les modes de factures ne sont pas limités, le moyen n’est considéré pour rien, le résultat seul compte pour quelque chose. L’effet voulu est-il obtenu? *All right*. Tout est pour le mieux’. E. Chesneau, ‘Exposition Universelle. Beaux-arts: les écoles étrangères (I)’, *Le Moniteur universel* (4 July 1878). Note that ‘All right’ appears in English in the original text. Chesneau later incorporated his critique of Burne-Jones in this article, verbatim, into *La peinture anglaise* (p. 238).

⁷⁴ ‘Le type maigre aux grands yeux caves que M. Burne-Jones et M. Richmond ont donné à la Viviane du Moyen-Age et à l’Ariadne antique, est encore un type anglais, le type des âmes poétiques par excellence, mais toujours avec la mâchoire accusée et amie des viandes saignantes, et toujours avec un arrière-sentiment dur et farouche, sensible quoique lointain.’ Duranty (1878), p. 306.

⁷⁵ ‘La beauté et l’élévation du front, la noblesse du nez et la fermeté pénétrante du regard’. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁷⁶ Blanc (1878), p. 335.

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formulae’.⁷⁷ Mantz correctly identified Leonardo as the source of Burne-Jones’s androgynous figures, and, while allowing that ‘such refinements rather disconcert the spectator accustomed to obvious things’, he added that they ‘are possible, and at home, in the land of Shakespeare’.⁷⁸ Ironically, this very aspect of Burne-Jones’s work had been decried by British critics as ‘effeminacy’ and ‘morbidly’; no doubt it was to more open-minded critics like Mantz that Burne-Jones’s first biographer Malcolm Bell referred when he wrote that it had taken the appreciation of French critics to belatedly open the eyes of their British colleagues to Burne-Jones’s genius.⁷⁹ More intriguing still are the visual correspondences between *The Beguiling of Merlin* and Moreau’s *L’Apparition* and *Salomé*, works which were appearing together for the second time at the Exposition, after their first pairing in the previous year’s Grosvenor Gallery exhibition. Apart from the obvious similarities in composition and narrative – a sinuous, serpentine femme fatale confronting (or, in the case of *L’Apparition*, being confronted by) her male victim – the facture of the surfaces of both paintings also displays revealing parallels. The surfaces of both *L’Apparition* and *Salomé* appear encrusted with jewels (a particularly remarkable feat in the former case, as its medium does not allow the impasto possible with oil), a glittering *horror vacui* that heightens the atmosphere of hothouse exoticism and sexual terror; *The Beguiling of Merlin* is similarly encrusted, though with hawthorn blossoms rather than jewels. It would be easy to attribute the welter of obsessively drawn detail in Burne-Jones’s painting to his Pre-Raphaelite heritage; here, however, the blossoms have a stylised, decorative quality, as if made of extremely fine enamel.⁸⁰ In fact, their fragile artificiality and their hard, enamel-like finish contribute to the scene’s leaden,

⁷⁷ ‘Cette adoration du vrai, quand elle est mise au service d’une haute imagination, apporte aux choses interprétées de la sorte une singulière plus-value, une émotion, une transfiguration poétique, hélas! vainement demandée en dehors de la vérité partant de jeunes peintres français à des traditions d’académie qui ne sont que des recettes d’atelier’: Chesneau (1878).

⁷⁸ ‘De tels raffinements déroutent un peu le spectateur ami des choses claires; ils sont possibles, ils sont à leur place dans le pays de Shakespeare’. P. Mantz, ‘Exposition Universelle. Les Écoles étrangères (X): Angleterre’, *Le Temps*, 11 November 1878 (hereafter Mantz 1878b).

⁷⁹ M. Bell, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones. A Record and Review* (London and New York, 1892), p. 5.

⁸⁰ Note that the word ‘decorative’ had different, and more positive, connotations in British and French art criticism of the late nineteenth century than it does today; not only was it used as a complimentary term by contemporary advocates of Aestheticism, ‘art décoratif’, in the sense of monumental painting intended for an architectural setting, was generally considered to be the highest genre to which an artist could aspire in France.

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airless atmosphere of dread in much the same way as Moreau’s jewel-encrusted

canvas.⁸¹

British observers had maintained a curious silence about *L'Apparition* when it graced the walls of the Grosvenor Gallery's East Gallery – no doubt a disappointment to the managers of the Grosvenor, who appeared to have put a considerable effort into securing its loan.⁸² Comyns Carr himself only mentioned it in passing in his review in *L'Art*, perhaps less because of a lack of interest than because he probably saw no need to extol at length a work that had already occupied so many column inches in its own country the year before.⁸³ In London, however, the only references to Moreau's presence at the Grosvenor are a passing mention in an article in the *Academy* by William Michael Rossetti (disposed perhaps by his relationships, familial and professional, with the Pre-Raphaelites to notice him)⁸⁴ and a brief allusion to 'the flashy attractions of M. Gustave Moreau's picture', erroneously described as depicting the head of Christ, in an unsigned review in the *Athenaeum*.⁸⁵ Oddly enough, Moreau garnered more attention from British reviewers at the 1878 Exposition, although references were brief and sometimes patronising; a critic for the *Art Journal* drew parallels between his colour and, bizarrely, that of William Etty.⁸⁶ Although Duranty did not make the connection between the two artists in his 1878 review, another realist critic, Jules Castagnary, did, noting that in his visit to the British exhibition, he perceived 'here and there certain vague resemblances to some of our painters – thus it is that M. Jones in his *Merlin and Vivien* evidently concerns himself with Gustave

⁸¹ Burne-Jones's maternal grandfather, Benjamin Coley, was the head of a jewellery firm in Birmingham, and it is tempting to speculate on what role this heritage played in the painter's style and methods, especially given Burne-Jones's comment that he 'love[d] to treat [his] pictures as a goldsmith does his jewels' (quoted in Wildman and Christian 1998, p. 42). The bejewelled quality of Moreau's paintings and his concept of 'richesse nécessaire' was a common topic of discussion among his contemporaries – not always flatteringly. For example, the heated (although possibly apocryphal) exchange between Moreau and his former friend Degas, as recorded by Paul Valéry: Moreau is said to have demanded of Degas, 'Do you have pretensions to restoring art through dance?' only to receive the rejoinder, 'And you're claiming to revive it with jewellery?'

⁸² Comyns Carr arranged the loan through his connections at *L'Art*; the dealer Léon Gauchez, in whose possession it was in 1877, wrote for the magazine under the pseudonym Paul Leroi, and Moreau's address in the exhibition catalogue was listed as the London office of *L'Art* – coincidentally, next door to the gallery in New Bond Street. Lindsay's decision to hang it, with the work of a wide array of other foreign artists, in the first room gallery-goers entered is indicative of his overt internationalism; see Bryant (1996) in Casteras (1996), pp. 120-21.

⁸³ Comyns Carr (1877), p. 270.

⁸⁴ Bryant (1996), p. 121.

⁸⁵ 'The Salon, Paris (second notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2586 (19 May 1877), p. 647.

⁸⁶ 'International Art at the Universal Exposition, Paris', *Art Journal* 18 (1878), p. 198. The reviewer singled out *Moses exposed on the Nile* and *Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra* as typical of Moreau's style.

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Moreau'.⁸⁷ Duranty picked up this thread in a review of the Grosvenor Gallery's summer exhibition in 1879 – the first instance in which the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* had asked its *correspondant d'Angleterre* to cover the Grosvenor exhibition alongside that of the Royal Academy – when he characterised Burne-Jones's work as 'loaded with intentions and implications which recall the complications of the imagination of M. Gustave Moreau'.⁸⁸ These were the first recorded comparisons of Burne-Jones and Moreau – the first, as it turned out, of many over the next two decades.

Watts and the Shadow of Puvis de Chavannes

Watts's imaginative works proved more problematic for the critics – somewhat surprisingly, since he drew upon more conventional academic models than Burne-Jones did, and his stylistic references originated mainly in the Cinquecento painting embraced by the critical and academic establishments in both Britain and France.

Indeed, Blanc passed over them entirely in his review, simply praising Watts as a skilful and sensitive portraitist.⁸⁹ As with Burne-Jones, the majority of French critiques were formalist, rather than moralising. Where Watts's reputation at home had benefited from the high-minded tone of critics in the broadsheet and periodical press who cast his art as a 'manly' and 'healthy' alternative to the effeminacy and morbidity of Burne-Jones's style and subject matter while giving less weight to formal flaws,⁹⁰ French critics evinced less interest in Watts's masculine rectitude and focused instead on his peculiarities as a painter – often to his detriment. Chesneau, who had waxed so enthusiastic over Burne-Jones, dismissed *The Three Goddesses* as 'thoroughly mediocre' and scoffed, 'No doubt M. Watts has made an interesting

⁸⁷ 'Une surprise que nous avons éprouvés dans notre promenade a été de constater çà et là certaines velléités de quelques-uns de nos peintres. C'est ainsi que M. Jones dans son *Merlin et Viviane* se préoccupe évidemment de Gustave Moreau'. J. Castagnary, 'L'Exposition (XIV). Beaux-arts – Angleterre', *Le Siècle* (24 May 1878).

⁸⁸ 'Chargée d'intentions, de sous-entendus, et qui rappelle les complications de l'imagination de M. Gustave Moreau'. E. Duranty, 'Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor-Gallery, à Londres', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (October 1879), p. 372.

⁸⁹ Blanc (1878), p. 336.

⁹⁰ See, among many examples this anonymous review of Burne-Jones's paintings in the 1878 Grosvenor exhibition: 'As to the value, in a larger sense, of this art, and of the poetry which is its companion, we most seriously protest against it (with a reverence for its genius and a tenderness for its beauty) as unmasculine; [...] it is fresh strenuous paganism, emasculated by false modern emotionalism'. ('The Grosvenor Gallery: Second Notice', *Magazine of Art*, 1878, p. 81.) By contrast, the same reviewer (presumably) characterised Watts's paintings in the exhibition as 'noble' and 'lofty' ('The Grosvenor Gallery: First Notice', *Magazine of Art*, 1878, p. 50).

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attempt in his picture *Love and Death* [. . .] but utterly for naught';⁹¹ most of the other reviewers followed suit, praising his imagination and the sincerity of his efforts while condemning Watts's faulty grasp of anatomy, his dry facture and his bizarre colour schemes.

Duranty discussed Watts's imaginative subjects at length, but he was at a loss as to how to categorise the artist, coining the term 'post-Raphaelite' to describe him, in recognition of his affinities with the Pre-Raphaelites and his stylistic debt to Michelangelo and other artists of the High Renaissance. While he seemed to feel qualified to comment upon the sculptural quality of Watts's drawing and on his eccentricities and deficiencies as a colourist,⁹² he had little to say about the content of either *Love and Death* or *The Three Goddesses*. His one brief comment on the latter is telling. While Watts originally entitled the painting *The Three Goddesses*, and it was listed in the official exhibition catalogue as *Pallas, Juno and Venus*, Duranty refers to it as *The Judgment of Paris*.⁹³ Yet Paris is nowhere in evidence – unless, by a stretch of the imagination, the viewer is meant to place himself in the role of Paris – and none of the three figures bears any of the traditional attributes of those goddesses. It seems as if, faced with an image devoid of any readily evident narrative and populated only by three mysterious, impassive nudes, Duranty clutched at straws to give some semblance of a conventional meaning to the painting.

The salient characteristics of *The Three Goddesses* – the suppression of meaning and the monochrome palette – appear to reveal the origins of a dialogue with another artist whose style, programme and aspirations closely paralleled those of Watts. While *Love and Death*, by virtue of its imposing size and dramatic subject, garnered more critical attention than Watts's other works in the British Fine Art section, *The Three Goddesses* displays more compelling links with French antinaturalism, and in particular with the work of Puvis de Chavannes, which have thus far received surprisingly little attention. While Puvis absented himself,

⁹¹ ‘Fort médiocre’; ‘Sans doute M. Watts a fait une tentative intéressante dans son tableau de *l’Amour et la Mort* [. . .] mais absolument en vain’. Chesneau (1878). Chesneau subsequently softened his criticism of Watts in *La peinture anglaise*, praising both *The Three Goddesses* and *Love and Death* for expressing ‘a real poetic sentiment’ (‘un réel sentiment poétique’, pp. 265-66), but, in common with most other French critics who wrote on that artist, he continued to assert that Watts’s imaginative reach exceeded his technical grasp.

⁹² It is worth bearing in mind that *Love and Death* looked much darker when Duranty saw it at the Exposition than it does today. Watts subsequently reworked it, lightening the colours considerably; see Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 167-8. For a contemporary account of Watts’s working methods, see C. Monkhouse, ‘The Watts Exhibition’, *Magazine of Art* (1882), pp. 181-2.

⁹³ Duranty (1878), p. 310.

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apparently voluntarily, from the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition, precluding comparisons of both artists’ works, a parallel reading of French criticism from 1878 and the following decade demonstrates that mainstream critics responded similarly to the work of both artists, faulting both for their divergence from academic ideals and slavish emulation of archaic models (in Puvis’s case, Giotto and Benozzo Gozzoli), but rarely raising the issue of subject matter or narrative inscrutability.⁹⁴ Although Puvis would presumably have seen Watts’s work in 1878, he never exhibited in Britain during his lifetime, and Watts would almost certainly not have seen any of his paintings before he began work on *The Three Goddesses*. He may, however, have had access to reproductions; line drawings of Puvis’s work regularly featured in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*,⁹⁵ and an etching after his *Death and the Maidens* (1872) [Figure 10] was published by Durand-Ruel in 1873 and available for sale in London, at which time he had just completed the painting. The engraving gives a poor idea of Puvis’s chalky colour and the sculptural solidity of his figures, but in the static poses and pensive gazes of the two girls in the lower right, to say nothing of Puvis’s sophisticated twist on traditional allegorical iconography, Watts would probably have recognised a kindred spirit. Significantly, Watts first exhibited *The Three Goddesses* in 1876 at the Deschamps Gallery, a venue linked with Durand-Ruel’s and favoured by Whistler, where French and British art were shown side by side; thus, he underlined that painting’s experimental nature.⁹⁶ Louis Huth, the collector who purchased the work from Deschamps and lent it to the British exhibition at the Exposition Universelle, was a devotee of this particular aspect of Watts’s oeuvre and a keen collector of the work of other artists working in a similar vein. Thanks to Huth’s generosity, *The Three Goddesses* enjoyed a greater and longer-lived reputation in France than it did in Britain. As well as lending it to the Exposition Universelle, he allowed an etching to be made after it to illustrate Comyns Carr’s review of the 1880 Grosvenor Gallery exhibition for *L’Art* [Figure 11], thus increasing its audience and

⁹⁴ These tendencies were particularly evident in reviews of Puvis’s 1879 Salon submissions; see M.-T. de Forges, ‘Un nouveau tableau de Puvis de Chavannes au musée du Louvre’, *Revue du Louvre* 20, no. 4 (1970), p. 248. Like Watts, Puvis had foregone an orthodox academic education, opting for a wandering apprenticeship in the 1850s in the ateliers of Henri Scheffer, Delacroix and Couture; see A. B. Price, *Pierre Puvis de Chavannes* (exh. cat., Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1994), pp. 11-12, for further particulars of his training.

⁹⁵ Reproductions of Puvis’s work in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* before 1878 include a heliogravure after *La Fantaisie*, *GBA*, June 1866, p. 510; an engraving after *L’Été*, *GBA*, June 1873, p. 477; and a fold-out line-engraving of *Sainte Geneviève*, *GBA*, June 1876, facing p. 692.

⁹⁶ Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 115.

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extending its presence in the public eye. The article itself is notable for gliding over the painting’s subject and concentrating on Watts’s treatment of the nude – a theme rare in current British art but of key importance in France – and his ‘spiritualisme raffiné’, concerns which, as Barbara Bryant notes, prefigured the language of

Symbolist criticism in the coming decade.⁹⁷

Duranty stated at the beginning of his review of the British section that of all the national art exhibitions, it was ‘the most interesting in terms of national character, distinctive spirit, and the characteristic aspect of its works, although insular English art has ties with the Continent that one can easily see’.⁹⁸ Ostensibly he was referring to its ties with Continental art of the past – drawing comparisons between Burne-Jones and Florentine painting of the Quattrocento and, more unusually, Albrecht Dürer, as well as between Watts and the High Renaissance and Mannerism – but it is tempting to wonder whether he detected any common ground between Watts and Puvis, the contemporary artist whose work came closest in spirit to his own. Might he have seen, for example, similarities between *The Three Goddesses*, with its monumental yet strangely flat figures, limited tonal range, matte surface, and lack of an obvious narrative, and the easel paintings of Puvis de Chavannes, which had been praised and ridiculed in equal measure for the same qualities? Watts’s trio of impassive nudes, while betraying debts to the contemporary life class, classical images of the Three Graces, and Dürer’s *Four Witches*,⁹⁹ may not only echo some of Puvis’s earlier work, but have served as an inspiration – not previously noted – for one of his most iconic and frequently-reproduced canvases, *Jeunes femmes au bord de la mer* [Figure 12]. This painting, exhibited with the subtitle ‘panneau décoratif’ at the 1879 Salon, portrays three statuesque, half-draped young women – goddesses or mortals, there is nothing to indicate which might be the case – disposed in attitudes that almost exactly reiterate those of Watts’s goddesses, the key differences being the reclining poses of the two outer figures, and the bold cropping of the woman on the right. Although Puvis’s palette includes more vivid hues than he ever used in his murals,¹⁰⁰ the

⁹⁷J. Comyns Carr, ‘La Royal Academy et la Grosvenor Gallery’, *L’Art* 12 (1880), p. 172; B. Bryant, ‘G. F. Watts and the Symbolist Vision’, in Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 67.

⁹⁸‘La plus intéressante par le caractère national, par l’esprit tranché et par l’aspect tout particulier de ses oeuvres, bien que l’art insulaire anglais ait avec le continent des attaches que l’on peut voir aisément’. Duranty (1878), p. 298.

⁹⁹Albrecht Dürer, *Four Witches*, engraving, Vienna, Albertina, 1497. I am grateful to Glyn Davies for drawing my attention to the parallels between Dürer’s engraving and *The Three Goddesses*.

¹⁰⁰De Forges (1970), p. 248.

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relatively limited tonal range and dry, chalky finish recall those of *The Three Goddesses* (which Mantz had disparaged as ‘terreuse’),¹⁰¹ as does the strangely bare, conventionalised landscape with a few sparse sprigs of vegetation, which hovers ambiguously between the idyllic and the desolate.

Although Puvis had by 1878 established himself as one of the foremost monumental painters in France, he was no stranger to smaller-scale decorative allegory; in 1866 he had completed a suite of decorative panels for the Paris home of the sculptor and writer Claude Vignon. This set of four panels depicts ‘four symbolic figures’: *Fantasy* (*La Fantaisie*), *Vigilance* (*La Vigilance*), *Meditation* (or *Reminiscence – Le Recueillement*) and *History* (*L’Histoire*),¹⁰² portrayed as classically draped female figures in generalised bucolic settings. *Meditation* stands out as the only figure not assigned a time-hallowed identifying attribute; even so, she, like her sisters, is labelled with a *trompe l’oeil* plaque, ensuring correct interpretation. *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, however, removes all signposts that might help the viewer interpret what he sees. The title and its tag of ‘panneau décoratif’ may go some way to explaining why critics at the 1879 Salon rarely questioned the strangeness of the scene or even tried to supply a narrative of their own; Roland Barthes’s theories on the ability of an image’s ‘linguistic message’ to anchor and guide its interpretation are

particularly apposite here.¹⁰³ Directed to view the work as purely decorative, both in the sense of being intended for installation in an architectural scheme (even though, in actual fact, it was neither commissioned nor ever used in a decorative scheme)¹⁰⁴ and of lacking a clear narrative, most observers naturally placed more weight on its formal qualities than on trying to puzzle out a narrative; given a title devoid of any reference to classical mythology, that simply described the figures as ‘young girls by the seashore’, critics could not neatly slot it into the rubric of mythological or history painting.

The significance – and mutability – of titles is another point of commonality between *Jeunes filles* and *The Three Goddesses*. Watts’s painting, exhibited a total of ¹⁰¹Mantz (1878b).

¹⁰² Puvis’s first biographer, Marius Vachon, lists the ensemble as consisting of *La Fantaisie*, *La Vigilance*, *Le Rêve*, and *La Poésie* (M. Vachon, *Puvis de Chavannes*, Paris 1895, pp. 77-78); see Price (1994) for further detail on the commission of the decorative scheme. The panels are now divided between the Musée d’Orsay and the Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki, Japan.

¹⁰³ R. Barthes, ‘Rhetoric of the Image’, in idem, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), pp. 40-41.

¹⁰⁴ Puvis did not even find a purchaser for the painting immediately after the Salon; it was eventually bought after its third exhibition at his one-man show at Durand-Ruel’s in 1887 by an M. Boivin.

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six times during his lifetime, appeared under four different names. From its first outing in 1876 as *The Three Graces*, it became *Pallas, Juno and Venus* (Paris, 1878), then *The Three Goddesses* (Grosvenor Gallery, 1880), then *Ida* (Paris, 1883), before finally settling for the next twenty-two years into the guise of *The Judgment of Paris* (Glasgow, 1888; Wolverhampton, 1902; Royal Academy, 1905).¹⁰⁵ What role Watts himself played in the fluctuation of the title is unknown. As we have already seen, however, even the critics reviewing the exhibitions did not always respect the title given them in the catalogue, imposing their own title on the work and with it, a different reading of the scene. Describing the figures as Graces, personifications of beauty and harmony, or as a trio of anonymous goddesses might conjure up either an ‘art for art’s sake’ celebration of female beauty and cause us to read the expression of the figure on the left as calm or even indolent; call them Pallas, Juno and Venus and state (or simply imply) that they are being judged by Paris, and a connection with a classical epic is established, while the left-hand figure’s expression, if we presume that she is Venus, takes on an air of brazen self-confidence or mocking triumph. Puvis’s title underwent a smaller but crucial alteration which subtly shaped the stories critics chose to impose upon it. Exhibited at the 1879 Salon as *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, a title it retained at the 1883 Exposition Nationale, it was then shown at the 1887 Durand-Ruel exhibition as *Femmes au bord de la mer*.¹⁰⁶ The change in French from ‘filles’ to ‘femmes’ implies an increase in maturity and experience, probably (although not necessarily) the product of the loss of virginity. Although most commentators at the 1879 Salon refrained from attempts at exegesis,¹⁰⁷ the caricaturist Stop could not resist trying to explain just what these young girls were doing at the seaside; in a parody of the picture published during the Salon’s run in the *Journal amusant* [Figure 13], he not only lampooned Puvis’s bold cropping by lopping the left-hand figure in half at the waist, but changed the two distant seagulls into vicious birds attacking the girl in the centre, explaining that she was trying to defend herself against them by using her abundant tresses as a flail. Eight years later,

¹⁰⁵ Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 114 ; see also Note 55 above.

¹⁰⁶ De Forges (1970), p. 241.

¹⁰⁷ One notable exception to this trend was the poet Théodore de Banville, who described the young girls as both ‘pure as the azure waves’ and yet seeming ‘despairing like Baudelaire’s Damned Women;

they might wish to go still farther away, near a calmer sea unruffled by either the flight of great birds or the gaze of human eyes' ('pures comme l'onde azurée'; 'désespérées comme les Femmes Damnées de Baudelaire; elles voudraient aller encore plus loin, près d'une mer encore plus tranquille et que n'aurait effleurée ni le vol des grands oiseaux ni le regard des yeux humains'). T. de Banville, 'Salon de 1879', *Le National*, May 1879, quoted in De Forges (1970), p. 248.

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confronted by *Femmes au bord de la mer* (no longer labeled 'panneau décoratif'), Gustave Kahn argued that the minimalist title 'forces us to see a poem, an allegory analogous to that of the Sirens'.¹⁰⁸ He elaborated on this claim, constructing a tale of loss and unfulfilled longing in which the young women, whose inscrutable mien he interpreted as weary and desolate, wait on the shore, tired of singing as they await the arrival of a ship bearing a hero that never comes. Kahn even went so far as to claim that the three women in fact represented three different physical and emotional states of the same woman.¹⁰⁹ This latter judgment echoes those made by Chesneau and Duranty six and ten years earlier – about *The Three Goddesses*.

After-Effects: The 1883 Exposition Internationale and the Literary Publicity Machine

If Burne-Jones's and Watts's appearance at the 1878 Exposition Universelle did not make such a resounding splash as their next outing at the 1889 Exposition, it produced instead the effect of two small stones dropped side by side into a pond, whose waves reverberate, rebounding and spreading. The general acclaim accorded the British art exhibition, as Michael Orwicz has demonstrated, played a small but crucial role in the loosening of the stranglehold of conservative 'grande peinture' in the Salon and other major exhibitions; fearing that Britain's ascendancy would seriously threaten French domination of the art market, Jules Ferry's regime (the so-called

'Republic of the Republicans'), from 1879 onward, actively promoted a wider array of styles.¹¹⁰ Watts felt the impact first: he was awarded a first-class medal at the Exposition, the only British artist, apart from Alma-Tadema, to receive that honour. While Burne-Jones was content to wait until the 1889 Exposition to exhibit again in France, Watts's work made two return visits shortly afterward. No doubt because of his coup at the Exposition, his *Orpheus and Eurydice* was accorded a prominence at the 1880 Salon rarely given to a British artist, its fame increased by an etching published the previous year in *L'Art*; reviewing the Salon for the *Gazette des Beaux-*
¹⁰⁸ '[II] force nous est d'y voir un poème, une allégorie analogue à celle des Sirènes'. G. Kahn, 'Exposition Puvis de Chavannes', *Revue indépendante* 6, no. 15 (January 1888), p. 144.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹¹⁰ M. Orwicz, 'Anti-academicism and state power in the early Third Republic', *Art History* 14, no. 4 (December 1991), pp. 571-74. Orwicz notes that the personal interests and tastes of those members of republican parties involved in arts administration during the 1880s played a significant part in government policy; especially important in this regard was Antonin Proust, who would organise the Centennale exhibition at the 1889 Exposition Universelle.

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Arts, Philippe de Chennevières, the disgraced director of the French Fine Art section in 1878, confessed that what he had seen of Watts both two years ago and at present made him 'jealous for our Gustave Moreau, of whom he appears the fortunate rival'.¹¹¹ More significantly, the seven works – including *The Three Goddesses*, now renamed *Ida* – which he exhibited at the 1883 Exposition Internationale at the Galeries Georges Petit caught the eye of J.-K. Huysmans, who was then in the midst of writing his seminal novel of the Decadence, *À rebours*.¹¹² Soon thereafter Huysmans placed Watts, whose work he characterised as 'sketched by an ailing Gustave Moreau, painted in by an anaemic Michelangelo and retouched by a Raphael

drowned in a sea of blue', in his protagonist Des Esseintes's exclusive pantheon of contemporary artists, in the company of Moreau, Rodolphe Bresdin, and Odilon Redon.¹¹³ Meanwhile, across town in the Palais des Champs-Élysées, four of Puvis's key panel paintings – *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, *Femme à sa toilette*, *L'Enfant prodigue*, and *Le pauvre Pêcheur* were on view, as were two of his new paintings at the Salon, a melancholy portrait of his companion Marie Cantacuzène and *Le Rêve* – another trio of female figures, albeit decidedly more celestial, whom he designated in the *livret* as Love, Glory and Riches (significantly, the three prizes offered Paris, and personified by, Watts's Venus, Pallas, and Juno).¹¹⁴

Huysmans's embrace of Watts, however jaundiced, is indicative of a key development in the fortunes of British antinaturalists in France, but whether this change would have happened when it did, much less at all, without the impetus of the 1878 Exposition is doubtful. Significantly, in 1879 the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* sent Duranty to London to review the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition for the first time; although the magazine had had a London correspondent almost since its inception in 1859, there had been no coverage of the first two Grosvenor shows. Except for a

¹¹¹ 'J'en étais jaloux pour notre Gust. Moreau, dont il parut alors le rival heureux'. P. de Chennevières, 'Le Salon de 1880 (troisième et dernier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July 1880), p. 66.

¹¹² The other paintings Watts sent to the Exposition Internationale were a portrait of Swinburne (National Portrait Gallery), *Paolo and Francesca*, *The Denunciation of Cain* (both Watts Gallery, Compton), and three *Eves*, one of which is almost certainly a version of 'She Shall Be Called Woman' (Walker Art Gallery). See Bryant in Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 67.

¹¹³ 'Esquissé par un Gustave Moreau malade, brossés par un Michel-Ange anémié et retouchés par un Raphaël noyé dans le bleu'. J.-K. Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris, 1884), pp. 173-74. Huysmans, at the outset of his career as an art critic, wrote a review of the British Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition for *L'Artiste*, but mentioned neither Watts nor Burne-Jones by name and dismissed the exhibition as a whole as embodying eclecticism run mad – 'moderne, médiéval, antique, everything rubs shoulders as if at a masked ball' ('moderne, moyen âge, antique, tout s'y coudoie comme en un bal masqué'). Huysmans, 'Exposition universelle: l'Ecole anglaise', *L'Artiste* no. 22 (2 June 1878), p. 167.

¹¹⁴ *Le Rêve*, 1883 (Musée d'Orsay).

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break in 1880, presumably due to Duranty's untimely death, the *Gazette's* London correspondents covered every Grosvenor show up until the gallery's demise in 1890, also turning their eyes toward the New Gallery, which Carr and Charles Hallé had set up in 1887 following disagreements with Lindsay over the increasing commercialisation of the Grosvenor and where Burne-Jones and Watts henceforth exhibited their new work. Comyns Carr continued to publish lengthy accounts of the Grosvenor exhibitions in *L'Art* until the end of his tenure there in 1882, and other French art periodicals began, sporadically, to follow his lead. With increased journalistic coverage of the antinaturalist trend in Britain came an ever greater number of reproductions of paintings, more often than not of rising quality. Where Comyns Carr left off, Chesneau took up the slack, publishing *La peinture anglaise, 1730-1882* in 1882 and, a truly dreadful engraving after *The Beguiling of Merlin* notwithstanding, augmenting Burne-Jones's reputation in France.

It was at about this time that, while journalists and critics continued to write, increasingly favourably, about this strand of contemporary British art, that Symbolist and Decadent novelists and poets in France began to gravitate towards the oeuvre of Burne-Jones, Watts, and the recently deceased Rossetti.¹¹⁵ While Huysmans, Edouard Rod, and Paul Bourget promoted them in prose, the dandy-poet Jean Lorrain, who became one of Burne-Jones's most vocal advocates in the late 1880s and 1890s, included a poem entitled 'Printemps mystique, pour Burne Jones' in his 1887 collection *Les Griseries*. While not alluding to a specific work, from its references to

‘bois épineux’ and ‘pâles aubépines’ it would be reasonable to infer that Lorrain had the hawthorn wood of *The Beguiling of Merlin* in mind.¹¹⁶ Bourdieu’s contention that the only audience Symbolists aimed at was other Symbolists, generating a hermetic and perfectly autonomous field of cultural production, although a vast oversimplification, highlights the significance of the adoption of Burne-Jones and Watts, and the suggestive, unashamedly elitist and (ostensibly) ‘anywhere out of the world’ art they produced, by their cross-Channel peers.¹¹⁷ A parallel acceptance of French antinaturalist artists by British writers of similar sensibilities (much less by mainstream commentators) was slower to take root, only coming into full flower after

¹¹⁵ I follow Lethève (1959), pp. 320-21, in the dating of this paradigm shift, although there are a few notable exceptions, particularly in the case of Rossetti; see Chapter 4.

¹¹⁶ J. Lorrain, *Les Griseries* (Paris, 1887), pp. 85-86. Also included in the volume is ‘Printemps classique, pour Gustave Moreau’ (pp. 131-32). For further discussion of Lorrain’s writings on Burne-Jones and Moreau, see Chapter 3.

¹¹⁷ P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. R. Johnson (Cambridge, 1993), p. 39.

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the 1889 Exposition, and was marked by recurrent nationalistic backlash.¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, 1878 proved to be a pivotal moment in British antinaturalism’s dialogue with France.

Whether British painting would have been taken as seriously as it was at the 1878 Exposition Universelle had the French school not sunk to such an apparent low point, and had the general mood not dictated a reaction against contemporary subjects and a turning toward art that depicted a past that only existed in the imagination, is open to speculation. But if ‘misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows,’ it also, in this case, initiated a dialogue between two neighbours and long-time rivals.

¹¹⁸ The most well-known example of this backlash is the bitter debate, initiated by Chesneau with his open letter ‘The English School in Peril’, played out in the *Magazine of Art* 1887-88, and culminating in W. P. Frith’s excoriation of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists, whom he blamed for polluting the moral and technical purity of English art. It is significant that he should have conflated these two particular movements, as, while there was often little love lost between them, they represented two sides of the same coin of rebellion against the positivism and striving for objectivity that characterised establishment art in both countries.

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Chapter 2

‘The revenge of art on life’: Republican fantasia and antinaturalist escapism at the 1889 Exposition Universelle

Marius Vachon, Puvis de Chavannes’s first biographer, recalled a visit he made to the 1889 Exposition Universelle with the artist that had left a strong impression on him. Strolling through the vast Galerie des Machines, Vachon noticed a mounting unease take hold of Puvis, until, finding it too much to bear, he cried, ‘My children, there is no more art to be made. How can a painter or a poet fight against the social influence, the power of all this over the imagination? Let us go!’ When Vachon anxiously sought him out in his atelier the following day, Puvis was in low spirits. ‘I was sick from that visit,’ he told Vachon. ‘I had nightmares all night. What’s to become of us artists in the face of this invasion of engineers and mechanics?’¹ Leaving aside the irony that Puvis himself had originally been destined for a career as an engineer and that his rapidly ascending star as a muralist assured that demand for his own work would not flag, this apocalyptic vision of art and the imagination menaced by technology, however poignant, has become such a familiar trope in studies of Symbolism and other fin-de-siècle anti-realist movements that its uncritical acceptance hinders a deeper understanding of the ways in which antinaturalism responded to political and social change.

Robert de la Sizeranne, the Anglophile critic whose *La peinture contemporaine anglaise* (1895) rapidly became the key text on contemporary British painting, and antinaturalist painting in particular, on both sides of the Channel,² offered a radically different view of antinaturalism's position at the 1889 Exposition. Reminiscing in 1898 about his visit to the British Fine Art section, he eulogised the cathedral calm of the galleries, hung with eight canvases by Watts flanking Burne-Jones's masterpiece *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, as a refuge from all things commercial and vulgar:

As we came out of the Gallery of Machinery . . . we found ourselves in the silent and beautiful English Art Section, and we felt as though everywhere else in the exhibition we had seen nothing but matter, and here we had come on the exhibition of the soul . . . It seemed as though we had come forth from the

¹ 'Mes enfants, il n'y a plus d'art à faire. Comment un peintre, un poète, pourrait-il lutter avec cela d'influence sociale, de puissance sur les imaginations? Allons-nous en! [...] J'ai été malade de cette visite [...] j'en ai eu le cauchemar toute la nuit. Qu'allons-nous devenir, nous artistes, devant cette invasion d'ingénieurs et de mécaniciens?' M. Vachon, *Puvis de Chavannes* (Paris, 1895), p. 16.

² The book was published in a translation by H. M. Poynter as *English Contemporary Art* in 1898.

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Universal Exhibition of Wealth to see the symbolical expression of the Scorn of Wealth. All round this room were others, where emblems and signs of strength and luxury were collected from all the nations of the world – pyramids, silvered or gilt, representing the amount of precious metal dug year by year out of the earth; palaces and booths containing the most sumptuous products of the remotest isles – and here behold a king laying his crown at the feet of a beggar-maid for her beauty's sake! . . . It was a dream – but a noble dream – and every young man who passed that way, even though resolved never to sacrifice strength to right, or riches to beauty, was glad, nevertheless, that an artist should have depicted the Apotheosis of Poverty. It was the revenge of art on life.³

Sizeranne posits antinaturalist painting as constituting a spiritual oasis for sensitive souls at the margins of an increasingly secular and mechanised society; once again Art is pitted against Life, but in his scenario, Art achieves a small but decisive moral victory. It is as tempting to fall into Sizeranne's trap as into Vachon's; both set antinaturalist art – French and British – in polar opposition to contemporary society. Both of these views, however, pinpoint an important aspect of the immense appeal that antinaturalist art held for audiences at the 1889 Exposition Universelle – its offer of a rarefied escape from the quotidian and the overtly 'modern'. Although, as I have demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the presence of British antinaturalism at the 1878 Exposition was more influential on the current's subsequent development than has been previously acknowledged, the 1889 Exposition has overwhelmingly been viewed, then and now, as the moment antinaturalism truly 'arrived'.⁴ In order to better understand why 1889 was such a pivotal moment, both in the development of an anti-realist idiom and in the evolution of a dialogue between artists in Britain and France, however, we may need a different approach from the ones proposed above, one which delves beneath the Exposition's ostensible deification of science and technological progress. Jennifer L. Shaw's argument may provide a more appropriate model; she contends that the formation of a national identity under the Third Republic hinged on using public artworks – in particular, those of Puvis, whose work was claimed equally by conservatives and the avant-garde – to harness individual

³ R. de la Sizeranne, 'In Memoriam, Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Tribute from France', *Magazine of Art* (August 1898), p. 515.

⁴ This is particularly true of most twentieth-century studies of the reception of British antinaturalism (especially Burne-Jones) in France; apart from Lethève (1959), these include Des Cars, in Wildman and Christian (1998) and C. Allemand-Cosneau, in Munro (1992). Wilton and Upstone (1997), on the other hand, by stretching the chronological boundaries of Symbolism back to 1860 and as far ahead as 1910, dilute the significance of the exchanges taking place around the 1889 Exposition.

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subjectivity and personal fantasy in creating a sense of collective identity.⁵ Where the previous Exposition had been an intended balm for wounded national pride and a show of resilience to the rest of the Western world, the 1889 Exposition Universelle, with its fantastical, polychrome architecture and its exploitation of technology for the purpose of whimsy (especially in the nightly light-and-water shows), may be read as much as a dream – a collective fantasy of the modern state – as the antinaturalist paintings exhibited within its grounds.

Reading the work of Puvis, Moreau, Watts and Burne-Jones as an alternative fantasy responding to, or subverting, the collective dream formulated by the Exposition may allow us to better appreciate the growing complexities of the cross-Channel dialogue. Following three seemingly separate but ultimately intertwined threads, from the Exposition's socio-political milieu to its architectural and sculptural programme, to the positioning of antinaturalist art within the framework of the Centennale and British fine art section, to, finally, the paintings of Puvis and Watts themselves,⁶ I aim to demonstrate not only the increasing influence of French and British antinaturalists upon each other and the implications for the continuation of their dialogue in the 1890s, but also how they were beginning to self-consciously locate themselves within a defined artistic tradition. The antinaturalist reaction to the positivist, public-spirited dream of the Third Republic as embodied by the Exposition constituted not so much a total retreat into a private dream-world as a reflection 'in a glass darkly' of their surroundings.

The Gentle Art of Making Enemies: Nationalism and the Exposition's Politics

In order to gain a purchase on the reception of these works, and the alternative fantasy they proposed, we need to examine the socio-political milieu of the 1889 Exposition, the so-called 'Republic of Republicans', with a particular eye to the Exposition's repercussions for Franco-British relations (still, at this point, characterised primarily by cordial dislike).⁷ The preceding decade, which had

⁵ J. L. Shaw, *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* (New Haven and London, 2002), pp. 10-11.

⁶ While I will make some reference to Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and Moreau's *Galatée* in this chapter, I have reserved much of my discussion of these artists for Chapter 3.

⁷ I am indebted in my approach in this section, as I was in the preceding chapter, to Paul Greenhalgh's insistence that the works in the Fine Art sections of the Expositions cannot be considered independently

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witnessed the ascendancy of a centre-left Republican government, increasing economic prosperity and colonial power, and a measure of relative calm at home and abroad, yet which had also witnessed the mounting threat of Boulangism, gave rise to a potent blend of optimistic positivism, nationalist pride, and fearful distrust that was in some ways a far cry from the national mood in 1878, in other ways uncomfortably familiar.

I have spoken already of the hoped-for tranquillising effect of the 1878 Exposition in the wake of the Seize Mai crisis;⁸ the organisers of the 1889 Exposition seem to have begun with the intention of calming one source of discontent, and ended by playing a central role in averting another, unforeseen, crisis. The Exposition was, among other things, intended as a soporific for the fantasies of *revanche* that had never entirely faded since the humiliating defeat of 1871.⁹ However, it found itself in

the unlikely position of keeper of peace and saviour of the government when the premature possibility of *revanche* and rebellion reared its head in the shape of Boulangism.¹⁰ This is not the place to discuss the complexities of Boulangism; it will suffice to note that one of its most remarkable qualities was the appeal of its extreme nationalist and anti-establishment platform to both ends of the political spectrum. That Boulanger could have inspired such hero worship and captured the imagination and loyalties of such diverse and divergent groups bespeaks a deep-seated discontent with the Republican agenda, driven by its fundamental beliefs of democracy, equality, and science.

Ironically, given its conciliatory posture, the Exposition also managed to drive a wedge between France and many of the countries invited to take part. The significance of its date at the centenary of the Revolution, and indeed the overt initial staging of the Exposition as a commemoration of the Revolution and celebration of its ideals, were not lost on the monarchies invited to participate – not least, Britain.¹¹ of the Exposition's physical fabric and social setting, although I strongly disagree with his dismissal of the art displays as having had little impact on artistic innovation (Greenhalgh, 1988, p. 218).

⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹ See R. Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 169-222, on the sublimation of *revanche* in the last decade of the century and its manifestations in visual culture.

¹⁰ For detailed accounts of Boulangism's rise and fall, see Chapman (1962), pp. 265-91 and R. Tombs, *France 1814-1914* (London, 1996), pp. 447-53. Jacques Chastenet insists most succinctly on the Exposition's role in 'giving the coup de grace to Boulangism' (Chastenet, 1952, p. 214).

¹¹ French monarchists and legitimists were also, understandably, upset by the conflation of centenary and Exposition; an unsigned editorial in the rightwing *La Patrie* expressed strong reservations about the appropriateness of combining the two events, and the newspaper appears to have acted on its

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Queen Victoria refused to attend the opening, even recalling her ambassador to ensure that no representative of the British government was in Paris for the opening.¹² (The Prince of Wales, a popular fixture of the 1878 Exposition, was, however, permitted to attend, and made as favourable an impression on the French press as he had done eleven years before.) The Queen was far from being the only Briton not amused by the implications of an Exposition that paid tribute to the overthrow of a monarchy: the British press's coverage of the preparations for the Exposition's opening ranged from mild disdain to open scorn, though few matched the mix of hostility and nationalistic one-upmanship of an unsigned article in the *Saturday Review*:

The French have made a bad start with their Exhibition. The first circular issued by the Government, with its tall talk about the Hegira of the First Revolution – there have been so many that it is indispensable to distinguish them by numbers – set all Monarchical Governments against it; and though this unfortunate document was subsequently disavowed, they have failed to obtain that recognition for their venture which Royal and Imperial commissions can alone confer.¹³

Even a retroactive attempt by the opposition to censure the British government for its diplomatic faux pas in banning the British ambassador from the opening ceremonies came to grief, and was met with bemusement and scepticism in France; a journalist writing for *Le Moniteur universel* commented tartly that 'as agreeable as these flatteries are, we prefer, for our part, that foreigners not occupy themselves with our domestic affairs, and Mr Gladstone's congratulations do not make up for the impression given us by Bismarck's small-talk in the Reichstag'.¹⁴ Perhaps, a month into the Exposition's run, observers on both sides were beginning to realise the inherent ludicrousness of what was fast becoming a tempest in a teapot. The

rightwing neo-Catholic writer Eugène Melchior de Vogüé summed up the situation most succinctly, remarking cynically that both the republican grandstanding and the convictions by devoting relatively little space to coverage of the Exposition, particularly in comparison with 1878. ‘L’Exposition Universelle’, *La Patrie* (2 May 1889).

¹² Greenhalgh (1988), pp. 35-36. An article in *Le Temps*, published the day after the Exposition’s opening, notes that Britain’s sole representative at the ceremonies was Austin Lee, first secretary to the embassy of England, whereas most other participating countries were represented by ambassadors and ministers, although not, with the sole exception of Belgium, by their monarchs (‘Dernières nouvelles: Inauguration de l’Exposition Universelle de 1889’, *Le Temps*, 7 May 1889).

¹³ ‘The Paris Exhibition’, *Saturday Review* 67, no. 1748 (27 April 1889), p. 506. The writer goes on to note, with no small satisfaction, that ‘Great Britain alone is fairly forward in her arrangements’ and is likely to be one of the few national sections ready in time for the opening (p. 507).

¹⁴ ‘Mais, quelque agréables que soient ces flatteries, nous aimons mieux, pour notre part, que les étrangers ne s’occupent pas de nos affaires intérieures, et les félicitations de M. Gladstone ne rachètent pas l’impression que nous laissent les menus propos du prince de Bismarck au Reichstag’. L. L., ‘Le Parlement anglais et l’Exposition de 1889’, *Le Moniteur universel* (2 June 1889).

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monarchist backlash were lost on the average Exposition-goer, who viewed the Exposition as a celebration of industry and technology first, and of France’s superiority second.¹⁵

Given the adverse British reaction to the Exposition’s commemoration of the Revolution’s centenary, and France’s awareness of it, it is strange, to say the least, that the radical nature of the British Fine Art section’s star exhibit – a king removing his crown and paying homage to a humble beggar – merited no mention in any contemporary reviews.¹⁶ Silence on such a thorny subject is probably to be expected in British journals; silence in French criticism is rather more surprising. Perhaps, in view of the charged atmosphere, there was a tacit agreement among critics not to raise such a touchy issue. More likely, the unfamiliarity of the subject matter and its unusual rendering overshadowed the work’s subversive implications.

Britain was not, of course, the only nation guilty of chauvinistic posturing. In the years leading up to the opening of the Exposition, a growing chorus of opposition in the French government grumbled that the Exposition would only serve as a vector for ‘deleterious’ foreign ideas, particularly from countries more progressive in the arts and industry.¹⁷ Conversely, some Republican critics expressed bemusement tinged with annoyance at what they perceived as the resolutely nationalistic and insular character of the paintings displayed in the British Fine Art section, implying that after three previous Expositions, the British ought to have learned something from their neighbour’s superiority in that arena and applied those lessons to improving their own art. Sizeranne later summed up these critics’ perplexity in the face of such apparent intransigence with a revealing military analogy: ‘The assaults of realism and impressionism break against their aesthetic like the squadrons of Ney upon the squares of Wellington’.¹⁸

The ill-feeling stirred up by the Exposition’s ‘revolutionary’ nature obscures the fact that, in the decade since the last Exposition, Britain and France had been moving gradually toward an artistic rapprochement, or at least a growing openness to

¹⁵ E. Melchior de Vogüé, *Remarques sur l’Exposition du Centenaire* (Paris, 1889), pp. 6-8.

¹⁶ At least, no traced mention: I refer here to the major newspapers and art periodicals, of which I have made a thorough survey.

¹⁷ G. P. Weisberg, ‘The Republican Style in the Age of the Eiffel Tower’, in M. Levin and G. P. Weisberg, eds., *1889: When the Eiffel Tower Was New*, exh. cat. (South Hadley, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1989), p. 2.

¹⁸ ‘Les assauts du réalisme, de l’impressionnisme se brisent sur leur esthétique comme les escadrons de Ney sur les carrés de Wellington’. Sizeranne (1895), p. 3.

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what the other had to offer. The *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and the *Magazine of Art* may serve as a useful barometer of this détente. The *Gazette*'s coverage of the Grosvenor Gallery exhibitions and its devotion of ever greater space to articles on contemporary British art, particularly the art of the Pre-Raphaelites, have already been discussed.¹⁹ The *Magazine of Art* was somewhat slower to catch up, and its interest in art across the Channel did not grow in a predictable upward trajectory. Its growing openness to contemporary French art owed much to the efforts of the critic Claude Phillips, an avowed Francophile whose pivotal role in opening eyes and minds on both sides of the Channel has yet to be examined adequately. Phillips not only served as *correspondant pour l'Angleterre* for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* from 1885, but he also published a series of articles in the *Magazine of Art* in 1885 on Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, and Burne-Jones (the first two being among the first serious studies of those artists in a British art periodical), evidence of a growing, if sometimes grudging, interest in French art, including antinaturalism. If, as the decade drew to a close, there were occasional retrenchments and rumblings of reactionary discontent, most notably in 1888 when W. P. Frith rounded on the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists with a hysterical tirade against what he saw as their technical incompetence and immoral subject matter, it is significant that these detractors conflated and confused progressive tendencies in both Britain and France.²⁰ Furthermore, photographs of the installations of some of the galleries in the Centennale exhibition (notably the Galerie Rapp) indicate that the French Fine Art section's organisers appear, grudgingly or otherwise, to have taken some inspiration from the comparatively sparse hang, probably influenced by that of the Grosvenor Gallery, of the British Fine Art section from the previous Exposition.²¹

Britain's own waning political and economic ascendancy, and its attempts to refashion its image and re-present itself in a way that took the sting out of these changes, also needs to be considered here. Although Britain's colonial and economic might was still the object of resentful envy in France, the nation was in fact, by the time of the Exposition, at the midpoint of the long Indian summer of its world dominance that characterised the last two decades of Victoria's reign. In an attempt to

¹⁹ See Chapter 1.

²⁰ W. P. Frith, 'Crazes in Art, "Pre-Raphaelitism" and "Impressionism"', *Magazine of Art* 11 (1888), pp. 187-91.

²¹ See Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, Paris Album 4o 28 (*Exposition Universelle de 1889*, H. Blancard, 1889), nos. 686 and 687.

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recoup some of the glory it now saw receding inexorably into the past, Britain did precisely that – look to its history. As Anne Helmreich has demonstrated, the swing of the pendulum from unvarnished modernity to nostalgia for a lost golden age can be charted in the reversion to imitation-Tudor architecture for the British sections of the Expositions of 1878, 1889 and 1900.²² Gone were the days of the Crystal Palace; now cutting-edge iron architecture had become the province of France, and Britain staged its identity as a pre-industrial, pre-democratic, and, by extension, pre-Reformation utopia, with the centrepiece of its fine art section a tour-de-force by Burne-Jones, an artist by now a byword for his medievalising tendencies²³ – a jarring intrusion indeed into an Exposition hosted by a Republic that aggressively styled itself as modern and secular.

'Ces palais féeriques': the Exposition as capital of Republican fantasy

As the first Exposition Universelle held during the Third Republic's truly republican phase, the 1889 Exposition offered the state unparalleled opportunity for self-promotion. After the lacklustre architecture of the last Exposition, whose sole

new edifice – the Palais du Trocadéro – had inspired derision and whose overall effect had been, as Louis Gonse recalled, ‘a bit thin, monotonous, and grey . . . [like] a series of juxtaposed hangars’,²⁴ the Republic and its chosen designers, Gustave Eiffel, Stephen Sauvestre, Charles-Louis-Ferdinand Dutert and Jean-Camille Formigé, worked in close partnership to formulate a tightly integrated architectural and decorative programme in which fancy and (closely regulated) imagination played as important a role as hard science in promulgating the values of the Republic. Most explorations of the Exposition’s design have focused on its exploitation of iron and glass and its break with historicist style, particularly in its most iconic structures, the

²² A. Helmreich, ‘The Nation and the Garden: England and the World’s Fairs at the Turn of the Century’, in *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, ed. M. Facos and S. Hirsh (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 39-64. Although Helmreich focuses on the 1900 Exposition Universelle and the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, her arguments are equally applicable in the context of 1889.

²³ Burne-Jones’s medievalism was frequently parodied in the British satirical press; *Punch*’s typically deflationary caricature of *King Cophetua* during its showing at the Grosvenor Gallery cast the beggar maid as a limp and emaciated Pallid Maiden to whom a Mediaeval Royal Personage (Cophetua) complains, ‘Oh I say, look here, you’ve been sitting on my crown’, with the caption, ‘Yes, and she looks as if she had, too, poor thing!’ For further discussion of British parodies of the picture, see Wildman and Christian (1998), pp. 197 and 254-55.

²⁴ ‘Un peu maigre, monotone et gris [...] c’était une série de hangars juxtaposés’: L. Gonse, ‘Exposition Universelle de 1889. Coup d’oeil avant l’ouverture’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (May 1889), p. 355.

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Tour Eiffel and the Galerie des Machines.²⁵ I want instead to investigate the other weapons in the designers’ arsenal – colour, light, moving water – and how they created a fantasia that was critiqued and ultimately subverted by the Symbolist artists exhibiting within it.

The guiding principles of the Exposition’s design were, simply put, to throw off the fusty historicism that had characterised much of the century’s public architecture and to do so with the aid of cutting-edge materials and design. Naturally, economic concerns played a central role; the extensive use of iron was intended to bolster ailing national industry in the face of American and German competition and to proclaim France’s expertise in engineering (and, by implication, military technology) to the world.²⁶ Yet iron edifices stripped of ornamentation, no matter how strongly they might appeal to the most progressive elements of the architectural world, were not guaranteed to charm the broader public.²⁷ The tower and the machine hall remained unadorned, but for the rest of the halls of the Champ de Mars, Formigé enlisted the help of the tile manufacturer Emile Muller to fashion a polychrome skin of enamelled tile to cover the metallic skeletons of the buildings.²⁸ While the result of their efforts is difficult to discern in contemporary photographs of the Exposition, some of Formigé’s surviving designs for the decoration of the cupola of the Palais des Beaux-Arts [Figure 14] reveal vivid juxtapositions of warm yellows and cool blues and greens, an explicit borrowing of Neo-classical vocabulary and a careful interweaving of republican motifs into the overall scheme. Judging from

²⁵ Examples include C. Mathieu, *1889: La Tour Eiffel et l’Exposition Universelle* (exh. cat., Paris, Musée d’Orsay, 1989); D. L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989) and Levin and Weisberg (1989). T. Burollet, ed., *Quand Paris dansait avec Marianne*, (exh. cat., Paris, Musée du Petit Palais, 1989) instead concentrates on the iconography of the Republic’s symbol Marianne, a point which I shall discuss in Chapter 3.

²⁶ Silverman (1989), pp. 52-54.

²⁷ The controversy incited by the winning design for the Tour à 300 mètres (the Eiffel Tower) is notorious; a group of prominent and mostly conservative artists, writers and composers published an open letter to Adolphe Alphand, the director of works for the Exposition, in *Le Temps* on 14 February 1887, protesting his decision to erect ‘a vertiginously ridiculous tower, dominating Paris, like a gigantic black factory chimney, crushing Notre-Dame, the Sainte-Chapelle, the Tour Saint-Jacques, the Louvre,

the dome of the Invalides, the Arc de Triomphe with its barbarous bulk, all our humiliated monuments, all our belittled architecture will disappear in this stupefying dream' ('une tour vertigineusement ridicule, dominant Paris, ainsi qu'une noire et gigantesque cheminée d'usine, écrasant de sa masse barbare Notre-Dame, la Sainte-Chapelle, la tour Saint-Jacques, le Louvre, le dôme des Invalides, l'Arcde-

Triomphe, tous nos monuments humiliés, toutes nos architectures rapetissées, qui disparaîtront dans ce rêve stupéfiant'). As this brief excerpt demonstrates, much of their quarrel with the winning design was the way it seemed to elevate industry above high culture, history and religion (the latter of which will be discussed further in Chapter 3).

²⁸For a more detailed discussion of the role of polychromy in the Exposition's architecture, see C. Mathieu, 'Architecture métallique et polychrome', in C. Mathieu (1989), pp. 59-73.

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contemporary accounts, classicising sobriety and bright hues combined to striking effect.

One of Formigé's most enthusiastic partisans was the architect and critic Frantz Jourdain, an advocate of unvarnished modernity. Writing in the *Revue des arts décoratifs*, he congratulated the Exposition's architects on their refusal to disguise the nature of their materials and their successful integration of structure and decoration. His review, which borders on rhapsody, is worth quoting at length.

Contemporary industry, so rich, so intelligent, so inventive and thus far so parsimoniously employed, has this time collaborated greatly in the final success: staff, faïence, enamelled lava, tinted brick, glazed tile, lacquered zinc, coloured plaster, glimmering mosaics, flashing glass, all kinds of terra cotta, used in profusion, throw a sparkling gold powder over these fairylike palaces, which effervesce under the sun like French wines and sing of the triumph of Gallic gaiety and of rationalism over a morose and antediluvian scholasticism.²⁹

An anonymous writer for *La Construction Moderne*, an architectural periodical not ordinarily noted for its expressive prose, was no less fervent in his praise, particularly for the illuminated fountains (an invention first constructed for the London Exhibition of 1884):

On the Champ de Mars, the festival is no less beautiful. The Tower, whose arcs and platforms are bordered with luminous cords, is ablaze with Bengal lights which give it a truly impressive aspect, both fantastic and grandiose. The iron colossus rises in the night enveloped in blood-red flames, while at the summit shines the tricolour beacon and electric reflectors project their blue rays over Paris. Finally, the illuminated fountains launch their sparkling spray toward the heavens. The water takes on the colours of a prism one by one . . . Blue, red, green succeed each other or blend together. Then the light, penetrating the liquid mass, gives it the appearance of molten silver which falls back in droplets in the basin.³⁰

²⁹'L'industrie contemporaine, si riche pourtant, si intelligente, si inventive et si parcimonieusement mise jusqu'ici à contribution, a largement collaboré, cette fois, au succès final: les stafs, les faïences, les laves émaillées, les briques teintées, les tuiles vernissées, les zincs laqués, les enduits colorés, les mosaïques chatoyantes, les verres flamboyantes, les terres cuites de toutes natures, employés à profusion, jettent une étincelante poudre d'or sur ces palais féériques, qui pétillent sous le soleil comme des vins de France et chantent le triomphe de la gaieté gauloise et de rationalisme sur une morose et antédiluvienne scolastique': F. Jourdain, 'La décoration et le rationalisme architecturaux à l'Exposition universelle', *Revue des arts décoratifs* 10 (August 1889), p. 36.

³⁰'Au Champ-de-Mars, la fête n'est pas moins belle. La Tour, dont les arcs et les plates-formes sont bordés de cordons lumineux, est embrasée de feux de bengale qui lui donnent un aspect fantastique et grandiose véritablement impressionnant. Le colosse de fer se dresse dans la nuit enveloppé de flammes sanglantes, tandis qu'au sommet brille le phare aux trois couleurs et que des réflecteurs électriques projettent leurs rayons bleus sur Paris. Enfin, les fontaines lumineuses lancent vers le ciel leurs gerbes

étincelantes. L'eau emprunte tour à tour les couleurs du prisme [. . .] Le bleu, le rouge, le vert se succèdent ou se mélangent. Puis la lumière pénétrant seule dans la masse liquide la fait paraître de
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Both Jourdain and the writer for *La Construction Moderne* were careful to underpin their panegyrics with references to the aspects of republicanism that had made possible the construction of these 'fairy palaces': technological innovation (the synthesis of new materials and new methods of construction and electricity), rationalism and positivism, and colonialism (Jourdain and Gonse credited the steady influx of goods from the Orient with marked improvements in design and ornamentation at home). Sympathetic commentators echoed these praises, frequently imputing moral values to the glittering domes and towers of the Champ de Mars. Emile Monod boasted that they were an affirmation of the Republic's 'pacific genius, creative power and, in many cases, its still incontestable superiority'; although such hyperbole smacks of the flag-waving of a government functionary, similar examples were scattered liberally throughout the pages of republican newspapers and the numerous one-off publications brought out to celebrate the Exposition's opening.³¹ This city of dreams, they implied, represented the apotheosis of the Republic and the liberal values in which it was grounded, which in turn would feed the desire of all who experienced it to keep France on the path to ever greater glory – a self-perpetuating cycle of dream and reality.

Not everyone was prepared to buy into this official fantasy, however, and the Exposition's architecture proved a double-edged sword in the hands of its detractors. Much as the Exposition's champions evoked its metallic and polychrome architecture as proof, because of its beauty, whimsy and modernity, of the Republic's greatness, its critics used these same features to mock the Exposition's, and by extension, the Republic's, philistinism, corruption, and, most significantly, its flimsy impermanence and unreality – the dark underside of the collective dream. J.-K. Huysmans penned a blistering attack on the Exposition, 'Le Fer', in which he mocked the tastelessness of the palaces of the Champ de Mars as 'heavy and garish, emphatic and mediocre, evoking in a different medium the theatrical painting of Makart so cherished in l'argent fondu qui retombe en gouttelettes dans le bassin': *La Construction Moderne*, vol. 4, no. 31 (11 May 1889), p. 362.

³¹ 'Le génie pacifique, la puissance créatrice et, dans bien des cas, la supériorité encore incontestable, sinon toujours incontestée': E. Monod, *Beaux-arts et merveilles de l'industrie à la fin du XIXe siècle (Exposition universelle de 1889): grand ouvrage illustré historique, encyclopédique, descriptif* (Paris, 1889), vol. 1, p. ix. For further examples of republican enthusiasm for the appearance of the Champ de Mars, see especially M. Huart, 'L'Inauguration', *L'Événement* (8 May 1889), Gonse (1889) and E. Bergerat, 'Paris!', in F.-G. Dumas and L. de Fourcaud, eds., *Revue de l'Exposition Universelle de 1889* (Paris, 1889), p. 6.

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Hamburg in the superfluous splendour of bordellos'.³² In a single sentence Huysmans turned republican pride and moral rectitude on its head, comparing the palaces' ornamentation not merely to that of a brothel but to a *German* brothel decorated by the Austro-Hungarian Empire's chief exponent of academic pomposity. In inventing this tawdry fantasy, he insinuated, France had lowered itself to the level of its mortal enemy, for while Germany might be a colossus of blood and iron, France had always consoled itself, especially in the face of humiliating military defeat, on its unimpeachable superiority in the arts and general good taste. Edmond de Goncourt was scarcely more forgiving; making his way through the crowds on opening day, he admired the sunset ablaze with fireworks and the obelisk on the place de la Concorde bathed in white light 'with the rosy colour of a champagne sorbet' while noting with waspish amusement the ecstatic-looking ladies queuing for the public toilets, 'their

bladders overcome by emotion'.³³ This crude detail neatly undermines both the highflown rhetoric of the event and the dignity and aesthetic appeal of the setting, highlighting Goncourt's disgust with all for which the Republic stood.³⁴ Other commentators, more predictably, made the Tour Eiffel [Figure 15] the target of their criticisms. Despite the mass protest of conservative cultural figures against the possibility of the tower making a permanent blot on the skyline of Paris,³⁵ a significant part of the criticism painted it as inherently precarious, an overconfident iron giant bound to crumble into a scrap heap. A tongue-in-cheek exposé entitled 'Elle a trois cents mètres!!!' which appeared in *L'Art* shortly before the Exposition opened playfully deflated the hubristic mythmaking already engulfing the tower by affecting comparisons with the pyramids and the great cathedrals, pagodas and Roman palaces, before ending with the *memento mori* that it would one day be reduced to a pile of rust and its worshipers would all be dead.³⁶ Beneath its sly humour, the article

³² 'C'est lourd et criard, emphatique et mesquin; cela évoque en un art différent la peinture théâtrale de Mackart [sic] si chère à Hambourg au faste redondant des maisons de filles!': J.-K. Huysmans, 'Le Fer', in *idem, Certains* (Paris, 1889), p. 173.

³³ 'Avec la couleur rosée d'un sorbet au champagne'; 'la vessie émotionnée': E. de Goncourt, *Journal* (Paris, 1989), entry for Monday, 6 May 1889, vol. 3, p. 267.

³⁴ He adds, in the entry for 14 July 1889, 'Today, the anniversary, thundering from all the cannons of the good city of Paris, of the Revolution of '89, of this revolution which made of the great France of yesteryear the small and ridiculous France of today' ('Aujourd'hui, l'anniversaire, tonitruant par tous les canons de la bonne ville de Paris, de la Révolution de 89, de cette révolution qui a fait de la grande France d'autrefois la petite et ridicule France d'aujourd'hui.') *Ibid.*, p. 295. As a descendant of the aristocracy, Goncourt could scarcely be expected to approve of the celebrations for the centenary of the Revolution.

³⁵ See note 26 above.

³⁶ L. Augé de Lassus, 'Elle a trois cents metres!!!', *L'Art* (1889), pp. 164-67.

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underscored some of the unnerving contradictions on which the tower was grounded. For the Tour Eiffel, that much-vaunted symbol of progress, actually represented a technological dead end, a sort of funeral monument to itself. As Richard Guy Wilson has pointed out, the tower and the Galerie des Machines were already outmoded by the time they were built; for France's greatest rivals, Germany and America, steel construction had by then taken precedence over iron.³⁷ Even if one were unaware of the implications for French industry, it was hard to ignore the disturbing fact that the tower, which fast became the symbol of the Exposition and, by extension, of Paris and of France, was utterly devoid of functional utility – which rather undermined the Republic's identification with utilitarianism and progress, outdated technology harnessed to create a reflexive, useless memorial to itself. ³⁸ Viewed thus, the collective dream spun by the Exposition was unsettlingly empty. Goncourt wrote of his unease as he gazed on the Champ de Mars from the Trocadéro in just such terms: 'It is as if it puts you in a dream. This Exposition has no reality . . .'³⁹

Horizons of expectation: the position of antinaturalism at the Exposition

Inside the Palais des Beaux-Arts, the Republic was busy shoring up its standing, seriously threatened at the last Exposition, as the artistic leader of the civilised world with not one but two fine art exhibitions – the jury-selected Décennale displaying French artistic production since the 1878 Exposition, and the retrospective Centennale, chosen by an individual, showing an ostensibly balanced history of the French school since the Revolution of 1789. Whether its avant-garde artists were willing to go along with this grandiose publicity exercise, and where they chose to position themselves within it, was another question.

The organiser of the Centennale was former Fine Arts minister Antonin Proust, a vocal supporter of Realism and a friend and patron of Manet and Monet.

Disappointed by the trite conservatism that reigned in the French art exhibition in 1878, he had been lobbying to stage a centenary retrospective in addition to the Décennale since the early 1880s. Unlike the Décennale, which operated under the time-honoured system of a jury composed of Academicians and other officially

³⁷ R. G. Wilson, 'Challenge and Response: Americans and the Architecture of the 1889 Exposition', in A. Blaugrund, ed., *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposition* (exh. cat., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989), p. 104.

³⁸ Silverman (1989), p. 3.

³⁹ 'Ça vous met comme dans un rêve. Cette Exposition n'a pas la réalité': Goncourt (1989), entry for Saturday, 8 May 1889, vol. 3, p. 271.

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recognised artists, the Centennale can be read as a record of Proust's personal predilections, complicated by his role as a promoter of republican values. The Centennale's most remarked-upon features were its showcasing of Courbet and the Barbizon school, as if to compensate for the shoddy treatment accorded them in 1878, and its inclusion of recent work by Manet and Monet (a first at an Exposition Universelle).⁴⁰ Raymond Isay defined the spirit of the 1889 Exposition as a contradictory melange of conservatism and progress, novelty and tradition; nowhere is this more evident than in the French Fine Art exhibitions.⁴¹ Ironically, while the Décennale avoided the humiliating debacle of the previous Exposition, the exhibition of contemporary art still came off as staid and conservative while the retrospective succeeded in uniting tradition and innovation.

Although Fantin-Latour showed five Wagnerian paintings in the Décennale,⁴² Puvis and Moreau preferred to exhibit only in the Centennale, apparently in the face of protests from their colleagues on the Décennale jury. Puvis made the token gesture of allowing the mention of his recent decorative schemes for the New Sorbonne and the museums of Amiens and Lyon in the Décennale catalogue while otherwise absenting himself from the exhibition (a fact much lamented by critics).⁴³ He reserved his easel paintings, two of which (*Jeunes filles au bord de la mer* and *L'Enfant prodigue*) fell within the Décennale's purview, for the walls of the Centennale's Galerie Rapp. Moreau, despite his eligibility as a member of the jury and a newlyelected

member of the Institut to show in both exhibitions, and despite the urging of his colleagues, refused to submit work to the Décennale and appeared solely in the retrospective with the bookends of his Salon career: his 1865 success *Le Jeune homme et la Mort* and the 1880 *Galatée*.⁴⁴ A perusal of the catalogue of the Décennale offers

⁴⁰ On Proust's role in the creation and organisation of the Centennale, see Vaisse (1995), pp. 126-28.

⁴¹ Isay (1937), p. 188.

⁴² Fantin-Latour's works in the Exposition excited little comment in the press on either side of the Channel, although what notices he received were complimentary. His Wagnerian pictures will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

⁴³ The works listed in the French Fine Art catalogue were *Pro patriâ ludus* [sic], *Vision antique*, *Inspiration chrétienne*, *Le Rhône et la Saône*, *Le Bois Sacré*, and the mural for the great hemicycle of the Sorbonne; all were unnumbered: *Exposition Universelle internationale de 1889: Catalogue officiel. Tome I: Groupe I, Oeuvres d'Art, classes 1 à 5*, (Lille, 1889), p. 46).

⁴⁴ Moreau's attitude toward the Académie des beaux-arts had always been ambivalent; he craved the recognition that membership would guarantee while cherishing his equivocal status as an outsider and frowning upon the facile, market-friendly classicism it sanctioned. Objections on the grounds of principle were intertwined with personal rivalries: he had put his name forward for election in 1882, only to be beaten out by Gustave Boulanger, who had defeated him in the Prix de Rome competition in 1849. Elected to fill the seat vacated by Boulanger's death in 1888, Moreau was always a reluctant Academician; indeed, the memorial speech he was obliged to deliver for Boulanger upon his election

an explanation for their actions: the exhibition was dominated by the diluted justemilieu

naturalism of the recently deceased Bastien-Lepage's followers, with painters such as Léon Lhermitte, Alfred Roll and Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret taking pride of place. Rather than mix with company whose principles stood in diametric opposition to their own, it appears that Puvis and Moreau elected to throw their lot in with history and wished their work to be seen as belonging to a tradition rooted in the Romanticism of Delacroix and Chassériau – even if, as one of the few surviving installation views of the grand staircase [Figure 16] reveals, Puvis's early allegory *L'Automne* ended up sharing wall space with Courbet's *Stonebreakers*.⁴⁵

The decision of Puvis and Moreau to anchor their work within tradition indicates a sea change that had been unfolding since 1878. Hans Robert Jauss's theory of the 'horizon of expectations' may be most useful in helping to understand how and why this change occurred. Jauss posits the reception of a new work of literature (or art) as bound up in a complex network of previous aesthetic experience, which directs the reader's or viewer's perception; the horizon of expectations shifts subtly and incrementally with the accumulation of new experiences.⁴⁶ It was just such a gradual but accelerating accretion of new experience, in the form of reproduced images and literary advocacy, that brought about the alteration in the reception of Symbolist painting. By this time, Symbolism was no longer an intriguing aberration without a name (Zola's caustic jibes against Moreau notwithstanding). Moréas's Symbolist manifesto, with its famous proclamation that poetry should 'clothe the Idea in a sensible form which, nevertheless, would not be a goal in itself but which, in serving to express the Idea, would remain its subject' and its avowal that this concept had roots that reached back to the beginnings of literature, had been published in *Le* was a polemic, albeit cloaked in politesse, against the commercialisation of history painting by Boulanger and his ilk. See Cooke (2002), vol. 2, pp. 338-48, for the full text of Moreau's speech.

⁴⁵ As most surviving installation photographs of the Palais des Beaux-Arts show the grand staircase, the hang of the adjoining Centennale galleries is a matter of speculation. Judging from contemporary reviews, it would appear that works by individual artists were exhibited contiguously (or at least within the same gallery), with star pieces (or those works too large for the side galleries) ranged around the grand staircase.

⁴⁶ H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982), pp. 22-25. Especially important in the present case is his characterisation of the change of the horizon of expectation in the face of a new work: 'If one characterises as aesthetic distance the disparity between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work, whose reception can result in a "change of horizons" through negation of familiar experiences, or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness, then this aesthetic distance can be objectified historically along the spectrum of the audience's reactions and criticism's judgment (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or belated understanding).'

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Figaro in 1886 to cheers and jeers.⁴⁷ Although the applicability of Moréas's theories to pictorial Symbolism has been a matter of some debate, it is worth noting that shortly after publishing his manifesto, he took up his pen in defence of Symbolist painting, anointing Puvis, 'whose work, beyond the narrowness of the impression, flourishes among the coruscating haloes of Pure Symbol', as leader of the movement.⁴⁸ (Ironically, despite the emulation of other Symbolist poets, Puvis always kept himself at a distance, apparently preferring to think of himself as a rejuvenator of the French tradition of high art – which is what the choice of exhibiting solely in the Centennale implies.)⁴⁹ Although the literary Symbolism promulgated by Moréas and his peers might not have reached its apogee by 1889, the term itself was on enough writers' lips by the time the Exposition opened that, while not often used by critics in

mainstream periodicals, terms in a similar vein, such as ‘idealist’ and ‘imaginative’ were frequently applied to the work of Puvis, Moreau and Watts. As well, the latter two were by now linked in the public imagination, thanks to Huysmans, to the Decadent phantasmagoria of *À rebours*. The ‘period of rupture’, to use Bourdieu’s term, in which reviewers found themselves lost in 1878 had now begun to move toward becoming the norm – or one of them.⁵⁰

Hand in hand with this surge in literary interest in pictorial Symbolism – particularly as practiced in Britain – came a gradually increasing flow of reproductive prints across the Channel, albeit of varying quality. Arguably, these post-1878 reproductions played a more important role in disseminating the reputation of British Symbolists in France and in changing the horizon of expectations in favour of their work than the few, but vital, engravings circulated before Burne-Jones and Watts appeared in the flesh at the 1878 Exposition. The inherent inadequacies of engravings, in terms of size, technique, and colour, to convey the impact of the original painting could not be fully appreciated until the originals themselves were made available; once made aware of the true appearance of Burne-Jones and Watts’s paintings, connoisseurs’ demands for more reproductions was complicated by their

⁴⁷ Moréas, ‘Le Symbolisme – Manifeste de Jean Moréas’, *Le Figaro* (18 September 1886).

⁴⁸ ‘Mais hâtons-nous de proclamer la souveraineté du maître Puvis de Chavannes, dont l’oeuvre, hors les

parvités de l’impression, s’essore parmi les halos coruscants du Pur Symbole’: J. Moréas, ‘Peintures’, *Le Symboliste* 3 (22 October 1886), p. 9.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Shaw (2002), p. 128. Puvis’s rightwing supporters, such as Ferdinand Brunetière, also stressed his alignment with the classical tradition, wishing to ‘rescue’ his work from the stigma of the inward-looking mysticism associated with Symbolism.

⁵⁰ Bourdieu (1991), p. 43; see also Chapter 1, n. 62.

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recognition that engravings and photographs were unsatisfactory substitutes for the real thing, whetting the appetite for more and better images which could only be satisfied by seeing, once again, more paintings.⁵¹ Thanks to the Grosvenor Gallery’s ties with *L’Art*, its illustrated catalogues were available from the Librairie de l’Art from 1878; the illustrations consisted mainly of simple line drawings by the artists themselves or by Alfred Dawson, intended to serve as aides-memoires only.⁵² According to Philippe Saunier, one of the only known ways for the French amateur frustrated with the poor quality of the catalogues or the sparse illustrations in Ernest Chesneau’s *La peinture anglaise* (which went through multiple printings after its 1882 publication), pre-1889, to lay hands on high-quality reproductions was through personal contacts in Britain. Thus, where observers in 1878 responded to the Symbolism of Burne-Jones and Watts with more or less ‘innocent’ eyes, those in 1889, while unarguably better informed, were depending on a combination of a burgeoning literature on the movement, problematic reproductions, and distant memories of actual paintings.

In any case, French observers’ reactions to the British Fine Art exhibition could be broadly characterised as a struggle to negotiate déjà vu and the shock of the new. If French art (at least, the official version of it) had largely recovered its equipoise after the humiliation of the previous Exposition, critics were still bewildered at Britain’s continued resistance to its influence – not, some of them admitted, that this was a bad thing. The budding Symbolist critic Albert Aurier sourly congratulated France on its ‘intellectual *revanche*’ on the art of the rest of the Continent, lamenting that, with the exception of a rare few British and Nordic painters, the art of the other nations in the Exposition mindlessly echoed the *juste-milieu* platitudes of the Salon and the *Décennale*.⁵³ Others, usually those establishment critics less well-acquainted

with advanced British art, registered momentary disorientation upon stepping into the

⁵¹ Few comprehensive studies of the trade in reproductions of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in France exist; the most complete thus far is P. Saunier, 'Les préraphaélites anglais. Les reproductions de leurs oeuvres et leur réception au XIXe siècle en France', *Revue de l'Art* no. 137 (2002), pp. 73-86. Saunier's investigation owes a great debt to the pioneering work of Jacques Lethève and is concerned mainly with documentation; he rightly points out the difficulty of mapping the flow of such ephemeral objects, but his insistence that the reproductions were an attraction mainly to writers and exercised little influence on the visual arts is problematic. Furthermore, his concentration on prints and photographs after Burne-Jones and Rossetti entirely sidelines Watts.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 75. A complete collection of the catalogues is conserved in the Bibliothèque d'Art et d'Archéologie Jacques Doucet in Paris.

⁵³ G.-A. Aurier, 'A Propos de l'Exposition universelle de 1889', first published in *Le Pléiade* 2, 27 June, 27 July, and 24 August 1889, reprinted in *Textes critiques, 1889-1892. De l'impressionnisme au symbolisme*, eds. D. Mellier, M.-K. Schaub and P. Wat (Paris, 1995), p. 133.

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calm, sparsely-hung galleries; no less than four commentators employed the word 'dépaycé' ('disorientated', but literally 'removed from one's country') to express the uncanny otherness of the art on view – and nowhere was this more the case than in the second gallery, which amounted to a displaced Grosvenor Gallery, a shrine to antinaturalist painting.⁵⁴

Goddesses and monsters: the antinaturalist dream of Watts and Puvis

While Burne-Jones's rapturous reception at the Exposition rested on a single picture, Watts dominated the British galleries in terms of the sheer amount of his work on view – eight paintings, more than any other single artist in the exhibition. Leaving aside the portraits, the six imaginative subjects constitute a remarkable survey of the evolution of Watts's style and concerns over the decade and of the gradual convergence of his approach with that of his French counterparts. Although the allegory *Love and Life* stands as a logical continuation of the aesthetic and conception of *Love and Death* and *Mammon* [Figure 17] falls solidly within the didactic strain that had intermittently characterised Watts's oeuvre since the 1860s, the Michelangesque *Diana and Endymion* and the ethereal, opalescent *Uldra* and *The Judgment of Paris* – these last two characterised by Henry Havard as 'dreamlike fantasies' – signal a new and, as I shall argue, more cosmopolitan direction in Watts's work.⁵⁵

Thanks to a schematic plan of the British galleries reproduced in the catalogue of the British Fine Art section, we know that *King Cophetua* occupied a commanding position in the second gallery of oil paintings, on an end wall in the long, narrow space, flanked by Watts's *Hope* and *The Judgment of Paris*, like the high altar in a church.⁵⁶ Although Sizeranne did not mention any of Watts's canvases in his tribute to Burne-Jones, his assessment of the effect of *King Cophetua* as an altarpiece

⁵⁴ See for example A. Picard, *Exposition universelle internationale de 1889 à Paris: Rapport général* (Paris 1891), vol. 4, p. 109; Monod (1891), p. 603; M. Hamel, 'Exposition universelle de 1889: les écoles étrangères (premier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1889), p. 225; G. Lafenestre, 'La Peinture étrangère à l'Exposition universelle de 1889', *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1 November 1889), p. 140. The latter three qualify the sensation as 'agrément dépaycé'.

⁵⁵ 'Fantaisies rêveuses': H. Havard, 'L'Exposition des Beaux-Arts. Les écoles étrangères: l'Angleterre, l'Autriche Hongrie', in Dumas and Fourcaud (1889), vol. 2, p. 182. It is worth noting that Havard did not intend this as a compliment; he evinced little regard for the type of painting practiced by Watts and Burne-Jones.

⁵⁶ H. Blackburn, *A Complete Illustrated Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture in the British Fine Art Section* (London and Paris, 1889), p. 43. No installation photographs of the British galleries have thus far surfaced.

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celebrating the supremacy of Beauty over Wealth within the British galleries takes on

a deeper significance when we consider that *Mammon* hung on the other side of the gallery. Subtitled by the artist, ‘Dedicated to His Worshippers’, this grotesque and brutal personification of wealth, nursing moneybags on his lap and impassively crushing the life from two naked youths, was unambiguously posited as an anti-altarpiece;

in fact, Watts, who in his 1880 article ‘The Present Conditions of Art’ had railed that ‘material prosperity has become our real god, but we are surprised to find that the worship of this visible deity does not make us happy’,⁵⁷ had earlier expressed a wish to erect a statue of the monster in Hyde Park, in the hope that ‘his worshippers would be at least honest enough to bend the knee publicly to him’.⁵⁸ Of all his paintings at the Exposition, *Mammon* clung the closest to conventional types – here, the grand manner portrait and the retable⁵⁹ – and strove the hardest for legibility in a contemporary context.⁶⁰ It was also, crucially, the most overt rebuke to the bloated materialism and vulgar disregard for the spiritual that characterised mainstream Victorian society, a lament which, if the aforementioned criticisms of the Exposition are any indication, retained the same urgency in Third Republic France.

In spite, or because of, the pointed criticism which *Mammon* might have been construed to contain, it is curious that this was the painting by Watts most often singled out by republican critics for lengthy discussion, if not praise. André Michel, writing in the *Journal des débats*, dubbed it ‘at once the most characteristic and the least good of his eight exhibited works . . . a Couture translated into English’,⁶¹ no doubt an allusion to the French master’s enormous tour-de-force of moralising history painting, *Les Romains de la décadence* (1847), which held court on the grand staircase of the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Notwithstanding this unflattering conclusion, Michel conceded that he found it difficult to pull his eyes away, and that despite Watts’s

⁵⁷ G. F. Watts, ‘The Present Conditions of Art’, *The Nineteenth Century* (February 1880), p. 243.
⁵⁸ M. S. Watts, *George Frederic Watts: Annals of an Artist’s Life* (London, 1912), vol. 2, p. 149.
⁵⁹ Veronica Franklin Gould draws attention to an interesting parallel between *Mammon* and Watts’s portrait of Cardinal Manning (1882, National Portrait Gallery): V. Franklin Gould, ed., *The Vision of G. F. Watts OM RA (1817-1914)*, (exh. cat., Compton, Watts Gallery, 2004), p. 74. As a sought-after portraitist, Watts was certainly conversant with the conventions of grand portraiture and seems to have skilfully manipulated them to heighten the picture’s impact.
⁶⁰ Colin Trodd argues that in *Mammon*, as opposed to Watts’s more allusive Symbolist works, ‘The job of allegory is to find the symbolic form of the real, to provide the conditions in which this manifestation is understood as a bringing together of the past and the present, and to make a public for art confront who they are by questioning the role of the image in modern life’; C. Trodd, ‘“To intensify the sense of teeming life”: Watts and the twilight of transcendence’, in C. Trodd and S. Brown, eds., *Representations of G. F. Watts* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 66.

⁶¹ ‘A la fois le plus caractéristique et le moins bon de ses huit tableaux exposés [...] on dirait un Couture traduit en anglais’: Michel (1889).

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heavy-handedness with both brush and message, ‘nothing he does leaves one indifferent; one does not forget what one has seen’.⁶² Perhaps *Mammon* carried a less potent charge in Paris than it had in London because it seemed so *English*, rather than universal; Michel and his colleagues were amused (and perhaps comforted) by what they saw as Watts’s *très anglais* use of an allegorical subject to justify the inclusion of nude figures, and, as ever, the inadequacy of his technique to his grand ideas became a favourite talking point.⁶³ Possibly, though, republican commentators gravitated toward *Mammon* for precisely the reasons outlined by Michel: despite the clumsy execution, the meaning was readily deciphered, its historical credentials were impeccable, and most importantly, its moral message – that love of money to the exclusion of all else is the root of all evil – could be willingly embraced by upholders of the Republic. Barbara Bryant’s claim that *Mammon* held a fascination primarily for

the more extreme fringes of Symbolist and Decadent circles because of its rendering of destruction and evil only tells part of the story; it held as much attraction for those establishment critics suspicious of paintings whose meaning came veiled in allusion and suggestion.⁶⁴

If *Mammon*, despite its timely subject and nightmarish subversion of the fantasy promoted by the Exposition's organisers, had no real equivalent in French Symbolism, deepening affinities between Watts and Puvis are discernible in two of the former's most recent works, *The Judgment of Paris* [Figure 18] and *Uldra* [Figure 19] and Puvis's *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, on its fourth outing in a decade. I have already discussed the possible influence of Watts's *Three Goddesses* on *Jeunes filles*;⁶⁵ reversing the direction of the comparison draws out a growing convergence of concerns with the blurring of boundaries between the physical and the intangible, the concrete and the poetically allusive. For if Watts's experimental, quasi-decorative composition and suppression of meaning may have influenced Puvis's enigmatic classical-yet-not-classical 'panneau décoratif', *Jeunes filles*, and the poets' plaudits it attracted, may have combined to push Watts still further toward poetic suggestion.⁶⁶

⁶² 'Rien de ce qu'il fait n'est indifférent ; on ne l'oublie pas quand on l'a vu': Ibid.

⁶³ Charles Bigot, for instance, wrote of *Mammon*, 'C'est surtout en regardant la peinture de M. Watts que l'on peut voir quelles différences sépareront toujours le génie anglais et le génie français': C. Bigot, 'Les Beaux-arts à l'Exposition. L'Angleterre', *Le Siècle* (24 June 1889).

⁶⁴ Bryant in Upstone and Wilton (1997), p. 170.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 1.

⁶⁶ Much of the following argument is informed by Jennifer L. Shaw's persuasive analysis of *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer* as the site of poetic potentiality and unfulfilled desire (Shaw 2002, pp. 14-32).

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Jeunes filles, along with *L'Enfant prodigue* and *Le Pauvre pêcheur*, became one of Puvis's calling cards in the 1880s, for both aesthetic and practical reasons; this repeated exposure brought Puvis to the attention of Claude Phillips. In one of the most sympathetic and insightful analyses of his work to come from either side of the Channel during the 1880s, Phillips debunked the now firmly entrenched perception that Puvis was an incompetent draughtsman; pointing to a group of masterly sketches, he argued that Puvis's project was one of purifying simplification.⁶⁷ The article was accompanied by numerous illustrations which, despite their limitations, give the reader a fair sense of Puvis's style. While Phillips may have seemed a voice in the wilderness, and while he himself drew no comparisons with Watts (although he did with Burne-Jones, to the latter's detriment), many of his insights into Puvis's recent work are also applicable to two of the paintings on which Watts was at work when his article appeared.

The bridge between *The Three Goddesses* and *The Judgment of Paris* would seem to be *Uldra*, an atypically modest half-length 'portrait' of a Scandinavian water sprite (*uldra* or *huldre* – contrary to critical assumptions, the subject of the painting was not a specific figure, but one of a type).⁶⁸ Wreathed in swirling veils of pale, shimmering vapour, the blond sprite, whose hair appears to dissolve into the mist, gazes upward, the direction of her eyes implying inner vision. The facture plays a key, and unsettling, role in etherealising the figure. Watts was by now notorious for his idiosyncratic methods and penchant for scumbling and scrubbing the paint onto – or into – his canvases, and in *Uldra* the paint surface is thickly and unevenly built up so that it catches the light, causing the mist to sparkle in imitation of the spray of a waterfall yet also drawing the spectator's attention to its very material presence. The tension between the materiality of the paint and the immateriality of what it depicts is still greater in Watts's rendering of the sprite's body, its contours scarcely delineated,

the breasts – the only indication of gender – defined only by the palest of shadows; the body has less physical substance than the insistently plastic paint from which it is created. Shaw has pointed to a parallel tension between potential facture and the illusory physicality of figures in *Jeunes filles*, in which the overall scraped roughness of the surface and the overemphatic black outlines drawn around the left and centre

⁶⁷ C. Phillips, 'Puvis de Chavannes', *The Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), p. 62.

⁶⁸ Indeed, a reviewer in *The Magazine of Art* (incorrectly) described *Uldra* as a portrait when it was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery.

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figures deny the illusion of three-dimensionality and bodily presence.⁶⁹ The dreamlike atmosphere engendered by this unresolved conflict between line and form was much remarked upon. Symbolist poets and theoreticians Théodore de Banville and Gustave Kahn celebrated the painting's allusiveness and oneiric reverie, while more conservative critics, especially the *Revue des deux mondes*'s Ferdinand Brunetière (an admirer himself, if for completely different reasons) vigorously minimised these same aspects, which he considered dangerous to the health of society because they might be seen to promote narcissistic contemplation over responsibility and action. For perhaps the same reasons, *Uldra* proved a greater attraction to Symbolist and Decadent writers than to republican and conservative commentators; René Doumic, writing in *Le Moniteur universel*, lumped it together with *The Judgment of Paris* and *Hope* as an incomprehensible exercise in coloured nothingness, 'what M. Whistler would call a real painting'.⁷⁰ Jean Lorrain, on the other hand, although by taste and temperament a much stronger partisan of Burne-Jones, singled out *Uldra* and *The Judgment of Paris* for praise, delighting in their opalescent colour harmonies and describing in detail the sensuous reverie they sent him into – precisely the sort of 'ill effects' which so worried an establishment critic like Brunetière.⁷¹ *The Judgment of Paris* may be viewed as the outcome of cross-fertilisation between *Uldra* and *Jeunes filles*, though of course it traces its roots in Watts's oeuvre back to *The Three Goddesses*. Yet those earlier goddesses seem positively fleshly and earthbound when confronted with those in *The Judgment of Paris*. Rather than place his figures in a conventionalised landscape, as before, Watts surrounds them in billowing clouds, from which, much like *Uldra*, they emerge as if they were a part of them; once again, the boundary between solid flesh and formless, liquid atmosphere is eroded, dissolved. This dissolution is especially striking when we consider the disparity between the goddesses' heads and bodies. The profile of the left-hand figure (tentatively identified as Minerva, although she is stripped of any identifying attributes) and the face of the central figure (probably Juno) are both unexpectedly solid, with firm outlines and sharply-cut, marmoreal features which would not be out of place on the shoulders of a Greek statue. The bodies, however, are wraithlike and almost androgynous, with the bare minimum of detail to suggest that we are gazing

⁶⁹ Shaw (2002), pp. 22-24.

⁷⁰ R. Doumic, 'Les beaux-arts à l'Exposition: l'Angleterre', *Le Moniteur universel* (25 September 1889).

⁷¹ J. Lorrain, *Mes Expositions universelles* (Paris, 2002), p. 148.

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upon the goddesses of antiquity rather than on disembodied spirits. The disjunction resolves in a surprising manner in the third figure. Presumably Venus, Watts has given her the same insubstantial body as her sisters, and the vaporous golden hair and visionary gaze as his water sprite. Thus, he pushes Puvis's refusal to resolve the conflict between convention and dream, between the material and the dematerialised, almost to breaking point. Yet, like Puvis, he was passionately engaged, in both these

pictures, in calling forth the spiritual through the activation of matter – a pursuit central to Symbolism’s goals. With all markers of narrative and meaning banished (despite the clues provided by its title), *The Judgment of Paris* demands that we see it as an inner vision, a suggestive fantasy in which the mind of the individual viewer wanders at will. Nothing, it seemed, could be more inimical to the collective fantasy promoted by the state through the Exposition.

Between Hope and Despair

The inward turn seen in *The Judgment of Paris*, *Uldra* and *Jeunes filles*, however subtly contrary to republican goals, carries a less explosive charge than a second pair of Exposition works by Puvis and Watts. Of Watts’s submissions to the Exposition, *Hope* [Figure 20] excited the most critical notice and the most debate. And well it might, for none of his subjects diverge so sharply from what its title purported to represent. The entry in the official Exposition catalogue listed the title as “*Hope!*”, as if the exclamation mark was required both to clarify the picture’s subject and to reinforce its tenuous meaning.⁷² G. K. Chesterton described the painting in 1904 as a representation of ‘Despair’ rather than ‘Hope’⁷³; André Michel, seeing *Hope* at the Exposition, had a similar reaction:

Hope, her eyes bandaged, enveloped in a greenish dress, is seated, slumped rather, on the globe which turns in desolate space. She clutches to her heart, in a desperate embrace, her lyre, of which all the strings, save one, are broken. It is enough for her to make a song, a prayer, a lament rise in the silence of the night. Her infinite lassitude has not killed her faith; . . . in the depths of the immutable ether, a star twinkles and appears to respond to her . . .⁷⁴

⁷² *Catalogue général officiel* (1889), p. 206, no. 163.

⁷³ G. K. Chesterton, *G. F. Watts* (London, 1904), p. 94.

⁷⁴ ‘*L’Espérance*, les yeux bandés, enveloppée d’une robe verdâtre, est assise, affaissée plutôt, sur le globe qui tourne dans l’espace désert. Elle serre contre son coeur, d’une étreinte désespérée, sa lyre, dont toutes les cordes, sauf une, sont brisées. C’est assez pour qu’elle fasse monter dans le silence de la nuit un chant, une prière, une plainte. Son infinie lassitude n’a pas tué sa foi ; . . . au fond de l’immuable éther, une étoile s’allume et semble lui répondre . . .’ Michel (1889).

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While Michel was able to discern a faint note of hope in the depths of painting (the twinkling star), he identified the primary mood of *Hope* as a mixture of despair and desperation (both of which are derived from the same French root). Certainly, Watts’s incarnation of Hope broke startlingly with the time-honoured conventions of Christian allegory.⁷⁵ Rather than representing her as a theological virtue, posed upright, gazing calmly and directly outward, and holding a symbolic anchor, he blindfolded her (borrowing an attribute more typical of Faith or Justice), pressed her down, as if under a tremendous weight, into an awkward sitting position, and bathed the scene in a vaporous green atmosphere, a colour suggestive of the polar opposites of new growth and decay. Colin Trodd and Stephanie Brown have observed that many of Watts’s late figures, *Hope* in particular, appear to be ‘struggling to resist the powers of disenchantment in the modern world’,⁷⁶ and the figure’s intense physicality bears this out; her bowed head and shoulders appear to be straining against a crushing weight, much like one of Rodin’s caryatids, while the knuckles of her left hand clutching the broken lyre have blanched a ghastly greenish white from the pressure of her grip. Although Watts himself explained his unorthodox approach by claiming that ‘it is only when one supreme desire is left that one reaches the topmost pitch of hope’,⁷⁷ his ambiguous portrayal of Hope – desperate, despairing, striving not to be awakened from a consoling dream – places it centrally within a Symbolist tradition of mingling enchantment, despair and melancholy.

Before Watts painted his two versions of *Hope*,⁷⁸ the most famous – or notorious – nineteenth-century portrayal of the subject was Puvis’s *L’Espérance* [Figure 21]. Shown at the 1872 Salon, the first held following the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, it stirred critical outrage with its equivocal depiction of Hope not as an anchor-bearing Christian allegory or as a doughty Marianne figure clad in classicising drapery, but as a frail young girl in white, perched stiffly and precariously on a breached wall before a ruined city. Daring to embody Hope in such a fragile,

⁷⁵ The theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity were, in fact, recurrent subjects in Watts’s oeuvre, although he never represented them as a trilogy; see Gould (2004), p. 78.

⁷⁶ C. Trodd and S. Brown, ‘Introduction: Generations of Watts’, in Trodd and Brown (2004), p. 10.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Gould (2004), p. 78; no source given.

⁷⁸ The first version, painted in 1885 and exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery that year, is now in a private collection (illustrated in Gould 2004, p. 7 and Wilton and Upstone 1997, p. 201); it differs from the second version, under discussion here, in the colour of the drapery (greyish-white rather than green) and in the background, which is brushy rather than diffuse, with a paler, blue-green tonality.

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contingent guise at such a volatile time earned Puvis the wrath of conservative commentators. Victor Cherbuliez’s unflattering assessment is typical:

Shall I speak to you of a certain damsel, scrawny and sickly, dressed in a white tunic or chemise . . . ? [...] This poor little creature represents a great divinity, Hope, at least that’s what M. Puvis de Chavannes insists.⁷⁹

Puvis’s Hope, while not crushed to the earth, is nevertheless semi-recumbent; indeed, the uneven length of her legs makes it doubtful that she could ever rise. While most observers reserved their scorn for the skinniness of her physique, her gaze must have seemed strange in a figure whose ostensible intent was to inspire optimism in the viewer: although she proffers a sprig of oak, her eyes are turned both upward and inward, either unconscious of or deliberately ignoring the viewer, denying the promise of connection implied by her gesture. Another grievous error was the ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ tendencies of Puvis’s style, according to the reviewer for the *Revue des deux mondes*, who sniffed, ‘convenient genre for anyone who can neither draw nor paint’.⁸⁰ Although Watts never saw *L’Espérance* in the flesh, and it is difficult to ascertain whether he could have seen a reproduction before or during work on *Hope*, he certainly could have known it by description; the *Athenaeum*’s article on the 1872 Salon included a detailed account of the picture and insisted, albeit in more positive terms, on its ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ qualities.⁸¹

L’Espérance, both its clothed Salon and slightly later nude versions, continued to be exhibited throughout the 1880s, despite this unpromising beginning; its political charge defused as painful memories of war ebbed and signs of its aftermath effaced from the cityscape, it came to be lauded by Symbolist critics (notably Gustave Kahn) and to serve as inspiration for avant-garde artists including Gauguin, Emile Bernard and Maurice Denis. Although Puvis did not exhibit it in the Centennale, another of his ‘calling-card’ panel paintings, *L’Enfant prodigue* [Figure 22], did appear in the

⁷⁹ ‘Vous parlerai-je de certaine jeune fille, maigre et malingre, vêtue d’une tunique ou d’une chemise blanche [...] ? Cette pauvre représente une grande divinité, l’Espérance, c’est du moins ce qu’affirme M. Puvis de Chavannes’. V. Cherbuliez, *Études de littérature et d’art. Études sur l’Allemagne. Lettres sur le Salon de 1872* (Paris, 1873), p. 261.

⁸⁰ ‘Genre commode pour qui ne sait ni dessiner, ni peindre’: E. Duvergier de Hauranne, ‘Le Salon de 1872’, *Revue des deux mondes* (1872), pp. 843-44.

⁸¹ ‘The Salon, Paris, 1872 (Second Notice)’, *Athenaeum* no. 2327 (1 June 1872), p. 692. The reviewer (possibly F. G. Stephens or William Michael Rossetti) adds, ‘M. Puvis de Chavannes has, however, out-Heroded Herod, to use a term which is most apt to his case, by carrying what our amazed countrymen fancied was Pre-Raphaelitism to an excess which is almost laughable; and yet his work remains most respectable, because the artist is a man of some power, and so very much in earnest as to

persist seriously and steadfastly in modes of design and painting which must surely have occurred to him in a dream’.

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exhibition. Its parallels with *Hope*, not previously noted, may serve to further illuminate the disturbing alternative fantasy spun by both paintings within the Exposition’s framework. The comparison I am drawing between these two works is not meant to be the last word on the subject; however, bringing them together in this way may serve to open new directions in interpretation.

Puvis was nothing if not evasive when asked to speak to the significance of his unconventional rendering of biblical parable; Vachon records him explaining the painting’s origin as an excuse to use sketches of pigs he had made during a recent trip to rural Burgundy.⁸² Yet this flippant remark points to one of the painting’s most unsettling qualities, the near-total disjuncture between figure and landscape. Indeed, it might almost be two paintings joined by accident – on the one hand a modest pastoral landscape, on the other the completely unrelated figure of the Prodigal Son, pushed so far to the right of the composition that he seems to have been caught in the frame by pure chance. The figure is unique in Puvis’s oeuvre; in contrast to the generalised masks or averted faces which characterise his pictures, the Prodigal Son’s face is sharply delineated. Indeed, the salient lantern jaw, the exaggerated hollows of the cheeks and the deep-set, introspective eyes appear to bear witness to the influence of Burne-Jones (whose *Beguiling of Merlin* Puvis would have seen before he started work on the painting). The young man’s slender body is disposed in an attitude of extraordinary vulnerability – a quality which becomes easier to understand when we consider that Puvis took the unusual step of using a female model for preliminary studies of the figure [Figure 23]. Perched uneasily on a fallen tree, staring off into the distance, with his shoulders hunched forward, the Prodigal Son clasps his arms against his chest with startling vehemence, more so than would seem to be warranted in trying to keep off a chill wind.⁸³ We have already witnessed the same violence of gesture in *Hope*’s white-knuckled grip on her lyre, the same bending of head and shoulders beneath an invisible burden. What, one wonders, is the Prodigal Son struggling against? Is he, too, attempting to escape the disenchantment that would maroon him in mundane reality?

My comparison of *Hope* and *L’Enfant prodigue* is not meant to suggest mutual influence – again, it is all but impossible to ascertain whether Watts could have seen a

⁸² Vachon (1895), p. 71.

⁸³ Shaw (2002), p. 32, notes a similar unwonted violence in the disposition of the fisherman’s arms in *Le pauvre pêcheur*.

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reproduction of Puvis’s work before he began work on his own – but rather to draw out a shared concern for the impossibility of preserving individual dream and contemplation, and a possible common point of inspiration. Both paintings belong to a tradition tracing its origins back to Dürer’s defining representation of melancholy, *Melencolia I* [Figure 24]. Watts drew more heavily on the iconography established by Dürer, including two of Melancholy’s symbolic accessories, a stringed instrument and a globe, though he transforms the latter from a scientist’s tool into a precarious support for *Hope*.⁸⁴ Both unquestionably emulated the hunched posture, the body beginning to fold in upon itself, and the bleak expression, which Félix Fénéon, upon seeing *L’Enfant prodigue* at the 1883 Exposition Nationale, described as ‘one of those dreadfully enveloping melancholies’.⁸⁵

Melancholy’s fortunes, however, had changed since Dürer’s age, when it was considered, even glorified, as a natural and necessary condition of genius and as the

humour most conducive to creativity and intellectual endeavour. As the study of psychology advanced in the nineteenth century, melancholy fell under the cold gaze of medicine. The conversion of its public image from exalted spiritual-intellectual state to psychosomatic illness fed into the fears of creeping degeneration that had haunted France ever since its embarrassing defeat in 1870. Theorists of degeneration, most notably Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau, published dire predictions, and the majority pinpointed melancholy as one of the key symptoms of this alarming trend.⁸⁶ Melancholy, then, represented a threat to the social order, particularly to the vision of progress and harmony promoted by the Republic and the Exposition; introspection and withdrawal, its key symptoms, were dangers to be repressed, averted at any cost. Yet, as we have seen, *Hope* and *L'Enfant prodigue* appear to resist. Bodies compressed in upon themselves as they withstand, in extremis, the forces that would wrench them from their reveries, they represent not so much a retreat from contemporary reality, but a valiant struggle to keep it out.

⁸⁴ *Hope's* composition may also be indebted to Jacob II de Gheyn's 1596 engraving *Melancholicus* (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum), which depicts an old man seated atop a globe, contemplating another smaller globe.

⁸⁵ 'Une de ces mélancolies épouvantablement enveloppantes': F. Fénéon, 'Exposition nationale des beaux-arts (15 septembre-31 octobre)', *La libre revue* 1 (1 October 1883), p. 20.

⁸⁶ On the pathologising of melancholy by the medical profession in the second half of the nineteenth century, see L. Bossi, 'Mélancolie et dégénérescence', in J. Clair, ed., *Mélancolie. Génie et folie en occident* (exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais and Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie, 2005), pp. 398-411.

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The beginning – or the end?

The reverberations of this change in critical fortunes followed closely on the closing of the 1889 Exposition. Watts and Burne-Jones were now firmly established in the firmament of avant-garde painting in Paris, their rise echoing that of Puvis and Watts and occasioning further exchange and collaboration. In 1890, after a decade of acrimonious wrangling after its control was placed in the hands of artists, the official Salon split in two. The more conservative elements remained in their Champs-Élysées quarters as the Société des Artistes Français, while a dissenting group, spearheaded by Puvis and possibly inspired by the secessionist Grosvenor and New Galleries in London,⁸⁷ broke away to form the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts, better known as the Salon du Champ de Mars because it staged its exhibitions in the Palais des Beaux-Arts on the Exposition grounds.⁸⁸ Puvis made a concerted effort to include Burne-Jones in this alternative Salon, which proclaimed its modernity by giving space to the decorative arts and was known for showing artists working in a Symbolist vein;⁸⁹ a series of letters tells the story of his attempt to solicit Burne-Jones's *The Wheel of Fortune* (1883) for inclusion in the 1892 Salon. Although he ultimately had to make do with a selection of drawings in place of the hoped-for painting,⁹⁰ and his wistfully expressed wish for 'a meeting that I have long desired' with Burne-Jones was destined to remain unfulfilled,⁹¹ Puvis was responsible for

⁸⁷ Annie Dubernard-Laurent suggests this connection; certainly, by this date, the example of both galleries was widely known in Paris: Dubernard-Laurent (1996), vol. 4, p. 221.

⁸⁸ The distinction between the kinds of artists who exhibited at the two Salons is not, of course, black and white. Fantin-Latour, for example, remained loyal to the Société des Artistes Français until the end of his life, exhibiting his imaginative pastels and paintings to great acclaim, while one of the key figures in the decision to secede from the Champs-Élysées was the historical genre painter Meissonier, an academic painter par excellence (albeit not in the traditional sense).

⁸⁹ The Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts broke with centuries of tradition in allowing entry to the decorative arts, and as such became an important breeding ground for Art Nouveau; see Silverman (1989), pp. 207-14, for further discussion of the implications of the Salon's split for the status and development of the decorative arts. Painters associated with the second wave of Symbolism who

exhibited with the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts included Eugène Carrière, Edmond Aman-Jean, Armand Point, Alexandre Séon and Louis-Welden Hawkins; many of these artists also exhibited at some point with the Salon de la Rose + Croix.

⁹⁰ A letter from Puvis to Burne-Jones, dated 8 February 1892, indicates that Burne-Jones sent a study for the figure of Fortune ('Merci de tout mon coeur d'artiste pour l'envoi de votre puissant et original symbole de la Fortune. – comme tous ceux que j'ai conviés à le voir j'ai été profondément frappé de son aspect de grandeur.'). but the painting itself was never sent, for reasons that must remain obscure. It appears that the drawings mentioned in following letter, dated 28 April 1892, were the only works included in the Salon (Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Puvis de Chavannes, P.: 9308 Bb-Bc). Puvis's wish was granted nearly a century later, however, when *The Wheel of Fortune* was purchased by the state in 1980.

⁹¹ 'De plus vous me faites espérer une rencontre que je désire depuis bien longtemps'. Fondation Custodia, Puvis de Chavannes, P.: 9308 Bd. In fact, Burne-Jones's final visit to France, in 1878, was also the last time he left England before his death.

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securing Burne-Jones's participation in the Salons of 1893, 1895 and 1896.

Moreover, the respect and admiration Puvis expressed seems to have been reciprocated. When, in 1891, Joséphin Péladan sent a pamphlet to Burne-Jones to solicit his participation in the first Salon de la Rose + Croix, the artist, no doubt taken aback by the Sâr's purple prose and alarming vehemence, wrote to Watts expressing his misgivings, describing the pamphlet as 'disgracefully silly, but I was in the mood . . . to help in anything that upholds the ideals I care for . . . do you know Puvis de Chavannes? Who has lifted the same banner'. Burne-Jones then evidently consulted Puvis, who himself refused to associate himself with the Rose + Croix, and on his advice declined to exhibit.⁹²

Puvis also made inroads into the British cultural conscience, which have thus far passed largely unnoticed, as a result of the Exposition. In 1893, James Hibbert, the architect of Preston's new museum, put forward Puvis's name as a possible decorator for the central lantern. Puvis turned down the commission, explaining that his involvement in the decorative cycle for the Boston Public Library precluded it.⁹³ Had he accepted, the mural would have been the only publicly commissioned decorative ensemble in Britain by a French artist, and a striking parallel to the work of Watts, whose ambitions as a monumental decorative painter had been sadly thwarted but whose high-minded subject matter and seriousness of purpose echoed that of Puvis. In any event, the invitation demonstrates that awareness of, and admiration for, Puvis in Britain was more widespread than previously acknowledged. Sir C. J. Holmes devoted eight pages to his obituary in the *Contemporary Review* in 1898, naming him as one of the three greatest contemporary French artists (along with Moreau and Rodin) and claiming that, while his work displayed affinities with that of his recently deceased peers Burne-Jones and Moreau, Puvis was by far the greatest exponent of 'the pictorial conception of the heroic age'.⁹⁴ Much as had been the case in France, the darker, more introspective visions expressed in canvases such as *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, *L'Enfant prodigue* and *Le Pauvre pêcheur* appealed to artists and

⁹² R. Upstone, 'Echoes in Albion's Sacred Wood: Puvis and British Art', in Lemoine (2002), p. 279.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁹⁴ Sir C. J. Holmes, 'Puvis de Chavannes', *Contemporary Review* no. 396 (December 1898), p. 871. Holmes makes no mention of Puvis's easel paintings, with the exception of *The Death of St John the Baptist*, which had been exhibited at the Guildhall the previous year and eventually entered the National Gallery as part of the Hugh Lane bequest in 1917. His Puvis is almost exclusively a decorative painter; moreover, he claims that the artist's name is well-known in England because large numbers of visitors to France saw his murals at Amiens, Paris and Lyon.

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writers of a Symbolist bent, while the tranquil, classicising fantasy of the murals earned the approval of establishment critics.

The Exposition and its aftermath also prompted the only known correspondence between Moreau and Burne-Jones. Moreau, who had been instrumental in awarding Burne-Jones a *médaille d'honneur* for *King Cophetua*, apparently asked his patron Charles Ephrussi to put him in contact with Burne-Jones; through the offices of Ephrussi and Burne-Jones's friend Lady Brook, Burne-Jones sent Moreau a photograph of *The Seven Days of Creation* [Figure 25]. The sole surviving letter from Moreau to Burne-Jones is an effusive note of thanks, extolling the work's 'charming and delicate attention [to detail]' and acknowledging Burne-Jones as a kindred spirit whose sympathy was 'one of the rarest and most beautiful recompenses of my long working life'.⁹⁵ While we unfortunately have no record of Burne-Jones's letters, Moreau's affinity with Burne-Jones is attested to not only by this letter, but by the fact that the photograph, the only reproduction of a contemporary work in his personal collection, was still hanging in Moreau's house when he died six years later.⁹⁶ Although the existence of this artefact of an interchange between the two artists is occasionally remarked upon without further comment, both Burne-Jones's choice of a work to send Moreau and the latter's response to it are worth considering. *The Seven Days of Creation* shows Burne-Jones at both his most deliberately archaic, with its polyptych format and austere verticality and his most original and (to conservative eyes) unsettling, with its host of melancholic, androgynous angels who appear to exist at an utter remove from reality. Such characteristics were, of course, salient in much of Moreau's work, and it seems safe to suppose that Burne-Jones deliberately selected as his offering to Moreau the painting he considered to best demonstrate their aesthetic affinities.

Strengthened personal ties were not the only result of the Exposition.

Crucially, the early 1890s also saw the Symbolist press in France embrace British antinaturalism. The *Revue Blanche*, best known as the mouthpiece of the Nabis,

⁹⁵ 'Quelle attention délicate et charmante!'; 'd'une sympathie [qui est] . . . pour moi une des plus rares et des plus belles récompenses de ma longue vie de travailleur': Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Moreau, G.: 9308a, letter to Burne-Jones.

⁹⁶ This evidence of Moreau's admiration for Burne-Jones is somewhat complicated by the fact that a disparaging article on the latter, penned by Robert de Montesquiou in 1894 when Burne-Jones's fortunes in France were on the wane and describing his paintings witheringly as 'des *Christmas-cards* géants et sublimes' was found among Moreau's belongings at his death: R. de Montesquiou, 'Burne Jones', *La Revue illustrée* 18, no. 212 (1 October 1894), p. 48.

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sporadically featured articles on the Pre-Raphaelites, most of them aimed at amateurs seeking to enhance their collections of books and reproductions. In February 1894, for example, Gustave Kahn directed readers to a reissue of the Moxon *Tennyson*, whose illustrators he described as 'then almost unknown, now intellectual celebrities', and to a reproduction of Burne-Jones's *Chant d'Amour* published the previous month in the *Magazine of Art*.⁹⁷

If the *Revue Blanche*'s approach to the Pre-Raphaelites leaned more in the direction of connoisseurship than critical analysis, Aurier's decision to include the Pre-Raphaelites along with Puvis and Moreau in what was becoming an increasingly familiar triad as precursors to the latest wave of Symbolist art was more significant. Having already formulated a definition of Symbolist painting specific to the recent work of Gauguin and the Pont-Aven circle in 'Le Symbolisme en peinture – Paul Gauguin', published in the *Mercure de France* in 1891, Aurier elaborated on his initial ideas in 'Les Peintres Symbolistes' the following year, consolidating Symbolism's status as a reaction against the positivism and scientific advances of the nineteenth century and proclaiming its victory over naturalism and materialism:

In vain does exclusively materialist, experimental and immediate art struggle against the attacks of a new, idealist and mystical art. On all fronts it claims the right to dream, the right to the pasturelands of the skies, the right to take flight towards the stars denied by the absolute truth.⁹⁸

As Juliet Simpson has suggested, ‘Les Peintres Symbolistes’ sought to reach – and convert to the Symbolist cause – a much broader audience than Aurier’s previous sally, not only by appearing in a journal with a more general readership than the Symbolist *Mercure de France* but by anchoring pictorial Symbolism firmly within an established tradition of primitive and naïve art.⁹⁹ Aurier was at pains to portray his heroes, ‘Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, the English Pre-Raphaelites’, as having ‘already, in isolation, with glory and victory if without much real doctrine, fought the same fight, claiming the right to dream, flourishing far from materialist swamps and having the courage to proclaim the excellence of the true and good

⁹⁸ G. Kahn, ‘Les Lettres anglaises’, *La Revue Blanche* 6, no. 28 (February 1894), pp. 188, 191. Kahn’s reference to the *Magazine of Art* suggests that by this date, obtaining British art periodicals in France was a relatively simple matter.

⁹⁹ ‘En vain l’art exclusivement matérialiste, l’art expérimental et immédiat, se débat contre les attaques d’un art nouveau, idéaliste et mystique. De toutes parts on revendique le droit au rêve, le droit aux pâturages de l’azur, le droit à l’envolément vers les étoiles niées de l’absolue vérité’. G.-A. Aurier, ‘Les Peintres Symbolistes’, *La Revue encyclopédique* 1, 1 April 1892, pp. 475-87, reprinted in Aurier (1995), p. 96.

⁹⁹ J. Simpson, *Aurier, Symbolism and the Visual Arts* (Bern, 1999), pp. 245-46.

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tradition: that of the Primitives’.¹⁰⁰ Britain’s antinaturalists were no longer an insular curiosity but part of an international vanguard, yet Aurier’s attempt to have it both ways – to portray them both as isolated, misunderstood geniuses and as renovators of a time-honoured tradition – betrays an irrevocable shift toward conservatism. This subtle but telling paradigm shift in Aurier’s criticism is symptomatic both of a trend toward conservatism and an emphasis on tradition in avant-garde circles and of a change in British antinaturalism’s critical fortunes in the 1890s.¹⁰¹ As Burne-Jones became a fixture of the Champ de Mars and the 1894 version of Watts’s *Love and Life* entered the Musée du Luxembourg to hang in the company of *Le Pauvre pêcheur* and Moreau’s *Orphée*, serious studies of their work proliferated in French art periodicals.¹⁰² Common to many of them were an earnest scholarly effort to situate the artists within an overarching tradition and a memorialising tone, indicating a collective sense that an epoch was slipping irretrievably into the past.¹⁰³ Familiarity – and official recognition – often breeds contempt, and antinaturalism was no exception. Indeed, Burne-Jones often found himself the scapegoat for the sins of the entire Symbolist movement, never more so than under the sarcastic pen of the anarchist critic and defender of Impressionism Octave Mirbeau. Beginning in 1895, Mirbeau launched a series of scurrilous attacks in *Le Journal* on Burne-Jones and his lesser French imitators that continued unabated until May 1897. Through the parodic character of Kariste, the *über*-Symbolist martyr to his own art (whose name Mirbeau probably invented for its phonetic similarity to ‘Christ’), Mirbeau poured scorn on this

¹⁰⁰ ‘Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, les préraphaélites anglais avaient déjà isolément, avec gloire et victoire, mais sans bien nette doctrine, combattu le même combat, revendiquant le droit au rêve, à l’essor hors des marécages matérialistes, et ayant le courage de proclamer l’excellence de la vraie et de la bonne tradition: celle des Primitifs’: Aurier (1995), p. 105.

¹⁰¹ Michael Marlais has explored the paradoxical appearance of a conservative, traditionalist tone in anti-naturalist avant-garde criticism from 1889-1900, particularly in the writings of Aurier, Maurice Denis and Camille Mauclair, pinpointing its origins in the Third Republic’s aggressive institutionalization of naturalism and materialism: Marlais (1992), p. 7.

¹⁰² Puvis experienced a similar belated recognition in Britain; see, for example, Prince Bojidar

Karageorgevitch, 'Puvis de Chavannes', *Magazine of Art* 17 (1894), pp. 73-79, which is notable for the space it devotes to Puvis's easel paintings, including an extended meditation on *Le Pauvre pêcheur* which the Prince considered his masterpiece.

¹⁰³ Notable examples of this trend include P. Leprieur, 'Artistes contemporains: M. Burne-Jones, décorateur et ornemaniste', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 8 (November 1892), pp. 381-99 and L. Bénédite, *Deux idéalistes: Gustave Moreau et E. Burne-Jones* (Paris, 1899). Critics writing in establishment periodicals tended not to class Burne-Jones and Watts as Symbolists, often opting for the designation of 'idéaliste' instead. Richard Thomson suggests that Bénédite, as a state functionary and curator of the Musée du Luxembourg, was especially eager to dissociate Moreau (who had just left his vast personal collection to the nation) from the less salubrious fringes of Symbolism, particularly Lorrain and Huysmans (Thomson 2004, pp. 27-28); this may explain his decision to classify Moreau and Burne-Jones under a heading with more high-minded connotations.

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strand of Symbolism, reserving much of his fire for Burne-Jones, in no less than seven articles.¹⁰⁴ Although Mirbeau's quarrel with Burne-Jones's Symbolism (and, perhaps more to the point, the excessively allegorical mysticism of the Rose + Croix painters) seems to have been partly motivated by its wilful archaism, from which he inferred a corresponding political conservatism, his repeatedly expressed distaste catalysed a turning of the tide amongst Burne-Jones and Watts's erstwhile Symbolist and Decadent defenders, especially Jean Lorrain and Robert de Montesquiou.¹⁰⁵ Of course, British antinaturalism did not lack for advocates in France in the closing years of the nineteenth century. What distinguished these supporters' accounts, however, were both an appreciation of its affinities with its French counterpart and a palpable nostalgia for the irrecoverable loss of a dream.¹⁰⁶ As the Third Republic's policies shifted inexorably toward the right in the wake of the Boulangist crisis and the escalation of anarchy and the elite retrenched against the spectre of socialism, the private, desolate dream-world of cross-Channel antinaturalism appeared less a questioning – or, in the case of *Hope* and *L'Enfant prodigue*, defiant – alternative to the collective Republican fantasy of 1889 than it seemed to be converging with the more conservative Republic of the *ralliement*. Political and artistic radicals such as Mirbeau and Gustave Geffroy naturally found this hard to stomach. Sizeranne's call to arms for 'the revenge of art on life' had been answered, but with results for which he might not have wished.

¹⁰⁴ Mirbeau's anti-Symbolist writings include 'Des lys! des lys!', *Le Journal* (7 April 1895); 'Toujours des lys', *Le Journal* (28 April 1895); 'Intimités préraphaélites', *Le Journal* (9 June 1895); 'Les artistes de l'âme', *Le Journal* (23 February 1896); 'Mannequins et critiques', *Le Journal* (26 April 1896); and the two-part 'Botticelli proteste!...', *Le Journal* (4-11 October 1896) which imagined Botticelli rising from the grave to protest the Burne-Jonesian perversions being painted in his name (all collected in *Combats esthétiques*, eds. P. Michel and J.-F. Nivet, Paris 1993, vol. 2). Although other Symbolists, particularly Denis and Point, also suffered Mirbeau's barbs, he was consistently kind to Puvis, praising him as 'Le peintre de la vie' (*Le Gaulois*, 26 June 1897). Especially curious in this context is Mirbeau's role in launching the reputation of Maeterlinck, a poet with obvious (and openly acknowledged) debts to Pre-Raphaelite poetry and painting.

¹⁰⁵ Lorrain was a notorious fair-weather friend of artists, and his betrayal of Burne-Jones was particularly cruel; having celebrated the artist in numerous articles, poems and short stories, he began to publish articles deriding him in 1894, culminating in his attack in *Madame Baringhel* on Burne-Jones's portrait of the Baronne Deslandes (shown at the Salon du Champ de Mars in 1896) as 'that washerwoman escaped from the wash house, with her rotted flesh and purplish lips . . . why, she's the muse of bleach!' ('Cette lessiveuse en rupture de lavoir, elle, avec ses chairs faisandées et ces lèvres violâtres . . . mais c'est la Muse de l'eau de Javelle [sic]'). J. Lorrain, *Madame Baringhel* (Paris, 1899), p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ See especially Sizeranne's extended meditation on Burne-Jones's second version of *Love among the Ruins* (Sizeranne 1895, pp. 199-203).

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Chapter 3

Altars of perversity: Burne-Jones, Moreau and the religion of beauty

‘The religion of art has established itself on the debris of Faith. This religion wants its priests, its confessors, its martyrs. It raises its basilicas and its chapels. And this, at the very moment when thrones are collapsing, [...] when Renan ironises, when Taine cuts off the flight of the soul by clipping its wings and claims that crime and virtue are the natural products of the brain, like vitriol and sugar . . .’¹

Edward Burne-Jones’s 1884 magnum opus, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* [Figure 26], dominates the gallery it now occupies at Tate Britain. With its forlorn king and enigmatic maiden painted in darkly glowing tones, enveloped in an eerie submarine hush, and flanked by gilded pilasters, it presides over its smaller, brighter neighbours with all the *gravitas* of the high altar in a great cathedral. Across the Channel, in the Musée d’Orsay, Gustave Moreau’s *Galatée* [Figure 27, Mathieu 226], painted four years earlier, occupies its own wall in the centre of a smaller, more intimate chamber. Although no longer in its original frame, the dazzling Nereid and her grotto are enclosed in a fair reconstruction of the original, an elaborate, columned neo-Renaissance setting.² If *King Cophetua* seems set in a cathedral nave, *Galatée* and its surroundings more closely resemble a small altarpiece set for private contemplation in a chapel or shrine.

This use of the vocabulary of religious imagery is neither casual, nor is it the product of hindsight. Both *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and *Galatée* engage deliberately, subversively, and even perversely with ideas of worship, with the conventions of religious painting, and with the increasingly porous boundary between the sacred and the profane. Although a strong case can be made for these paintings’ function as secular altarpieces dedicated to the worship of Beauty and Woman (sometimes inextricable from each other) in their own right, a greater range of meanings emerges when they are considered not only in the context of a dialogue between their creators, but especially in that of the 1889 Exposition Universelle in

¹ ‘La religion de l’art s’est installée sur les débris de la Foi. Cette religion veut ses prêtres, ses confesseurs, ses martyrs. Elle dresse ses basiliques et ses chapelles. Cela, au moment même où les trônes s’écroulent, [...] où Renan ironise, où Taine coupe l’essor de l’âme en lui rognant les ailes et prétend que le crime et la vertu sont des produits naturels du cerveau comme le vitriol et le sucre’.

Raynaud (1918), vol. 1, p. 44.

² *Galatée*’s original frame was larger and more imposing than its present one, judging from the measurements, which included the frame as well as the painting, that appeared in the 1880 Salon *livret*; see G. Lacambre, ‘La *Galatée* de Gustave Moreau entre au musée d’Orsay’, 48/14, *La revue du Musée d’Orsay* 6 (spring 1998) (hereafter Lacambre 1998b), p. 50.

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Paris, where they were displayed in their respective nations’ fine art exhibitions. The Exposition, the first truly republican one held under the aegis of the troubled Third Republic, an era, as we will recall, aptly characterised by Daniel Halévy as ‘a regime of discord tempered by festivals’ and by Eugen Weber as ‘one long crisis, every lull overshadowed by disbelief that it could last’,³ is generally acknowledged by scholars as a high-water mark in the Symbolist dialogue between Britain and France, particularly with regard to the establishment and flowering of Burne-Jones’s reputation on the Continent and to his personal and artistic exchange with Moreau.⁴ Yet no study of the 1889 Exposition thus far has focused closely on the parallels between, and resonances generated by, these two paintings.

The Exposition was also an event remarkable for the prevalence of quasireligious language found in contemporary discussions of it. Keeping in mind Georges Bataille’s definition of the festival as a site where the ‘aspiration for destruction’, particularly sacrifice, is given controlled rein, while at the same time offering all the possibilities of consumption at once,⁵ I shall consider the Exposition as a whole as a

religious site to which the masses flocked to worship at the altars of new divinities: Technology, Progress, Commerce, Modernity. In this examination of *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and *Galatée* in relation to their setting in this modern pantheon, I hope to show not only the multiple levels on which Burne-Jones and Moreau engaged in a dialogue with each other, but also how their works respond to the shifting notions of religion and religiosity at play within the Exposition to formulate a new and transgressive mode of devotion.

Prelude: The Grosvenor Gallery, the Salon, and the Origins of a Dialogue

As artists who regularly worked with sacred subject matter in the conventional sense, Burne-Jones and Moreau were in a unique position to test and even violate the established practices of religious art. While explicitly religious paintings occupy a relatively minor position in his oeuvre, Burne-Jones, who had gone to Oxford with the intention of taking orders, was involved in the design of church decoration from early in his career. Moreau, on the other hand, did begin his public career as a religious painter: his first Salon work was a Pietà (1852, Mathieu 11) bought by the French

³ Halévy (1936), p. 423; E. Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge and London, 1986), p. 47.

⁴ See, for example, Lethève (1959); Allemand-Cosneau in Munro (1992), pp. 69-80; Wilton and Upstone (1997); *Des Cars* in Wildman and Christian (1998), pp. 25-40; and Dubernard-Laurent (1996).

⁵ G. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. R. Hurley (New York, 1989, 1973), pp. 53-54.

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state for the high altar of the cathedral of Angoulême and seven years later, on another state commission, he produced a rather lacklustre *Chemin de Croix* (Mathieu 61-74) for the church of Décazeville, although religious subjects soon gave way to a highly personal interpretation of history painting in the grand manner. In any case, by the time they produced the works under discussion here, both artists had established a long precedent of fusing literary or mythological subject matter with religious, and more specifically, medieval and renaissance Christian compositional conventions. One of Moreau's greatest Salon successes, *Orphée* [Figure 28, Mathieu 84], openly appropriated Pietà imagery, an act which did not pass unnoticed by the critics; Paul de Saint-Victor described the Thracian maiden as resembling 'a female saint of the German school' and declared that 'the head of Orpheus, asleep in its blond hair, angelic and not at all antique, is also that of a Christian martyr'.⁶

While Moreau's borrowing of religious motifs did not initially ruffle many feathers in Catholic France, Burne-Jones, who came of age artistically within the controversy of the Catholic Emancipation Act, the High Church movement and the beginnings of Aestheticism in Britain, sometimes provoked critics at home. For example, his *Laus Veneris* [Figure 29], shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1878, elicited reactions ranging from discomfort to outright anger. Frederick Wedmore attacked it as 'an uncomfortable picture, so wan and death-like, so stricken with disease of the soul, so eaten up and gnawed away with discomfort and desire, is that sad Queen of Love'.⁷ Although he does not say so in the review, the cause of his wrath may well have been Burne-Jones's overt casting of the goddess of Love in the role of the Virgin Mary; Gail-Nina Anderson has described the picture as 'a perverse *Sacra conversazione* where the life of the senses has leached out all spirituality'.⁸ The rose lying on the floor and the crown resting on Venus's knees, both traditional attributes of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven, give credence to this view. Wedmore and his fellow critics would also have been cognisant of the picture's roots in

⁶ 'Une sainte femme de l'École allemande'; 'La tête d'Orphée, endormie dans ses cheveux blonds, angélique et nullement antique, est aussi celle d'un martyr chrétien'. P. de Saint-Victor, 'Salon de 1866', *La Presse* (13 May 1866), cited in P. Cooke, *Gustave Moreau et les arts jumeaux* (Bern, 2003), p. 83. Cooke also cites several other of Moreau's pictures that appropriate Christian imagery: *Jason et Médée* (1865), *Adam and Eve*; *Leda* (various versions), the Annunciation or the Coronation of the

Virgin; and *Prometheus* (1869), the Passion. The list is probably not exhaustive. For a different view of *Orphée*'s symbolism, see Chapter 5.

⁷ Wedmore (1880), p. 219; the review originally appeared in *Temple Bar Magazine*, May 1878.

⁸ G.-N. Anderson and J. Wright, *Heaven on Earth: the Religion of Beauty in Late Victorian Art* (exh. cat., Nottingham, Djanogly Art Gallery, 1994), p. 42.

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Swinburne's poem of the same name, a retelling of the Tannhäuser legend that shifted the emphasis from repentance and the triumph of Christian virtue to a celebration of super-sensuous, amoral beauty in which Venus is exalted above the Virgin (early in the poem, Tannhäuser exclaims, 'Nay, fair Lord Christ, lift up thine eyes and see; / Had now thy mother such a lip – like this? / Thou knowest how sweet a thing it is to me');⁹ memories of Robert Buchanan's polemical attack on Swinburne's 'blasphemy [and] wretched animalism' in *The Fleshly School of Poetry* (1871) may also still have been at the back of their minds. When we take into account the fact that *Laus Veneris* was exhibited in a Protestant country still deeply suspicious of Mariolatry and of the veneration of images in general, its ability to unsettle viewers takes on another shade of meaning.¹⁰

Neither *King Cophetua* nor *Galatée* was a new work by the time of the 1889 Exposition Universelle. In order better to understand the impact of these two works at the Exposition, we need to return to the origins of *King Cophetua* and *Galatée*, examining their inspiration, the environments in which they were first exhibited, and the ways they were first received in their native countries. Both works were a long time in germinating, taking more than two decades each to emerge in their final form;¹¹ we must also consider that, over this germination period, Burne-Jones and Moreau came in contact with each other's work in the flesh for the first time when they exhibited together at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 and at the 1878 Exposition Universelle – the first time Moreau's work had been shown in Britain, and Burne-Jones's first outing in France.¹² When Burne-Jones first encountered Moreau's *L'Apparition* in 1877, he would have been roughing out the composition of the definitive version of *King Cophetua*, although he did not begin working it up on canvas for another three years – the same year *Galatée* appeared at the Salon. The following year, not only were both artists exhibiting together, they were both themselves in Paris; although we have no written evidence of them meeting then (and

⁹ A. C. Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads* (London, 2000, first published 1866), pp. 9-22. Swinburne dedicated the volume 'to my friend Edward Burne-Jones'.

¹⁰ On the controversy surrounding the High Church movement and the impact of anti-Catholic criticism on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in the 1840s and 1850s, an impact which would continue to be felt, albeit in muted form, for decades afterward, see J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 20-36.

¹¹ In fact, Moreau did not consider *Galatea* finished even after it had been exhibited at the Salon of 1880 and bought by Edmond Taigny; he asked Taigny to return it to him the following year for minor reworking (Lacambre 1998b, p. 54).

¹² See Chapter 1.

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in Burne-Jones's case our only record of his activities during this, his last visit to Paris, is, infuriatingly, of his attendance at a *guignol* performance with his teenaged son and William Morris), it seems fair to assume that they saw each others' work at the Exposition. Reproductions of the work of both artists were also becoming more readily available. Prints after Burne-Jones in France have already been discussed; reproductions of Moreau's work followed soon after.¹³ Indeed, although he never saw *Galatée* in person, Burne-Jones could have encountered it either in a photograph published by Goupil during the 1880 Salon [Figure 30], and probably available from the firm's London offices; one of Moreau's compositional studies for the painting was

also published that year in Philippe de Chennevières's Salon review in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. Reproductions can, of course, only capture so much of the spirit and often little of the physical presence of the original, particularly in the case of artists renowned for their colour and their manipulation of surface effect; in *King Cophetua*, though, the subtle encrustation on the king's armour and crown and especially on the roundels on his cloak seems to indicate that Burne-Jones had closely studied the bejewelled, textured surfaces of Moreau's paintings. Thus, although we have no evidence of them meeting or corresponded before 1889, by the time both artists began to work in earnest on these paintings, they were aware of one another's work and also, perhaps, of the comparisons critics were beginning to draw between them. Burne-Jones turned for inspiration to the ballad 'The King and the Beggar Maid' in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and to Tennyson's 'The Beggar Maid', a sixteen-line condensation of the ballad first published in 1842. His first attempt at the subject dates from 1861-62 [Figure 31], relatively early in his career, is a literal transcription of the first six lines of Tennyson's poem:

Her arms across her breast she laid,
 She was more fair than words can say:
 Bare-footed came the beggar maid
 Before the king Cophetua.
 In robe and crown the king stept down
 To meet and greet her on her way.¹⁴

¹³ For a survey of the reproduction of Moreau's work during his lifetime, see G. Lacambre, 'La diffusion de l'oeuvre de Gustave Moreau par la reproduction au XIXe siècle', *Bulletin de la Société J.-K. Huysmans* 94 (2001), pp. 30-51. I shall discuss the role of reproductive prints in establishing Moreau's reputation in Britain in Chapter 5.

¹⁴ C. Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson* (London, 1969), p. 522. 'The Beggar Maid' was written in 1833, the year of Burne-Jones's birth.

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The depiction of action came off awkwardly; realising his failure, Burne-Jones laid the work aside unfinished. When he took up the subject again, apparently around 1875, he settled on a different composition, a scene that featured in neither poem: a moment not yet reached in 'The Beggar Maid' and not actually described in the ballad, that of the king seated in his palace, gazing up in mute admiration at the beggar maid perched above him on his throne.¹⁵ Significantly, the inspiration for the new design appears to have been Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* [Figure 32], which Burne-Jones had first seen at the Louvre in 1855 and of which he is known to have possessed an engraving.¹⁶ But *King Cophetua* takes telling liberties with Mantegna's design, placing the beggar maid higher than the Virgin and Cophetua at the viewer's level, thus very much below the beggar maid and literally beneath her notice. When Burne-Jones exhibited the final version at the Grosvenor Gallery's summer exhibition in 1884 (and it is worth noting in passing that the Grosvenor itself was often spoken of, whether reverentially or in jest, in religious terms, as a 'temple of art'), Théodore Duret was less than impressed, complaining in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* that Burne-Jones's choice of subject was symptomatic of the insularity and parochialism of British art (a criticism which, as we shall see, is unjustified).¹⁷ British critics, however, overwhelmingly hailed it as a masterpiece. Yet oddly, the major reviews skirted over the work's religious and potentially blasphemous overtones; most focused their attention on the figure of the king, whom the critic for the conservative *Art Journal* considered a salutary change of direction in Burne-Jones's oeuvre, which had been dogged up until then by accusations of 'morbidness' and 'unmanliness':
 Can we in two lines tell of the high humility, the manliness, the chivalry of the

noble figure, who, his crown in his hand, sits on the lowest step of the throne, on whose summit he has placed the beggar maid? His gaze is turned towards his love, a gaze of reverence, almost of adoration, for her simple beauty and purity. There is no feeling in Cophetua's mind that he has bent down to this woman.¹⁸

¹⁵ See D. Robinson, Letter to the Editor, *Apollo* (May 1973), p. 626; Robinson dates the origin of the new composition to 1875 based on two sheets of sketches in the Fitzwilliam Museum.

¹⁶ W. S. Taylor, 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid', *Apollo* (February 1973), pp. 151-52. Burne-Jones's debt to Mantegna was noted by at least two contemporary observers in France, Maurice Hamel and Jean Lorrain.

¹⁷ 'Le sujet . . . même avec l'aide du catalogue reste incompréhensible à tout autre qu'un Anglais': T. Duret, 'Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor Gallery', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1884), pp. 534-35.

¹⁸ 'London Spring Exhibitions: The Grosvenor and the Water-Colour Societies', *Art Journal* (1884), p. 189.

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The sentimental and moralising tone of this review effectively silences any transgressive nuances at play in the painting; furthermore, the reviewer shifts the emphasis away from the beggar maid as object of worship/adoration by dismissing her as 'infinitely less moving than her lover . . . she cannot fail to be less interesting than the king', as well as diminishing the interest and significance of the figures' exotic surroundings by claiming that 'it is the idea, the inspiration of this picture that makes it so fine', rather than execution or technique.¹⁹ F. G. Stephens, reviewing the show for the *Athenaeum*, gives a subtler reading, with greater attention paid to the aesthetic and decorative importance of the setting, but still couches the king's attitude in the language of chivalry rather than of religious devotion: 'The swarthy face of the king [...] is turned upwards with chivalric reverence and self-abnegation'.²⁰ As we shall see, the rapturous reaction to *King Cophetua* in 1889 contrasts sharply with the restraint of its first British critics; it was appreciated for reasons on the other side of the Channel that would likely have surprised its original viewers.

Moreau, on the other hand, derived the inspiration for *Galatée* from both verbal and visual sources: the former, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a personal bible since boyhood; the latter, the frescoes by Raphael [Figure 33] and Sebastiano del Piombo [Figure 34] in the Sala di Galatea in the Villa Farnesina, which he visited during his stay in Italy between 1857 and 1859, and of which he owned a print.²¹ Closer to home, a walk in the Jardins du Luxembourg would have taken him past Auguste-Louis Ottin's new sculptural group, *Polyphemus surprising Acis and Galatea* [Figure 35], from which he appears to have derived the composition of Polyphemus watching over a reclining Galatea from above. Yet in opposition to the dynamism of *The Triumph of Galatea*, and the blood-and-thunder theatrics of Ottin's sculpture, Moreau conceived an image of hieratic silence. Apparently drawing on a favourite subject entirely of his own invention, *La Fée aux griffons* [Figure 36] (and possibly on a reproduction of *Laus Veneris*, with which it shares elements of composition and atmosphere) but making a number of significant changes, particularly in the lowered eyelids and more languid, abandoned pose,²² he set a dreaming, solitary Galatea in a

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ 'The Grosvenor Exhibition (First Notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2949 (3 May 1884).

²¹ Both the print after *The Triumph of Galatea* and a 1660 French edition of the *Metamorphoses*, the latter containing sketches and annotations by Moreau, remained in his possession for the rest of his life and are still to be found in the Musée Gustave-Moreau.

²² See P.-L. Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 1994), pp. 142-43, for further discussion of the parallels between *La Fée aux griffons* and *Galatée*.

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fantastic underwater grotto, apparently unaware of being spied upon by the brooding Cyclops.

When *Galatée* appeared at the Salon of 1880, the last at which Moreau would exhibit, observers were alternately dazzled and bemused. One of the critics in the former category was J.-K. Huysmans, who waxed lyrical – and mystical – in his review:

Here above all the magianisms of the brush of this visionary burst forth [...] This cavern illuminated by precious stones like a tabernacle . . . contain[s] the inimitable and radiant jewel, the white body, breasts and lips tinted rose, of Galatea, asleep in her long pale hair!²³

Fittingly, Huysmans was the founder and spiritual leader in France of an unofficial cult of Moreau and his art; Des Esseintes, the protagonist of his key novel *À rebours* (itself characterised by Arthur Symons as ‘the breviary of the Decadence’), practices what can only be described as the perverse ritual veneration of Moreau’s pictures.²⁴ Other Symbolist and Decadent writers were quick to follow in Huysmans’s steps; by the end of the decade, the poets Jules Laforgue and Francis Poictevin were writing about making ‘pilgrimages’ to the Musée du Luxembourg to gaze at *Orpheus*, Moreau’s only work then in a public collection, and on a more modest scale, devotees could make a similar pilgrimage to see *Galatée* hanging in the home of its owner, Edmond Taigny, who generously allowed access to those interested in viewing it.²⁵ *Galatée* drew a distinctly lukewarm response from the few British critics who responded to it at all; the reviewer for the *Athenaeum* (possibly William Michael Rossetti or F. G. Stephens) grumbled that ‘M. Gustave Moreau has produced pictures which the irreverent call pyrotechnic [...] In [*Galatée*] the subject is a mere excuse for the display of tawdry colour and meretricious sentiment’.²⁶ Even the more sympathetic Francophile critic, Claude Phillips, although he found much to admire in Moreau’s oeuvre and drew favourable comparisons between his work and that of

²³ ‘C’est ici surtout que vont éclater les magismes du pinceau de ce visionnaire [...] cet antre illuminé de pierres précieuses comme un tabernacle et contenant l’inimitable et radieux bijou, le corps blanc, teinté de rose aux seins et aux lèvres, de la Galatée endormie dans ses longs cheveux pâles!’ J.-K. Huysmans, ‘Salon officiel de 1880’, in *L’Art moderne* (Paris, 1883), pp. 136-138. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the French are my own. In the present case, I have followed the translator’s lead in my rendering of ‘magismes’, apparently a neologism of Huysmans’s invention: Lacambre (1998a), p. 191.

²⁴ See Huysmans (1884), pp. 141-49, for the infamous ekphrasis on *Salomé* and *L’Apparition*.

²⁵ We know this thanks to Moreau’s student, Henri Evenepoel, who described a visit to Taigny’s collection in a letter to his father; he evinced little regard for *Galatée*, preferring the watercolour *Les Voix* (see Lacambre, 1998b, pp. 57-58).

²⁶ ‘The Salon, Paris (First Notice)’, *Athenaeum* no. 2741 (8 May 1880), p. 607.

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Burne-Jones, acknowledged *Galatée*’s ‘charming . . . conception of the bright seanymp,

joying in her ever-fresh youth and free from the burdening thoughts and woes of mortality’ but dismissed the picture in the same breath as ‘marred by the accessories . . . which are treated in somewhat childishly emphatic fashion’.²⁷ Still, the fact that *Galatée* attracted critical notice at all indicates the inroads Moreau had made into the British press’s consciousness since 1877, when *L’Apparition* appeared at the Grosvenor Gallery to deafening silence. In a milieu where omitting to mention a painting in a review effectively nullified its existence, bad or indifferent press could be more effective than none at all in the formation of an artist’s reputation. And in any case, critical reception notwithstanding, *Galatée* appears to have found its way into Burne-Jones’s horizons and may well have been on his mind while he was at

work on *King Cophetua*. Placed together within the ostensibly secular milieu of the 1889 Exposition, however, both paintings' reinterpretation of devotional art took on a deeper and more unsettling significance.

Marianne versus La Vierge Marie: Religious Imagery in the Republic of the Republicans and the Exposition as Religious Site

Like many such unequivocal statements, Robert Tombs's assertion that the Third Republic 'set out not to use but to replace the Church' is potentially misleading and needs further qualification; had he finished the sentence with '... with a religion of its own', he might have struck closer to the mark.²⁸ It is certainly true that the Republic entered its truly republican phase (upon the election of Jules Grévy to the presidency in 1879) on a wave of anticlericalism, and that, although church and state would not formally separate until 1905, the power struggle in which they had been involved for much of the century seemed to be tipping definitively in favour of the state under the pressures of Republican reforms. Indeed, the government engaged in open Church-baiting with its appropriation of saints' days for holidays celebrating Republican ideals and of the Panthéon to enshrine the Republic's 'secular saints'.²⁹ But, faced with a vacuum of its own making, the government responded by inventing its own, self-reflexive religion, complete with a complex iconographic programme.

The irony of an ostensibly forward-looking, 'an-iconic regime', in the words of

²⁷ C. Phillips, 'Gustave Moreau', *Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), pp. 230-31.

²⁸ Tombs (1996), p. 139.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

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Maurice Agulhon, needing to invent an iconography for itself gave rise to some disconcerting contradictions.³⁰ The divinity of the Republic was Marianne, consciously modelled, significantly, on a pagan goddess, Ceres. Presumably a figure with classical antecedents was chosen for its associations with Enlightenment ideals and to highlight Marianne's role as an 'anti-Madonna'. However, in actual practice images of the 'goddess' were created, positioned, and treated in much the same way as the Catholic images of the Virgin they sought to supplant; reports of good citizens bending the knee, without a hint of irony, to a bust of Marianne set on a plinth before a *mairie* were quite common,³¹ bearing witness to the elision of Catholic practice and the new cult of the Republic. Not surprisingly, Marianne figured prominently in the architectural decoration and freestanding statuary of the 1889 Exposition; her blandly beneficent presence was as ubiquitous as that of the Virgin in the sculptural programme of a cathedral.³²

A few words should be said at this point about the dramatic changes in status that sacred images and objects underwent from the mid-nineteenth century on both sides of the Channel. I have already spoken of the perceived threat posed by religious images *in a religious context* within Protestant Britain and the need to defuse that threat by decontextualising them, by redirecting the emphasis from doctrine to formal qualities (exemplified by the growing scholarly interest in Renaissance art) and mood (typified by artists involved in Aestheticism). The case in France was rather different. Despite the Republic's hard-edged anticlericalism, which in 1889, on the eve of the *ralliement* (the short-lived and tentative rapprochement between Church and state) was beginning to soften, the state continued to support and commission religious art.³³ However, it championed artists who worked in a Naturalist mode, regarding styles that smacked of archaism as tainted by their associations with the legitimist movement and as harking back to the bad old days of a government dominated by clerics.³⁴ (Indeed,

³⁰ M. Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris, 1989), pp. 21-22.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 184, 175.

³² For Marianne's presence and significance at the Exposition, and throughout Paris, see Burolet (1989).

³³ On the effects of the *ralliement* of the early 1890s on religious painting, see Thomson (2004), pp. 117-22.

³⁴ For a far more in-depth discussion of the status and practice of religious painting under the Third Republic, see M. P. Driskel, *Representing Belief: Politics, Religion, and Society in Nineteenth Century France* (University Park, 1992). Especially relevant here is his tracing of the co-opting of a hieratic, 'Byzantine' aesthetic by the avant-garde from its origins in the authoritarian Ultramontane movement. See also Thomson (2004), pp. 135-39, for a analysis of the ambiguities inherent in modern-life,

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the predominance of this state-sponsored Naturalism, particularly in the work of Bastien-Lepage and his disciples, in the Decennale exhibition at the Exposition probably played a part in Moreau's decision to show his work exclusively in the Centennale, although as a newly elected Academician and a member of the selection jury, he was entitled to show in both.)³⁵ Among the defining qualities of this officially sanctioned Naturalism were its emphasis on narrative action and its embrace of a modern notion of time very much at odds with the changelessness ordinarily associated with religious images. We may recall Hans Belting's thesis that one of the central themes running through the history of religious imagery is the privileging of the hieratic image, or *imago*, over the narrative, or *historia*;³⁶ Third Republic policy would seem, in its relentless promotion of secular modernity, to be attempting to abolish this time-honoured hierarchy.

At the same time, France and Britain were in the grip of a burgeoning craze for sacred objects, both genuine and counterfeit, as collector's items. Museums in both countries, particularly the Musée de Cluny in Paris and the South Kensington Museum in London, were either set up specifically to house medieval, for which in most cases we may read religious, objects, or collected them in quantities; removed from their original settings in churches and monasteries, these began to acquire an aura of aesthetic mystique divorced from, but also in some ways a subversion or perversion of, their intended function.³⁷ (It hardly seems coincidental that two of the most avid fictional collectors of religious objects were the great Decadent heroes of France and Britain, Des Esseintes and Dorian Gray.³⁸) Conversely, religious adoration began to be displaced onto objects and symbols that had not originally had any sacred content; we have already seen one example of this in the guise of Marianne, and as we shall see in a tour of the grounds of the 1889 Exposition, it could assume a bewildering variety of forms.

Naturalist interpretations of religious subjects and in the concurrent casting of secular subjects in sacred terms by leading Naturalists such as Lhermitte and Cottet.

³⁵ See Chapter 2. Moreau's aversion to Naturalism is apparent in much of his art critical writings; see Cooke (2002), vol. 2.

³⁶ H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of Images before the Age of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago 1994), p. 20.

³⁷ On the collecting of medieval art for art's sake, see E. Emery and L. Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: the Medieval Revival in fin-de-siècle France* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 61-84. See also Weber (1986), pp. 34-35, on the fashion among the elite for decadent mysticism and neo-Catholicism in the late 1880s and 1890s and its relationship to the craze for all things (pseudo) medieval.

³⁸ On Dorian's obsessive collecting of copes, descriptions of which were lifted almost verbatim from a guide to the collections of the South Kensington Museum, see O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford, 1994, 1891), pp. 114-15.

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Where, then, do Burne-Jones and Moreau's own ideas on religion fit within this highly charged and paradox-ridden milieu? Neither was a conventional Christian; what few tantalising clues they have left us as to their beliefs may shed some light on

how they, and their art, responded to these contradictions. Burne-Jones, as has already been mentioned, read theology at Oxford with the intention of taking orders. According to one of his first biographers, Fortunée de Lisle, during his first year at Oxford, Burne-Jones and his new friend William Morris, ablaze with enthusiasm fed by the heady atmosphere of the Tractarian movement, aspired to found a monastery ‘in which they might “combine an ascetic life with the organised production of religious art”’; – even then they felt that their religious vocation would be incomplete unless it included art’.³⁹ Although within a year he had given up this dream, ultimately deciding that art need not be subservient to religion and could be pursued as an end in itself, and despite the contradiction inherent in his being a decorator of churches who gradually stopped attending church, the inseparability in his mind of aesthetic and spiritual concerns continued to inform his oeuvre. If he took pains to dissociate himself from the sillier expressions of this philosophy by certain followers of Aestheticism, the divinity of art and the artistic value of divinity are nonetheless defining concerns in his work, and particularly in *King Cophetua*.

Moreau’s religious ideals are rather more difficult to pin down. The child of agnostic parents who appears not to have received a religious education, he was never a practicing Catholic, and his suspicion of the more outrageous manifestations of the Catholic revival of the 1890s (particularly Sâr Péladan and the Salon de la Rose + Croix) is well documented. However, he does seem to have adhered to a number of typical beliefs of the period, including the cult of the Virgin, the veneration of the blood of martyrs, and hostility to scientific positivism.⁴⁰ The only real clues he left as to his beliefs are a series of jottings that probably date from the 1880s in which he set forth a highly personal *credo*:

Do you believe in God?

I believe *only* in him.

I believe neither in that which I touch, nor in that which I see. I only believe in what I do not see and uniquely in what I feel.

³⁹ F. de Lisle, *Burne-Jones* (London, 1904), p. 13.

⁴⁰ See Mathieu (1994), pp. 174-76, and Driskel (1992), p. 229.

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My brain, my reason seem ephemeral to me and of a questionable reality; my interior sentiment alone seems eternal to me and incontestably certain.⁴¹

The similarities of sentiment and vocabulary to the concurrent explosion of Symbolist manifestoes, with their privileging of suggestion and inner vision over the positivist insistence that seeing is believing, is striking. At a later date, Moreau elaborated on this Symbolist/religious manifesto, describing the ideal artist as having ‘a soul of childlike ingenuity and stupefying complication; this soul, as a function of art, impose[s] on itself the task of showing everywhere and always . . . that which comes directly from God and that which was neither fashioned nor deformed by men’.⁴²

Both his vision and that of Burne-Jones initially seem to locate them outside the prevailing mood, and many are the writers who have fallen into the trap of considering their art in isolation, or as an instinctive recoiling from it.⁴³ I would argue, instead, that both artists’ commitment to a religion of aestheticism and an aesthetic vision of religion engages directly and multifariously with contemporary religious debate – nowhere more so than within the Exposition.

A new array of nuances opens up when we consider *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* within the architectural setting of the Exposition Universelle. Although the Exposition’s organisers promoted it as an unequivocal celebration of progress, a revival of the expansive spirit of the 1867 Exposition after the lean years of the early

Third Republic,⁴⁴ and there is every indication that the majority of the Expositiongoing

public responded with wholehearted enthusiasm, peeling back the veneer of propaganda reveals a deep ambivalence toward the prevailing Liberal ideology of free trade, material progress, imperialism and capitalism that informed most elements of

⁴¹ ‘Croyez-vous en Dieu? Je ne crois qu’à lui seul. Je ne crois ni à ce que je touche, ni à ce que je vois. Je ne crois qu’à ce que je ne vois pas et uniquement à ce que je sens. Mon cerveau, ma raison me semblent éphémères et d’une réalité douteuse; mon sentiment intérieur seul me paraît éternel, incontestablement certain’. Cooke (2002), vol. 1, p. 163. Cooke dates this note after 1880 based on a reference in the remainder of the text to the (apparently recent) death of Flaubert.

⁴² ‘Une âme d’une ingénuité enfantine et d’une complication stupéfiante. Cette âme, comme fonction d’art, s’était imposé le devoir de montrer partout et toujours . . . ce qui lui vient directement de Dieu et ce qui n’a pas été façonné ni déformé par les hommes’. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 165. Cooke believes this note may have been a self-penned obituary.

⁴³ Huysmans must bear the blame for originating the stereotype of Moreau as ‘un mystique enfermé, en plein Paris, dans une cellule où ne pénètre même plus le bruit de la vie contemporaine qui bat furieusement pourtant les portes du cloître’: Huysmans (1883), p. 135. Burne-Jones’s definition of his art as ‘a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be – in a better light than any light that ever shone – in a land that no one can define or remember, only desire’ has often been cited uncritically by scholars as evidence of wilful isolation from society; see for example M. Harrison and B. Waters, *Burne-Jones* (London, 1973) and P. Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones* (Stroud, 1975, 1997).

⁴⁴ Isay (1937), p. 182.

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the Exposition.⁴⁵ This unease becomes painfully apparent when we examine three of the principal architectural spaces in the Exposition grounds: the Palais des Beaux-Arts, the Galerie des Machines, and the Tour Eiffel.

Of the three, the Palais des Beaux-Arts [Figures 37.1-12.4] made the greatest effort to conceal its modern design and construction, draping a historicising skin, complete with allegorical figures of Poetry, Study, Truth and Colour, over its iron framework. Although Frantz Jourdain praised the decorators for their use of modern, industrial materials without attempting to disguise them,⁴⁶ and the architects Dutert, Sauvestre and Formigé for breaking with the teachings of the École des Beaux-Arts, the supposed triumph of ahistorical architecture is not so clear-cut when we examine the building from two different angles, inside and out. Viewed side-on, the palace’s exterior displays the streaming horizontality of a contemporary urban train station. Yet viewed from its frontal approach, with its dome of glittering faience tiles, it resembles nothing so much as an Italian Gothic church. Once inside, the central hall and ground floor sculpture galleries extend the impression of streaming forward motion, evoking the anxiety of rushing through a crowd (in this case, of sculptures as well as of people) to catch a train – but again, beneath the dome, as well as in some of the galleries (not least in the British Fine Art section) a reverential calm and stillness reigned. Paul Mantz made this most explicit in his comment that the Palais des Beaux-Arts had ‘the calming serenity of a temple’, though he was quick to temper any undue religious overtones by qualifying it as a temple of peace where the results of the artistic conflicts since the Revolution now hung in ‘fraternity and concord’.⁴⁷

Moving beyond the uneasy compromise between a quasi-sacred past and an ahistorical present, we come to the Exposition’s most iconic structures, the Galerie des Machines and the Tour Eiffel. The machine hall [Figures 38.1-2] might be considered an exercise in architectural jingoism: modelled on St Pancras Station, then the largest freestanding iron structure in the world, it seemed to be trying to beat British technological prowess at its own game.⁴⁸ Beneath its soaring glass and iron vault, rows of machines were ranged like phalanxes of immense idols, technology and

⁴⁵ See Greenhalgh (1988), pp. 23-27, for further discussion of the driving political ideology behind the

pre-1914 Expositions.

⁴⁶Jourdain (1889), pp. 36-38. See also Chapter 2.

⁴⁷'La sérénité calmante d'un temple'; 'fraternité et concorde': P. Mantz, 'Exposition universelle de 1889: La Peinture française (1^{er} article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 2 (July 1889), p. 28.

⁴⁸For the history and design of the Galerie des Machines, see M.-L. Crosnier Leconte, 'La Galerie des Machines', in C. Mathieu (1989), pp. 164-95.

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progress elevated to the realm and status of deities. It was a point not lost on observers, whether or not they approved (although of the key buildings on the Champ de Mars, it was the most consistently praised by otherwise sceptical critics, both British and French) – but in terms of sheer contentiousness it paled in comparison with the Tour Eiffel.

It is easy to forget that the tower, so much a part of Paris's identity for the past century, was once viewed as an unwelcome intruder in the cityscape; before the design had even been agreed, controversy was already swirling around it. Before the design competition opened, a reporter for *La Semaine des Constructeurs* was already scoffing at the very idea as 'an ill-advised rival to the Tower of Babel';⁴⁹ shortly after the winning design, by Eiffel and Sauvestre, was selected, Paul Eudel, writing in *L'Illustration*, again labelled it a 'Tower of Babel', adding, 'personally, I confess I'd willingly swap this heavy piece of iron scaffolding for the chapel of Amboise, the doors of Saint-Maclou, the campanile of Pisa, the spire of the Sainte-Chapelle or the staircase of Chambord'.⁵⁰ Eudel's desire to substitute a piece of ecclesiastical architecture of established aesthetic merit for this unapologetically stripped down and of-the-moment structure betrays an anxiety voiced by other observers that the tower would displace Notre-Dame as the city's symbol (indeed, this anxiety seems to have been compounded by the recognition that the tower's design fused the spire of Notre-Dame and the legs of the Arc de Triomphe), and by extension, exchange the values represented by the church for the empty glamour of progress and commerce.

Huysmans memorably employed the trope of Tour Eiffel versus Notre-Dame in a scathing attack on the Exposition's architecture, declaring,

[The tower] should be the spire of Notre-Dame of the Junk Shop, a spire stripped of bells, but armed with a cannon that announces the opening and closing of the offices, that calls the faithful to the Mass of finance, to the Vespers of the bank charge, a cannon which sounds, with its volleys of powder, the liturgical feast days of Capital!⁵¹

⁴⁹'Malencontreuse rivale de la Tour de Babel': *La Semaine des Constructeurs* 10, no. 45 (May 1886), p. 537.

⁵⁰'Personnellement j'avoue que je troquerais ce lourd échafaudage en fer, pour la chapelle d'Amboise, les portes de Saint-Maclou, le campanile de Pise, la flèche de la Sainte-Chapelle, ou l'escalier de Chambord': P. Eudel, 'Les Projets du concours pour l'Exposition de 1889', *L'Illustration* 87, no. 2258 (5 June 1886), p. 395.

⁵¹'Elle serait la flèche de Notre-Dame de la Brocante, la flèche privée des cloches, mais armée d'un canon qui annonce l'ouverture et la fin des offices, qui convie les fidèles aux messes de la finance, aux vêpres de l'agio, d'un canon, qui sonne, avec ses volées de poudre, les fêtes liturgiques du Capital!': Huysmans (1889), p. 179.

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Even popular souvenir images of the Exposition bore witness to this ambivalence. Some of the more high-flown illustrations portrayed the tower emerging from a starry mist like a celestial being; on the other hand, an engraving by Georges Garen [Figure 39] depicting the Exposition grounds at night gives the Tower, ablaze with artificial light and wreathed at its base with crimson smoke from the fireworks and plumes of spray from the illuminated fountains, a decidedly diabolical – even apocalyptic – air. **Animal, Vegetable, Mineral – Or All Three at Once?**

Within this confrontation between iron/modernity and church/tradition, the ways in which Burne-Jones and Moreau treat metal, decoration, and construction assume a particular potency. Robert de la Sizeranne recalled the stunning effect *King Cophetua* engendered when it was viewed within, and in contrast to, the overall setting of the Exposition; it is worth revisiting his impressions:

It seemed as though we had come forth from the Universal Exhibition of Wealth to see the symbolical expression of the Scorn of Wealth. All round this room were others, where emblems and signs of strength and luxury were collected from all the nations of the world – pyramids, silvered or gilt, representing the amount of precious metal dug year by year out of the earth; palaces and booths containing the most sumptuous products of the remotest isles – and here behold a king laying his crown at the feet of a beggar-maid for her beauty’s sake! . . . It was a dream – but a noble dream – and every young man who passed that way, even though resolved never to sacrifice strength to right, or riches to beauty, was glad, nevertheless, that an artist should have depicted the Apotheosis of Poverty. It was the revenge of art on life.⁵²

Thanks to a schematic plan of the British galleries reproduced in the catalogue of the British Fine Art section, we know that *King Cophetua* occupied a commanding position in the second gallery of oil paintings, on an end wall in the long, narrow space, flanked by G. F. Watts’s *Hope* and *The Judgment of Paris* – like the high altar in a church.⁵³ Although Sizeranne does not allude to it here, his assessment of the effect of *King Cophetua* as an altarpiece celebrating the supremacy of Beauty over Wealth within the British galleries takes on further significance when we consider that in the same room hung Watts’s *Mammon*. Subtitled by the artist, ‘Dedicated to His Worshippers’, this cruel personification of wealth was unambiguously posited as an anti-altarpiece; as we will recall, Watts had earlier expressed a wish to erect a statue of

⁵² Sizeranne (1898), p. 515.

⁵³ H. Blackburn, *A Complete Illustrated Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture in the British Fine Art Section* (London and Paris, 1889), p. 43. No installation views of the British galleries have thus far surfaced; likewise, no plans of the hang of the Centennale have been traced.

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the monster in Hyde Park, in the hope that ‘his worshippers would be at least honest enough to bend the knee publicly to him’.⁵⁴

However, Sizeranne’s paean to this ‘Apotheosis of Poverty’ obscures the complexity of its relation to its surroundings. *King Cophetua*, its longstanding association with the Socialist philosophy of Burne-Jones’s friend William Morris notwithstanding, is not a straightforward deprecation of wealth;⁵⁵ nor does it turn its back so completely on the technology of the present. Burne-Jones appears to have drawn the architectural setting from Carlo Crivelli’s *Annunciation* [Figure 40], in the National Gallery from 1864.⁵⁶ This reverent referencing of the Quattrocento would seem to isolate the scene safely from the nineteenth-century present – that is, until we consider that Burne-Jones transformed the wood panelling of the Virgin’s chamber, Midas-like, into a highly polished bronze jewel-box, simultaneously vertiginous and claustrophobic in its extreme narrowness and soaring height. Some of the designs in his *Flower Book*, on which he was at work from 1882, suggest the fascination this brazen chamber held for him, and are notable for the disparity between their chilly settings and the events unfolding within them: *Golden Shower* [Figure 41] transposes the story of Danaë from the warm domestic interior favoured by other artists to an empty, highly polished golden chamber in which a heavily draped Danaë palpably shivers, while *Golden Gate* and *Welcome to the House* [Figure 42] envision the gates of the celestial sphere as fashioned of a similarly cold, uncomfoting golden bronze

that hardly seems guaranteed to make the prospect of entering Heaven very enticing. The other metallic elements of the picture, Cophetua's armour and crown, are even more extraordinary. The armour bears little or no relation to any historical armour, resembling leather, feathers and fish scales – organic material, that is, rather than mineral. The hybrid nature of the armour was not lost on French observers, one of whom characterised it and its surroundings as 'mineral flora' – incidentally, the exact phrase used by Huysmans to describe the setting of *Galatea* nine years earlier.⁵⁷ Georgiana Burne-Jones records that her husband had commissioned the metalworker W. A. S. Benson to design the pieces, 'expressly in order to lift them out of

⁵⁴ M. S. Watts (1912), vol. 2, p. 149.

⁵⁵ See G. Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, p. 139.

⁵⁶ Indeed, Burne-Jones had an embarrassment of Crivelli at his fingertips while he worked on *King Cophetua*; the National Gallery acquired nine of its eleven works by that master between 1859-1875, while the South Kensington Museum received the bequest of the so-called Jones Madonna in 1882.

⁵⁷ 'Flore minérale'. M. Hamel, 'Exposition universelle de 1889: les écoles étrangères (premier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1889), p. 230. See also Huysmans (1883), p. 137.

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association with any historical time'.⁵⁸ When we recall that the winning design for the Tour Eiffel was the one that broke the most sharply with the past, Burne-Jones's wilful syncretism, and his willingness to make use of Benson's revival of traditional metalworking techniques allied with contemporary methods of production, rather than paint directly from historical pieces, reveals a deeper and more subtly questioning connection with technology than has previously been taken for granted.

Even the beggar maid herself is not immune to all of this creeping metal.

Although ostensibly clad in rags, the colour, the drape of the stuff and the stiffness of the hem of her shift more closely resemble silver or pewter than fabric.⁵⁹ The dress caused Burne-Jones considerable difficulties, as demonstrated by the number of drapery studies he made and his remarks in a letter in November 1883 about his desire 'to put on the Beggar Maid a sufficiently beggarly coat, that will not look unappetizing to King Cophetua, – that I hope has been achieved, so that she shall look as if she deserved to have it made of cloth of gold and set with pearls'.⁶⁰ It would seem that Burne-Jones settled on a compromise halfway between rags and cloth of gold, a compromise that both anchors the maid in the rich metallic setting like a jewel and also throws her into isolated relief. Even her limbs and face, whose extraordinary pallor was remarked upon by most reviewers, resemble ivory or marble rather than living flesh, evoking a kinship with Galatea, the 'milk-white' Nereid. Jean Lorrain, one of Burne-Jones's most ardent devotees in France, seized on the tension between flesh and mineral in his fairy tale 'La Princesse des chemins' (1892), essentially an evocation of the picture in prose. After devoting fully two-fifths of the text to an overheated catalogue of the metallic and jewelled wonders of the king's palace, he turns his attention to the beggar maid, characterising her flesh, and in particular her feet, as 'ivory stained with blood'.⁶¹ Trapped in an intermediate state between mineral (although ivory, significantly, is an organic substance with the hardness of stone) and flesh, Burne-Jones's beggar maid, and Lorrain's prose rendering of her, provide a

⁵⁸ Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, p. 145-46.

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Elizabeth Prettejohn for drawing my attention to the metallic character of the dress.

⁶⁰ Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, pp. 134-35.

⁶¹ 'Ivoire taché de sang'. J. Lorrain, 'La Princesse des Chemins', in *Princesses d'ivoire et d'ivresse* (Paris, 1902, first published with a dedication to Burne-Jones in *L'Echo de Paris*, 22 August 1892), p. 21. I am grateful to Elizabeth Emery for pointing me to its later appearance in the *Revue illustrée* in 1897, complete with Pre-Raphaelite pastiche illustrations by Manuel Orazzi but without the original dedication and with no reproductions of, or reference to, *King Cophetua*. See also M. Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. A. Davidson (London and New York, 1970, 1931), p. 364, for a discussion,

albeit dismissive, of the fairy tale.

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vivid illustration of Francette Pacteau's contention that the use of jewel metaphors in the description of the feminine body results in the evacuation of that very body, leaving an imprisoning casing of precious materials.⁶² Small wonder, then, that Lorrain leaves the beggar maid staring sadly out of the window 'as if through the bars of a gaol'.⁶³

Moreau situates *Galatée* in a different sort of built environment, a coral grotto overgrown with the simultaneously vegetable and animal forms of anemones and soft corals – creatures in whom scientific interest had been growing steadily. Ernest Chesneau's remark in his Salon review that he 'reckon[ed] Mr Darwin himself would not look at the painting without some interest' indicates an awareness of Moreau's creative engagement with the study of biology and evolution (belying Huysmans's notorious characterisation of him as 'a mystic shut away in the middle of Paris').⁶⁴ Recent research has shown that he based the marine fauna in *Galatée* upon illustrations in Philip Henry Gosse's *Actinologia Britannica* (published in London, 1858-60), which he consulted in the library of the Muséum de l'Histoire Naturelle [Figure 43].⁶⁵ A glance at the sketches he made after the illustrations, though, shows his imagination already at work, transforming the dull browns and greys and muted reds of Gosse's illustrations into a vibrantly coloured fantasy. We cannot know whether he also read Gosse's description of coralaceous anemones, whose explication of the structure of their stone skeletons borrows heavily from the language of Gothic architecture with its talk of walls supported by ribs and the arrangement of coral plates in cycles, but it seems likely that, in choosing to construct an underwater cathedral with an organic structure, he was well aware of the implications of combining nature and artifice.⁶⁶

Another layer of meaning reveals itself when we compare Moreau's rendering of the scene to his precedents in the Villa Farnesina. Raphael depicted Galatea triumphantly skimming over the waves on a dolphin-drawn chariot; although she is a water nymph, she is above, and by implication has mastery over, her own element.

Yet Moreau has placed a seemingly water-breathing Galatea *within* water, in an

⁶²F. Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (London, 1994), pp. 28-29.

⁶³'Comme à travers les barreaux d'une geôle'. Lorrain (1902), p. 24.

⁶⁴'Je me figure que M. Darwin lui-même ne la verrait pas sans quelque intérêt'. E. Chesneau, 'Salon de 1880', *Le Moniteur universel* (2 May 1880).

⁶⁵Lacambre (1998b), p. 54.

⁶⁶P. H. Gosse, *Actinologia Britannica: A History of the British Sea Anemones and Corals* (London, 1858-60), p. 307.

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enclosed space, surrounded by otherworldly anemones – beautiful and poisonous creatures that exist in a limbo halfway between the animal and the vegetable. Her oneness with them and with the water is underlined by Moreau's extraordinary treatment of her long blonde hair; the thickly built-up paint surface is almost identical with that of the anemones, and the ends of her locks appear to dissolve into the water. Polyphemus appears at first glance manifestly an intruder in the world of this beautiful, unthinking marine animal, sufficient in herself; she recalls nothing so much as Bataille's characterisation of the animal, 'in the world like water in water'.⁶⁷ Yet as the ends of Galatea's tresses melt into their surroundings, the rest of her hair resembles nothing so much as the striations of the rocks and the flowering vine trailing across her groin seems to emerge from her, implying that she is part plant, somehow related to the surrounding marine flora – a creature simultaneously water

and stone, floral and carnal. Odilon Redon, who certainly knew the painting, and whose interest in biology is thoroughly documented, took the morphing of forms to an extreme in his own version, *The Cyclops* [Figure 44]; however, the doubts about the substance of Galatea's body raised in Moreau's painting are arguably more disconcerting for being unresolved.

The morphing of form and the fluidity of the substance of Galatea's body had a precedent that Moreau certainly knew well: the original story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁶⁸ The frustrated Polyphemus serenades Galatea (who listens unobserved) with a dizzying stream of simile and metaphor, the register shifting capriciously from the trite to the bizarre bordering on grotesque over the course of fifteen lines, comparing her successively to the petals of privet (l.789), an alder (l.790), crystal glass, a young kid (l.791), shells worn smooth by the ocean (l.792), the sun in winter and shade in summer (l.793), a gazelle, a plane tree (l.794), ice, grapes (l.795), curdled milk, the wings of a swan (l.796), a garden (l.797), an untamed heifer (l.798), an ancient oak, waves (l.799), willow, bryony (l.800), a stone crag, a river in full spate (l.801), a peacock, fire (l.802), thorns, a she-bear (l.803), the sea, and a trampled snake (l.804) – it is almost as if Galatea herself undergoes a series of metamorphoses, from plant to animal to stone to water and back again.

⁶⁷Bataille (1989), p. 25.

⁶⁸The full story is found in *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, book 13, ll. 740-897, trans. D. Raeburn (London, 2004), pp. 534-41.

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Both critics and poets took up this trope of morphing form and substance; we have already seen Huysmans's characterisation of Galatea as a jewel set among jewels; Victor Champier echoed this by comparing her both to a flower ('an exquisite flower rising, all fragrant, from the Ideal') and to a jewel.⁶⁹ But perhaps more significant in this case are a group of four sonnets inspired by *Galatée* by the Symbolist poets Robert de Montesquiou (1880), Henri de Régnier (1887), the Cuban Julián del Casal (1891), and Jean Lorrain (1893).⁷⁰ All four share a few salient characteristics, including a lapidary use of language, an obvious delight in the naming and description of rich and luxurious materials (both organic and inorganic), and a tendency to work from the outside in, or from background to foreground, setting the scene and then positioning Galatea (and Polyphemus, often as an afterthought) within her surroundings as a jeweller carefully places a jewel in its setting. De Montesquiou in particular accentuated the fluidity of Galatea's body, alluding to her 'fluid whiteness' and further qualifying her as 'streaming, milky, astral', while positioning her in the midst of marine flora which he described alternately as stained glass (an integral component of a cathedral, echoed by Lorrain in his reference to the grotto's 'sonorous vaults') and 'gems close to blossoming'.⁷¹ The confusion and elision of form reaches an extreme in Régnier's sonnet, 'Galatée'; never published in his lifetime, it is worth quoting in full here.

Un rêve de crystal, d'azur et de fleurs peintes,
 Éclos loin du soleil, qui n'est jamais venu,
 Par le seuil entr'ouvert du retrait inconnu,
 S'introduire en la nuit des ténèbres enfreintes.
 Aux parois d'airain clair, décor de flores feintes,
 Et, comme elles, dressant l'émail de son corps nu,
 Galathée, immobile et d'un geste ingénu
 Défiant à jamais l'insulte des étreintes,
 Calme, sous le regard du cyclope affolé
 De l'éternel appât de la chair tentatrice,

Dont le désir crisper son masque en bronze lisse,

⁶⁹ 'La fleur exquise sortie toute embaumée de l'idéal'. V. Champier, *L'Année artistique. Troisième année, 1880-1881* (Paris, 1881), p. 83.

⁷⁰ See Cooke (2003), pp. 161-65, for an in-depth discussion of the sonnets.

⁷¹ 'Sa blancheur fluide'; 'Ruisselante, lactée, astrale'; 'gemmes près d'éclorre'. R. de Montesquiou, 'Nymphé', in idem, *Le Chef des odeurs suaves* (Paris, 1893), p. 135; see also note 104.

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Songe, parmi les fleurs du retrait isolé,

Receleur du trésor de ses gloires charnelles,

À l'intacte blancheur des neiges fraternelles.⁷²

That the setting is 'a dream of crystal, azure, and *painted* flowers' immediately suggests a refined, excessive, and self-referential artificiality; strikingly, Galatea herself, spied upon by a bronze Cyclops, is the most artificial element of the scene, with a body composed, literally, of flesh, snow, and enamel – the logical extreme of Ovid's amorphous paean. Within the Exposition Universelle, with its mind-boggling array of goods and edifices composed of one substance pretending to be another, the notion of Galatea as shape-shifting goddess, simultaneously animal and mineral, acquires a particularly disquieting resonance.

The disturbing suggestion that the adoration of Polyphemus has elevated the animal and the mineral to the level of the divine takes yet another turn when we gaze more closely at the assemblage of tiny figures on the floor of the grotto. Weightless wraiths defined only by coloured outlines, in contrast to Galatea whose body is modelled by light and shadow without the benefit of line, they seem to echo both her human form and the linear, un-modelled rendering of the corals and anemones, occupying a state somewhere between the two. That Moreau took as much trouble over these figures, whom Lorrain portrayed in his sonnet as 'divinities of the abyss, souls or flowers of flesh',⁷³ as he did over Galatea herself is evident from numerous meticulous studies; their presence clearly contributes much to the picture's overall meaning.⁷⁴ One such figure, hidden to the left of Galatea's feet among a tangle of coral, is worth lingering over [Figure 45]. This transparent water nymph is disposed in the attitude of voluptuous suffering, with hands apparently bound behind her head, in which St Sebastian is usually portrayed.⁷⁵ It was common practice in the painting

⁷² H. de Régner, 'Galatée', Musée Gustave Moreau, correspondance Delarue, quoted in Lacambre (1998b), p. 61.

⁷³ 'Divinités du gouffre, âmes ou fleurs de chair': J. Lorrain, 'Galathée', in idem, *L'Ombre ardent. Poésies* (Paris, 1897). Lorrain wrote the poem in 1893 and sent a handwritten copy to Moreau.

⁷⁴ See G. Lacambre, 'Une nouvelle acquisition du musée d'Orsay: la *Galatée*, 1880, de Gustave Moreau', *Revue du Louvre* 4 (October 1998), p. 76 (hereafter Lacambre 1998c), for the studies. Moreau appears to have used the same model, Adrienne Dubois, for both Galatea and some of the grotto figures.

⁷⁵ Although Lacambre and Cooke have both noted the presence of 'small figures' at the borders of the picture, they make no further comment on their significance. They also goes unmentioned in all Salon reviews I have thus far found – even, surprisingly, that of Huysmans. However, given that one needs to come within inches of the picture's surface to discern the figures, and that no photographs of the installation of the *salle hors concours*, where *Galatée* hung, have surfaced so far, it is possible that the original viewing conditions simply precluded anyone noticing the figures. St Sebastian was,

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of altarpieces in the Quattrocento to place a small image of a saint or of Christ at the bottom of the centre panel below the main image as a means of establishing a closer connection between the main image and the altar, on which the Eucharist was celebrated.⁷⁶ By inserting a diminutive figure resembling St Sebastian – a saint whose body was adored in Decadent circles as the site of the intertwining of beauty and masochistic suffering – in a tangle of animal-flowers, many of them painted in

sanguine reds, below a Nereid enthroned like a Madonna in an underwater cave, Moreau strengthens the painting's claim to be read overtly as an altarpiece, one that twists and travesties Christian practice, substituting for the veneration of virtue the worship of a painful and potentially destructive beauty.

A comparable blasphemous detail lurks in the minutely worked paint surface of *King Cophetua*, obscured by the play of light on the glazing. A line drawn in the wet paint with the point of the brush handle outlines the beggar maid's head;⁷⁷ surrounding this is a faintly glowing aureole. Again, this passed unnoticed by observers on both sides of the Channel; even if it had been readily visible under the glass which French critics found so peculiar, it was nowhere near as obvious or outrageous as the gold-leaf haloes Burne-Jones's mentor Rossetti placed behind the heads of genuine saints in modern dress (or, worse yet, behind the head of a nude and assertively carnal Venus).⁷⁸ The presence of this aureole, however subtle, demands that we read the beggar maid as a Madonna, venerated by Cophetua, whom Jean Lorrain described, tellingly, as 'immobile, as if in prayer'.⁷⁹ But this is a Madonna who, unlike Mantegna's with her sweetly inclined head and graceful gestures, will never acknowledge prayers. Once again, the paralysing stasis of the worship of beauty supersedes the veneration, and, presumably, active emulation of virtue ostensibly encouraged in its Renaissance ancestor.

incidentally, a frequent subject in Moreau's oeuvre throughout the 1870s, including a watercolour (Fogg Art Museum, Mathieu 165) exhibited at the 1876 Salon.

⁷⁶H. van Os, *Sieneese Altarpieces, 1215-1460: Form, Content, Function. Volume 1: 1215-1344*, trans. M. Hoyle (Groningen, 1988), pp. 13-14; I am grateful to Glyn Davies for first informing me of the practice of appending such figures to the main panels of altarpieces. Moreau would have seen numerous examples of this practice during his visit to Siena in 1858.

⁷⁷Penelope Fitzgerald has noted this feature and claims that Burne-Jones did it in order to emphasis the head; my own close observation appears to back up her claim. Fitzgerald (1997), p. 200.

⁷⁸See Chapter 4.

⁷⁹'Immobile et comme en prière'. Lorrain (2002), p. 136.

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Through a Glass, Darkly: A Dialogue with the Renaissance

The debt of both Burne-Jones and Moreau to the religious art of the Quattrocento is a factor frequently cited as a defining element of their work by contemporary observers, and by and large agreed upon by twentieth-century scholars; indeed, Mantz insisted that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the two artists' affinity with each other was their shared reverence for this era and the resulting work 'conceived in the style of 1490'.⁸⁰ Yet although Burne-Jones's drawing upon Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* and Crivelli's *Annunciation* are noted in most studies of *King Cophetua*, and while Moreau's stylistic debt to Mantegna in general was a truism repeated unthinkingly *ad infinitum* by nineteenth-century critics, relatively little attention has been given to the possibility that they both drew on Mantegna's Madonna; likewise, their affinities with the work of Leonardo da Vinci, particularly the *Mona Lisa*, remain surprisingly unexplored. I would suggest that viewing the dialogue between *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* as mediated by the lens of the past, and in the case of Leonardo, by the magisterial reading of Walter Pater, sheds further light on the transformation of the aesthetics of the Renaissance and the essentially public character of its sacred paintings into a private, decorative, and perverse religious art.

Burne-Jones visited Paris for the first time in 1855 with William Morris, viewing the *Madonna della Vittoria* at the Louvre and returning home with an engraving after it; Moreau, as an habitué of the Louvre from his student days, was well acquainted with the work.⁸¹ The compositional parallels between the *Madonna*

and *King Cophetua* have already been noted, but arresting disparities between the two open up when we look closer. The dais on which the Madonna is enthroned, although highly ornamental and artificial, is festooned with natural materials – greenery, fruits and flowers. Transported into the world of *King Cophetua*, fruit and flowers harden into metal and gems; poignantly, the scattered posy of anemones in the beggar maid’s hand and at her feet are almost all that remains of Mantegna’s floral effusion. As well, the facial expression of the kneeling knight, Francesco Gonzaga, was unusual for

⁸⁰ ‘Conçu à la mode de 1490’: P. Mantz, ‘La Peinture française (4e et dernier article)’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (November 1889), p. 508. While noting approvingly the similarities between *King Cophetua* and *Galatée*, Mantz allowed his national pride to get the better of him by insisting that Moreau should be viewed as the precursor and Burne-Jones as the follower by virtue of Moreau’s being seven years older.

⁸¹ For a thorough analysis of the painting’s iconography, see R. Lightbown, *Mantegna* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 180-84.

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its time in that, in place of the respectful solemnity normally associated with donors, he gazes smilingly up at the Virgin, his broad grin as much one of complicity as of gratitude: we should remember that the occasion for the commission of the altarpiece was an important military victory, highlighting the inextricable connections between the Church and civic and political matters.⁸² Yet Cophetua, his melancholy gaze unacknowledged as he languishes in gloomily ornate surroundings, his crown lying uselessly in his lap, abdicates the responsibilities of his position for the sake of adoring his own ‘Madonna’.

Moreau appears to have borrowed from, and subverted, the *Madonna della Vittoria* to similarly bizarre and perverse effect. The shape of the canopy over the Virgin’s throne and the lushness of the foliage and fruits find an analogue in the profuse growth of marine life in Galatea’s grotto; however, where Mantegna sets the Virgin’s throne in a heavenly realm of air and light (with patches of blue sky glimpsed in the interstices between the ribs of the canopy), Moreau plunges it into a dark, airless, watery space – if not exactly underground and, by extension, in the underworld, then uncomfortably close. But Moreau also seized on, and distorted, marine elements already present in Mantegna’s painting. The canopy is hung with strings of coral and pearls (the latter long associated with purity) in the form of paternosters, each bead standing for an *Ave*, while a branch of coral dangles directly above the Madonna; according to Ronald Lightbown, coral was believed at the time to ward off demons and was worn as a protecting amulet in battle.⁸³ In *Galatée*, however, the coral appears instead to *attract* a ‘demon’, while the symbolic virtues associated with coral and pearls are blurred and warped (Galatea herself, with her nacreous flesh, could be considered one giant pearl whose purity sits uneasily with her sensuality and causes suffering rather than purification). One last detail, easy to miss, completes the perverse reading of Mantegna. At the base of the throne is a relief panel depicting the Temptation, with Adam and Eve flanking the serpent-entwined Tree of Knowledge; by positioning them thus, Mantegna collapsed the narrative of the Fall and the Redemption (symbolised by the Virgin). The group of three tiny figures picked out in red outline in the lower left corner of *Galatée* bears a noticeable resemblance to the relief – but Galatea’s disengagement from worldly concerns would appear to preclude any possibility of redemption.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

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The swing from the public and exterior to the private and interior mines another level of meaning in Burne-Jones’s appropriation and transformation of

Crivelli's *Annunciation*. I have already noted the effect of his borrowing and gilding of the interior space of the Virgin's house; moving from the interior to the exterior, or more precisely, to the doorframe, brings forth other points of comparison. If we examine the carved scrolls ornamenting the doorposts in the *Annunciation* with those on the pilasters of *King Cophetua*'s frame, we see that the picture frame is almost a direct copy of the doorposts. Given how well Burne-Jones knew the *Annunciation* and that he is known to have commissioned the frame expressly for his own painting,⁸⁴ we may safely assume that this was done deliberately. Enlarging the doorframe to frame the entire canvas effectively turns the scene inside out, transforming this most public and politically charged of Annunciations – Crivelli was commissioned to paint it to celebrate the granting of semi-autonomous government to his adopted home of Ascoli Piceno, and was ordered to include the city's patron saint, Emidius, and set it in a recognisable street – into one of stifling interiority.⁸⁵ The brilliant, all-pervading sunlight that drenches Crivelli's Ascoli street is darkened to a tenebrous gloom out of which the figures emerge like phantoms; the landscape is reduced to a crepuscular patch glimpsed through a high window. The open doorway in the *Annunciation* symbolises Mary's epithet, *Porta Coeli* (doorway of Heaven) and implies her willingness to intercede in earthly affairs;⁸⁶ Burne-Jones's transformation of Crivelli's doorway into the frame of a space without a door, with no visible exit apart from the small high window, effectively isolates Cophetua's throne room from the outside world and strands it in a dream from which there appears to be no waking. A slightly later common ancestor of *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* adds another key to the unravelling of their mysteries: the *Mona Lisa* [Figure 46]. That both Burne-Jones and Moreau were familiar with it is beyond question, and a debt to Leonardo is immediately apparent in the shadowy, fantastical landscapes in the backgrounds of both paintings.⁸⁷ French critics were quick to note the family resemblance between Galatea and Mona Lisa; Marius Vachon, to name but one, described the painting as

⁸⁴ J. Christian, ed., *Edward Burne-Jones* (exh. cat., London, Hayward Gallery, Southampton, Southampton Art Gallery and Birmingham, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1975), p. 56; see also Wildman and Christian (1998), p. 255, for further information on the frame.

⁸⁵ See R. Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 323-44, for an exhaustive discussion of the *Annunciation*'s commission and iconographical programme.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁸⁷ Moreau also seems to acknowledge a debt to the grotto-like space in the *Virgin of the Rocks*.

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suffused 'with the mysterious and troubling poetry in the conception of [Moreau's] feminine ideal, like the *Gioconda* of Leonardo da Vinci'.⁸⁸ W. S. Taylor has also raised the possibility of its influence on Burne-Jones's depiction of the beggar maid.⁸⁹ But we might most usefully view the relationship of *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* to the *Mona Lisa* through yet another lens, Walter Pater's 'Notes on Leonardo da Vinci'. First published anonymously in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1869 and reprinted twice in *The Renaissance* in 1873 and 1877, it would certainly have been within Burne-Jones's frame of reference, and while *The Renaissance* does not seem to have been translated into French until after the First World War, it was being embraced by Symbolist literary figures: Mallarmé praised Pater as 'the writer of highly embroidered prose *par excellence* of our time'.⁹⁰

Pater's delirious, impressionistic evocation of the *Mona Lisa* remains notorious for its ability to snuff out the possibility of ever again looking at the painting with an innocent eye; indirectly, traces of its effect appear in *King Cophetua* and *Galatée*. What is of particular interest here is his insistence on the *Mona Lisa* as what Paul Barolsky has termed 'the essential synthesis of antitheses'⁹¹ – of Nature and Art,

of myth and history, of body and soul, of paganism and Christianity, of life and death and of eternity and change. In Pater's words,

She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands.⁹²

This fusion of innocence and perverse secret knowledge made Pater's *Gioconda* a potent synthesis of chaste Madonna and amoral pagan goddess; underlying all of these stated contradictions are those of attraction and repulsion, fleshly warmth and marmoreal coldness. Kenneth Clark, a scholar whose approach to Leonardo was decidedly Paterian, echoed this paradox when he declared of the *Mona Lisa* that 'this absence of normal sensuality makes us pause and shiver, like a sudden wave of cold
⁸⁸ 'D'une poésie mystérieuse et troublante dans la conception de son idéal féminin, comme la *Joconde* de Léonard de Vinci'. M. Vachon, 'Salon de 1880', *La France* (30 April 1880).

⁸⁹ Taylor (1973), p. 153.

⁹⁰ 'Le prosateur ouvrier par excellence de ce temps': cited in P. Barolsky, *Walter Pater's Renaissance* (University Park, 1987), p. 48.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹² W. Pater, *The Renaissance* (Oxford, 1986, 1873), p. 80.

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air in a beautiful building'.⁹³ This is a sort of classical perfection at odds with the normative humanistic classicism promoted in the Renaissance but with great resonance in the late nineteenth century. Burne-Jones's beggar maid, too, with her marble skin and unreadable expression, embodies this conflict between attraction and repulsion, warmth and cold, as does Galatea with her seaweed hair and mineral body (whose primeval physical presence can be read, literally, as 'older than the rocks among which she sits') – and as Clark would one day find himself shivering in front of the *Mona Lisa*, one visitor to the Grosvenor Gallery in 1884 reported, standing before *King Cophetua*, 'a bathing feel', that is, the shrinking of flesh from ice-cold water.⁹⁴

Altars of Perversity: Masochism, Decoration, and the Suspension of Narrative

The distortion of worship is thrown into even higher relief in both paintings when we consider the growing elaboration of the decorative against the lessening of narrative action. A look at the evolution from study to final composition is instructive. Most of Burne-Jones's post-1875 studies for *King Cophetua* depict the king and the beggar maid enthroned in relatively spare surroundings [Figure 47]. While one could not, with any fairness, describe the scene as dynamic, there is some indication of a narrative: Cophetua is placed in closer proximity to the beggar maid, who, blushing slightly, acknowledges his presence by demurely averting her gaze, while a pair of pages sings lustily in the background. Yet when we turn to the final version, we find the two marooned in a brazen chamber whose every surface is worked and decorated; Cophetua, now seated on a lower step, gazes across an unbridgeable distance at the maid, who not only does not acknowledge him but seems completely unaware of him as she stares blankly, as if hypnotised, out of the canvas. Even the pages have fallen silent. In this regard, it is useful to examine Burne-Jones's own parody of the painting. In a comic drawing made for the young daughter of a friend in 1885, he recast *King Cophetua* in the style of his *bête noire*, Rubens [Figure 48]. The beggar maid, metamorphosed into a buxom, half-draped female who is

Rubenesque in every sense of the word, holds court from a curtained dais with a burly Cophetua in Roman armour who gesticulates wildly, to the accompaniment of shouting and further gesticulation from the pages. The figures' inherent

⁹³ K. Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci* (London, 1989, 1939), p. 175.

⁹⁴ Fitzgerald (1997), p. 200. The visitor was Mary Gladstone.

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ridiculousness aside, Burne-Jones's distaste for the other distinguishing characteristics of Rubens's swirling baroque classicism – the sweeping, windblown movement (here subtly lampooned by the dashing facture), the heavy-handed drama, the muscular classicism and the over-emphasis of the figure at the expense of the setting (Burne-Jones's cod-Rubens is transposed to a sparsely sketched outdoor setting on the edge of what appears to be a Roman military camp) – is evident, and we may take it as an indication of the centrality of the devaluation of narrative action and the privileging of decorative stasis to the picture.

A similar transformation is evident in *Galatée*. A watercolour of the subject painted in 1878 [Figure 49] shows an almost coy Galatea, in a nearly empty grotto, lowering her eyes and draping an arm across her body against Polyphemus's avid, menacing gaze. Already, a key element of the narrative has been effaced – Galatea's handsome lover, Acis, whom Polyphemus murders out of jealousy. In this confrontation lies the possibility that Galatea has spurned the Cyclops not for a man but for communion with herself. In the finished painting, Galatea is set, in Huysmans's phrase, like a jewel among jewels, her right arm resting against the side of her coral throne, her eyes half-closed in a dreaming, self-absorbed smile. Tellingly, one of the noticeable changes Moreau made after the painting was shown at the Salon, visible in a comparison between the painting today and the Goupil photograph, was a repainting of Galatea's right hand; originally it rested, relaxed, on the rock. In the finished painting, it grips the rock, fingers tensed, as if clenched in the throes of a masturbatory reverie. Huysmans's observation that the figures in Moreau's oeuvre give 'the impression of a spiritual onanism, oft repeated, in chaste flesh' seems especially pertinent here.⁹⁵

One of the most important factors in the diminishment of narrative in both paintings is so obvious as to be easy to overlook: the titles. In history and literary painting, the title is indispensable to the viewer's identification and understanding of the subject and the incident. Yet Moreau and Burne-Jones have both entitled their pictures in ways that not only give the viewer precious little assistance in reading them, but that at the same time direct the eye to focus on some elements while effacing others by not mentioning them. If the titles fulfil the role of 'linguistic message' that Barthes termed 'anchorage', they do so in a vague and deceptive

⁹⁵ 'L'impression de l'onanisme spirituel, répété, dans une chair chaste'. Huysmans (1889), p. 19. I am grateful to Linda Goddard for drawing my attention to the relevance of this description here.

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manner.⁹⁶ A comparison of *Galatée* with one of its putative sources, Ottin's *Polyphemus surprising Acis and Galatea*, is instructive. The title names all three figures and its present participle invites us to view them as active participants in a narrative whose circumstances (the dalliance of Acis and Galatea inciting the murderous jealousy of the Cyclops) will lead to a dramatic conclusion (Polyphemus crushing Acis under a boulder). Moreau, ever wary of pedantic exegesis and frequently wilfully enigmatic in his titles and 'explanations' of his work, reduces this comparatively long-winded title to the bare minimum.⁹⁷ Not only is Acis no longer physically or verbally present, Polyphemus's existence has been effectively cancelled by his absence from the title; we are guided to regard the picture not as an episode in

an overarching story, but rather as a meditation on the beauty of Galatea herself. The fact that the vast majority of Salon and Exposition reviews make little or no reference to Polyphemus and focus almost exclusively on Galatea gives some indication of the extent to which the picture's title succeeded in directing the gaze. Indeed, Chesneau admonished,

Do not search for M. Gustave Moreau's *Galatea in Fable*. This very great artist [...] never borrows from ancient texts word for word. These texts furnish him with a situation, a theme that he then develops in the free activity of his thoughts. Galatea here is nothing but a symbol, that of Beauty; a name, that of Woman.⁹⁸

The case of *King Cophetua* is somewhat different. The ability to recognise a narrative hinges on a familiarity with Burne-Jones's literary sources; this was unproblematic enough in Britain, but less so in France, where Tennyson's poetry was not necessarily a ready reference and the original ballad probably even more obscure (witness the umbrage Duret took when faced with the painting on its native soil).⁹⁹

Like Moreau, Burne-Jones supplied no explanation of the subject in the French Exposition catalogue.¹⁰⁰ Although a few critics particularly well-versed in

⁹⁶ Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1977), pp. 39-41.

⁹⁷ See Cooke (2003), pp. 116-19, for a discussion of the importance of titles in Moreau's Salon paintings of the 1860s. Cooke partly attributes Moreau's refusal to give the viewer sufficient clues to a reaction against the practice of Paul Chenavard, who appended a verbose and pedantic explication to his *Divina Tragedia* (1859) in the Salon *livret*.

⁹⁸ 'Ne cherchez pas la *Galatée* de M. Gustave Moreau dans la *Fable*. Ce très grand artiste [...] n'emprunte jamais aux textes anciens leur lettre précise. Ces textes lui fournissent une situation, un thème qu'il développe ensuite dans la libre activité de sa pensée. Galatée ici n'est qu'un symbole, celui de la Beauté; un nom, celui de la Femme'. Chesneau (1880).

⁹⁹ See n.17 above.

¹⁰⁰ There is a brief description of the painting in Blackburn (1889), p. 9, but no allusion to the story or even to the literary sources.

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contemporary English poetry, including André Michel and Jean Lorrain, recognised *King Cophetua*'s literary sources (and Lorrain, in the same vein as the painting's first observers in Britain, laced his review with enthusiastically misspelled snippets of 'The Beggar Maid', throwing in a line of Keats for good measure),¹⁰¹ the unfamiliarity of the subject combined with the title's faintly exotic names, lack of a verb, and refusal to give the viewer any means of deducing a narrative meant that, at least for a non-Anglophone audience, Cophetua and the beggar maid are two figures of unknown (and possibly unknowable) relation to each other, two frozen figures stranded in an ornate setting for reasons that can only be guessed at. Unencumbered by familiarity with the picture's literary sources, French observers were not conditioned to read as narrowly as their British counterparts and tended to respond, rather like Cophetua himself, by paying rapt attention to the scene's aesthetic pleasures rather than by trying to reconstruct a narrative. Maurice Hamel, at the end of a rhapsodic account of the beauty and strangeness of the figures and their surroundings, notes almost as an afterthought that 'the disjointedness and the passivity of the scene have something disturbing about them that escapes analysis', speculating that 'this could be called the dream of life and the artist may have rendered here the anguish of the future, the fascination of souls before the unknown abruptly revealed' – hardly what Tennyson can have had in mind.¹⁰² Others, like Michel, were content to conclude (in English, no less), 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever'.¹⁰³

The simultaneous draining away, or looping, of narrative and heightening of decoration to a stifling level are qualities which figure strongly in Gilles Deleuze's

formulation of masochism; in his essay ‘Coldness and Cruelty’ he identifies the prototypical masochistic setting as one of ‘cluttered intimacy, [which] creates a chiaroscuro where the only things that emerge are suspended gestures and suspended suffering’.¹⁰⁴ The masochist, as Deleuze defines him, is one who does not in fact enjoy and seek out suffering as an end in itself, but who accepts it as a necessary

¹⁰¹ Lorrain (2002), pp. 134-35.

¹⁰² ‘Le décousu, le passif de la scène a quelque chose d’inquiétant et qui échappe à l’analyse’; ‘Cela pourrait s’appeler le rêve de la vie et l’artiste aurait rendu l’angoisse de l’avenir, la fascination des âmes devant l’inconnu brusquement ouvert’. Hamel (1889), p. 230.

¹⁰³ A. Michel, ‘Les beaux-arts à l’Exposition Universelle. Les écoles étrangères: l’Angleterre (I)’, *Journal des débats* (28 July 1889).

¹⁰⁴ G. Deleuze, ‘Coldness and Cruelty’, in *idem* and L. von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York, 1989, first published Paris, 1967), p. 34. I am indebted in my thinking on masochism and the decorative to C. Arscott, ‘Venus as dominatrix: nineteenth-century artists and their creations’, in C. Arscott and K. Scott, eds., *Manifestations of Venus: Art and sexuality* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 109-25.

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condition of an infinitely deferred pleasure. When we remember Belting’s contention that the privileging of the hieratic image, or *imago*, over the narrative, or *historia*, is also one of the defining themes running through the history of religious painting, the implications for a perverse reading of the pictures deepen.¹⁰⁵ The conflation of the veneration of beauty with masochistic suffering in *Galatée* and *King Cophetua* was almost immediately taken up by Symbolist poets and novelists in France. *Galatée*, as mentioned previously, became the subject of sonnets by several Symbolist poets, written in lapidary language that echoes the richly elaborated decorativeness and immobility of the scene; the final tercet of Montesquiou’s ‘Nymphé’,

Galathéa sommeille en un rêve étranger,
Sous l’adoration triste dont l’enveloppe
L’unique fixité songeuse du Cyclope¹⁰⁶

underlines the inextricability of suffering and adoration in Polyphemus’s never-to-beanswered gaze.

King Cophetua is not known to have inspired any new poems, but its suspended narrative and oneiric air of mystery proved an irresistible challenge for at least one novelist – particularly remarkable given the central problem in ekphrasis, the impossibility of setting a static image in motion and of reconciling the spatial and the temporal. Three years before Lorrain published ‘La Princesse des chemins’, the painting found itself translated into prose in Edouard Rod’s novel *Les Trois coeurs*, serialised in the *Journal des débats* during the run of the Exposition (the first instalment of which appeared alongside André Michel’s appreciative review of the British Fine Art section, in particular Burne-Jones).¹⁰⁷ Rod, a sometime art critic

¹⁰⁵ Belting (1994), p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Montesquiou (1893), p. 135; Lacambre (1998b) contends that the poem was written much earlier, probably in 1885, based on the date a copy of it was sent to Moreau. For further discussion of the *Galatée* sonnets, see Cooke (2003), pp. 148-54. Interestingly, ‘Lilia’, another poem in *Le Chef des odeurs suaves* (in the same sequence as ‘Nymphé’), centres on Burne-Jones, even mentioning him by name in the first line. Although it appears not to describe a specific painting, it is tempting to speculate whether its hypnotic repetition of the word ‘lys’ may have some connection with Octave Mirbeau’s scurrilous attacks (1895) on Burne-Jones and his followers, ‘Des Lys! des lys!’ and ‘Toujours des lys!’ (see Chapter 2).

¹⁰⁷ E. Rod, *Les Trois coeurs* (Paris, 1890, first serialised in *Le Journal des débats*, July-November 1889). *King Cophetua* exerted a hold on the Francophone literary imagination well into the twentieth century. In addition to *Les Trois coeurs* and Lorrain’s ‘La Princesse des chemins’, I have counted Iwan Gilkin’s drama *Le Roi Cophetua* (Brussels, 1919), which renames the beggar maid Rosamie, makes her

compete for the love of the king against three maidens of noble birth, and gives her a far greater vocal presence than in any literary precedents, and Julien Gracq's novella of the same name (published in *La Presqu'île*, Paris, 1970), which goes a step further in recasting the 'beggar maid' as a taciturn housemaid whose threatening, ambiguous silence and rare utterances help to characterise her as a cold and mysterious dominatrix who holds the male narrator in sexual thrall.

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whose contributions to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* included one of the first serious studies in French of Pre-Raphaelitism from its origins to the present day, like Huysmans before him blurred the boundary between art criticism and fiction.¹⁰⁸ *Les Trois coeurs*, on the surface the fairly conventional story of a love triangle in contemporary Paris, does for Burne-Jones on a modest scale what Huysmans did for Moreau in *À rebours*. Its protagonist, Richard Noral, transforms his study into a shrine hung with reproductions of talismanic images of women whose juxtaposition is both revealing and resonant: a fifteenth-century Rhenish Virgin from the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, Il Sodoma's *Judith*, Rossetti's *La Pia de' Tolomei*, Moreau's *La Chimère* and 'King Cophetua', by Burne-Jones, uselessly kneeling at the feet of his beggar maid: enveloped in her rags on the throne to which love has led her, her sorrowful features recount her long suffering, proclaiming her powerless to enjoy the happiness come too late, and her eyes, in which anguish persistently floats, say that she will not be able to respond to the ecstasies of the worshipper abasing himself before her'.¹⁰⁹ In a narrative characterised by relentless repetition, Noral returns again and again to his gloomy inner sanctum to contemplate the images of the beggar maid and her spiritual sisters in a state of melancholic inactivity worthy of Cophetua himself. Indeed, each time he enters his study and falls into a trance before his personal pantheon, the narrative grinds to a halt. Pacteau has noted the disruptive properties of physical descriptions of women in fiction.¹¹⁰ But the women who bring about the narrative 'freezing' in *Les Trois coeurs* are painted and *decorative* (that key aspect of Deleuze's formulation of masochism), not flesh and blood; conversely, it is Noral's wife and mistress, not the rather ineffectual man himself, who serve to drive the plot forward, and neither one is the recipient of his worshipping gaze. He evidently prefers (we are told he 'had wanted to surround himself with these [images] to trouble his own heart') to retreat from his escalating difficulties in the pleasurable and painfully pleasurable search for transcendence in these 'material visions of

¹⁰⁸ Rod (1887), pp. 177-95 and 399-416.

¹⁰⁹ 'Le Roi Cophetua, de Burne-Jones, inutilement agenouillé aux pieds de sa mendicante: enveloppée dans ses haillons sur le trône où l'amour l'a conduite, ses traits douloureux racontent sa longue souffrance, la proclamant impuissante à jouir du bonheur trop tard venu, et ses yeux, où flotte obstinément l'angoisse, disent qu'elle ne saura pas répondre aux extases de l'adorateur abîmé devant elle', Rod (1890), pp. 29-30. Based on Rod's description of *La Chimère*, it seems likely that he refers to the 1867 painting now in the Fogg Museum, Cambridge, MA (Mathieu 104) (see Mathieu, 1994, p. 101).

¹¹⁰ Pacteau (1994), pp. 107-8.

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intangible things, entering the soul through the eyes'.¹¹¹ Ultimately, as the crisis precipitated by his double life comes to a head, he comes to identify himself with the sole male figure in his study, 'King Cophetua languish[ing] at the feet of his beggar maid'.¹¹²

The parallel I have drawn between Noral's despondent stare and that of Cophetua (and, for that matter, Polyphemus) is not fortuitous. For one of the most striking aspects of both pictures is their refusal to resolve the position of the beholder and the beheld. Cophetua's gaze is doomed never to be answered; so hypnotic and hypnotised is the beggar maid's stare, so utter her refusal to acknowledge him, that the

thought arises that she may be a vision in Cophetua's fevered imagination. Yet when we gaze into the gleaming surface of this hall of mirrors, only the beggar maid's feet are reflected. Is she, then, the only physical presence, and the king her hallucination? The disjuncture between beholder and beheld becomes even more unsettling when we turn to *Galatée*. At first glance, Polyphemus appears as an intruder in Galatea's marine domain, gazing at her as if into the depths of an aquarium, held apart by an invisible barrier. (Even then, the nature of the setting remains open to interpretation: one reviewer, on first seeing it at the Salon, took it for 'the heart of the earth'.)¹¹³ However, a closer look reveals the ends of the nymph's hair reflected as if in a pool, as if she is above, rather than in, the water; moreover, the dim, watery light bathing the Cyclops suggests that he, and not Galatea, is underwater. This, in tandem with the disconcerting disparity in scale between the two figures, raises the possibility that not only may Galatea be the fantasy of Polyphemus, he may instead – or simultaneously – be her dream. The interplay of gazes here, apart from its significance for the frustration of narrative and of desire, has further ramifications. Moreau has bucked classical and art-historical precedent by giving Polyphemus, in addition to the usual huge single eye in the middle of his forehead, two human eyes; this departure from convention serves in part to humanise the Cyclops and to render him more sympathetic (compare the horrifying yet faintly comical Polyphemus in Redon's *Cyclopes*). Yet at the same time, tripling the number of Polyphemus's eyes radically

¹¹¹ 'Richard avait voulu s'entourer comme pour se troubler le coeur'; 'visions matérielles de choses intangibles, entrant dans l'âme par les yeux'. Rod (1890), pp. 136 and 31.

¹¹² 'Le Roi Cophetua languissait aux pieds de sa mendicante'. Ibid., p. 187.

¹¹³ 'Au sein de la terre'. Champier (1881), p. 83.

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over-endows him with the power of vision.¹¹⁴ Are we, then, to take his waking dream of Galatea as a result of this excess of vision? If so, Polyphemus's hyper-visual hallucination (and, by extension, that of Cophetua and the beggar maid) could be considered an inversion of the positivist dictum that seeing is believing, substituting the notion that believing makes us see what we desire most to see. Taken together, in the setting of the Exposition Universelle where so much else willingly and dumbly gave itself up to the gaze, where the positivist avowal of the primacy of the material and the visible clashed with the Symbolist and antinaturalist privileging of suggestion and inner vision, where almost anything could and did become an object of veneration, *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* conceive a world where beauty equals divinity, where to worship it is to suffer eternally, where veneration dissolves the identity and the existence of both worshipper and worshiped – altars of perversity, indeed.

¹¹⁴ See D. de Margerie, *Autour de Gustave Moreau. La Maison des Danaïdes* (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire, 1998), p. 30, for an interesting angle on Polyphemus's three eyes and the implications raised by the crossed gazes.

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Chapter 4

Lost in translation? Rossetti's reputation and influence in France, 1872-1898

Traduire, c'est trahir

old French adage

Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when in the course of its survival a work has reached the age of its fame.¹

When many artists die, their reputations follow them to the grave. In the case of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, on the other hand, dying could arguably be thought of as one of the best career manoeuvres he ever made. Concealed from public view during his lifetime, whether because of his notorious sensitivity to criticism or because his

well-established network of patrons lessened the pressure to exhibit, his paintings and drawings were revealed to the public – directly in Britain, indirectly in France – as almost a complete body of work in simultaneous retrospective exhibitions at the Royal Academy and the Burlington Fine Arts Club early in 1883. Roughly halfway between France’s first exposure to the new wave of British anti-naturalist painting at the 1878 Exposition and the publication of Moréas’s Symbolist manifesto, and months before the publication of Ernest Chesneau’s *La Peinture anglaise* (re)introduced him to the French public, Rossetti could scarcely have chosen a more opportune moment to expire.

If this statement appears overly provocative – certainly, it contains a deliberate echo of Sâr Péladan’s characteristically intemperate injunction to the equally reclusive Gustave Moreau, ‘Drop dead, for the greatest good of art, for your own glory’ – then let me explain why I have chosen to open with this salvo.² The sudden access to his art afforded by his death excited an extraordinary level of interest from critics, poets and painters on both sides of the Channel; it would be fair to estimate that the ink spilt in the two decades after he died far exceeds what was written about him, both in quantity and variety, during his whole lifetime. Furthermore, the steady increase in access to his paintings, whether through reproductions, loan exhibitions, sales or acquisition by public collections, allowed a younger generation of anti-realist painters to draw inspiration from his work. Yet the fin-de-siècle explosion of interest in Rossetti, and specifically in what Rossetti had to offer Symbolism in France, remains

¹ W. Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, in *Illuminations* (1999), p. 72.

² ‘Mourez tôt, mourez tout de suite, pour le plus grand bien de l’art, pour votre propre gloire’: J. Péladan, ‘Gustave Moreau’, *L’Ermitage* (January 1895), p. 34.

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largely unexplored in subsequent scholarship on the impact of the Pre-Raphaelites in France. Burne-Jones and Watts have commanded the lion’s share of attention in such studies; Rossetti, although generally acknowledged to have been a key figure in the cross-Channel exchange, has remained a shadowy presence at the margins.³ Even the literature that accords him greater impact on the course of Symbolism in France has focused on his poetry to the exclusion of his painting, despite the inseparability of the verbal and visual aspects of his oeuvre.⁴ In fact, Rossetti’s affinities with the central Symbolist tropes of *correspondances* and the unity of the arts were integral to his appeal for continental Symbolism; moreover, unlike Burne-Jones and Watts, he occupied the unique position of having inspired works in multiple media.

Why this disparity, and why this false division? The most obvious answer is that Rossetti’s work was much less visible than that of his compatriots. While new work by Burne-Jones and Watts could be seen at least once a year in London from the late 1870s, and both exhibited more or less regularly in France, Rossetti exhibited little during his lifetime in Britain (and not at all in the last two decades of his life) and never in France – either during his lifetime (an exhibition of his recent work in

³ For example, Lethève (1959), because of his focus on exhibitions and documentation, mostly passes over Rossetti; E. Becker, ‘Sensual eroticism or empty tranquility: Rossetti’s reputation around 1900’, in J. Treuherz et al., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (exh. cat., Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 2003), while casting his net wider to take account of Rossetti’s reception in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, employs a similar documentary approach and is much indebted to Lethève. S. Phelps Smith, ‘From Allegory to Symbol: Rossetti’s Renaissance Poets and His Influence on Continental Symbolism’, in Casteras and Faxon (1995), provides a more in-depth analysis of the appeal Rossetti’s brand of antinaturalism held for Continental artists, but does not discuss any specific works inspired or influenced by him.

⁴ A particularly egregious example is the only recent biography of Rossetti in French, J. de Langlade, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Paris, 1985), which, while it devotes a full chapter to Rossetti’s discovery by Debussy, Albert Samain, Pierre Louÿs and other poets, merely notes in passing that Rossetti’s artistic

influence manifested itself in the work of Moreau, Redon, and other Symbolists (bizarrely, Van Gogh is included in this list) without further discussion. Indeed, Rossetti's painting barely receives mention in the rest of the text, which is luridly sensationalistic in the mould of Violet Hunt's *The Wife of Rossetti* (1932) and proffers such unedifying details as the assertion that Rossetti, in his final decade, enjoyed a *ménage à trois* with Fanny Cornforth and Alexa Wilding.

⁵ Many of Rossetti's biographers have operated on the assumption that he withdrew wholly from exhibiting his work as a reaction against the scathing criticism *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (S.44) received in 1850; see for example J. Comyns Carr, *Some Eminent Victorians* (London, 1908), p. 65. As Colin Cruise has recently demonstrated, Rossetti did in fact continue to exhibit in small, independent group shows (notably the Hogarth Club) up to 1856: C. Cruise, "'Sincerity and earnestness": D. G. Rossetti's early exhibitions 1849-53', *Burlington Magazine* 146 (January 2004), pp. 4-12. Rossetti knowingly colluded in his self-mythologising as a mysterious, temperamental recluse, for example telling Chesneau that 'since the age of twenty-two, I can say that I have never exhibited anywhere, for personal motives whose details here would be egotistical' ('Depuis l'âge de vingt-deux ans, je puis dire que je n'ai jamais exposé nulle part, pour des motifs qui me sont personnelles [sic] et dont le détail ici serait égoïste [sic]'): Rossetti, letter to Ernest Chesneau, 7 November 1868, W. E. Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Cambridge, 2003), vol. 4, p. 119.

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Paris in 1862 mooted by Whistler evidently came to nothing)⁶ or posthumously. Furthermore, to this day, no French collection, either public or private, possesses any of his paintings.⁷ Although, in addition to the two 1883 retrospectives, Rossetti's work appeared at the Manchester Exhibition in 1888 and 74 of his paintings were displayed at the New Gallery in 1894, outside of these exhibitions a visitor to Britain hoping to view his paintings faced disappointment. By 1890, only two of his paintings – *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* [Figure 50, S.44] and *Beata Beatrix* [Figure 51, S.168] – had entered the National Gallery. If one was prepared to venture further afield, the altarpiece of Llandaff Cathedral in Cardiff, the Oxford Union murals, in an advanced state of ruin, and *Dante's Dream* in Liverpool (the only one of Rossetti's paintings to enter a museum during his lifetime) raised the tally to five. Otherwise, one had to rely on the largesse of collectors, a few of whom were apparently willing to show their paintings to amateurs, but, as Paul Bourget, one of the first French writers to develop an interest in Rossetti, lamented after a trip to London in the autumn of 1883, such crumbs of generosity only whetted an insatiable appetite; he was only able to see twenty of the 395 paintings listed in William Sharp's recent catalogue.⁸ Amateurs like Bourget who crossed the Channel and actively sought out Rossetti's work were, however, a tiny minority. For a Paris-bound audience, then, viewing Rossetti took place under conditions that set him apart from his peers – namely, his work could be seen *only* in the form of reproductions.

In the previous chapters, I touched upon the problems inherent in the use of reproductions to disseminate original works of art. However, these issues acquire a particular urgency in discussing Rossetti's reception in France. In the case of Burne-Jones and Watts, reproductions, however unsatisfactory, were periodically supplemented with exhibitions of 'the real thing', transforming prints and photographs into aides-memoires rather than imperfect independent objects; reproductions of their work functioned as they were intended, that is, as substitutes for originals. In the case of Beardsley, the medium of illustration meant that his art was intended for

⁶Rossetti wrote to George Price Boyce on 20 October 1862 asking permission to borrow back *Bocca Bacciata* as it would be 'going to Paris under Whistler's auspices to an exhibition': Fredeman (2003), vol. 2, p. 494-95.

⁷According to V. Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1971), and J. McGann, ed., *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive* (2000 and forthcoming).

⁸P. Bourget, 'Lettre de Londres', *Le Journal des Débats politiques et littéraires*, 24 September 1884, republished in *Études et portraits* (Paris, 1889), vol. 2. See also Bourget, 'Sensations d'Oxford'

(1883), republished in *Études et portraits*, vol. 2, pp. 212-18, on the Oxford Union murals.

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reproduction from the start. The French Rossetti, however, was an artist whose original work, because of its near-complete unavailability, effectively ceased to exist. Walter Benjamin's contention that the 'aura' of a work of art decreases in direct proportion to the proliferation of mechanical reproduction would seem to find its inverse in Rossetti's case.⁹ In the absence of the original work, photographs and engravings, which seem largely to have been published in limited editions and collected by a literary and artistic elite, took on the ritualistic fetish value that would ordinarily have been accorded the original.¹⁰ Indeed, photographs after Rossetti's paintings were deemed important enough to include in the 1892 Salon de la Rose + Croix; two years later, an exhibition of photographs after Rossetti and Burne-Jones was held in Brussels.¹¹ And still, notwithstanding the remarkable quality of many of these reproductions, they could only give an incomplete, or worse, a deceptive idea of the original. Camille Mauclair recalled that the reproductions of *Beata Beatrix* and other Pre-Raphaelite paintings that he and his colleagues pored over at Mallarmé's *mardis* 'ravished our Symbolist-Wagnerian imaginations', but when he saw the paintings for the first time, 'there was nothing more disappointing'.¹² If the reproductions Mauclair knew were guilty of hiding the inelegance of Rossetti's drawing and facture, neither could they convey, by virtue of their much-reduced scale, the overpowering physical presence of Rossetti's late works. Even in one of the rare coloured mezzotints, the hothouse lushness of the colour that critics agreed was one of the strongest and most distinctive aspects of Rossetti's painting was lost¹³ – a loss, I would argue, comparable to the loss of the elusive essence of his poetry when it was translated into French.

⁹ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1999), pp. 216-17.

¹⁰ For example, in *Les Trois coeurs*, Richard Noral decorates his study with reproductions of talismanic Symbolist and Renaissance paintings of women, including Rossetti's *La Pia de' Tolomei* (S.207); see Chapter 3.

¹¹ For further discussion of Rossetti's presence at the Salon de la Rose + Croix, see below. I have not been able to discover whether a catalogue of the Brussels exhibition exists, but given that Dietrich, one of the major publishers of Pre-Raphaelite reproductions, was located there, it seems reasonable to assume that the photographs exhibited were those published by Dietrich.

¹² 'Tout cela ravissait notre imagination de symbolistes et de wagnériens, et, en photographie, c'était vraiment très attachant. Quand nous avons vu les peintures elles-mêmes, [...] il n'y a rien de plus décevant': C. Mauclair, *Mallarmé chez lui* (Paris, 1935), pp. 72-73. It is worth bearing in mind that at the time of writing, the reputation of Symbolism and Pre-Raphaelitism was at its lowest ebb.

¹³ My decision to focus on Rossetti reproductions owes much to Jerome McGann's approach in his recent monograph on the artist; McGann reasons that as reproductions represented the broader public's only knowledge of the artist, they provide a better way to contextualise him than would the paintings themselves: J. McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game That Must Be Lost* (New Haven and London, 2000), p. ix.

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Any study of Rossetti's role in the development of antinaturalism in France is, then, a study of translations – from English poetry into a French approximation thereof, from painting or drawing into photograph or print, and even, in the case of *The Blessed Damozel*, from two different media (poetry and painting) into a third (music). In tracing Rossetti's impact on the poets who attempted to translate his words and on the artists – Maurice Denis, Odilon Redon and Claude Debussy – who translated his visual world from black-and-white photographs and colourful descriptions into new images, we should bear in mind Benjamin's warnings about the pitfalls and potentials of translation:

In translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were.

It cannot live there permanently, to be sure, and it certainly does not reach it in its entirety. Yet, in a singularly impressive manner, at least it points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages. The transfer can never be total, but what reaches this region goes beyond the transmittal of subject matter. This nucleus is best defined as the element that does not lend itself to translation. [...] Unlike the words of the original, it is not translatable, because the relationship between content and language is quite different in the original and the translation. While the content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds.¹⁴

The most ‘successful’ translation, then, is not one which adheres slavishly to the letter (or the outline) of the original, but one which manages to capture something of its spirit within the gap it creates between itself and the original. Elements of Rossetti’s work did, inevitably, get lost in the translation; however, in some of the more sensitive translations, be they verbal, visual or musical, rich and complex resonances reverberate in these newly opened spaces.

‘Un Italien d’Angleterre’: French Perceptions of Rossetti

When the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* assigned Théodore Duret to cover the Rossetti retrospectives in 1883, their choice of critic was highly significant. An advocate of the Impressionists, a close friend of Whistler and an enthusiastic promoter of Japanese art, Duret had been the *Gazette’s* *correspondant d’Angleterre* since Duranty’s death in 1880 and was the epitome of the cosmopolitan avant-garde critic. While Duret, like many of his British counterparts, expressed doubts about the validity of Rossetti’s project to resuscitate Renaissance art, the similarities cease there. Unlike

¹⁴ Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’ (1999), pp. 75-76.

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the mainstream British critics, who seemed contractually obliged to rail against the physical and moral sickness they perceived in Rossetti’s late work,¹⁵ Duret’s sophistication allowed him to recognise the complexity of the artist’s range of literary and visual references¹⁶ and to acknowledge readily the power of the late works’ overwhelming physicality, characterising the feminine prototype represented therein as simultaneously compelling, repellent and terrifying: ‘she exerts a sort of fascination, but mixed with disquiet; one would be afraid to approach too closely, one feels that if she took you in her arms, she would make your bones crack’.¹⁷

The choice of Duret to report on Rossetti in such a distinguished publication indicates that Rossetti had already, by this date, acquired a reputation in France as a major vanguard artist and a figure whose importance transcended national boundaries. Indeed, in spite of never having exhibited in France, Rossetti had not been entirely unknown there before his death. For instance, Duret’s prior knowledge of Rossetti’s art is apparent in his review of the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition in 1881 in which he discussed the artist at length despite his absence from the exhibition, admitting that while Rossetti’s attempts to turn back the clock of art history were ‘absolutely opposed to [his] tastes and indeed [his] ideas about art’, his art nonetheless exerted a strange fascination upon him.¹⁸ However, tracing the international dissemination of his literary and artistic reputation during his lifetime is a haphazard exercise, relying much on speculation to knit together sparse or no longer extant pieces of evidence.¹⁹ Examining the evolution of responses to Rossetti, and the growing engagement with

¹⁵ A pertinent example is the unsigned review in the *Illustrated London News*, which was typical in its conflation of biography and art and its equation of physical illness with moral downfall: ‘Perhaps no man has ever lived in the past – in the world of his own imagination – so completely as Rossetti. But

has the painter, or even the poet, the right to live wholly for himself in his own fancy, and not for his age and his fellows? Will not such infidelity bring penalties upon himself and his art too? As regards himself, the piteous story of Rossetti's later life – the febrile strain, with its unhealthy, morbid tendencies, resulting in insomnia, hardly relieved by inordinate doses of chloral – sufficiently answers the question. As regards a man's art, the answer is scarcely less plain.' 'Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Illustrated London News* (6 January 1883), p. 30.

¹⁶ Although he does not allude to it in his article, Duret, as a keen Japonist, probably admired Rossetti's appropriation of Japanese motifs (particularly in the Llandaff altarpiece), some of which predate Whistler's experiments. I am grateful to Laura MacCulloch for drawing my attention to Rossetti's Japonisme.

¹⁷ 'Elle exerce une sorte de fascination, mais mêlée d'inquiétude; on aurait peur d'en approcher de trop près, on sent que si elle vous prenait dans ses bras, elle vous ferait craquer les os': T. Duret, 'Les Expositions de Londres: Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 18, (1 July 1883), p. 54.

¹⁸ 'Absolument opposés à mes goûts et à mes idées en fait d'art': T. Duret, 'Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor Gallery', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1881), pp. 555-56.

¹⁹ This is especially the case in trying to chart the growth of awareness of Rossetti's painting; as Saunier (2002), p. 74, has observed, few reproductions from before 1880 are known, and attempting to trace sources for extant early reproductions has proven difficult.

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him, first as a poet and then as a painter, reveals the formation of an artistic identity strikingly different from Rossetti's British persona. This 'French' Rossetti, the exotic 'Italien d'Angleterre',²⁰ I would argue, conditioned the attempts of his first (poetic) translators to render his verse into French and, more broadly, reshaped his identity, drawing him out of his self-imposed isolation and transforming him into a full-blown Symbolist.

Brief references to Rossetti occur in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in the 1860s;²¹ a French amateur eager to learn more generally had to rely on British art periodicals for further information. Given his aversion to exhibiting, and the fact that steady patronage meant he could afford to keep a low profile, Rossetti displayed a surprisingly keen interest in maintaining public interest in his painting, making certain that laudatory notices of his new work appeared in key periodicals – of course, it helped that his brother, William Michael, and his former Pre-Raphaelite Brother F. G. Stephens, were respected critics, both of whom wrote for the *Athenaeum* and other widely-read publications.²² The first traced article devoted solely to Rossetti to appear in a French periodical, though, was a review of his *Poems* in *La Revue britannique* in 1870. The critic, Amédée Pichot, was not wholeheartedly enthusiastic, but his article highlights aspects of Rossetti's work frequently dwelt upon by French commentators over the following decades: his status as an exotic outsider, his isolation from contemporary trends and his debts to medieval Italian poetry, his blending of mysticism and sensuality, his idealism and its roots in the material.²³ While noting

²⁰ H. Dupré, *Un Italien d'Angleterre. Le poète-peintre Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Paris, 1921); Dupré's title is informed by Ruskin's famous remark that Rossetti was 'a great Italian tormented in the Inferno of London'.

²¹ In 1859, 1865 and 1869, most notably in Burty (1869), pp. 52-54, who refers to him as 'Rosetti' and designates him as the founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but does not refer to any of his works; see S. Phelps Smith in Casteras and Faxon (1995), p. 61.

²² See, for example, 'Mr. Rossetti's New Pictures', *Athenaeum* no. 2581 (14 April 1877), pp. 486-87; 'Art Notes', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 1 (1878), p. v; and 'Art Notes', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 4 (1881), pp. xlvi-xlvi. All of these feature detailed descriptions, often in fulsome, florid language, of Rossetti's recent work; the first 'Art Notes' piece cited, a description of the newly completed *Blessed Damozel* (S.244) is a good case in point, beginning 'There are few more intense and perfect poems in the English tongue than "The Blessed Damozel," by Dante Gabriel Rossetti; and there must be thousands of persons who feel something more than mere curiosity to see the picture, founded on the poem and bearing its name, painted by the poet himself for Mr. William Graham'. Rossetti's zeal in crafting a positive self-image is apparent in a letter to Stephens chiding the latter for penning a critical article on his poems and asking him in future to refrain from writing about him entirely unless his intention was

to praise: letter to F. G. Stephens, 15 November 1871, in Fredeman (2003), pp. 185-86.

²³ A. Pichot, 'Correspondance de Londres', *La Revue britannique*, vol. 3 (June 1870), pp. 560-61. He concludes: 'En peinture comme en poésie, M. Rossetti est idéaliste. Tantôt le symbole reçoit de lui-même une forme matérielle qui a la transparence d'un voile, et quand ses personnages ont réellement existé, il les transfigure et les divinise par des attributs mystiques' (p. 561).

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that the Blessed Damozel is 'a rather pagan saint', Pichot's review displays none of the moral outrage that marked much of the British response to Rossetti's poetry. The first traced in-depth French analysis and translation of Rossetti's poetry appeared in 1872, coincidentally the same year that his nemesis Robert Buchanan expanded and reprinted his infamous polemic, 'The Fleshly School of Poetry', in pamphlet form.²⁴ Significantly, the article, by Emile Blémont, appeared in *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique*, one of the first *petites revues* to be born from the ashes of the Franco-Prussian War (itself a vital nexus for artistic exchange between Britain and France) and characterised by Ernest Raynaud as the precursor to the myriad Symbolist periodicals of the 1880s and 1890s.²⁵ Blémont's thoughtful examination of the Pre-Raphaelite school of poets, which focuses mainly on Rossetti, draws comparisons between them and the idealism of Gautier and Puvis and characterises Rossetti's *House of Life* as a blend of 'Italian delicacy and *morbidezza* united with the deep reverie of the North'. It includes two translations of Rossetti's poems: the whole of 'Lost Days' ('Les Jours perdus') from *The House of Life* and the first stanza of 'The Blessed Damozel'.²⁶ Despite Blémont's good intentions and his valiant attempt at a metrical (though unrhymed) rendering of Rossetti's verse, the French version of 'The Blessed Damozel' is flat, stilted; read aloud, it feels uncomfortable in the mouth, and meaning is distorted by his efforts to shoehorn the words into the correct number of syllables ('Her eyes were deeper than the depth / Of waters stilled at even' becomes 'Ses yeux savaient mieux le calme et l'ombre / Que les eaux dormantes du soir').²⁷

Even as Rossetti's complex, Dantesque prosody frustrated French translators, his Italian roots and his foreignness in the country of his birth seem, ironically, to have increased his appeal in France and smoothed the path for his acceptance. First and foremost, the allure of the exotic hovered about him; the son of a *carbonaro* born in

²⁴ Buchanan originally published 'The Fleshly School of Poetry' under the pseudonym 'Thomas Maitland' (*Contemporary Review*, October 1871, pp. 334-50). Motivated as much by professional envy (Buchanan was a decidedly second-rate poet) as by prudery, the article and its repercussions are widely considered to have precipitated Rossetti's nervous breakdown and increasing withdrawal from the world from 1872.

²⁵ Raynaud (1918), vol. 1, p. 9. Indeed, Raynaud credits Blémont with 'preparing the path for Symbolism' ([il] prépare les voies au symbolisme) with his articles on the Pre-Raphaelites. It is also worth noting that Blémont was a close friend of Fantin-Latour, who had visited Rossetti on one of his stays in London in 1864; Rossetti reciprocated the visit later that year.

²⁶ 'Les sonnets sur la Vie, l'Amour et la Mort, unissent la délicatesse, la *morbidezza* italienne à la forte rêverie du Nord': E. Blémont, 'Littérature étrangère: l'école préraphaélite', *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique*, no. 14 (27 July 1872), p. 107.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

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exile was a deeply romantic figure, and his French biographers and critics consistently identified him as such, rather than as an Englishman;²⁸ reproductions of his selfportraits,

highlighting his dark, liquid eyes, broad forehead and sensual lips, frequently appeared in his biographies to emphasise the point. In an era of simmering (though never virulent) Anglophobia, Rossetti's Italianness was a point in his favour in France; not only did it make his status as an outsider fascinating rather than

threatening, it simultaneously gave him, as a member of a Latin people, a degree of familiarity and belonging. Not least, his work's embrace of mysticism, the ideal, and the world of the imagination could be partly explained and justified by contemporary stereotypes about his nationality.²⁹

This point was taken to stupefying extremes by Péladan in the preface to the first (and only) translation of the whole of *The House of Life* in 1887. Declaring Rossetti the last (or latest) exponent of the Latin tradition, Péladan all but claimed him as a reincarnation of the Neo-Platonic ideal as represented by Dante and Guido Cavalcanti.³⁰ But he went further still in his ultra-romantic characterisation of Rossetti (whom he compared to his other idol, Moreau), rhapsodising that 'Rossetti's charm is a woman's charm, one must experience it without explaining it'.³¹ Such a bald declaration of the painter-poet's androgyny (or effeminacy) would have been anathema in Britain; indeed, Rossetti's defenders had had to go to great lengths to counter the assaults of the conservative press on the virility of Rossetti's person and oeuvre, which, although at their harshest in the wake of 'The Fleshly School'

²⁸ See Dupré (1921); M. Duclaux, *Grands écrivains d'outre-Manche* (Paris, 1901), p. 273 ('Cet Italien qui a laissé sur l'art et la littérature d'outre-Manche une empreinte si forte et si personnelle, et dont l'influence est visible jusque dans les récents développements de la poésie française'; C. Dupouey, *Notes sur l'art et la vie de D.-G. Rossetti* (Paris, 1906), p. 4; G. Mourey, *D.-G. Rossetti et les Préraphaélites anglais* (Paris, 1909), p. 24; G. Sarrazin, *Poètes modernes de l'Angleterre – Walter Savage Landor, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Élisabeth [sic] Barrett Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne* (Paris, 1885) (hereafter Sarrazin 1885a), pp. 234-355 ('Devenu Anglais par circonstance . . . l'artiste hérita la raffinement de sa race, et garda, chez ses nouveaux compatriotes, le pur esprit italien du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance'); O. G. Destrée, *Les Préraphaélites. Notes sur l'art décoratif et la peinture en Angleterre* (Brussels, 1894), pp. 25-26. This is far from an exhaustive list. Of course, none of these writers could have known about Rossetti's almost comical, over-compensatory John Bullishness, frequently expressed in his letters.

²⁹ The definition for 'imaginatif' in P. Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e Siècle*, vol. 9 (Paris, 1873), p. 578, cites Jules Michelet: '*L'Europe aristocratique se plaît à confondre le peuple de France avec les peuples IMAGINATIFS et gesticulateurs, comme les Italiens, les Irlandais, Gallois, etc.*'

³⁰ J. Péladan, preface to C. Couve, trans., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. La Maison de la vie* (Paris, 1887), pp. x and xlviii. However, Péladan expressed reservations about Rossetti's place in this grand hierarchy, noting that the chief inspiration of his poetry was Dante's most 'earthly' work, *La Vita Nuova*.

³¹ 'Le charme de Rossetti est un charme de femme, il faut le subir et non l'expliquer': *ibid.*, p. lii.

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controversy, had not abated following his death eleven years later.³² Péladan's Rossetti, while wildly exaggerated, is characteristic of the persona created for him in France by Symbolist poets and critics – just recognisable from knowledge of the English version, but distorted as if by a curved mirror, the raw materials of his life and poetry shaped to fit the mould of a sensual-mystical French Symbolist poet-painter.³³ And what of Couve's translation of *The House of Life* itself? The method she employed is unique in nineteenth-century translations of Rossetti's poetry, in that she translated each sonnet twice: once 'literally' (in prose) and, on each facing page, 'literarily' (in verse).³⁴ The prose translations are nearly all significantly shorter than the poems, reducing them to two or three sentences conveying the bare bones of dramatic incident – the epitome of Benjamin's notion of the bad translation, that which transmits information only. The verse translations, while not as shockingly blunt and spare, make no attempt to render Rossetti's metre or rhyme scheme into French. Although marginally 'poetic', they display only a partial understanding of Rossetti's vision or his unusual imagery. The translation of the first sonnet of 'Willow-wood' is a good case in point – the final couplet, 'And as I stooped, her own lips rising there / Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth', which sent Buchanan (who, typically, took the quotation entirely out of context) into apoplexies of disgust,

is rendered as the rather more innocuous, conventional and awkward 'Et tandis que je me baissais, les lèvres de ma Bien-Aimée émergèrent / Et inondaient mes lèvres d'un torrent de baisers'. The grand expectations of metaphysical, neo-Platonic poetry built up by Péladan's introduction are disappointed by the inept translation.

³² Comyns Carr (1908), p. 65, admits that 'The common impression of the time, which I indeed partly shared, was that Rossetti's individuality, however finely it might be endowed with poetic imagination, was not of the most virile order', adding that once he met Rossetti he realized that the artist's reluctance to exhibit was 'not due to any lack of masculine strength'. As Kate Flint has observed, conservative critics in Victorian Britain employed adult male heterosexuality as the norm against which 'unhealthy' (for which read 'effeminate') art was judged and condemned: K. Flint, 'Moral judgment and the language of English art criticism 1870-1910', *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 6, no. 2 (1983), p. 64.

³³ An interesting comparison is G. Mourey, *Passé le détroit. La vie et l'art à Londres* (Paris, 1895), pp. 160-61. Echoes of Huysmans's heated writings on Gustave Moreau are discernible in Mourey's perfumed, highly romantic characterisation of Rossetti and his work; indeed, Huysmans was Mourey's mentor and they seem to have discussed Rossetti and the other Pre-Raphaelites together.

³⁴ Apart from Blémont's translation of 'Lost Days' in 1872, the major translation of selections from *The House of Life* was I. Cleveland, trans., 'La Maison de la vie, Sonnets', *La Revue contemporaine*, vol. 5, no. 1, June-July 1886, pp. 65-69 and no. 2, August-September 1886, pp. 216-19, which translated 'Winged Hours', 'Heart's Compass', 'The Soul's Sphere', "'Retro me, Sathana!'", and 'The Vase of Life'. As I have found no references to Ianthe Cleveland elsewhere, I assume the name is a pseudonym, but have not been able to discover the identity of its user.

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While Couve's attempts represent the nadir of French translations of Rossetti's poetry, it underscores several crucial problems present in varying degrees in all of the published translations from the 1880s. Rossetti's strikingly unusual turns of phrase were almost always rendered in French in a manner that made them either anodyne or nonsensical, and the flavour of his deliberate archaisms was lost as they were translated into current French. The hallmark of his verse, the union of the spiritual and the sensual that so disturbed his more conventional British readers, was muted and cooled; particularly in the case of Gabriel Sarrazin's translation of 'The Blessed Damozel', the heated yearning and palpable fleshliness of the Damozel were rendered passive and wistful.³⁵ In effect, translating Rossetti into French uncoupled the spiritual from the sensual; what emerged were poems by a different poet in which the spiritual and the mystical took centre stage.

This is not to imply that Rossetti never found sympathetic and able translators in France. Not surprisingly, the most interesting (and freest) responses to his poetry came from other poets whose own work trod a similar path, but most of them remained unpublished until long after the demise of Symbolism. Albert Samain produced several translations of the *House of Life* sonnets. A first version dates from 1873, following a visit to London during which he evidently met Rossetti and visited his studio, and includes twenty-two of the sonnets as well as translations of 'The Blessed Damozel', 'Eden Bower', 'Troy Town' and 'Love's Nocturne'; Samain, more than any other French translator, made the most painstaking efforts to preserve the rhythms and euphony of Rossetti's verse.³⁶ He returned to the task early in 1887, but as he confessed to his friend Raymond Bonheur, he felt the essence of Rossetti's poetry elude his grasp the harder he tried to capture it, and in the end never published his translations.³⁷ Pierre Louÿs crafted a sensitive free-verse translation of 'Willowwood'

in 1896 which Debussy considered setting to music (a project that never came to fruition), but which did not see the light of day until 1931.³⁸ Finally, Francis Vié-
³⁵ G. Sarrazin, trans., 'La Damoiselle élue', *La Revue contemporaine*, vol. 1, no. 3, 25 March 1885, pp. 373-78 (hereafter Sarrazin 1885b)

³⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, La Maison de vie, traduite de l'anglais par Albert Samain*, NAF 12856.

³⁷ A. Samain, *Des Lettres, 1887-1900* (Paris, 1933), pp. 1-6 ; see especially his letter to Bonheur of 30 April 1887, in which he laments, 'Le texte ne se laisse pas violer commodément, d'autant plus qu'à la concentration hyper-elliptique de la forme s'ajoute la concentration quintessentielle de l'idée'.

³⁸ P. Louÿs, 'La Saulaie', *L'Esprit français* (10 April 1931). On the aborted project for 'La Saulaie', see F. Lesure, ed., *Claude Debussy. Lettres 1884-1916* (Paris, 1980), pp. 83 and 98-101, H. Bourgeaud, ed., *Correspondance de Claude Debussy et Pierre Louÿs (1893-1904)* (Paris, 1945), pp. 75-76 and 146-139

Griffin, the Franco-American Symbolist poet who had written admiringly of Rossetti in an 1891 notice in *Entretiens politiques et littéraires*,³⁹ published a translation, in *beau livre* form, of 'The Blessed Damozel' in 1924. One could argue that the bilingual Viélé-Griffin had an unfair advantage over his peers; his translation, which took more liberties with Rossetti's words than any other and even introduced a new metre and rhyme scheme, restored to it the musicality that preceding versions had leached out.⁴⁰

One feature common to the better part of French literary responses to Rossetti, despite – or perhaps because of – the appeal of his double works of art to Symbolist aesthetics, was the subsuming of his artistic production into his literary production, or, in the case of one of his most influential critics, Gabriel Sarrazin (who did have firsthand knowledge of Rossetti's paintings)⁴¹, the imposition of a false division between the two halves of his oeuvre.⁴² Surprisingly, even that arch-supporter of the synthesis of the arts, Teodor de Wyzewa, had little time for Rossetti as a painter, considering his artistic production contrived, deficient in technique and inferior to his poetry.⁴³ Of course, this can be partly attributed to the difficulty of seeing Rossetti's paintings and the inadequacies of reproductions, but it may also be symptomatic of the rivalries between writers and artists that characterised much Symbolist debate, with writers claiming the primacy of literature over the visual arts.⁴⁴ Or, as Dario Gamboni trenchantly encapsulates these attitudes, 'fin-de-siècle *littérateurs* generally made no

³⁹ F. Viélé-Griffin, 'Deux mots', *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* (1891), pp. 215-17.

⁴⁰ F. Viélé-Griffin, *La Damoiselle élue* (Paris, 1924).

⁴¹ Sarrazin met William Michael Rossetti during a visit to London in 1878 and apparently saw some of his brother's paintings; he was also friendly with Ford Madox Brown. For further discussion of Sarrazin's links with London, see Brogniez (2003), pp. 90-97.

⁴² 'Distinct, divisé, tour à tour maître des deux pôles opposés d l'art, mystique, puis sensuel, traversé d'une ombre de sensualisme dans sa mysticité, et d'une vive lueur de mysticité dans son sensualisme, tel fut Rossetti': G. Sarrazin, 'L'École esthétique en Angleterre', *La Revue indépendante*, vol. 2 (November 1884), p. 166.

⁴³ Wyzewa based his damning judgment of Rossetti on *Ecce Ancilla Domini* and *Beata Beatrix*, claiming that the latter 'est le plus saisissant modèle que l'on puisse offrir aux Jeunes peintres pour leur faire sentir la nécessité d'apprendre leur métier': T. de Wyzewa, *La Peinture étrangère au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1892), p. 158. He continued to disparage Rossetti as a painter in *Peintres de jadis et d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1903), pp. 284-85. (Both essays, according to the exhaustive bibliography in P. Delsemme, *Teodor de Wyzewa et le cosmopolitisme littéraire en France à l'époque du symbolisme*, Brussels 1967, were not published elsewhere previously).

⁴⁴ See Goddard (2004).

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secret of their conviction that the world, paintings included, had been made so as to result in a book'.⁴⁵

In this mass of verbal translations, only one poet – Paul Verlaine – stands out as having engaged with Rossetti's pictorial work. Verlaine was commissioned by William Rothenstein to write an ekphrastic poem on Rossetti's 1867 portrait of his patron Frederick Leyland's wife, *Monna Rosa* [Figure 52, S.198] for the first issue of the short-lived, and actively internationalist British Symbolist journal *The Pageant* in

1896; it was one of the last poems he ever wrote and, as his response to Rothenstein makes clear, financial considerations loomed uppermost in the ailing poet's mind.⁴⁶ While not one of his best poems, 'Monna Rosa' is worthy of closer attention than it has previously been accorded. Rossetti himself, apart from a pastiche quotation from Angelo Poliziano inscribed on the frame, had not, as was his usual practice, written a poem for the painting;⁴⁷ Verlaine's effort may thus be seen as a collaborative postscript or a posthumous pendant. Notably, his poem makes no attempt to impose any narrative or, indeed, any concrete meaning on this explicitly subject-less picture. Rather, the hypnotically repetitive cadences and fluid assonances combine to evoke aurally the dreamlike, sensual atmosphere of the painting. Just as Mrs Leyland, draped in the same white and gold damask robes in which Rossetti dressed his 'stunner' *Monna Vanna* (S.191), merges with her exotic Aesthetic surroundings as merely another swathe of sumptuous colour, so Verlaine takes obvious pleasure in the simple naming and suggestion of colour –

Elle est seule au boudoir
 En bandeaux d'or liquide,
 En robe d'or fluide
 Sur fond blanc dans le soir
 Teinté d'or vert et noir.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ 'Les littérateurs fin-de-siècle ne faisaient généralement pas mystère de leur conviction que le monde, tableaux compris, était fait pour aboutir à un livre': D. Gamboni, "'Vers le songe et l'abstrait": Gustave Moreau et le littéraire', *48/14: La Revue du musée d'Orsay*, no. 9 (Autumn 1999), p. 56.

⁴⁶ Verlaine returned his poem to Rothenstein with the following note, dated 15 September 1895: 'Voici vers [sic]: je les crois appropriés *ad-hoc*, "and the right lines of the right thing". Si vous pouviez me les faire payer tout de suite, quelle reconnaissance!' P. Verlaine, *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. Y.-G. Le

Dantec and J. Borel (Paris, 1962), p. 1356. The poem was published in *The Pageant* in the original French.

⁴⁷ While Rossetti informed Leyland that the quotation ('Con manto d'oro, collaria ed anelli, / La piace aver con quelli / Non altro che una rosa ai sua capelli') was from Poliziano, according to William Michael it was actually his own work 'in the style of'; he may have been flaunting his erudition at Leyland's expense. Fredeman (2003), vol. 3, letter to Frederick Leyland, 18 June 1867, pp. 546-47.

⁴⁸ P. Verlaine, 'Monna Rosa', *The Pageant* (1896), p. 14.

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– a task given particular urgency by the fact that his readers only had access to the black-and-white reproduction which his poem, both literally and figuratively, framed.⁴⁹

The sensitivity of Verlaine's poetic response to Rossetti's pictorial work is, however, rare among his contemporaries. For a more satisfactory example of a Benjaminian 'good' translation – one that 'is transparent; does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully'⁵⁰ – we must turn instead to Rossetti's fellow visual artists, and to the work that resulted when a poet, a composer and a painter took on the task of translating his most talismanic double work, *The Blessed Damozel* [Figure 53, S.244].

A Total Work of Art: From *The Blessed Damozel* to *La Damoiselle élue*

In 1885, the 23-year-old Claude Debussy, about to depart for Rome for a two-year stint as a *pensionnaire* of the Académie Française, read 'La Damoiselle élue', Gabriel Sarrazin's translation of 'The Blessed Damozel', in the *Revue contemporaine*. Although inspiration did not strike immediately, his reading sowed the seeds of a composition that germinated over his sojourn in Rome, emerging in 1887 as a cantata, based on Sarrazin's translation, for female soloists and choir.⁵¹ Five years later,

shortly before the work received its premier in Paris and the score was published by Edmond Bailly of the Librairie de l'art indépendant (a publisher and shop with links to the occult and Péladan's Salon de la Rose + Croix), Bailly asked the young Nabi painter and theoretician, Maurice Denis, to provide the frontispiece [Figure 54, C.30] – a willowy white-gowned woman standing on a golden balcony, the stylised arabesques of her blonde tresses floating like flames against a starry sky.⁵² The resulting work, informed by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* theories formulated by Teodor de Wyzewa in *La Revue wagnérienne*, exemplified the synthesis of the arts which had

⁴⁹ Presumably Rothenstein provided Verlaine with a verbal description of the painting's colour scheme.

⁵⁰ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' (1999), p. 79.

⁵¹ François Lesure speculates that Debussy's younger brother Alfred may have been a catalyst in the composition of *La Damselle élue*; Alfred published a translation of Rossetti's 'The Staff and the Scrip' ('Le Bourdon et le besace') in *La Revue indépendante* (November 1887) and the brothers probably discussed contemporary poetry together: F. Lesure, *Claude Debussy avant Pelléas ou les années symbolistes* (Paris, 1992), pp. 80-81.

⁵² Throughout my discussion of *La Damselle élue*, I shall be referring to the 1893 piano reduction published by Bailly, not the orchestral score (unless otherwise noted).

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become central to Symbolist aesthetics.⁵³ Yet, curiously, with a handful of important exceptions such as Richard Langham Smith's exploration of Debussy's creative debt to the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti himself often appears as a footnote in discussions of *La Damselle élue*.⁵⁴ Moreover, some of the literature on Denis's and Debussy's reinterpretation of Rossetti's *Blessed Damselle* discusses it as an 'improvement' on the original, to Rossetti's detriment.⁵⁵ This is, perhaps, not surprising given that Denis, both as a member of the Nabis, with their association with the radical aesthetic of Paul Gauguin, and as the author of the groundbreaking 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme' whose opening formula, 'Remember that a painting – before being a charger, a nude woman or some anecdote – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order' has been subjected to much misinterpretation as a manifesto of formalist abstraction, has always fitted more comfortably into high modernist narratives than has the 'retrograde', literary art of Rossetti.⁵⁶ I would like to propose a different, less normative reading that restores Rossetti to his rightful place in this Symbolist constellation and suggests that Denis's visual reinterpretation of the figure of the Blessed Damselle reveals a broader knowledge of, and deeper engagement with, Rossetti's oeuvre than has previously been acknowledged.

In temperament and in aesthetic preferences, Denis exhibited marked differences from his fellow Nabis and strong affinities with Rossetti almost from the beginning. As MaryAnne Stevens points out, Denis was unique among his peers in his fascination, verging on obsession, with women as ideal or sacred beings, a characteristic which allied him more closely to the subject matter and aesthetic of

⁵³ For further discussion of the role played by Wyzewa's articles, see J. Kearns, *Symbolist Landscapes: The Place of Painting in the Poetry and Criticism of Mallarmé and his Circle* (London, 1989), pp. 72-74. On Wyzewa's low opinion of Rossetti the painter, see n.43 above.

⁵⁴ R. L. Smith, 'Debussy and the Pre-Raphaelites', *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 2, Autumn 1981, pp. 95-109. It should be noted, however, that Smith errs in claiming that Debussy's interest in Rossetti and his decision to set *La Damselle élue* was 'clearly *avant l'heure*' and that there were few articles or translations until the 1890s (p. 96).

⁵⁵ The most extreme example is R. Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London, 1979), p. 22, who states that Debussy 'transcends Rossetti and restores to [him] his intention'; Guy Cogeval praises Denis's design as 'fort lointain de l'élégance morbide de Rossetti qui éternise un amour impossible par delà la barrière de la mort': G. Cogeval, 'Le ciel ne peut pas attendre. Maurice Denis et la culture symboliste', in G. Cogeval et al., *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943* (exh. cat., Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1994), p. 24.

⁵⁶ ‘Se rappeler qu’un tableau – avant d’être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote – est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées’: M. Denis [‘Pierre Louis’], ‘Définition du néo-traditionnisme’, *Art et critique* nos. 65 and 66 (23 and 30 August 1890), pp. 540-42 and 556-58, reprinted in M. Denis, *Le Ciel et l’arcadie*, ed. J.-P. Bouillon (Paris, 1993), p. 5.

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Rossetti and Burne-Jones.⁵⁷ His youthful tastes corresponded remarkably closely with Rossetti’s. A reading of Denis’s journal entries on his first visits to the Louvre and Rossetti’s letters home during his first visit to Paris, despite the difference in tone between the former’s rapturous reverence and the latter’s flippancy, shows that both were drawn to Fra Angelico’s *Coronation of the Virgin* and Hippolyte Flandrin’s frescoes at St-Germain-des-Prés, signalling the origins of a commitment to renew painting by keeping one eye fixed (selectively) on the past.⁵⁸ Furthermore – and crucially for his acquaintance with Rossetti’s work – Denis sought and maintained much closer ties with literary Symbolists than did the other Nabis, attending Mallarmé’s famed *mardis* from 1890. Not only did his affiliation with Mallarmé’s circle expose him to intense discussions on the notion that painting should approach, in Pater’s words, ‘the condition of music’ – Whistler and Arthur Symons were regular attendees – but also to reproductions of Rossetti’s painting, which Mallarmé apparently made available at his gatherings.⁵⁹

Although unfortunately we are forced to rely in large part on anecdotal information concerning which reproductions Denis may have seen, and many of the reproductions that survive today were published too late to have informed his work in the early 1890s, we can attempt a speculative reconstruction of the convergence of his path with Rossetti. He may have seen photographs of Rossetti’s paintings as early as 1889; the first version of *Mystère catholique* [Figure 55] bears an uncanny resemblance to *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* in terms of subject matter (moving the Annunciation into an overtly contemporary domestic setting), the deliberately

⁵⁷ Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 211-12.

⁵⁸ See M. Denis, *Journal*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1957), entries for 12 August 1885, p. 40, 20 August 1885, pp. 41-42, 5 January 1886, p. 63 (on Fra Angelico) and 18 August 1886, p. 66 (on Flandrin), and Fredeman (2002), vol. 1, letter to William Michael Rossetti, 4 October 1849, pp. 108-9 (‘Now for the best. Hunt & I solemnly decided that the most perfect works, taken *in toto*, that we have seen in our lives, are two pictures by Hippolyte Flandrin [...] in the church of S. Germain des Prés. Wonderful! wonderful!! wonderful!!!’). Rossetti’s enthusiasm for Flandrin has been dismissed by most scholars as an embarrassing error of youth, but there may be some significance in it previously overlooked: Driskel (1992), pp. 72-73, identifies Flandrin and other pupils of Ingres (including Eugène Amaury-Duval, whose frescoes in the church at St-Germain-en-Laye were among the first works of art to which Denis was exposed as a child) as representing a French form of Pre-Raphaelitism, in the sense that they were inspired by the work of Fra Angelico and subscribed to the belief that Raphael had ‘declined after his first efforts’ (in moving to pagan subjects, among other things), a central tenet of the aesthetics of ultramontanism. For further discussion of Denis’s dialectical relationship with the painting of Flandrin, see Driskel (1992), pp. 237-39; see also Marlais (1992), pp. 186-207, on the paradox of Denis’s conservative modernity.

⁵⁹ G. Vaughan, ‘Maurice Denis and the sense of music’, *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 7, no. 1 (1984), pp. 38-40 and 42.

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awkward, flattened rendering of the figures and, most striking, the predominantly white palette, enlivened only by a few intense touches of red, blue and gold.⁶⁰

More central to the development of the imagery of *La Damaïsselle élue*, however, were two engravings either published or exhibited in Paris in the early 1890s which exemplified Rossetti’s perception of music’s power to suggest the divine, a notion closely bound up with his interest in medievalism and his conception of the Gothic – strikingly different from the Ruskinian Gothic – as centring on the

identification of flesh and spirit and on the importance of love.⁶¹ In 1891, an engraving by Eugène Gaujean after Rossetti's *Christmas Carol* [Figure 56] was exhibited at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Praised by Edouard Rod, who nevertheless expressed disappointment at the fact that Gaujean had not thus far made any engravings after Rossetti's most renowned works, '[those] admirable canvases that M. Leighland [sic] guards jealously',⁶² this image of a richly-dressed young woman lost in rapture as she sings a carol celebrating Christ's birth⁶³ must have struck a chord with Denis, for whom music, the divine, and love had always been intimately related, whether in the psalms sung in church or, more recently, in the form of his fiancée Marthe Meurier, a talented musician. Outside of the Salon, Denis may have had access to another reproduction of one of Rossetti's musical subjects, which has thus far escaped scholarly attention: an engraving after *King René's Honeymoon* recently discovered in an undated magazine clipping in the archives of the Musée

⁶⁰ Denis is known to have painted at least six versions of the subject; this one, the second, bears the closest resemblance to *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*. The third and fourth versions, painted in 1890 (one of which was exhibited at the 1891 Salon des Indépendants), while retaining the same composition and white colour scheme, are painted in a pointillist style. For further discussion of the multiple versions of *Mystère catholique*, see Cogeval et al. (1994), pp. 125-29. K. P. Aichele, 'Maurice Denis and George Desvallières: From Symbolism to Sacred Art', Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College (1976), p. 25, also notes the similarities between *Mystère catholique* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, but expresses doubts over whether the inspiration was direct. However, an etching by Eugène Gaujean after *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, in the National Gallery from 1886, was published by Thomas Agnew in 1880 and could have been available in France: R. K. Engen, *Pre-Raphaelite Prints: The Graphic Art of Millais, Holman Hunt, Rossetti and their Followers* (London, 1995), p. 66. Moreover, Frederick Hollyer produced a coloured mezzotint of the painting in the 1880s (reproduced in McGann (2000), plate II).

⁶¹ On Rossetti's conception of the Gothic, particularly in relation to *The Blessed Damozel* see D. M. R. Bentley, "'The Blessed Damozel': A Young Man's Fantasy", *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 20, nos. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 1982), pp. 36-37.

⁶² '[Une] de ces admirables toiles que M. Leighland [sic] garde jalousement': E. Rod, 'Les Salons de 1891 au Champ-de-Mars et aux Champs-Élysées (2e et dernier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July 1891), p. 33. For further discussion of Gaujean's reproductive prints of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, see Saunier (2002), p. 77, and Engen (1995), pp. 65-67.

⁶³ Rossetti inscribed on the painting's frame the first line of the carol, 'Jesus Christus hodie natus est de Virgine': Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 193.

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d'Orsay [Figure 57].⁶⁴ Although the source has proven impossible to trace, from the credit line 'Reproduit avec l'autorisation de J. H. Trist esquire' printed below the engraving, we may safely assume that it dates from before 1892.⁶⁵ Joanna Meacock suggests that this celebration of harmony in music and in love may be read as Rossetti's secular recasting of his earlier, and already highly sensual, *St Cecilia* in the Moxon edition of Tennyson's *Poems* [Figure 58]: as King René works the bellows of the Queen's portative organ, he becomes the force behind her music, creating a direct parallel with St Cecilia's reliance on the power of God, her spouse. Furthermore, the painting puns on the meaning of René's name ('reborn') to imply that physical love might somehow attain to the nature of the divine and become redemptive.⁶⁶

This shared interest in the intersection of music, love, and the sacred highlights another connection between Rossetti and Denis: a profound and, in Rossetti's case, complicated relationship with Catholic mysticism. Rossetti, although raised in the Anglican faith, displayed a strong predilection for Catholic ceremony and imagery, his interest whetted by the burgeoning Oxford Movement.⁶⁷ Although his early efforts at religious painting suffered a critical battering informed by the rabid anti-Catholicism of the early 1850s⁶⁸ and he would become disillusioned with religion in later life, a mystical spirituality continued to pervade his work to the end. As F. W. H. Myers, one of Rossetti's most sensitive critics, argued, this mysticism was inextricable from

the sensuous appeal of his work and differentiated it from the hedonistic materialism espoused by Gautier and Baudelaire:

The pictures that perplex us with their obvious incompleteness, their new and haunting beauty, are not the mere caprices of a richly-dowered but wandering spirit. Rather they may be called (and none the less so for their shortcomings) the sacred pictures of a new religion; forms and faces which bear the same relation to that mystical worship of Beauty on which we have dwelt so long, as the forms and faces of a Francia or a Leonardo bear to the medieval mysteries of the worship of Mary or of Christ.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Documentation du Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti box 1.

⁶⁵ J. Hamilton Trist's sale was held at Christie's on 9 April 1892: Surtees (1971), p. 101. Trist had commissioned the painting, a replica of Rossetti's panel from the King René's Honeymoon Cabinet (1862, London, Victoria and Albert Museum), in 1864.

⁶⁶ J. Meacock, 'Saintly Ecstasies: The Appropriation and Secularisation of Saintly Imagery in the Paintings and Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow (2001), p. 175. On the availability of the Moxon Tennyson in France and its mention by Gustave Kahn in the *Revue blanche*, see Chapter 2.

⁶⁷ On Rossetti's religious background and education, see Meacock (2001), pp. 19-38.

⁶⁸ See Bullen (1998), pp. 20-36, on the long-lasting implications of anti-Catholicism for the Pre-Raphaelites' critical fortunes in Britain.

⁶⁹ F. W. H. Myers, 'Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty', *Cornhill Magazine*, vol. 47 (February 1883), p. 219.

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But, as much as Myers stressed the moral dimension of Rossetti's mysticism, he could not efface completely the sensuous delight it took in beauty. We might fairly apply to him the oxymoronic label of 'materialist mystic', one whose insistence on, and devotion to, the sacredness of the physical put him at odds with both conventional Victorian Christianity and the body-denying austerity of the monastic ideal espoused by Walter Pater in *Diaphaneité*.⁷⁰ This would explain Rossetti's attraction to the writings of the Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, of whose work he is known to have owned several volumes, and the centrality of the Swedenborgian concept of the 'conjugal angel' – the divine being formed by the physical union of two ideal human partners – to the conception and symbolic programme of *The Blessed Damozel*.⁷¹

Even a cursory reading of Denis's early musings on religion reveals striking affinities with Rossetti's 'religion of beauty'. Denis, although a devout Catholic from an early age, was no ascetic. He unashamedly acknowledged the importance to his faith of the sensory delights of church ceremony – psalms, lights, incense⁷² – and at the age of fifteen, in the first flush of his passion for Fra Angelico, dreamed of founding a chapel-cum-art gallery in which he and his fellow artist-monks would hold masses and art exhibitions simultaneously.⁷³ His entry into the Académie Julian and subsequent initiation into the less exalted side of studio life precipitated a brief crisis of faith, or more accurately the loss of an ideal:

I used to say "the Nude is chaste, the Nude is beautiful", without knowing what it meant. Today I know it and I love it, but alas! why must it in fact be unchaste, and aesthetic pleasures necessitate immodesty?⁷⁴

However, meeting Marthe caused him to discard his callow notions of the opposition between the body and soul and to decide that indeed 'we must not give up on the reconciliation of what we call the flesh and what we call the spirit, that this

⁷⁰ W. Pater, *Diaphaneité* (1864), reprinted in *Miscellaneous Studies* (London, 1895), pp. 247-54.

⁷¹ On Rossetti's readings of Swedenborg, see Meacock (2001), pp. 202-5 and Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 192-93.

⁷² Denis (1957), p. 90, entry for 25 December 1891 ('Noël. Messe de minuit').

⁷³ ‘Et alors – oh, que ce serait beau – je lui élèverais en plein Paris profane une somptueuse chapelle, que mes confrères et moi n’ingénieraient à orner de tableaux, de fresques, de tavoles, de prédelles, de lunettes... Oh! que ce serait beau. Et chaque année, notre société artistico-religieuse y viendrait entendre la messe avec sa toile sur le bras. La messe dite on accrocherait les envois – exclusivement religieux – dans un local *ad hoc*. L’exposition se terminerait par une seconde messe dans notre église!...’ Ibid., p. 40 (12 August 1885).

⁷⁴ ‘Je disais “le Nu est chaste, le Nu est beau”, et je ne le connaissais pas. Aujourd’hui je le connais et je l’aime; mais, hélas! pourquoi faut-il qu’il ne soit point chaste en effet, et que les joies esthétiques nécessitent des impudeurs?’ Ibid., p. 68 (18 March 1888).

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reconciliation is the object of our greatest endeavours’.⁷⁵ At the same time, what Sarrazin considered the hallmark of Pre-Raphaelitism – the fragile ‘ange-femme’⁷⁶ – and the explicitly Marian nature of the Damozel’s physical description⁷⁷ doubtless appealed to his insistent idealisation of Woman. This resolution of opposites spilled over into his art and theoretical writings and, in tandem with his well-documented interest in all things medieval, made him an apt and sympathetic pictorial translator of *The Blessed Damozel*.

The Blessed Damozel, apart from being possibly Rossetti’s most renowned double work, occupies the unique position of forming the bookends of his career. Thus, it also carries the burden of encapsulating the trajectory from light to darkness which, in the heavily biographical view of most of Rossetti’s posthumous critics, defined his life and work. Furthermore, it is the only one of Rossetti’s double works in which word preceded image: more than twenty years separate the initial composition of the poem (1847) and the commission from William Graham for the painting (1871, but apparently not begun until 1873).⁷⁸ In that space of time, Rossetti’s style had evolved from the archaisms (both verbal and visual), angular forms and fresh, jewel-like palette of his truly Pre-Raphaelite phase to the overripe colour and mannered arabesques of his late, and what was widely considered his decadent, style. Indeed, Sidney Colvin, one of his more insightful critics, considered it the embodiment of Rossetti’s moral-cum-artistic decline and the squandering of his early promise, lamenting, ‘What a decay of the colour-sense is shown in the unwholesome pink stars and haloes, the dusky hotness and livid shadows of the “Blessed Damozel”! what a change, in the whole cast and temper of the imagination, from the mood in which the poem itself had been written thirty years before!’⁷⁹ For Duret, the Damozel had nothing of the delicacy and spirituality which characterised her poetic antecedent; he classed her among the other late female figures like *Astarte*

⁷⁵ ‘Qu’il ne faut renoncer à rapprocher ce qu’on nomme la chair de ce qu’on nomme l’esprit, que cette conciliation est l’objet de notre effort essentiel’: Ibid., p. 90 (25 December 1891).

⁷⁶ Sarrazin (1885a), p. 248.

⁷⁷ Bentley (1982), p. 38.

⁷⁸ Graham was not the first to request a painting after the poem *The Blessed Damozel*; Rossetti’s patron Thomas Plint apparently expressed an interest in such a painting in 1856, but Rossetti turned down the suggestion, confiding to Ford Madox Brown that ‘I think I shall stick to St. Cecilia’, even though Plint would have been willing to pay half again as much for *The Blessed Damozel*: Fredeman (2002), vol. 2, letter to Ford Madox Brown, 18 December 1856, p. 151.

⁷⁹ S. Colvin, ‘Rossetti as a Painter’, *Magazine of Art*, vol. 6 (1883), p. 183. See also J. Comyns Carr, *Papers on Art* (London, 1885), pp. 207-9.

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Syriaca and *Pandora* (a half-length engraving of which illustrated his review) as ‘a sort of sibyl, siren, or melusine’.⁸⁰

Indeed, the poem in its ‘final’, most explicitly sensual incarnation still sits uneasily with the even more overt, claustrophobic eroticism of the painting, with the compressed perspective of its background of embracing lovers threatening to burst

into the foreground, overwhelming the Damozel.⁸¹ Walter Pater, discussing this last version of the poem, considered this marriage of opposites central not only to *The Blessed Damozel*, but to Rossetti's art as a whole: 'One of the peculiarities of [the poem] *The Blessed Damozel* was a definiteness of sensible imagery, which seemed almost grotesque to some, and was strange, above all, in a theme so profoundly visionary.'⁸² The unnerving quality of Rossetti's attempt at fusing heaven and earth, that is, extreme material specificity and visionary ideas, finds concrete expression in his rendering of the Damozel's eyes and lips in the painting. Associating eyes with 'soul's beauty' and the mouth with 'body's beauty', as in so many of his late works, Rossetti enlarged and exaggerated the Damozel's hooded blue-green eyes and pouting Cupid's-bow lips to an almost grotesque degree, as if the celestial and the terrestrial are locked in an eternal struggle for dominance. Sarrazin seems to have been impelled by the unsettling carnality of this 'angelic siren' (the attention given to colour in his description of the painting indicates firsthand knowledge)⁸³ to change his translation of the title from *La Damoiselle bénie* in his first article on Rossetti to *La Damoiselle élue* in his translation of the poem. While both words do mean 'blessed', the choice subtly shifts the meaning from the holier, more conventionally religious overtones of 'bénie' (which can also be translated as 'consecrated') to the less literal 'élue' ('elect' or 'chosen', which accentuates the Damozel's humanity and physicality). This, then, was the challenge facing first Debussy, then Denis – how to capture the tension between the erotic and the spiritual and find a way to resolve it, or at least allow them to exist harmoniously, without letting the two destroy each other.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ 'Sorte de sibylle, de sirène, de mélusine': Duret (1883), p. 54.

⁸¹ On the evolution of the poem from its first draft in 1847 through its published versions in *The Germ* (1850) and the 1870 and 1881 *Poems*, see Bentley (1982).

⁸² W. Pater, *Appreciations* (London, 1889), p. 230.

⁸³ 'l'angélique sirène': Sarrazin (1884), p. 166.

⁸⁴ It is difficult to determine how much, if any, creative control Debussy exercised over Denis. His only letter to Denis on the subject was written after the score was printed, and merely notes, 'Je viens de voir « la Damoiselle Elue ». Vous dire que c'est une très belle chose est encore mal dire ce que j'en pense. Soyez-en bien remercier' (Musée départemental Maurice Denis-Le Prieuré, Ms. 12390). This would seem to imply that Debussy had only just seen the final design for the first time.

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Debussy's solution was to make several cuts to Sarrazin's translation, excising all of the parenthetical interjections from the Damozel's lover. This may have been in part for practical reasons – he may have felt that including a male soloist would clutter the cantata. However, the removal of the lover's voice, which D. M. R. Bentley likens to a typographical equivalent of the painting's predella,⁸⁵ dramatically alters our experience of the geography of the poem and the painting. Rather than a bipartite altarpiece in which a disquietingly lush *horror vacui* of a Heaven dominates over a compressed yet more austere Earth, we are left with a Marian icon; in place of a reinvented medieval-Catholic conception of the universe in which Heaven and Earth are simultaneously knowable and spirit and flesh are one,⁸⁶ we find a Heaven populated by angelic female voices from which the existence of the earth and, crucially, all signs of men have been removed except from within the mind of the Damozel, bounded by empty space.

Debussy's effacement of the terrestrial realm does not, however, cool or stifle the eroticism of the celestial sphere described in *La Damoiselle élue*; indeed, by isolating the Damozel in her heaven he turns the sensuality in upon itself, transforming the longing of two souls for each other across an unbridgeable distance into the Damozel's voluptuous reverie. His musical language is visually evocative, in keeping with the synaesthetic concerns of Symbolism and bespeaking a unified

response to the image and the text. As Smith points out, he uses three- and seven-note motives in the bars in which the choir describes the ‘seven stars in her hair’ and ‘the three lilies in her hand’.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the ‘strangely ethereal registration of the chords’ which open the cantata and recur throughout, with the high octave doublings often unsupported by a bass line, appears to mimic in sound the ‘stained glass’ effect of (early) Pre-Raphaelite painting, which often employed luminous unmixed colours on a wet white background to make them appear as if lit from behind,⁸⁸ while the swaying yet oddly static opening section leads the listener into a realm where time ceases to exist. Julie McQuinn observes that the entrance of the Damozel herself is built up as if she were the Virgin herself.⁸⁹ Indeed, the strangely static major triads in which the choir frames her utterances could be considered the aural equivalent of the

⁸⁵ Bentley (1982), p. 39.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸⁷ Smith (1981), p. 102.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ J. McQuinn, ‘Exploring the erotic in Debussy’s music’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. S. Trezise (Cambridge, 2003), p. 125.

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hieratism of a Byzantine icon. Yet in keeping with Debussy’s emphasis on the ambiguity between the sacred and the profane, this stasis also creates a feeling of ‘lush suspension’⁹⁰ in which is located the frustrated desire of the Damozel, a desire whose resolution is beyond the bounds of the text and which Debussy refuses to resolve musically, preferring to let it float. Significantly, most of her entrances are enclosed by silence, and her first is unaccompanied. Debussy often imbued silences with an intense erotic charge, and the stillness in which the Damozel dreams of being reunited with her lover is no exception.⁹¹

This combination of poetic, musical and visual concerns infuses Denis’s frontispiece. One of its most striking aspects is the way the design floats on the white surface of the sheet as if suspended in space – an effect most noticeable in the set of prints made outside the edition in 1892, as in Figure 54; Denis uses the white space to evoke visually the silences of the cantata and the ellipses in the poem. As Gerard Vaughan observes, he almost certainly had access to a reproduction of Rossetti’s painting, for the tilt of the Damozel’s head, the disposition of her hands and the waves of hair billowing around her head recall the original almost exactly.⁹² Yet Denis, not having seen the much larger original, had no firsthand knowledge of the intimidating corporeality of the Damozel evoked by Duret. Moreover, the loss of colour and scale in the reproduction dampened the sultry atmosphere conjured by Rossetti’s palette and hid the restlessness of his brushwork; just as in Sarrazin’s translation of the poem, the spiritual and the physical were uncoupled by the limitations of black-and-white photogravure. However, Denis’s decision to change the colour of the Damozel’s hair from the auburn of the painting to blonde harks back to the poem (‘the hair that lay along her back / was yellow like ripe corn’), indicating a close reading of the text and a desire to negotiate the gaps opened up by Rossetti between poem and painting. The attempt at a return to the more mystical, less physical text (which emerges as even more mystical in Sarrazin’s translation) accords with Denis’s religious concerns and the Byzantine aesthetic espoused in the ‘Définition du néo-traditionnisme’. If Debussy’s setting of the Damozel’s entrance musically evokes the otherworldly hieratism of a painted icon, then Denis’s lithograph borrows openly from the icon

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁹¹ Other examples include *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* (1894) and, most famously, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902), in which the protagonists declare their love in total silence.

⁹² Vaughan (1984), p. 43.

tradition. Exhibiting the pure profile of Marthe, his own “‘élue” par excellence’,⁹³ the Damozel is preternaturally tall, dominating the image even more thoroughly than does Rossetti’s, but her attenuated body, enveloped by her long-sleeved gown, is drained of almost all substance and transformed into a pale field delineated only by the dark heavens and their golden barrier. The only body parts to be given any real presence – again, following the conventions of icon painting – are her hands (not holding ‘three lilies’ but, oddly, a book), her voluminous hair and her face, with eyes not lowered to shade a smouldering gaze but closed completely on some inner dream and lips not parted, as in the painting, as if about to speak, but closed, indeed scarcely defined.⁹⁴ Save for her hair and the tilt of her head, one could be forgiven for thinking that Denis had, after a brief glance, turned his back entirely on Rossetti.

Although the influence of medieval devotional painting and Japanese prints on Denis’s rendering of *La Damoiselle élue* has become an article of faith,⁹⁵ and there is certainly much evidence to support this thesis, I would argue that in his ‘translation’ of *La Damoiselle élue* Denis also sought inspiration in reproductions of Rossetti’s work in a more overtly mystical vein. Laurence Brogniez notes that Denis’s syntheist vision displays more affinities with Rossetti’s gold-backed (and therefore more explicitly iconic) initial version of the subject, *Sancta Liliis*,⁹⁶ which also focuses on the Damozel to the exclusion of her lover. However, it seems probable that Denis was also aware of Rossetti’s most extreme essay in anti-illusionism, the two versions of *Dantis Amor* [Figures 59 and 60, S.117 and S.117A]. Seldom, if ever, cited in literature on the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites in France, the pen-and-ink preliminary version is included in a list of photographs after Rossetti’s works available to order from William Michael from 1882.⁹⁷ Given William Michael’s

⁹³ J.-P. Bouillon, *Maurice Denis* (Geneva, 1993), p. 43. The implications for Denis’s conflation of his artistic and emotional lives will be explored further in the following section.

⁹⁴ It is worth noting, however, that this last detail also varies in Rossetti’s two *Blessed Damozels*; in the second version now in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight (S.244 R1) the Damozel’s lips are closed.

⁹⁵ See especially U. Perucchi-Petri, ‘Les Nabis et le japonisme’, in C. Frèches-Thory and U. Perucchi-Petri, eds., *Les Nabis, 1888-1900* (exh. cat., Zurich, Kunsthaus and Paris, Grand Palais, 1993), pp. 33-59, and Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 24.

⁹⁶ Brogniez (2003), p. 233. She adds, ‘La peinture de Denis apparaît comme une préraphaélisme libéré de toute contrainte formelle, ayant renoncé à la précision mimétique pour mieux laisser s’exprimer le symbole.’ Frederick Hollyer photographed *Sancta Liliis* in 1874, so, assuming that the reproduction would have been available in France in the early 1890s, her suggestion is certainly plausible.

⁹⁷ For the price list of reproductions sold by William Michael Rossetti, see British Library, Add. 49525 (Dykes Campbell Papers), vol. 5, no. 78. The list is dated in pencil ‘1882-1890’, presumably by William Michael himself; most of the reproductions he sold were of drawings rather than paintings, *Dantis Amor* (no. 36) listed as selling for seven shillings.

acquaintance with Samain and Sarrazin, it seems plausible that the photograph may have made its way across the Channel. Even at first glance, the parallels between *Dantis Amor*, which McGann contends is Rossetti’s most wholly visionary work in its utter disregard for the idea of representation,⁹⁸ and *La Damoiselle élue*, are arresting: the deliberate refusal of post-Renaissance perspective and the collapsing of the picture plane, the archaising background (if one can fairly speak of background in images which fly in the face of Albertian perspective) of conventionalised gold stars scattered on a cobalt field, recalling Trecento Siennese painting, and the weightless, static angularity of the figures. Delving more deeply into Rossetti’s mystical symbolism reveals further parallels and points of inspiration for Denis. The head of Beatrice, encircled by a crescent moon, takes the traditional place of the Virgin, glowing in the

reflected light of Christ, the Son/the Sun (evoked by the visual pun of Christ's head haloed by the sun), alluding to her 'heavenly marriage',⁹⁹ while the separation of the two, presided over by the allegorical figure of Love, as drawn from the *Vita Nuova*, presents the two phases of Dante's love for Beatrice, earthly in the *Vita Nuova* and heavenly in the *Divine Comedy*, in cosmic unity.¹⁰⁰ This union of opposites, or at least the longing for it, is, as we have seen, central to *The Blessed Damozel* and, in different ways, to the ideals of both Rossetti and Denis. Rossetti conceptualises love as the force that generates and drives the universe, underscored by the centrality and scale of the figure of Love (who here simultaneously draws together and holds apart the symbolic lovers) and by his inscription, in the drawing, of the final line of the *Divine Comedy* along the diagonal divide between the spheres, 'the Love that moves the sun and other stars'. This seems to have emerged in Denis's pictorial translation of *The Blessed Damozel*.

Yet if the frontispiece for *La Damoiselle élue* seems to draw more upon Rossetti at his most spiritual and immaterial, Denis preserves and reworks one of the original Damozel's most sensual attributes – her luxuriant hair. His Damozel's hair seems to have more weight and substance than her body as it swirls around her as if caught in a celestial wind. Despite its stylised appearance, it exudes a warm, restless physicality somewhat at odds with the ascetic flatness and angular lines of the rest of the design (and, indeed, with the text, which describes the Damozel's hair as much

⁹⁸ McGann (2000), p. 115.

⁹⁹ Meacock (2001), p. 166.

¹⁰⁰ Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 160.

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more demurely '[lying] along her back'); it enfolds her in an ethereal envelope much as Debussy's excision of the lover's voice from the text turns the eroticism of the Damozel's monologue inward. If its golden colour distances it from the seductive black hair celebrated by Baudelaire's 'La Chevelure' and its length from Mélisande's notoriously fetishised hair, 'plus longs que moi',¹⁰¹ it recalls Pater's contention that the Damozel's hair was one of the details most disruptive to the visionary cast of the poem. In the context of Debussy's setting of the poem, however, the Damozel's hair serves not only to suggest the blending of the mystical and the sensual, but to tie together the pictorial, the poetic and the musical. Her hair is essentially a series of decorative arabesques, a motif central to the aesthetic of Denis and his fellow Nabis, whose importance was not simply decorative but synaesthetic. Indeed, in the 'Définition', Denis identified the arabesque as the earliest and purest form of artistic expression, not least because it made no attempt at mimesis;¹⁰² he further qualified this as a recurring theme in all art forms, with the ability to express the emotional and spiritual in sensual form: 'Even a simple pursuit of lines [...] has an emotional value. Even the Parthenon frieze, even, and especially, a great Beethoven sonata!'¹⁰³ The arabesques of the Damozel's hair give visual form to the undulations of Debussy's melodies, just as the cantata paints a picture in sound of the Damozel dreaming about her lover. This fusion of image, music and poem, of the sacred and the sensual, while not slavishly faithful to the letter (the mere 'information') of Rossetti's original, was faithful to its spirit, reversing the splitting of his oeuvre into discreet halves by his previous translators.

The Blessed Damozel continued to haunt Denis for at least another year, but her next incarnation, while no less poetic, was in a wholly secular vein. Fittingly, she resurfaced in another total work of art which would eventually involve Debussy: the programme design for the 1893 premier of Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre [Figure 61, C.68]. Smith contends that Mélisande is

¹⁰¹ M. Maeterlinck, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892), in *Théâtre complet* (Paris and Geneva, 1979), vol. 2, p. 25.

¹⁰² 'A l'origine, l'arabesque pure, aussi peu trompe-l'oeil que possible': Denis (1993), p. 13.

¹⁰³ 'Même une simple recherche de lignes, [...] a une valeur sentimentale. Même la frise du Parthénon, même, et surtout, une grande sonate de Beethoven !': Ibid., p. 17. See also M. Denis (writing as 'Pierre Louis'), 'A Blanc et noir', *Art et critique* 2, no. 76 (8 November 1890), p. 717, in which the synthesis of music and painting in the arabesque is made even more explicit: 'deux thèmes de symphonies colossales, à peine éclos de l'imagination du Voyant et déjà somptueux au minimum d'arabesques qui les exprime; déjà symboliques, sur la toile à peine effleurée, en rythmiques ondulations'.

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'in many ways a younger sister to the Blessed Damozel';¹⁰⁴ while he refers specifically to Debussy's opera, which was first performed nine years later, his characterisation applies with equal aptness to the character in the play, for Maeterlinck was an avowed admirer of Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry and openly paraded its influence on his work. This common parentage is given striking form – not previously noted – in Denis's lithograph for the programme, which displays much stronger compositional ties with *The Blessed Damozel* than did *La Damselle élue*. In the foreground, the figure of Mélisande, her face framed by her long blonde hair, lowers her eyes in a melancholy reverie. Behind her the climax of the drama plays out: she and Pelléas enfold each other in a last, despairing embrace – the pair bearing a remarkable resemblance to the lovers at left in the middle ground of *The Blessed Damozel* – while a ghostly, distorted Golaud looms above Pelléas to deal the fatal blow. The shift from the ethereal and the sacred to the claustrophobic sensuality played out in Rossetti's poem and painting repeats itself in the frontispieces for *La Damselle élue* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Denis's musical reimagining of *The Blessed Damozel* had come full circle.

Beata Beatrix, Sancta Martha: Icons of the Beloved

Denis continued his dialectical relationship with Rossetti, informed by the tension between the sacred and the secular inherent in *The Blessed Damozel*, throughout the 1890s. The most salient and intriguing element of this dialogue was his constant reworking of a recurrent trope in Rossetti's oeuvre, that of the icon of the beloved or muse. Aptly nicknamed 'le Nabi aux belles icônes', Denis's early work is rife with small-format female 'portraits' (I use the inverted commas advisedly, for many of them are not portraits in the conventional sense of a faithful likeness) which explicitly borrow from the language and practices of domestic devotional painting. This practice had informed Rossetti's own 'portraits' to such a degree that it became a commonplace for critics to describe him as the high priest of a religion of beauty.¹⁰⁵ Equally commonplace in Denis scholarship is the assumption that his 'icons' were primarily expressions of a personal faith that revolved around and exalted the rhythms

¹⁰⁴ Smith (1981), p. 104.

¹⁰⁵ P. T. Forsyth, for example, accorded him a prominent place in *Religion in Recent Art: Expository Lectures on Rossetti, Burne Jones, Watts, Holman Hunt and Wagner* (London, 1901 (1889)); see also Myers (1883). On the broader social significance of the establishment of a 'religion of beauty' in late Victorian Britain, see Anderson and Wright (1994), pp. 9-16.

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of domestic life, nowhere more so than in his explicitly iconic casting of Marthe as her namesake saint, *Sancta Martha* [Figure 62].¹⁰⁶ It may seem a stretch to claim that such quiet, tender pictures, some of which border on the sentimental, display any bonds with Rossetti's obsessive repertoire of 'beautiful women with floral adjuncts'¹⁰⁷ in which the flesh so often appears to exist in an uneasy truce with the spirit. We must, however, bear in mind the uncoupling of the sensual and the spiritual occasioned by the reproductions which constituted Denis's acquaintance with

Rossetti. In fact, Rossetti's fusion of the divine and the sensual is transformed in Denis's icons, which, I argue, while more restrained and operating in a more explicitly spiritual register, are also more erotic and troubled than has been previously assumed. If no one has accused Denis of the near-pathological repetition decried by critics of Rossetti's gallery of beauties, his cast of characters is in fact even more circumscribed than Rossetti's, whose sister Christina's declaration that 'One face looks out from all his canvases'¹⁰⁸ is generally considered a description of his oeuvre. While Rossetti, in the main, limited himself to a handful of models (Elizabeth Siddall, Fanny Cornforth, Alexa Wilding and Jane Morris) and his increasingly mannered concentration on certain salient features (hooded eyes, bow-shaped lips, lantern jaws, columnar necks and nervous hands) did indeed blur the distinctions between them, draining them of individuality and transforming them into what Griselda Pollock has termed 'woman-as-sign',¹⁰⁹ Denis, from 1891, rarely looked to any model other than Marthe, the touchstone of both his art and his life. Like Rossetti, and also like countless icon painters for centuries before him, Denis reduced Marthe to a set of stylised but still recognisable features, which, while far from the disquieting ideal formulated by the older artist, reveals the same drive towards abstraction and the displacement of the individual by the symbolic type. There is something of Pygmalion in the projects of both artists; Rossetti's attempts to educate Elizabeth Siddall and reshape her identity are too well known to require reiteration here,¹¹⁰ while Marthe

¹⁰⁶ On *Sancta Martha*, see Thomson (2004), pp. 126-27, who notes the political implications of Denis's creation of a religious-domestic idyll in the milieu of the *ralliement*, and Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 190.

¹⁰⁷ The term is William Michael's: W. M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters, with a Memoir* (London, 1895), vol. 1, p. 203.

¹⁰⁸ C. Rossetti, *Poems*, ed. W. M. Rossetti (London, 1895), p. 114.

¹⁰⁹ G. Pollock, 'Woman as sign: psychoanalytic readings', in *Vision and Difference* (London and New York, 1988), pp. 120-54.

¹¹⁰ For a revisionist re-reading of the narrative of Rossetti's relationship with Elizabeth Siddall, see Pollock (1988), pp. 91-114. My use of the original spelling of her surname, rather than the more common 'Siddal' (a deliberate misspelling by Rossetti) is informed by Pollock's essay.

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privately lamented in 1892, the year before her marriage to Denis, 'I have been distressed by the idea that he wants me to be very holy, more so than I ever can be'.¹¹¹ As Rossetti repeatedly cast Elizabeth in the role of his religio-poetic ideal Beatrice, Denis enacted a similar transformation of Marthe from flesh and blood to painted saint.

One of Denis's most obvious compositional borrowings from Rossetti was the *Triple portrait de Marthe fiancée* [Figure 63], which, as several commentators have noted, bears the imprint of Rossetti's watercolour *Rosa Triplex* [Figure 64, S.238].¹¹² Two versions of *Rosa Triplex* exist, both of which were known in France by the time Denis painted his triple portrait: the finished watercolour, modelled by May Morris, which was photographed by Frederick Hollyer in the 1880s, and an unfinished chalk drawing for which Alexa Wilding sat and after which prints were made and published in France [Figure 65]. The latter work was the subject of a short illustrated article by Cosmo Monkhouse in the *Magazine of Art* around the time of the retrospectives, in which the author predicted, presciently as it turned out, that the drawing was 'likely to be the parent of a thousand copies and adaptations'.¹¹³ While by virtue of size and medium it was one of Rossetti's more minor works, it was also one of his best known in France and, given the recurrence of triple figures in Denis's early work,¹¹⁴ a significant precedent. Furthermore, because of its near-monochrome palette, the drawing suffered less in translation than did many of Rossetti's paintings. While the parallels with the Holy Trinity no doubt appealed to Denis's religious sensibilities,

Rossetti's repetition of the same face in three different aspects relies on the time-honoured motif of the Three Graces as the personification of the aspects of beauty united in the person of Venus.¹¹⁵ This meditation on beauty also entered into Denis's conception – with some significant modifications. Judging from the composition of the portrait, Denis was acquainted with both versions of *Rosa Triplex*, drawing the

¹¹¹ 'Je m'affligeais de la pensée qu'il me désirait très sainte, plus que je ne puis l'être'; quoted in Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 220, no source given.

¹¹² See Frèches-Thory and Perruchi-Petri (1993), pp. 162-63, and Bouillon (1993), p. 33-34.

¹¹³ C. Monkhouse, "'Rosa Triplex.'" Drawn by Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 6 (1883), p. 272.

¹¹⁴ Important examples include *Soir Trinitaire* (1891, private collection), *Jeunes filles qu'on dirait des anges* (1892, private collection), and, most famously, *Portrait d'Yvonne Lerolle en trois aspects* (1897, Josefowitz collection). The Trinity was central to mystical theology, something of significance to both Denis and Rossetti.

¹¹⁵ Monkhouse, however, contended that 'these maidens are not one and the same', describing them as 'three different but sympathetic faces' (p. 272). Bouillon (1993), p. 34, also notes the possible inspiration of Puvis's *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, which Denis admired when it was displayed in the 1887 exhibition at Durand-Ruel's gallery.

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framing device of the vine-covered arbour from the rose trellis of the watercolour and the more simplified rendering of the figure from the drawing. Yet the expression of glazed, sensuous ennui imprinted on the faces of the 'triple rose' in both versions disappears in the portrait, replaced by the gentle, melancholy introspection of countless Renaissance Madonnas. At the same time, Denis renders the unity of the figures simultaneously less corporeal and more intimate. Where the intricately entwined hands of the three women in Rossetti's pictures form the heart of the design, the three Marthes are depicted without hands, completely covered by robes which give no hint of the contours or the volume of the bodies underneath, in the manner of a medieval or Byzantine icon; instead, the flattened robes, with their stylised, nonnaturalistic

fold, enfold the three figures, making of them a single white rose of flesh and linen – an effect heightened by the fact that the faces are turned inward to form a circle, rather than gazing in different directions as they do in *Rosa Triplex*. From Rossetti's subject-less trinity of beauties, Denis elaborated one which both tamed beauty and elevated it to the realm of the divine. Indeed, Jean-Paul Bouillon has suggested that the portrait represents Denis's personal Trinity: Love, Art and Religion.¹¹⁶

As pertinent as *Rosa Triplex* is for the recurrence of tripling in Denis's oeuvre (notably the far more unsettling *Soir trinitaire* and *Jeunes filles qu'on dirait des anges*), the crucial Rossettian influence appears to have been *Beata Beatrix*. On a purely practical level, *Beata Beatrix* was one of the most accessible of Rossetti's pictures, with the original being one of the few in public collections, and the frequency with which it crops up in French writings on Rossetti, both in description and reproduction, suggests that it was one of the most readily available in reproduction. If Mauclair's claim that 'perhaps five hundred persons [in Paris] . . . had at home the *Beata Beatrix* of Rossetti, the *Saint Cecilia* of Burne Jones [sic], . . . and hung their bedrooms with friezes by Walter Crane'¹¹⁷ needs to be treated with caution, it does suggest the fame Rossetti enjoyed among a literary and artistic elite and the extent to which that painting was considered exemplary of his art. However, the reproduction of the painting, as in this example by Frederick Hollyer [Figure 66],

¹¹⁶ Bouillon (1993), p. 34.

¹¹⁷ 'Cinq cents personnes peut-être . . . avaient toutes chez elles la *Beata Beatrix* de Rossetti, la *Sainte*

Cécile de Burne Jones, . . . tapissaient leurs chambres de frises de Walter Crane': C. Mauclair, *L'Art en Silence* (Paris, 1901), p. 173.

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is one of the most problematic.¹¹⁸ The painting's pulsating eroticism, its conflation of death and sexual ecstasy, depends in large part upon the hot yet subtly modulated reds and velvety greens which dominate its palette, not least because of the symbolic values Rossetti assigned them (red corresponding to death and green representing life and hope). The monochrome photograph not only evacuates the sensuousness of the colour from the image, it emphasises the misty, powdery quality of the facture – something of course already present in the painting but subdued by the lush hues – and the way in which the dying light limns Beatrice's hands, thus etherealising the image and disconnecting the troubling bond between Eros and Thanatos established by Rossetti. The spiritualised Beatrice known to Denis through the photograph was thus no longer one of the terrifying goddesses evoked by Duret, nor an image imbued with the 'conspicuous preference for the sad and the cruel' which for Mario Praz constituted the defining characteristic of Rossetti's art,¹¹⁹ but a beautiful saint and, by virtue of its reduced scale, a domestic icon.¹²⁰

The simultaneous domestication and spiritualising of *Beata Beatrix* begun by the reproductive process and completed by Denis is readily apparent in one of his earliest portraits of Marthe, *Le Menuet de la princesse Maleine (Marthe au piano)* [Figure 67]. Guy Cogeval has also noted in passing its formal parallels with Rossetti's *The Day Dream* [Figure 68, S.259],¹²¹ and we may usefully draw out the comparisons with both. Not only is Marthe posed in the same three-quarter profile, with a similar introspective expression, as if lost in dreams inspired by the music before her (much as Rossetti's dreamer has fallen into a reverie inspired by the book of poetry she holds) but both paintings also hinge on the interplay between word and image (and, in the case of *Le Menuet*, music). In *The Day Dream* this is made explicit by the poem inscribed on the frame describing, but not quite elucidating, the nature of the woman's dream. In *Le Menuet* the literary reference, to Maeterlinck's recent play *La princesse Maleine* (1890), is reduced to the title of the score (with a frontispiece by

¹¹⁸ Reproductions of *Beata Beatrix* were also produced by all of the major publishers on the Continent: Dietrich in Brussels, Hanfstaengl in Munich, Adolphe Braun in Paris, and the Berlin Photographic Company, among others. See McGann, web site, for the broadest selection.

¹¹⁹ Praz (1970), p. 228.

¹²⁰ This is supported by the performative devotion accorded by some of Rossetti's patrons to his pictures, the best known example being George Rae's wife, whom, as he reported to Rossetti, 'It is my belief that she spends half the day before the picture [*The Beloved*] as certain devout Catholic ladies had used to do before their favourite shrines in the days of old' (quoted in Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 78).

¹²¹ Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 165.

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Denis) for the play's incidental music on the music desk.¹²² Cogeval has remarked that the contemplative mood of the painting is at odds with the play's atmosphere of foreboding and violent denouement,¹²³ but perhaps the disjuncture is not so extreme. The fifteen-year-old princess Maleine, murdered on the eve of her wedding, her virginity thus preserved by death, is portrayed as too fragile and pure to exist in a corrupt world, and in a pivotal scene Maeterlinck has her appear illuminated and framed in a doorway in her wedding gown like an icon in an alcove.¹²⁴ The parallels with Dante's Beatrice, another child bride cut down in all her purity by an early death, are revealing, particularly when we consider the childlike quality of Marthe's beauty, insisted upon frequently by Denis both in his paintings and his journal.¹²⁵ While *Le Menuet*'s setting is clearly a contemporary bourgeois interior, and the subject of a woman playing or listening to music a common one at the turn of the

century (although with particular resonance for the Nabis and other anti-naturalist artists),¹²⁶ Denis's emphasis on the decorative and his adoption of certain of the conventions employed by Rossetti both in *Beata Beatrix* and *The Day Dream* (which also recall the conventions of icon painting) sanctify the domestic setting and elevate Marthe above its ordinariness. The most striking element of the painting's facture is the pseudo-Divisionist rendering of the wallpaper, a technique exploited on a more delicate scale in Marthe's hair and apron – almost as if the granular mistiness that distinguished the reproduction of *Beata Beatrix* were writ large. The relative lack of

¹²² Pierre Cailler includes the frontispiece for Pierre Hermant's score in the catalogue raisonné of

Denis's graphic work (P. Cailler, *Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre gravé et lithographié de Maurice Denis* (Geneva, 1968), C.4). However, given that no copy of the score has thus far surfaced, Vaughan (1984), p. 42, conjectures that the score depicted in *Le Menuet de la princesse Maleine* may have been a single handmade original, now lost.

¹²³ Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 165.

¹²⁴ The stage direction is 'The door opens slightly and we perceive, in the opening, Princess Maleine in the long white garments of a fiancée' ('La porte s'entr'ouvre et on aperçoit, dans l'entrebâillement, la princesse Maleine en longs vêtements blancs de fiancée'). M. Maeterlinck, *La princesse Maleine* (1890), in *Théâtre complet* (1979), vol. 1, p. 78. Also worth noting is the fact that Redon produced an etching of *La princesse Maleine* in 1892 (Mellerio 22), illustrated with the title *La Petite Madone* in A. Mellerio, *Odilon Redon, peintre, dessinateur, graveur* (Paris, 1923), p. 91.

¹²⁵ For example, 'Pour la rondeur puérile de ses bras, pour la parfum moite de sa chair, pour son sourire, pour l'étrange bonté de ses yeux': Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 86 (entry for 15 October 1891) and 'Et c'est après l'ecclésiastique caresse de ses mains dans les miennes, ses mains très douces, ses mains bonnes et blanches, ses mains enfantines': *ibid.*, p. 87 (entry for 16 October 1891). Furthermore, Denis and Marthe read *La princesse Maleine* together during their courtship, and both seem to have turned to it in moments of emotional turmoil, Denis noting that shortly before he announced their engagement to his parents, Marthe 'reread *La princesse Maleine* until two in the morning. She is pale, nervous, affectionate. Sorrows for me, and still more doubts. Always doubts. Never mind, that's life' ('Elle relit la *Princesse Maleine* jusqu'à deux heures de la nuit. Elle est pâle, énervée, caressante. – Des douleurs pour moi, et encore des doutes. Toujours des doutes. N'importe. C'est la vie'): *ibid.*, p. 87.

¹²⁶ See Vaughan (1984), pp. 41-42, and Bouillon (1993), p. 27, on *Le Menuet*'s precedents and contemporary counterparts.

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differentiation between Marthe's hair and the background, also in evidence in the way the curl of hair on the nape of her neck appears to be part of the pattern of decorative arabesques on the wallpaper, recalls both the dissolving of the (draped) body in *Beata Beatrix* and the interplay between the anti-illusionistic folds of the green robe and the convolutions of the leaves in *The Day Dream*. As Cogeval remarks, it 'enshrines her in a network of signs',¹²⁷ an enshrinement Denis verbalised in a veritable paean to Marthe written concurrently: 'SHE IS MORE BEAUTIFUL than all images, than all representations, than all subjective efforts! She exists, outside of me, I have not created her.'¹²⁸ This enshrinement in a network of decorative signs extends to the depiction of Marthe's body. Although Denis took evident trouble to represent 'the childish roundness of her arms' and 'her waist round as a tower',¹²⁹ her body lacks volume and any real sense of materiality, her contours and the lines of her dress and apron reduced to yet another set of arabesques. Only her face and her hands display any modelling and are given any real substance. Not surprisingly, the head and the hands have also long been the focal points of icons, the hands in particular as the site of healing and miracle-working power.¹³⁰ We have already seen how Rossetti centred the design of *Beata Beatrix* on Beatrice's ecstatic face, surrounded by a natural aureole, and open hands, highlighting their significance by outlining them with light, making them, rather than the ill-defined body hidden beneath heavy drapery, the carriers of the image's spiritual meaning and erotic charge. Likewise, the curiously insubstantial body of the dreamer in *The Day Dream* is literally thrown into the shade

by the startlingly mannered gesture of her hands. Marthe's hands, the part of her depicted as most sensual and alive, are poised over the keyboard, but her sideways pose precludes her actually playing the minuet (whose score is, in any case, closed). Instead, the delicately stylised disposition of her hands evokes the gestures commonly used in icons of the Virgin, their downward turn suggestive of benevolence and blessing. And as the transport of Beatrice's soul is attended by the figures of Love and Dante, so is Marthe's entry into the divine realm of music (a metaphor for the rapprochement of love and divinity which, as we have already seen, Rossetti

¹²⁷ Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 165.

¹²⁸ 'ELLE EST PLUS BELLE que toutes les images, que toutes les représentations, que tous les efforts subjectifs! Elle est, en dehors de moi, ce n'est pas moi qui la crée': Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 86 ('Dimanche de Notre-Dame du Rosaire').

¹²⁹ 'Sa taille ronde comme une tour – comme les Psyché de Raphaël': *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 90 ('Soirée du mardi 29 [December 1891]).

¹³⁰ See Belting (1994), pp. 36-41, for an explanation of the origins of the motif of the healing hand.

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favoured) accompanied by two allegorical guardian figures. The two female figures adorning the cover of the score have been interpreted as representing sacred love (the nude with raised arms) and human love (the clothed woman bending to gather flowers on the bank of the stream), the two inseparable facets, for both Denis and Rossetti, of love.¹³¹

Fittingly, it was in his suite of lithographs, *Amour*, commissioned by Ambroise Vollard in 1892 but not published until 1899, that Denis paid his greatest tribute to Rossetti.¹³² Regarded by his friend and advocate André Péroché as one of the masterpieces of Symbolism and the high-water mark of his graphic oeuvre,¹³³ the suite represents both the zenith of his Symbolist work and a farewell to those very ideals, as the Nabis disbanded to follow their separate paths and Denis devoted himself to the invention of a new classical order. Significantly, this was Denis's sole attempt at creating a double work of art; while he had often served as an illustrator for other writers (including Gide, Verlaine, Mallarmé and, of course, Rossetti), he had never created images inspired by his own writings. The twelve plates of *Amour*, all of which centre on either the figure of Marthe or a more generalised young girl who features in the more mystical scenes, deployed in natural or domestic settings, are captioned with fragments drawn from 'Les Amours de Marthe', his highly poetic and mystical account of his and Marthe's courtship.¹³⁴ Unlike Rossetti's poems, which were often inscribed in full upon the relevant pictures' frames, Denis's audience would not have had access to the original contexts of the captions; without knowledge of their personal meaning for the artist, the viewer would be compelled to discern or even create anew his or her own correspondences between word and image.

Moreover, the fact that the captions were printed on the stone and in coloured inks effectively makes them part of the lithographs, further breaking down the boundary between word and image. Indeed, even armed as we are today with Denis's *Journal*, the rapport between caption and picture is not always evident. Thus the private,

¹³¹ Bouillon (1993), pp. 27-28. This reading is open to interpretation and the reverse seems equally legitimate. The nude figure recurs several times in Denis's work, most significantly as the frontispiece of *Amour*.

¹³² François Fossier dates the creation of the suite to 1897-1899: F. Fossier, *La Nébuleuse nabie* (Paris, 1993), p. 100. However, at least three known preparatory drawings (private collection) have been tentatively dated to 1892-93, therefore, around the time of the events that inspired them.

¹³³ A. Péroché, 'Maurice Denis', *L'Art et les artistes* no. 41 (November 1923), p. 62. It is worth noting that Péroché contributed several articles as *correspondant d'Angleterre* to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in the 1890s, including a review of the 1897 Guildhall exhibition in which Rossetti's paintings featured.

¹³⁴ Denis (1957), vol. 1, pp. 85-101. Denis first met Marthe on 23 October 1890 (pp. 81-82); however,

'Les Amours de Marthe' only begins on 30 June 1891.

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personal narrative (or, to use Belting's term, *historia*) was transformed in the lithographs into discrete, generalised images whose fragmentary legends resisted reconstitution even as they suggested a new narrative.¹³⁵

Amour is ostensibly a celebration of courtship and marital love – the consummation of the latter underlined by the presence of a wedding ring on Marthe's finger in the final plate, 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' [Figure 69, C.119] – but,

with two exceptions ('Sur le canapé d'argent pâle' (C.117) and 'Nos âmes en des gestes lents' (C.116), Denis himself is absent from the lithographs, which posit a realm from which men are excluded and populated by angelic women, rather like that of *La Damoiselle élue* and very much in keeping with the hermetic feminine world of Rossetti's 'icons of beauty'. Even in 'Ce fut un religieux mystère' (C.111), which takes as its point of departure Denis's rapture over their first kiss, an androgynous figure takes his place in bestowing the sacred kiss. Most discussions of *Amour* have viewed the album in purely biographical or formal terms, either seeking keys to their meaning in Denis's journal or mapping the evolution of his style against his theoretical writings and concurrent artistic production.¹³⁶ Far from diminishing the interchange between Denis's life and art, I would suggest instead that richer meaning may be mined from *Amour* when we consider the influence of Rossetti and the convergence of the two artists' common concerns with the bonds between the sensual and the sacred.

François Fossier divides ten of the twelve plates of *Amour* into 'solar' and 'lunar' subjects, based mainly on the varying degrees of warmth of the palette and light but also on subject and the disposition of the figure.¹³⁷ Two lithographs, 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' and 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' [Figure 70, C.114], one from each of these categories, exhibit particularly striking debts to

¹³⁵ This is particularly relevant in the case of 'Le chevalier n'est pas mort à la croisade' (C.112), whose title forms part of a parable which Denis recounts to Marthe (p. 87, entry for 23 October 1891), the telling of which is depicted in 'Sur le canapé d'argent pâle' (C.117) but which is represented literally.

¹³⁶ For the latter approach, see Pératé (1923), p. 62. Fossier (1993), pp. 97-104, whose examination of *Amour* is the most in-depth available, while he takes some biographical detail into account and acknowledges a few external influences (notably Japanese prints), does not stray much beyond these limits.

¹³⁷ Fossier (1993), p. 102. According to this schema, 'Allégorie' (C.108), 'Les attitudes sont faciles et chastes' (C.109), 'Le Bouquet matinal, les larmes' (C.110), 'La vie devient précieuse, discrète' (C.118) and 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' (C.119) belong to the 'solar' group and 'Ce fut un religieux mystère' (C.111), 'Le Chevalier n'est pas mort à la croisade' (C.112), 'Les Crépuscules ont une douceur d'ancienne peinture' (C.113), 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' (C.114) and 'Et c'est la caresse de ses mains' (C.115) to the lunar. 'Sur le canapé d'argent pâle' and 'Nos âmes en des gestes lents' are excluded.

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Rossetti, but, if we also apply Fossier's schema to their Rossettian precedents, *Beata Beatrix* (which, with its crepuscular atmosphere and overtones of sorrow, belongs to the lunar) and *Venus Verticordia* [Figure 71, S.173] (whose blazing hues and confrontational frontality place it firmly within the solar), we see Denis subverting both in his reworking of the images. Like *Beata Beatrix*, 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' portrays a beautiful woman, simultaneously carnal and chaste, in transports which blur the distinction between the celestial and the terrestrial. The resemblance of Beatrice's expression – the straining throat, the parted lips and the closed eyes – to both sexual climax and a saint in ecstasy has often been remarked upon,¹³⁸ the eroticism paradoxically intensified by the fact that her body is modestly covered.

Denis heightens the image's sensuality by turning Marthe full-face and depicting her semi-nude. Her dress falls around her legs – an echo of the figure of sacred love, the nude stepping out of her drapery, on the frontispiece – as if undone by the sheer force of her too-quickly beating heart and her nudity is accentuated by the fact that she remains shod. Her blissful expression is reiterated by the sunburst, a symbolic expression of both mystical rapture and orgasm, visible through the window at right, as if nature itself echoed and redoubled her ecstasy.¹³⁹ Yet at the same time, Denis's powdery facture, reminiscent of pastel and of the heightened haziness of the reproduction of *Beata Beatrix*, his use of soft colours and the perfunctory modelling of the body etherealise a figure whose voluptuous nudity is potentially far more erotic than that of her clothed antecedent. As well, exchanging Rossetti's indistinctly brushed garden setting for the homely interior of 'Mais c'est le coeur. . .' tames and domesticates the ardour of the flesh. In place of the lover removed from mundane existence by the transfiguring and sanctifying power of death, Denis presents us with a life-affirming physical passion tempered and hallowed by its domestication, an innocent and saintly carnality sanctioned within the bounds of marriage and the home.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ See for example Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 156, and Meacock (2001), pp. 168-69.

¹³⁹ This passionate vision appears somewhat at odds with the chaste and restrained original context of its caption, one of the first sections of 'Les Amours de Marthe': 'One feels more beautiful when one is in love. Attitudes are easy and chaste. Life becomes precious, discreet: the sunsets have the softness of old paintings. But it's the heart that beats too fast, in truth. One is good and merciful' ('On se sent plus beau quand on aime. Les attitudes sont faciles et chastes. La vie devient précieuse, discrète: les couchers de soleil ont une douceur d'anciennes peintures. Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite, en vérité. On est bon, et miséricordieux'): Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 85, entry for 30 September 1891.

¹⁴⁰ Indeed, following the formalising of their engagement, Denis's musings about Marthe take on a markedly more sensual character, and they seem to have indulged in physical intimacy before their

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Whereas 'Mais c'est le coeur . . .' both intensifies and reins in the sensuality of the sacralised secular subject of *Beata Beatrix*, 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' reworks one of Rossetti's most contentious amalgamations of the Christian and the pagan, *Venus Verticordia*. One of Rossetti's rare nudes, *Venus Verticordia* borrows attributes from the iconography of the classical goddess, Eve and the Virgin Mary to, at the time, scandalous effect.¹⁴¹ While he also produced two watercolour replicas in which Venus is posed before a parapet against a simpler background (S.173 R1 and S.173 R2), reproductions of both of which were available in France by the early 1890s, it would appear from the inclusion of a rosebush in 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' that Denis was referencing the oil.¹⁴² While Rossetti did have a legitimate classical precedent for giving his Venus a golden nimbus,¹⁴³ *Venus Verticordia* is essentially a highly contentious reworking of the Renaissance convention of portraying the Virgin with one breast exposed; his jocular reference to the painting as 'Mary with her Bubs' demonstrates that he thought of it in precisely these terms.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, while the painting is generally discussed in the context of Rossetti's 'Venetian' experiments, and its opulent colour and facture place it firmly within that strand of his career, its prototype, to which Denis may also have turned, may in fact be Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child* (the so-called 'Melun Madonna') [Figure 72], which marriage, as a discreet, elliptical journal entry from early 1892 hints: 'In the studio, the awakening of our flesh: I was ashamed . . .' ('A l'atelier, l'éveil de notre chair: j'avais honte'): *ibid.*, p. 92 (entry for 3 February 1892). Note that this 'awakening of the flesh' takes place in the site of artistic creation. The domestic character of 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' is underlined by the recent rediscovery of Denis's photography; Saskia Ooms notes that a blurry, luminous photograph of Marthe wearing a chemise and sitting in front of a window with her daughter Noële on her lap, taken in 1898, displays striking similarities with the composition and atmosphere of the lithograph (F. Heilbrun and S. Ooms,

La Photographie au Musée d'Orsay: Maurice Denis, Paris 2006, p. 21). Although the composition of 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' dates from the early 1890s, it seems reasonable to assume some sort of interchange between the lithograph and the photograph. For further discussion of the role photography played in Denis's oeuvre, see N. Bondil, 'Maurice Denis photographe: "l'oeil mange la tête"', in J.-P. Bouillon, ed., *Maurice Denis* (exh. cat., Paris, Musée d'Orsay, Montréal, Musée des Beaux-arts and Rovereto, Museo di Arte Moderno e Contemporaneo, 2006), pp. 73-77.

¹⁴¹ Meacock (2001), p. 182, also notes the reference to St Teresa of Avila (a saint celebrated for her quasi-erotic mystical visions) in the presence and position of the arrow.

¹⁴² *Venus Verticordia* was mentioned by Sarrazin as the most sensual of Rossetti's female figures, 'flaunting her tempting breasts' ('ses seins tentateurs'): Sarrazin (1884), p. 166.

¹⁴³ On 23 August 1864, in the midst of working on *Venus Verticordia*, Rossetti wrote to Ford Madox Brown, 'What do you think of putting a nimbus behind my Venus's head? I believe the Greeks used to do it': Fredeman (2003), vol. 3, p. 85. As Elizabeth Prettejohn points out, far from being an attempt to find some flimsy justification for an outrageous innovation, this is evidence of the extent of Rossetti's learning, for Pausanias did record a famous statue of Venus holding an apple and with a sphere around her head (Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 189).

¹⁴⁴ Letter to Walter Theodore Watts-Dunton, 16 October 1877, O. Doughty and J. R. Wahl, eds., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Oxford, 1967), vol. 4, p. 1516.

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Rossetti probably saw on his visit to Antwerp in 1849.¹⁴⁵ The Virgin, widely believed to have been modelled on Charles VII's official mistress Agnès Sorel, presents what to a nineteenth-century eye must have seemed a bizarre melange of the timelessly conventional and the fashionably particular (especially the Virgin's shaven forehead and tiny waist). The use of Agnès Sorel, a woman whose status was defined in terms of her physical appeal and sexual availability, as model for the Virgin, which Johan Huizinga notoriously saddled with the charge of epitomising the breakdown of the boundary between the sacred and the erotic at the end of the Middle Ages,¹⁴⁶ would doubtless have been of interest to Rossetti's increasing tendency to secularise sacred subjects; it would have had a rather different resonance for Denis in his casting of his own beloved, Marthe, in that role. *Venus Verticordia* displays a similarly uneasy blend of the particular and the conventionalising, Rossetti having complicated the coarse sensuality of the nude bust by grafting onto it the classical but exaggerated features of Alexa Wilding.

From this potent and challenging clash of pagan and Christian, sacred and sensual, Denis distilled a no less erotic but altogether gentler icon of his wife. Again, the shortcomings of the reproductions available to him played a crucial role in these changes, with their effacement of the tactile, almost pulpy quality of Rossetti's facture and of the hot brilliance of the reds, pinks and gold. Marthe is posed in a similar manner – her hair loose and her shoulders and one breast bared, standing before a rose hedge in full bloom – but the confrontational frontality of Rossetti's Venus is attenuated by the choice of a more demure three-quarter profile. Ruskin, who so violently objected to Rossetti's overtly sexualised treatment of the flowers in *Venus Verticordia*, would have found fault with Denis's non-naturalistic roses on the grounds of style rather than eroticism. The flat, deliberately archaic nimbus is replaced by a warm golden mist that bathes the scene and etherealises the sensuous (more so than in 'Mais c'est le coeur. . .') handling of the flesh, a subsuming of the earthy into the spiritual even more striking when we consider that the origin of the lithograph's title was Denis's rhapsody, 'She was too beautiful in her virgin's veil and

¹⁴⁵ Although Rossetti makes no mention of Fouquet's painting in his letters home during his visit to Antwerp, the painting entered the collection of the Antwerp museum in 1843 and it may be reasonably assumed that it was on view when he visited.

¹⁴⁶ J. Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. R. J. Payton and U. Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996, first published 1919), pp. 181-82. The tradition that Agnès Sorel had served as the model, first recorded by Denis Godefroy, dates back at least as far as the seventeenth century, so it is possible

Rossetti was aware of it.

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completely an other, completely unreal, more beautiful than dreams'.¹⁴⁷ This Marthe, standing in an unspoilt forest glade, is, like Rossetti's Venus but in a markedly different manner, a new Eve in no danger of falling, a ripely beautiful Virgin, a Venus who harkens back to the original meaning of the epithet Verticordia – that is, contrary to Rossetti's creative misinterpretation, a guardian of marital fidelity, a turner of the hearts of married women towards their husbands.

Despite the abundant visual evidence of Rossetti's influence on his early work, mention of his name is conspicuously absent from Denis's writings, both private and public, from these years. When he finally encountered Rossetti's work in the flesh, during a visit to London in 1906, he succinctly expressed his disappointment and distaste: 'I saw again the Rossettis and the Burne-Joneses – absence of pictorial imagination and analysis and no feeling for nature'.¹⁴⁸ However, it is important to bear in mind that Denis's aesthetic and project had changed radically since the turn of the century and his search for a reinvigorated classicism was in many ways inimical to the *néo-traditionnisme* for which he had once so eloquently pleaded; his repudiation of his former models ought perhaps to be viewed in this light. Nevertheless, his work speaks for itself, revealing the constant return to and reworking of the concern he shared with Rossetti, the coexistence of the flesh and the spirit.

With Closed Eyes: Redon, Rossetti and the Inward Turn

Rossetti's fascination with mysticism, his dual career as a poet and painter, and his appropriation and transformation of Christian imagery held a considerable appeal for another artist whose mysticism was of a very different order – Odilon Redon. The assertion may seem bizarre at first glance; the fantastical creatures which populate the French artist's nightmarish *noirs* would appear far removed from Rossetti's lush gallery of beauties. Indeed, the apparently unbridgeable gulf between the two artists' oeuvres, exacerbated by Redon's all-too-successful expunging of references to other artists from his autobiography¹⁴⁹ and the care he took in crafting his image as an isolated genius immune to the influence of his contemporaries, has meant that, beyond

¹⁴⁷ 'Elle était trop belle en voile de vierge et tout à fait une autre, une d'irréel, plus belle que les rêves': Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 90 (entry for 29 December 1891).

¹⁴⁸ 'Je revois les Rossetti et les Burne Jones [sic], absence d'imagination pittoresque, analyse, et pas d'émotion de nature': Denis (1957), vol. 2, p. 40 (4 July 1906).

¹⁴⁹ Very few artists consistently receive positive mention in Redon's journal; the notable exceptions are Rembrandt, Delacroix and his mentor Rodolphe Bresdin: O. Redon, *A soi-même. Journal 1867-1915* (Paris, 2000).

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a few passing references to Redon's affinities with Rossetti (notably in Richard Hobbs's monograph), this avenue has remained largely unexplored.¹⁵⁰ Thanks to Douglas Druick's and Peter Zegers's careful deconstruction of the artist's painstaking self-mythologising with the aid of Redon's biographer André Mellerio's personal papers,¹⁵¹ we can finally begin to explore with a more critical eye Redon's connections with and responses to his contemporaries – not least, Rossetti. Like Denis and Debussy, Redon's first contact with Rossetti's work was probably with his poetry.¹⁵² Perhaps not coincidentally, his album *Hommage à Goya* (Mellerio 54-59), his first public attempt to create a double work of art, was published in 1885, the year after Sarrazin's articles on the English Aesthetic School in the *Revue indépendante* and the same year that his translation of 'The Blessed Damozel' and *Poètes modernes d'Angleterre* were published. Richard Hobbs has argued persuasively that the captions of the prints in this album were written as a prose poem

whose coherent continuity influences our reading of the images.¹⁵³ This practice represents a break with that of his earlier albums, such as *Dans le rêve* (1879), whose titles simply served to indicate the subject matter of the individual plates. While this was not the first time Redon, whom Mellerio characterised as a ‘painter-writer’,¹⁵⁴ had composed a prose-poem title for one of his albums – he had done so for *Les Origines* in 1883, but suppressed the captions for its first printing – the revelation of Rossetti’s project may have provided the necessary impetus for his making known his own literary aspirations.¹⁵⁵ However, given Redon’s extraordinarily complicated relationship with contemporary literature and his not unreasonable anxieties about the possibility of his art being misinterpreted and co-opted by writers for their own

¹⁵⁰ This portion of the chapter is much indebted to Hobbs’s research on Redon’s acquaintance with Pre-Raphaelite painting and his attempts to break into the London art world. R. Hobbs, *Odilon Redon* (London, 1977), pp. 91-94.

¹⁵¹ D. Druick et al., *Odilon Redon, 1840-1916*, exh. cat. (Chicago, Art Institute, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum and London, Royal Academy, 1994).

¹⁵² Hobbs (1977), p. 91, also notes that he may have been acquainted with earlier Pre-Raphaelite painting as early as 1867, thanks to the British art displays at that year’s Exposition Universelle.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-48. Redon continued this practice in his next album, *La Nuit* (1886), but thereafter renounced it, partly because, with the exception of *Songes* (1891), all of his subsequent albums were inspired by the work of other writers.

¹⁵⁴ A. Mellerio, ‘Trois peintres écrivains. Delacroix, Fromentin, Odilon Redon’, *La Nouvelle revue* (15 April 1923), pp. 304-314.

¹⁵⁵ Redon was also friendly with Samain, another possible factor in his acquaintance with Rossetti’s poetry.

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ends,¹⁵⁶ Rossetti’s pictorial oeuvre seems to have held greater appeal for him, and proved a greater influence on his own work.

Redon’s interest in Rossetti seems to have burgeoned in the 1890s, the decade in which Symbolist critics began to embrace him as one of their leading lights and in which he began, after decades of *noirs*, to experiment with colour. Having attended the first performance of *La Damselle élue* in 1893, he was moved to offer Debussy one of his works by way of homage, a gesture reciprocated by Debussy’s gift of a copy of Denis’s illustrated score.¹⁵⁷ As a regular at the *mardis* from 1885, he probably saw the same reproductions discussed by Mauclair, and he was in contact with Arthur Symons from 1890. He may also have discussed Rossetti with Mellerio; Mellerio’s working notes for his survey of anti-naturalist art, *Le Mouvement idéaliste en peinture*, show that early on he had considered including a chapter on the Pre-Raphaelites, with special reference the Rossetti, ‘le plus ancien’,¹⁵⁸ although the book in its published form was rather more reticent about the place of the Pre-Raphaelites in the idealist movement.¹⁵⁹ However, the primary source of his knowledge of Rossetti’s oeuvre, apart from the expected media of reproductions, articles, and translations, was a personage and an exhibition society with whom he always had a tense relationship: Péladan and the Salons de la Rose + Croix.

Péladan, who courted Redon aggressively and unsuccessfully for inclusion in the first Salon de la Rose + Croix in 1892, evinced a great admiration for the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti in particular.¹⁶⁰ Jean da Silva has noted that, the outrageousness of the Sâr’s programme aside, the Salon was the first international exhibition of Symbolist art¹⁶¹ (albeit a very narrowly and crudely defined brand of Symbolism), and

¹⁵⁶ For a thorough examination of Redon’s relationship with literature and writers, see D. Gamboni, *La Plume et le pinceau. Odilon Redon et la littérature* (Paris, 1989).

¹⁵⁷ A. Redon and R. Bacou, eds., *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Mallarmé, Verhaeren... à Odilon Redon* (Paris, 1960), p. 228.

¹⁵⁸ André Mellerio Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago, Series X,

Box FF.12:5, I.65. This box also contains pages transcribed from Gustave Geffroy's *La Vie artistique* (second and third series) and Destrée's *Les Préraphaelites*.

¹⁵⁹ Mellerio only mentions the Pre-Raphaelites as a 'possible' influence on the *mouvement idéaliste*: 'Peut-être le Préraphaelisme Anglais a-t-il été aussi de quelque enseignement, sinon comme influence picturale directe, du moins comme tendances à la hauteur intellectuelle et morale, formation du caractère de l'artiste'. A. Mellerio, *Le Mouvement idéaliste en peinture* (Paris, 1896), p. 67.

¹⁶⁰ See n.30 above.

¹⁶¹ J. da Silva, *Le Salon de la Rose + Croix (1892-1897)* (Paris, 1991), p. 5. Huysmans expressed the hope – never realised – to Mourey that the publication of *Passé le détroit* might encourage the Pre-Raphaelites to stage a group exhibition in Paris, implying that this would be far superior to the diluted 'Pre-Raphaelitism' on view at the Salons: 'ce serait un vrai service que vous nous rendriez à tous – sauf aux foetus du Rose-Croix – ça serait vraiment l'heure!' Letter from Huysmans to Mourey, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Fonds Lambert, Ms. 50.

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Péladan's regard for its British exponents was apparent in his list of potential exhibitors in 1891. When his intent to include Burne-Jones and Watts 'and the five other Pre-Raphaelites' in the first Salon came to nothing, he exhibited photographs of paintings by Burne-Jones and Rossetti instead. While the choice of photographs is unfortunately lost to posterity – they receive no mention in the catalogue – it seems reasonable to surmise that one of the photographs exhibited was *Beata Beatrix*. Indeed, the Salon abounded with Dantean imagery and themes, not least the angelic figure of Beatrice, especially in Edmond Aman-Jean's poster for the 1893 Salon [Figure 73].¹⁶² Aman-Jean's Beatrice is a distant relation of Rossetti's, with her willowy, weightless body borne off by an angel as she passes a lyre to an unseen Dante whose presence is signified solely by the laurel wreath in the lower right corner. Sapped of the least suspicion of corporeality, she evokes the centrality of the neo-Catholic revival to Péladan's aims and the inseparability of religion from the aesthetic ideal he promulgated.

Redon himself may have been privately sceptical of both the neo-Catholic and occult strands of this enterprise, both on religious and artistic grounds (he had, after all, been an exhibitor in the Salon des Indépendants, which Péladan despised)¹⁶³, but he found it expedient to remain on good terms with the neo-Catholic writers who promoted and patronised him.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, although he would not allow Mellerio to mention their accolades in his biography, he numbered several esoteric mystics associated with the Salon de la Rose + Croix, including Antoine de la Rochefoucauld and Elémir Bourges, among his acquaintance, and most significantly, from 1890 Bailly had sold his albums through the Librairie de l'art indépendant – the publisher, we should recall, of *La Damaoiselle élue*.¹⁶⁵ If Redon did not buy into their wilder beliefs and practices, he was clearly intrigued, his interest sparked by his fascination with idealist philosophy in the 1870s and 1880s. His interest in hermetic mysticism found its clearest expression in a recurrent subject in his 1890s work, that of the

¹⁶² On Aman-Jean's contribution to the second Salon, see R. Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose + Croix* (New York and London, 1976), p. 150.

¹⁶³ Redon had exhibited paintings, drawings and lithographs at the Salon des Indépendants from 1884 to 1887.

¹⁶⁴ On Redon's relationships with figures in the Catholic revival, see M. Stevens, 'Redon and the transformation of the Symbolist aesthetic', in Druick et al. (1994), pp. 205-10.

¹⁶⁵ Redon's ties to esoteric mysticism are discussed in greater depth in F. Leeman, 'Redon's spiritualism and the rise of mysticism', in Druick et al. (1994), pp. 215-36.

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mystic head. These mysterious figures, shown in austere, firmly drawn profile or full face with eyes lowered or closed, show Redon's clearest debt to Rossetti's art. One of the earliest and most emblematic of these mystic heads was *Yeux clos* [Figure 74]. A subject Redon repeated several times to satisfy collectors, this

imposing androgynous head with closed eyes, either rising out of or sinking into the sea, was in an earlier version (1889) haloed like a saint or Christ and entitled *Au ciel*, which clearly suggests a religious interpretation. (It was also painted in the year of publication of Péladan's *L'Androgyne*, which hailed androgyny as the apotheosis of humanity.) Like *Beata Beatrix*, it originated as a portrait of the artist's wife, the traits generalised to reduce the face's particularity.¹⁶⁶ The powdery, diffuse quality of the paint, applied to the loosely-woven canvas like pastel, recalls the dreamlike atmosphere and ethereal haze surrounding Rossetti's Beatrice. Here, however, the head's closed expression diverges from Rossetti's image of divine ecstasy in revealing ways. Where Beatrice's closed eyes are directed upward in rapture, her body and soul overpowered by an external force, the 'gaze' in *Yeux clos* is both downward and inward, utterly self-contained as if its owner has achieved an absolute knowledge of ideal truth and is about to voluntarily leave the world behind for a state of hermetic perfection.

Yeux clos, with its nod toward naturalistic drawing and colour, characterised by Redon's Belgian admirer Edmond Picard as 'art that mixes reality and mysticism', was soon superseded by mystic icons that took anti-naturalism, the dematerialisation of the body and the inward turn to extremes.¹⁶⁷ *La Cellule d'or* [Figure 75] and *Sita* [Figure 76] were both exhibited in Redon's retrospective at Durand-Ruel's gallery in 1894, the exhibition that consolidated his reputation as a poet's painter. The former, a fusion of the esoteric imagery of *Yeux clos* with a Byzantine aesthetic (flattened, hieratic forms and unnatural colours – lapis lazuli and gold – with heavy symbolic import) and Christian iconography, pushes the icon-like qualities of *Beata Beatrix* and similar works to their limits, the head appearing to float, disembodied and completely spiritualised, within a grainy golden aureole. *Sita*, while usually considered an early example of Redon's growing fascination with Eastern mysticism, also appears a generalised and etherealised response to Rossetti's secular (or non-Christian) saints.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 227. Edmond Picard was the first to point out the face's resemblance to Camille Redon, a claim dismissed by Redon, who later admitted that while the likeness had not been intentional, he used few life models so the faces in his work were bound to reflect those of his intimate acquaintance.

¹⁶⁷ E. Picard, 'Yeux clos', *L'Art moderne* (28 December 1890), p. 142.

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Redon also borrowed one of Rossetti's favoured tropes, the use of symbolic accessories to both suggest a narrative and frustrate its interpretation. *Sita*, the wife of Rama in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, was abducted by her husband's rival Ravana and, as he carried her off through the skies, she threw down her jewels to indicate the direction of her flight to Rama. In the pastel, *Sita*, reduced to a haloed bust in profile against a starry sky, floats above a shower of falling forms which could be variously interpreted as jewels, blossoms or lights. To a viewer unfamiliar with its literary source, this syncretic image might have seemed an exotic icon of a saint or a highly original reading of the Assumption of the Virgin. The rich, velvety iridescence of the colour further recalls that of *Beata Beatrix*, as if Redon had imaginatively recreated the palette invisible to him in the available monochrome reproductions.

However, Redon was finally to encounter the genuine article when he visited London in October 1895 as a guest of his key British patron, Dr Albert Edward Tebb. Although the artist makes no mention of the painting in his correspondence during his visit – indeed, with the exception of a few ecstatic lines on the Elgin Marbles, he merely referred to 'beautiful museums which I have only thus far seen in rapid glances'¹⁶⁸ – it seems reasonable to assume that he saw it in the National Gallery. The impression it made upon him emerged the following spring, when Ambroise Vollard solicited his participation in his second album of original prints. *Béatrice* [Figure 77,

Mellerio 168], his first colour lithograph, although neither his first use of Dantean imagery nor his first ‘portrait’ of Beatrice,¹⁶⁹ is his first overtly Rossettian interpretation of the subject. Although he based the design on his own pastel by the same name made in 1885 [Figure 78], around the time when he first seems to have become acquainted with Rossetti’s work, the differences between the two are telling. In the pastel, Redon draws a hard line in charcoal around the figure, firmly delineating her individual features – especially her pensive, down-turned eyes – and the circlet of flowers garlanding her head. In 1896, probably with *Beata Beatrix* fresh in his mind’s eye, Redon preserved the basic elements of the composition but radically dematerialised

the head, retaining the profile (now demarcated only by fields of pale, diaphanous colour) and, removing all but the slightest hint of modelling and effacing

¹⁶⁸ ‘Beaux musées dont je n’ai vu encore que de rapides aperçus’: letter to Maurice Fabre, 8 October 1895, M.-A. Leblond, ed., *Lettres d’Odilon Redon, 1878-1916* (Paris and Brussels, 1923), pp. 25-26.

¹⁶⁹ Redon produced several charcoal drawings of Dante and Virgil in the 1860s (perhaps thanks to Delacroix’s example); an 1892 charcoal drawing of Beatrice, portrayed standing and full-face (Art Institute, Chicago) differs significantly in composition and mood from the lithograph.

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Beatrice’s eyes and mouth.¹⁷⁰ Deprived of eyes and outward vision, this Beatrice is the most extreme example of Redon’s inward turning of Rossetti’s imagery.

Although he had by this time seen Rossetti’s work in colour, Redon was to pay one more tribute to the other artist’s influence in one of the last *noirs* he produced before turning definitively to colour. *Tête d’enfant aux fleurs* [Figure 79, Mellerio 169], while on its surface a meditation on the fragility of childhood innocence, bears an unsettling resemblance, not previously noted, to Rossetti’s subjectless female portraits: with her weary, heavy-lidded gaze and an ill-defined cluster of flowers at her shoulder and tangled in her hair, Redon’s child could be a ‘stunner’ in miniature. In fact, an entry in *À soi-même* in 1900, which appears to relate to the lithograph, describes a quasi-mystical childhood encounter with a beautiful little girl while en route to his first communion in terms reminiscent of Dante’s first meeting with Beatrice:

The first time in the garden of the house where I was born (in Bordeaux, in the allées d’Amour). She was blonde, with large eyes and her hair in long curls that fell upon her muslin dress, which brushed against me. I felt a shiver, I was twelve, I was on my way to make my first communion. And chance willed it that she was near me on the retreats, at church, under the mystery of the vaults of Saint-Seurin. What emotions blended therein: all the art as much as the surroundings. Blessed hours, will you ever return in the mystery of the Unknown?¹⁷¹

This oft-overlooked print, perhaps more than anything else in Redon’s oeuvre, ties together the various strands that bind and differentiate the two artists: the blending of aesthetic pleasure and divine, or mystical transport. But Redon, even more so than his younger colleague Denis, was firmly on the side of the spiritual, and in a form that Rossetti, despite his far-ranging interest in mysticism, could never have imagined. Some elements of Rossetti’s poetry and paintings were bound, by their very nature, to be lost in translation. Yet the reinterpretations of his work by his French counterparts allowed, at their best, for new light to be cast upon it.

¹⁷⁰ In the first impression, however, Redon remained closer to the original pastel.

¹⁷¹ ‘La première fois, dans le jardin de la maison où je suis né (à Bordeaux, allées d’Amour). Elle était blonde, avec de grands yeux et les cheveux en longues boucles tombant sur sa robe de mousseline, qui me frôla. Je connus un frisson, j’avais douze ans, j’allais faire ma première communion. Et le hasard

voulût qu'elle fût près de moi lors des retraites, à l'église, sous le mystère des voûtes de Saint-Seurin. Que d'émotions s'y mêlèrent : tout l'art aussi de ce décor. Heures bénies, reviendrez-vous jamais dans le mystère de l'Inconnu ?' Redon (2000), p. 100.

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Chapter 5

From *Salomé* to *Salome*: Gustave Moreau's reception and influence in Britain, 1877-1898

Two months after Gustave Moreau's death in April 1898, the *Magazine of Art* carried the following terse obituary:

M. Gustave Moreau has recently died at the age of 72. He was born in Paris; became the pupil of Picot at the École des Beaux Arts, and began exhibiting at the Salon in 1852. His "Cantiques des Cantiques" [sic] (1853) is at the Dijon Museum; "Oedipus and the Sphinx" (1864) obtained a medal, and "Man and Death" (1865) a medal of a higher class. "Orpheus torn in pieces by the Maenads" (1866) was acquired for the Luxembourg. His "Jupiter and Europa" (1869) was awarded a first-class medal, and "The Sphinx's Riddle Solved" a second-class medal at the Universal Exhibition of 1878. Besides these he painted many decorative pieces. He succeeded to the seat of Boulanger in the Académie des Beaux Arts in 1888, and was appointed *chef d'atelier* at the École in 1892.¹

Moreau's career, as outlined in this mainstream art periodical, is reduced to a skeleton of official honours and successes. No mention of his triumphant return to the Salon in 1876 with his two most notorious works, *Salomé* and *L'Apparition*, images which established and sealed his standing as one of the patron saints of Decadent and Symbolist literature; no reference to his appearances at the 1880 Salon or the 1889 Exposition Universelle; and, bizarrely, no allusion to the exhibition of his art in Britain, either his participation in the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition or the monographic show of his illustrations for the *Fables* of La Fontaine at the London galleries of Boussod and Valadon in 1886. To take this obituary at face value is to gain the impression that Moreau was a conventional history painter whose career was conducted within the respectable confines of the Académie and played out at a safe remove from Britain, on which it had no discernible impact.

This reticence may stem from reasonable causes: Moreau's general abstention from public exhibitions during the last two decades of his life kept him largely off the radar of all but his most vehement advocates, and confined awareness of his activities to specialist publications, and a magazine which had, two years previously, published a virulently Francophobic rant against Aubrey Beardsley and 'other Decadents'² would almost certainly not have wished to stress his association with the Decadence.

¹ 'The Chronicle of Art – June', *Magazine of Art* (June 1898), p. 456.

² M. Armour, 'Aubrey Beardsley and the Decadents', *Magazine of Art* (November 1896), pp. 9-12.

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However, it prefigures a lacuna in scholarship on Symbolism that has persisted to this day. While comparative readings of the work of Moreau and Burne-Jones multiply at a steady pace, and indeed form a keystone of studies of internationalism in antinaturalist

art, they have tended to focus on the perception of Burne-Jones in France as an 'English Moreau' (or Moreau in Britain as 'the French Burne-Jones') and have commented either only in more general terms on Moreau's reception and influence on other artists outside his own country, or have ignored the issue entirely.³ No doubt this single-mindedness of approach is an outgrowth of the numerous comparisons drawn between Burne-Jones and Moreau by critics during their lifetimes, an

association crystallised by Léonce Bénédite in the pamphlet he published shortly after the deaths of both artists, *Deux idéalistes: Gustave Moreau et E. Burne-Jones*. Even when both artists' critical fortunes were at their lowest ebb, in 1940, Robin Ironside kept this correlation alive in his influential reappraisal of their work.⁴ While I do not want to downplay the significance of the interchanges between Moreau and Burne-Jones, discussed in the preceding chapters, a significant part of the story remains thus far unexplored. As his *Magazine of Art* obituary suggests, Moreau was, if not a household name, then at least a regular presence in the British art press from the beginning of his Salon career, giving the lie to Pierre-Louis Mathieu's erroneous claim that 'outside France, Moreau's work remained little known, without any exhibitions, books or articles dedicated to him'.⁵ In fact, although the level of attention paid to his work fluctuated considerably over his lifetime, Moreau's reception in Britain underwent several significant changes which not only broadly reflected shifting British perceptions of French art and culture, from angry xenophobia to tentative interest, but also led to his elevation by an artistic elite in the 1890s to a position approximating the one given him by Huysmans and his followers in France. My aim in this chapter is twofold. Firstly, I wish to trace Moreau's critical reception in Britain over the last three decades of the nineteenth century, with particular attention paid to the exhibition of his watercolour illustrations to *Les Fables de La Fontaine* at Goupil's London galleries in November 1886 and to the role of photographs and reproductive prints in disseminating his oeuvre. Secondly, I wish to

³ For example, Dubernard-Laurent (1996); Casteras and Faxon (1995) and, more recently, R. Rapetti, *Symbolism* (Paris, 2005).

⁴ R. Ironside, 'Burne-Jones and Gustave Moreau', *Horizon* 1, no. 6 (June 1940), pp. 406-24, reprinted as 'Gustave Moreau and Burne-Jones', *Apollo* 101 (March 1975), pp. 173-82.

⁵ Mathieu (1994), p. 243. Mathieu mentions Gleeson White's 1897 article on Moreau in *The Pageant* in a footnote but makes no reference to any other points of contact with Britain.

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explore the influence of his work on Aubrey Beardsley – an influence remarked upon in passing ever since the beginning of the revival of Moreau's reputation in the 1960s, but never explored in any depth⁶ – and Beardsley's subversive reworking of Moreau's vision of Salome through the lens of Japonisme. In so doing, I hope to uncover the range of Moreau's influence in Britain, above and beyond Burne-Jones.

'Weird compositions' or 'the classical ideal'? Moreau in the British press, 1877-1900⁷

When Moreau exhibited six oils and five watercolours in the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition Universelle, most French broadsheets and art periodicals acknowledged his appearance, treating him, in the main, as a noteworthy anomaly. The consensus held that, while his art was of considerably greater interest than much of the stale, retrograde academic canvases that dominated the exhibition, his outré renditions of mythological and Biblical subjects either defied interpretation or were too idiosyncratic to herald a sea change in history painting.⁸ The view from Britain requires rather more effort to discover. As I have noted above, Moreau's appearance in the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition, the first time one of his pictures was on public view in Britain, seems to have done little to raise his profile. Indeed, almost the only reference to his work that year came in an *Athenaeum* review, not of the Grosvenor exhibition but of the 1877 Salon; the author, commenting unfavourably on *Herodias Dancing*, a painting by Adrien Moreau, complained, 'the rest of the picture is simply contemptible, and devoid of the flashy attractions of M. Gustave Moreau's picture which decorates the Grosvenor Exhibition, and bears the head of Christ (?) in the centre of chromatic coruscations'.⁹ Moreau's distinctive use

of colour is singled out as his defining characteristic; there is nothing unusual in this by itself, for French critics often dwell upon it. But for the *Athenaeum*'s critic there is something strange, unsettling, foreign and above all morally suspect (perhaps because foreign) about it – 'flashy attractions' calls to mind the tawdry decoration of a music

⁶ See, for example, R. von Holten, *L'Art fantastique de Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 1960), p. 58 and Mathieu (1994), p. 244.

⁷ I exclude reactions to Moreau's submissions to the 1880 Salon and the 1889 Exposition Universelle, which I discussed in Chapter 3.

⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹ 'The Salon, Paris (second notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2586 (19 May 1877), p. 647. The head in Gustave Moreau's picture was, of course, that of John the Baptist rather than Christ. Furthermore, Adrien Moreau did not exhibit a painting by this title at the 1877 Salon; the critic seems to have misidentified *Les Tziganes* (no. 1541) as such.

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hall and the entertainment on offer there. Apart from this instance of damnation with faint praise, most critics held their tongues; not mentioning a work of art at all, as Kate Flint has noted, marginalizes it more effectively than a negative notice,¹⁰ confirmation of the truth of Oscar Wilde's remark that the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about. Sir Coutts Lindsay's intention to advertise the international nature of his new gallery by hanging the first room with advanced continental art seemed to have come to naught.

A preliminary perusal of British reviews of the French Fine Art section at the Exposition Universelle the following year gives the impression that Moreau's work remained effectively invisible. Although the first article in the first number of the newly launched *Magazine of Art* was devoted to the Exposition, the anonymous author of the review of French art devoted the lion's share of the piece to the academic triumvirate of Cabanel, Bouguereau and Gérôme (who did, after all, occupy a disproportionate amount of space in the exhibition), and Moreau went unmentioned.¹¹ This trend continued in other major general-readership periodicals such as the *Times*, the *Athenaeum* and the *Saturday Review*. However, the *Art Journal*, as well as the one-off *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* published in Britain throughout the duration of the Exposition both made reference to Moreau, with varying degrees of scepticism and perplexity. The *Art Journal*'s reviewer was considerably more complimentary about the problem-fraught French section as a whole than many of his peers, claiming that even under such unfavourable circumstances France demonstrated 'eloquently and convincingly that she is the greatest living Art School in the world',¹² but became noticeably less eloquent himself when describing Moreau:

G. Moreau, who delights in Biblical and mythological subjects, has much of the brilliant colouring of the English Etty, with rather a heavy black element running through it. His 'Moses exposed on the Nile' (660) and 'Hercules and the Hydra' (656) afford indications of this tendency.¹³

The incongruous comparison of Moreau's scintillating jewel-like palette with Etty's smoky, overripe one is less than happy and suggests the critic's urgent groping for a means of making sense of such extraordinary images by anchoring them in a more familiar context.

¹⁰ Flint (1983), p. 60.

¹¹ 'French Fine Art at the Late Paris International Exhibition', *Magazine of Art* 2 (1879), pp. 15-18.

¹² 'International Art at the Universal Exposition, Paris', *Art Journal* 17 (1878), p. 197.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

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The reviewers in the *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* wrote in a more dismissive vein, perhaps not surprisingly considering the proudly nationalist tone

taken by the publication as a whole. The first mention of Moreau appeared on 18 June, when the author simply stated that ‘M. Gustave Moreau has his “Sphinx,” which created much controversy some years since, and several later works’.¹⁴ This critic appears to have possessed some prior knowledge of Moreau’s oeuvre, but clouded by the passage of time: the “Sphinx” shown at the Exposition was not the *OEdipe et le Sphinx* (Mathieu 75) with which Moreau made his name at the 1864 Salon and in which the figures of Oedipus and the Sphinx dominate the canvas, but a new work, *Le Sphinx deviné* [Figure 80, Mathieu 203], painted in his mature style, in which the small figures are enveloped in a misty atmosphere and dwarfed by the menacing Leonardesque landscape.¹⁵ Moreau’s watercolours were mentioned in passing in the next number,¹⁶ but the lengthiest commentary came from ‘a Lady in Paris’ who contributed a running report, in a more animated tone than her male counterparts,¹⁷ on the Exposition to the journal:

The first pictures the visitor notices on entering the long gallery to the right are some of Moreau’s weird compositions. There are quaint renderings of Biblical subjects: – a ‘Moses among the Bulrushes,’ with flames darting from his forehead; a ‘Jacob and the Angel,’ standing out against a limpid evening sky; and ‘The Daughter of Herodius [sic],’ dressed in airy gauze and flaming jewels; besides ‘Hercules doing battle against the Hydra’ and ‘The Secret of the Sphinx divulged.’¹⁸

In writing off Moreau’s style as ‘weird’ and ‘quaint’, this critic not only provides inadvertent confirmation of the artist’s dictum that ‘a work of art is especially beautiful when it can never please imbeciles’,¹⁹ she (or he) also devalues the seriousness of his intent and of the status of his work as high art. Although Moreau’s subjects are biblical, for a conservative British critic his ‘weird’ technique infringes upon their potential didactic value. Moreover, the unflattering national stereotypes

¹⁴ ‘French Art at the Exhibition’, *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* no. 7 (18 June 1878), p. 77.
¹⁵ *Le Sphinx deviné* was, incidentally, the painting Zola dwelt upon most in his review of the 1878 Exposition, despite (or, considering his lack of sympathy for Moreau’s style and subject matter, because of) its being the weakest of Moreau’s exhibited works.

¹⁶ ‘Fine Arts at the Paris Exhibition’, *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* no. 8 (29 June 1878), p. 89.

¹⁷ It is possible that ‘a Lady in Paris’ was actually the creation of a male journalist looking to mock feminine reactions to the Exposition’s attractions.

¹⁸ ‘French Art – II. [From a Lady in Paris]’, *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition*, no. 27 (9 November 1878), p. 317.

¹⁹ ‘Une oeuvre d’art est surtout belle quand elle ne peut jamais plaire aux imbéciles’: Cooke (2002), vol. 2, p. 219.

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invoked in the criticism of Moreau’s colour – flashy, gaudy, vulgar, and so forth – were a common tactic in conservative British art criticism at the time: moral impurity was considered to go hand in hand with colouristic excess (while, inversely, a muted palette was seen as denoting restraint and modesty), and if such pictures were produced by a foreign brush, so much the more dangerous.²⁰ Even a more broadminded and formalist critic like D. S. MacColl, writing of Moreau’s pictures, which included *Salomé*, in the retrospective exhibition at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, was not immune to this tendency, describing them as ‘gaudy tinsels [hung] on models from Chassérian [sic]’.²¹

While this mode of ‘blind and dumb criticism’ typified the mainstream British press’s response to Moreau in 1878,²² matters began to change in the Exposition’s aftermath. This may partly be explained by the gradually increasing availability of reproductions of Moreau’s paintings. A photogravure produced by Goupil after *Salomé* featured in the souvenir volume *Les chefs-d’oeuvre d’art à l’Exposition*

Universelle de 1878, while an etching by Gaujean after *L'Apparition* was published in *L'Art* (which, as we will recall, had a London office and important ties with the Grosvenor Gallery) in 1878.²³ Goupil seems to have played the chief role in publishing reproductions of Moreau's work, especially important as they had an office and gallery in London; the photograph of *Galatée* published after the 1880 Salon is a case in point.²⁴ However, Goupil's most significant part in Moreau's reception in Britain was not to occur until 1886, when it hosted the London showing of Moreau's watercolour illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine*.

The sixty-four watercolours constitute the most under-studied segment of Moreau's oeuvre, not least because all but one have been in private hands since the

²⁰ See Flint (1983), pp. 61-62.

²¹ D. S. MacColl, 'Art at the Paris Exhibition – I', *Saturday Review* 90 (15 September 1900), p. 327.

Flint (1983), p. 62, considers MacColl's reaction symptomatic of the lingering effects of the xenophobic aspect of British art criticism, but I would suggest that his unflattering description may also stem from the fact that by 1900 Moreau's star, and that of Symbolism as a whole, had faded. In other words, by this time Moreau's style and choice of subject may really have seemed bizarre and outmoded to a forward-thinking Modernist critic.

²² The term is Barthes's, which he defines as, instead of the critic honestly acknowledging his own incomprehension, '[elevating] one's blindness and dumbness to a universal rule of perception, and to reject from the world [that which is not understood]: "I don't understand, therefore you are idiots."' R. Barthes, 'Blind and Dumb Criticism', in *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers (London, 1972), pp. 34-35.

²³ G. Lacambre, 'La diffusion de l'oeuvre de Gustave Moreau par la reproduction au XIXe siècle', *Bulletin de la Société J.-K. Huysmans* no. 94 (2001), p. 30. Lacambre's article is the only in-depth study thus far of the role of reproduction in diffusing Moreau's reputation, but it is not exhaustive and, as with much of her work on Moreau, is concerned almost entirely with documentation.

²⁴ See Chapter 3.

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1930s and the owners have steadfastly refused to allow scholars access or to lend them to exhibitions.²⁵ Currently, only two serious studies of them have been attempted – a thesis on Moreau's iconography, and an article by Dominique Lobstein on the commission for the watercolours by Moreau's patron Antony Roux – and both, doubtless hindered by lack of access to the pictures, are primarily documentary.²⁶ However, uncovering the story of their creation, their exhibition on both sides of the Channel, and their eventual reproduction is key to understanding the extent of Moreau's reception and influence in Britain.

In 1879, the Marseillais banker Roux began to commission a series of watercolours illustrating La Fontaine's *Fables* from Moreau and several other leading artists, including Gustave Doré, Ferdinand Heilbuth, Elie Delaunay and Giuseppe de Nittis, in an endeavour that recalls earlier schemes in Britain such as Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Dalziel Brothers' Bible Gallery. The watercolours were displayed in a group exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit in May of 1881.

Unfortunately, no catalogue was produced, and we have no way of ascertaining which twenty-five of Moreau's watercolours were exhibited; however, the show received numerous press notices, many of which were clipped and preserved by Moreau and his mother.²⁷ The French periodicals were all but unanimous in their low opinion of the watercolours of the other artists, but most praised Moreau's as the most original on view, even if this originality was inextricable from his tendency to err on the side of the grotesque. This unsigned review in *L'Art moderne* is typical:

We are not admirers of this bizarre and fantastical painting, whose personages with greenish flesh and smelling of mud move about in a strange world dripping with gems and shimmering with brocades: a real jeweller's hallucination. But despite what is false and conventional in this art, despite the inevitable heaviness produced by repeated retouching, we must recognise that

the artist has got out of a rut and produced an ensemble which is personal, powerful, new in its ideas and clever in its execution: perhaps the most complete there is in the Salon of the rue Laffitte.²⁸

²⁵ The sole watercolour in public ownership, *Le paon se plaignant à Junon* (Mathieu 224), belongs to the Musée Gustave Moreau.

²⁶ M. Beynel, 'Iconographies du XIXe siècle: les *Fables* de La Fontaine vues par Gustave Moreau et Gustave Doré' (DEA thesis, Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, 1989) and D. Lobstein, 'Antony Roux, Gustave Moreau et les *Fables* de La Fontaine', *Paragone Arte* 28 (November 1999), pp. 75-88.

²⁷ This dossier (Musée Gustave Moreau, Recueil d'articles, INV.14581) includes articles by Charles Blanc (*Le Temps*), Marie Raffalovich (*La Vue*), Ary Renan and Judith Gautier (source unknown). Gautier, predictably given her place in Symbolist literary circles, wrote the most positive critique. Marie Raffalovich's relationship with Moreau will be discussed in more detail below.

²⁸ 'Nous ne sommes pas admirateur de cette peinture bizarre et fantasque, dont les personnages aux chairs verdâtres et sentant la vase s'agitent dans un monde inconnu où ruissent les pierreries, où chatoient les brocarts: une vraie hallucination de joaillier. Mais malgré ce que cet art a de faux et de 180

Included in the dossier is a single article in English, excerpted from *The Parisian*, a broadsheet that catered to the city's Anglophone community. The reviewer, whose name has not been preserved, in contrast to his French counterparts showers unreserved praise on Moreau:

No modern painter has a more brilliant palette than Mr. Gustave Moreau, and, if we did not know it already, the twenty-five water-colours which he exhibits in the Rue Laffitte would prove that he has an imagination with which no other living artist's can be compared. Each of his compositions has the brilliancy of a casket of jewels, and in imaginative power each seems to surpass the other. [...] The few pictures by Mr. Gustave Moreau which we have seen from time to time at the Salon had made us acquainted with a rare colourist and poet; the water-colours of which we are now speaking have revealed to us a varied and inexhaustible imagination beyond all our dreams.²⁹

Most of the recurring complaints about Moreau's oeuvre – the febrile colour, the tendency toward a *horror vacui* of bejewelled detail, the preference for the fantastic – are turned on their head. One could argue that the watercolours, by virtue of their fairytale subjects and medium, had less power to offend than the large-scale, encrusted canvases of myths and Biblical subjects played out in an atmosphere of exoticism and dread (although this critic appears to be full of praise for Moreau's Salon paintings as well). Furthermore, watercolour was considered the British medium par excellence, so there exists the possibility of condescension on the part of a British reviewer towards a French painter making a foray into unfamiliar territory – but this is belied, at least in the review in question, by the tone of genuine enthusiasm. In any event, whether because of a more anodyne choice of subjects or because of a shift in taste, at least a few British viewers were becoming more receptive to Moreau's art.

Roux was of the same mind as most of the critics, ultimately deciding in 1882 to give the entire commission for sixty-five watercolour illustrations to Moreau. All of Moreau's watercolours were exhibited together at the Goupil gallery (owned by the dealers Boussod et Valadon) in Paris from March to May 1886, and then at Goupil's convenu, malgré la lourdeur inévitable que produisent des retouches répétées, il faut reconnaître que l'artiste sort de l'ornière et produit un ensemble d'oeuvres personnelles, puissantes, neuves comme idées et habiles comme exécution : c'est peut-être ce qu'il y a de plus complet au Salon de la rue Laffitte': 'Nouvelles Parisiennes. Les fables de La Fontaine illustrées par aquarellistes', *L'Art moderne* no. 14 (5 June 1881), p. 111.

²⁹ Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, dossier of press clippings related to *Les Fables de La Fontaine* (1881), INV. 14582.

London branch in November of the same year. These were the artist's only one-man shows during his lifetime in either city.

Before I address the exhibition of Moreau's La Fontaine watercolours in 1886 in London and Paris, however, two important developments which prepared the ground for his (re)introduction to Britain need to be discussed. Much Moreau scholarship labours under the assumption that his work again remained out of the public eye between 1881 and 1886. This is true if we restrict ourselves to *original* work, but it overlooks the increasing importance of reproduction to keeping Moreau's reputation alive when he could not or did not choose to exhibit. As Geneviève Lacambre has demonstrated, Moreau, notwithstanding the image of the 'hermit in the midst of Paris' who cared nothing for the opinion of the masses promulgated by Huysmans, had taken a keen interest in the reproduction of his paintings ever since his first Salon appearance in 1852.³⁰ He was deeply concerned with the limitations of available techniques and their potential impact upon the presentation of his paintings. From the first, his technique of choice was photography because of its superior fidelity to the original over the more commonly used engraving, and his favoured photographer was his neighbour in the rue de la Rochefoucauld, the British photographer Robert Bingham. It is unclear whether Bingham's photographs of Salon paintings such as *OEdipe et le sphinx*, *Jason* and *Orphée* were ever sold in Britain, but they were exhibited as works of art in their own right³¹ and were available commercially in Paris; indeed, his photographs and those of his successors, Ferrier et Lecadre (who purchased his archive of negatives following his death in 1870), became a sought-after item in the 1880s and 1890s for amateurs unable to obtain Moreau's paintings for themselves. However, in 1883 Moreau began a fruitful professional relationship with a printmaker who was at the forefront of the original print revival and who was to have probably the most decisive impact upon the spread of his international reputation, Félix Bracquemond.

The dealer Georges Petit apparently commissioned an etching after *David* [Figure 81, Mathieu 201], one of the paintings Moreau exhibited at the 1878

³⁰ Lacambre (2001), p. 33.

³¹ Bingham exhibited a photograph of *Oedipe et le sphinx* at the 1865 Salon française de photographie: *ibid.*, p. 35.

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Exposition, from Bracquemond late in 1882 or early in 1883.³² Although only three letters from Bracquemond to Moreau concerning the project survive, they reveal that Bracquemond worked closely with the artist on the realisation of the etching, requesting meetings to discuss the project and to obtain Moreau's opinion (and, if necessary, corrections) on his work in progress.³³ The etching [Figure 82], which was published in Paris by Petit and in London by Obach, was exhibited at the 1884 Salon, thus not only renewing awareness of Moreau's work in an official venue at a time when the newly published *À rebours* was exciting interest in his work in Decadent circles, but also – very unusually – earning the only *médaille d'honneur* awarded a work in any medium at that Salon. Although Bracquemond was careful to attribute his success to the quality of the original,³⁴ the award heralds a dramatic change in both the status of printmaking in general and reproductive prints in particular. As with Rossetti, reproductions – especially those made by printmakers recognised as artists in their own right – became acceptable and sought-after substitutes for the original work. No doubt thanks to Bracquemond's success at the Salon, Boussod and Valadon chose him to produce a series of etchings after Moreau's illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine* in 1886, despite not being associated themselves with the movement to revive the original etching.³⁵

Before Moreau's work made its second appearance in London, however, another important development occurred. Claude Phillips, who had written the first serious study of Puvis to appear in a British art periodical earlier in 1885,³⁶ published a comparable article on Moreau in the *Magazine of Art* later the same year. Phillips, who concurrently served as the *correspondant pour l'Angleterre* for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, was the most openly Francophile critic in Britain in the 1880s and became instrumental in raising the profile of both Puvis and Moreau in his own country.

³² Bracquemond wrote to Moreau on 20 February 1883 to inform him that he had just finished preparations for the engraving after *David*: Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Bracquemond correspondence, letter dated 20 February 1883.

³³ Letter cited in n.32 above and a letter from Bracquemond to Moreau dated 5 February 1884 ('Voulez-vous me dire quand je pourrais avoir l'honneur de vous voir ? Je voudrais vous soumettre une épreuve de ma gravure d'après votre tableau et vous demander vos conseils avant de mettre la dernière main à mon travail').

³⁴ 'Permettez-moi de vous dire, qu'une grande part vous revient dans le succès que j'obtiens. J'ai en imitant votre oeuvre bénéficié des combinaisons de formes et de couleurs que vous avez imaginées': Bracquemond correspondence, letter dated 28 May 1884.

³⁵ On the commission for Bracquemond's *Fables de La Fontaine* etchings, see Sabine du Vignau, 'Michel Manet et Goupil & Cie: 1882-1915', *État des lieux (I)*, exh. cat. (Bordeaux, Musée Goupil, 1994), p. 120.

³⁶ See Chapter 2.

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Notably absent from Phillips's thoughtful analysis, which covers Moreau's publicly exhibited paintings from 1864 to 1880, is any hint of the moralising and xenophobia that pervaded earlier British criticism. Indeed, while acknowledging the increasing spate of comparisons between Moreau and Burne-Jones in the French press, he not only declares the parallel simplistic, but implies that Moreau is the better and more original artist and that Burne-Jones would do well to learn from him:

[Moreau] . . . makes everything – drawing, style, and technique – subservient to his efforts to render his conceptions concrete and visible. In this quality, though in this alone, he perhaps resembles Blake more closely than any other creative artist, though his art remains essentially that of the painter, and does not, like that of the Englishman, become a symbol only. [...] Moreau not so much merely imitates the outward characteristics and mannerisms of his prototypes the Quattrocentists, as he seeks to transfuse them into himself, and possess himself of the spirit with which they conceived and painted.³⁷

The article is illustrated with two reproductions, one after *Orphée* and the other after *David* (not Bracquemond's etching, which Phillips mentions as having renewed interest in Moreau, but an inferior engraving which renders the picture's jewelled surface flat and leaden). In fact, Phillips subjects *David* to a lengthier scrutiny than any of the other paintings he discusses, seeming to delight in describing the 'barbaric profusion and splendour' of the king, the angel and their exotic surroundings in terms somewhat reminiscent of, though more restrained than, those used in the infamous passages in *À rebours*.³⁸ Interestingly, Phillips only refers in passing to the by this time notorious *Salomé* and *L'Apparition*, for which he evinces little regard and expresses regret that it is, thus far, the only work by Moreau to have been exhibited in Britain, where his art is 'little known and less understood'; the latter is, in his estimation, 'in all respects one of Moreau's most fantastic and least successful works, one, indeed, on which it would not be fair to found any appreciation of his powers'.³⁹ Phillips's wish that Moreau be represented in Britain with stronger and more varied work was to be fulfilled the following year when the solo exhibition of his *Fables de La Fontaine* watercolours staged by Boussod and Valadon in Paris opened

in the company's London galleries in November. When the show was staged in Paris in May, it was accompanied by the publication of six etchings by Bracquemond [Figures 83-88] and attracted numerous plaudits, not least from Moreau's friend, the

³⁷ C. Phillips, 'Gustave Moreau', *Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), p. 233.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

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Symbolist writer Henry Cazalis. Cazalis's review, illustrated with etchings after *Le Génie du fable*, *La Fortune et le jeune enfant*, and *Le Loup et l'agneau*, appeared, probably not coincidentally, in Boussod and Valadon's bimonthly *Les Lettres et les arts*.⁴⁰ Cazalis, in summing up Moreau's achievement, drew on the growing vogue for the synthesis of the arts, declaring him an 'astonishing symphonist' in his handling of line and colour and that 'he communicates sensation, emotion, and intense reverie as the equal of a poet or a musician'.⁴¹

When the exhibition crossed the Channel, it excited considerably greater interest than Moreau's previous outing at the Grosvenor, attracting coverage in the *Athenaeum*, the *Magazine of Art* and the *World*. These three articles offer a telling cross-section of the evolution (or the lack thereof) of Moreau's reception in Britain. The *Athenaeum*'s review, while it accorded Moreau more column inches than he had ever received in that periodical, retained more than a trace of the disapproval and condescension of the recent past. While praising *Phoebus and Boreas* and *The Dragon of many Heads and the Dragon of many Tails* as 'not unworthy of Breughel, and combining charms of colour with peculiar wildness of invention', and *The Man who ran after Fortune* as '[epitomising] all the romance, beauty, and vigour of his invention and technique', the anonymous critic deployed the familiar vocabulary of moral censure for *Le Singe et le chat* [Figure 83], which 'approaches Decamps in its sumptuousness and its weird luxury; but the luxury is overdone, and the sentiment of the design, however romantic and spirited it may be, is sensuous, while the colour, though splendid and harmonious, is more showy than fine', a condemnation that reaches its acme in his conclusion that 'the artist possesses superb and powerful natural endowments, which, more from wilfulness and self-indulgence than any other cause, have been allowed to run to seed.'⁴²

Claude Phillips, however, writing in the *Magazine of Art*, paid homage to Moreau's qualities as a 'painter-poet' (an echo of the positive inter-artistic comparisons set up by Cazalis which were to prove a double-edged sword for Moreau's reputation in France), and opined that his genius was better suited to watercolour than to oils and praised his handling of Persian and Indian motifs (those

⁴⁰ The identity of the etcher has not been preserved, but they do not appear to be the work of Bracquemond.

⁴¹ 'Étonnant symphoniste'; 'La sensation, l'émotion, la rêverie intense, il les communique à l'égal d'un poète ou d'un musicien': H. Cazalis, 'Gustave Moreau et les Fables de La Fontaine', *Les Lettres et les arts* 2 (1 April 1886), p. 65.

⁴² 'Minor Exhibitions', *Athenaeum* no. 3080 (6 November 1886), p. 606.

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which had been denounced in the *Athenaeum* as 'weird luxury').⁴³ Yet, despite Moreau's reputation as a painter-poet, Phillips underlined the fundamental independence of the watercolours from their literary source material: 'his variations, it may be urged, are so dazzling and so little like the themes upon which they are built, that, to appreciate their singular charm, only the mere outline of the latter must be borne in mind, and their aim and spirit banished, as much as possible, from our thoughts.'⁴⁴ Particularly interesting in this regard is the brief notice of the exhibition written by George Bernard Shaw for the *World*. Shaw not only commended Moreau

for not falling into the trap of slavish ‘mere illustration’ of the Fables, but, in tune with Cazalis and other advanced French critics, added that ‘he has the insight of a poet, and the true painter’s faculty of mixing his colours with imagination. He uses the palette as a good composer uses the orchestra’.⁴⁵ In drawing this comparison, Shaw may, of course, have had in mind Walter Pater’s contention that ‘all arts aspire to the condition of music’, but it is also worth bearing in mind that he was almost certainly aware of concurrent discussions of cross-fertilisation between the arts, and particularly music and painting, in the influential *Revue wagnérienne*, which had begun publication in 1885.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, despite the advocacy and admiration of cosmopolitan critics such as Phillips and Shaw, enthusiasm for Moreau in Britain remained a minority taste, as evidenced by the poor sales of Bracquemond’s *Fables* etchings.⁴⁷

Moreau’s appearance at the 1889 Exposition Universelle – the final exhibition of his work during his lifetime – and concurrent studies of his oeuvre by Paul Leprieur and Ary Renan⁴⁸ seem to have been the primary point of exposure for key figures of the Decadent Nineties such as Arthur Symons.⁴⁹ Indeed, Symons, as the key promoter of French Symbolist literature and antinaturalist art in Britain in numerous articles

⁴³ The ‘Persian’ qualities of Moreau’s post-1870 oeuvre were frequently remarked upon by contemporary critics. For a thorough exploration of the extent of Moreau’s debt of inspiration to Persian and Indian art, see A. Okada, G. Lacambre and M. Maucuer, *L’Inde de Gustave Moreau* (exh. cat., Paris, Musée Cernuschi and Lorient, Musée de la Compagnie des Indes, 1997).

⁴⁴ C. Phillips, ‘The Fables of La Fontaine by Gustave Moreau’, *Magazine of Art* 10 (1887), p. 102.

⁴⁵ G. B. Shaw, ‘What the World says’, *The World* 644 (3 November 1886), p. 14.

⁴⁶ Interchanges between music and the arts will be explored further in Chapter 6.

⁴⁷ The London exhibition catalogue advertised sets of the six etchings for £25 (proofs on parchment) or £15 15/- (proofs on Japanese). They seem not to have sold well in either London or Paris, for Bracquemond wrote to Roux in December 1888, ‘La persistance de Monsieur Boussod à se débarrasser de nos gravures est étonnante’. Musée Gustave Moreau, Roux correspondence, letter from Félix Bracquemond to Antony Roux, 5 December 1888 (letter forwarded to Moreau by Roux).

⁴⁸ P. Leprieur, ‘Gustave Moreau’, *L’Artiste* 119 (March-June 1889), pp. 161-80, 338-59, 443-55.

⁴⁹ Symons devoted a chapter to Moreau in *Studies in Seven Arts* (London, 1906) which suggests close study of his paintings over a number of years, but he gives no clues as to when or how he first became acquainted with the artist’s work.

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throughout the 1890s and books including *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) and *Studies in Seven Arts* (1906) and, crucially, as a collaborator of Aubrey Beardsley, may be seen as a bridge for artistic reputations between the two countries.⁵⁰ However, despite the obvious attractions of Moreau’s work for British anti-naturalist and Decadent writers and artists, written evidence during the period remains frustratingly sparse. Confirmation of the high regard in which he was held by these circles exists primarily in an article by the critic Gleeson White that appeared in 1897 in the second (and final) volume of the *Pageant*, Britain’s most design-conscious and cosmopolitan analogue to the Francophone Symbolist *petites revues*.⁵¹ Even putting to one side White’s contribution, this volume, which features reproductions of Moreau’s work (*OEdipe*, *Hercule et l’hydre de Lerne*, and *L’Apparition*) alongside Puvis, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts, and its art editor Charles Shannon, validates Moreau’s place in an anti-naturalist artistic pantheon which was by this point venerated on both sides of the Channel. Still, White insisted that Moreau must be appreciated on his own terms, deploring the fatuity of his now-ubiquitous characterisation as ‘the French Burne-Jones’. Rather, he argued that, although the art of both ‘may [be] traced to the same fountain-head’, Moreau should be seen as representing the classic ideal and Burne-Jones the romantic.⁵² (Indeed, Jean Lorrain had introduced a similar dichotomy in his 1887 volume *Les Griseries* when he dedicated his poems ‘Printemps Classique’ and ‘Printemps Mystique’ to Moreau and

Burne-Jones, respectively.) Although White focused his discussion on Moreau's major Salon paintings, particularly *Oedipe*, *Orphée*,⁵³ *Salomé* and *L'Apparition*, he also refers to numerous lesser-known, privately owned works, which suggests that he may have paid visits to the relevant collections in Paris. In fact, Charles Hayem and Edmond Taigny, two of Moreau's most important patrons, were both noted for their

⁵⁰ On Symons's promotion of Redon in Britain, see Chapter 6.

⁵¹ The 1897 volume of the *Pageant* also featured works in translation by Maeterlinck ('The Seven Princesses') and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam ('Queen Ysabeau') as well as a commentary on Jules Barbey d'Aureville by Edmund Gosse; the 1896 volume published in the original French Verlaine's poem 'Monna Rosa', discussed in Chapter 4, and Maeterlinck's 'Et s'il revenait'.

⁵² G. White, 'The Pictures of Gustave Moreau', *The Pageant* 2 (1897), pp. 3-4.

⁵³ White quotes (without naming) another English critic on *Orphée*: 'It is against skies flushed by the aftermath of sun that recall for their touches of orange and bands of brooding purple these words, *Quelles violettes frondaisons vont descendre* – words so expressive of that hush in nature become strange in expectation of some countersign pregnant for the future – it is against a sky like this than an all-persuasive figure moves away; the head of Orpheus lies between her hands, and we scarcely know if her fastidious dress, decked with so many outlandish things, has been clasped to her waist and chaste throat in real innocence of the burden she holds so mystically; but this hint of sentiment is too slight, too fugitive, in the picture to become morbid'. I have not been able to discover the identity of this critic, but it does not appear to be Symons.

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generosity in allowing amateurs access to their collections, so it is certainly possible that White could have examined their contents.⁵⁴ Most significant, though, was White's insistence on the suggestiveness and ultimate resistance to exegesis of Moreau's oeuvre – terms which had, by this time, become standard in Symbolist criticism of Moreau in France. Finally, on the eve of his death, Moreau's reputation in Britain – at least, within a rather *recherché*, elite milieu – seemed to have achieved a degree of parity with that of his following in France.

Upon the publication of the second volume of the *Pageant*, Aubrey Beardsley, then convalescing in Boscombe, wrote to his patron André Raffalovich to thank him for sending a copy. He was especially taken with 'two of the Moreaus (*Oedipus* and the *Hercules*) [which] are perfectly ravishing', adding, 'I often think of *your* Moreau, one of his most beautiful works'.⁵⁵ Raffalovich's 'Moreau' was the 1872 watercolour *Sapho* [Figure 89, Mathieu 155], evidently a gift from his mother Marie and at this date the only work by Moreau in a British collection.⁵⁶ Beardsley's rapturous response indicates a longstanding acquaintance with Moreau's work, one which has been little explored and, I would argue, began even before his involvement in the creation of the most infamous illustrated book of the 1890s, Oscar Wilde's controversial play, *Salome*.

'Intensely decorative cruelty': Décadence, Japonisme and Beardsley's *Salome*
Wilde's displeasure with Beardsley's illustrations for *Salome* is notorious.

The reasons most often cited for his condemnation of the younger man's work are Beardsley's mischievous inclusion of unflattering caricatures of Wilde as the Woman in the Moon, Herod, and the sinister dramaturge/carnival barker in *Enter Herodias* [Figure 90, R.285], and his outrageous deviation from the text of the play in his addition of extraneous scenes (*The Peacock Skirt*, *The Black Cape* and *The Toilet of*

⁵⁴ Hayem donated his collection of works by Moreau to the state in 1899, on which occasion they were exhibited in the Musée du Luxembourg; see J. Lorrain, *Poussières de Paris* (Paris, 1902), pp. 22-23, for an account of the exhibition.

⁵⁵ Letter to André Raffalovich, 29 November 1896, H. Maas, J. L. Duncan and W. G. Good, eds., *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley* (London, 1970), p. 218.

⁵⁶ Marie Raffalovich purchased *Sapho* from Moreau in June 1872; the date at which it passed into André's possession is unrecorded, but presumably he owned it by 1895, when he first took Beardsley under his wing. See my article, 'Gustave Moreau and the Raffalovich family: new documents for

Sappho, *Burlington Magazine* 148 (May 2006), pp. 327-31, for further discussion of Mme Raffalovich's patronage of Moreau.

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Salome), now considered a central element of Beardsley's ironic critique of the text.⁵⁷ Yet it seems that Wilde's most fundamental objection to Beardsley's decorations was that their restless whiplash lines and Japanesque tendencies flouted the spirit of his Byzantine text and, even worse, its pictorial sources:

'My Herod is like the Herod of Gustave Moreau – wrapped in his jewels and sorrows. My Salomé is a mystic, the sister of Salammbô, a Sainte Thérèse who worships the moon; dear Aubrey's designs are like the naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes on the margins of his copybooks.'⁵⁸

In Wilde's eyes, it would seem that the most heinous crime 'dear Aubrey' committed was his impish infidelity to Moreau, whose vision of *Salome* had coloured and shaped Wilde's own ever since he read the newly published *À rebours* on his Paris honeymoon in 1884. However, Wilde's complaint, probably as much the product of the clash of two enormous egos as of genuine artistic disagreement, unwittingly reveals his short-sightedness. For Beardsley was probably not only better acquainted with the work of Moreau (who himself had more than a passing interest in Japonisme) than Wilde, he used this knowledge, as I shall demonstrate, allied with the inspiration of Japanese prints, to create a bold and subversive rereading of Moreau's vision of *Salome*.⁵⁹

Tracing Beardsley's contacts with Moreau's work prior to the creation of the illustrations for *Salome* is not a straightforward task, made still more difficult by large gaps in his correspondence in the early 1890s.⁶⁰ As we have already seen, he discussed and looked at Moreau's work with André Raffalovich, who, thanks to his mother's patronage, had enjoyed privileged access to Moreau's atelier from an early age, but such conversations are unlikely to have taken place much before 1895.⁶¹ The

⁵⁷ My approach to Beardsley as artist-critic of Wilde's text is informed by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's examination of the *Salome* illustrations as parody: L. J. Kooistra, *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 130-46.

⁵⁸ Quoted in J. P. Raymond and C. Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* (London, 1932), pp. 51-52. It should be noted that Charles Ricketts was a rival of Beardsley for Wilde's favour, having illustrated all of his works up to 1894, most famously *The Sphinx*, also published by John Lane.

⁵⁹ Beardsley's Japonisme in general has been discussed in K. Berger, *Japonisme in Western Painting from Whistler to Matisse*, trans. D. Britt (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 250-57, and, at greater length, in L. G. Zatin, *Beardsley, Japonisme and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁶⁰ No letters are known survive between early January 1890 and July 1891, and 1892 is patchy.

⁶¹ Some time after André had moved to London in 1882, Marie Raffalovich wrote to Moreau, 'Voulezvous

nous permettre, à mon fils André (qui est venu passer quelques jours avec nous) et à moi de vous rendre visite dans votre atelier? Il serait désireux d'emporter avec lui à Londres le lumineux souvenir de cette vision'. Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Raffalovich correspondence, undated letter. On another occasion, Mme Raffalovich invited him to dinner at her house on 6th January, noting that André was visiting for a few days and 'il serait fort heureux également de vous voir' (ibid., no year given).

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Bracquemond etchings after *David* and the *Fables* may well have still been available in London by the time Beardsley became a clerk in a City insurance office in 1889 and began to frequent nearby second-hand bookshops and print dealers, but we have no proof of his having seen them at this point; if he was indeed aware of the *Fables* illustrations, Moreau's Persian-influenced fantasies, worlds apart from the quaint moralistic tales of La Fontaine, could have provided him with a model for his transgressive approach to illustrating *Salome*. He met Wilde by chance when he

visited Burne-Jones at his studio and showed him some drawings in July 1891, but it seems rather unlikely that Wilde, despite his initial friendliness to Beardsley, would have discussed Moreau or *Salome* with a young upstart.⁶² More significant, no doubt, was Beardsley's first visit to Paris in June 1892, during which he met Puvis, then the president of the Salon du Champ de Mars, 'who introduced [him] to one of his brother painters as "un jeune artiste anglais qui fait des choses étonnantes!"'⁶³ In another letter he added that 'the new work was regarded with no little surprise and enthusiasm by the French artists'.⁶⁴ Although we have no way of determining the identity of the 'artists' or of Puvis's 'brother painter', it is tempting to speculate that the artist in question was Moreau, who was friendly with Puvis and by this time a member of the Académie. Even if this were not the case, though, Beardsley could certainly have seen *Orphée* at the Musée du Luxembourg or even have sought out Moreau's work in the collections of Hayem, Taigny or others; the resemblance of the Thracian maiden in her exotic garb, tenderly cradling the severed head of Orpheus, to Salome contemplating the head of John the Baptist had long been remarked upon, and would not have been lost on Beardsley.⁶⁵ As well, we must not forget Beardsley's fluency in

⁶² See Beardsley's letter to A. W. King, 13 July 1891, in Maas et al. (1970), pp. 21-23, for a description of his visit to Burne-Jones and the older artist's appraisal of his work.

⁶³ Letter to E. J. Marshall, autumn 1892, in Maas et al. (1970), p. 34. Beardsley repeats this news almost verbatim in a letter to his school friend G. F. Scotson-Clark, ca. 15 February 1893. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁴ Letter to A. W. King, 9 December 1892, *ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶⁵ When the painting was exhibited at the 1866 Salon, Théophile Gautier remarked on the similarity of Orpheus's severed head to 'that of John the Baptist on a silver charger in Herodias's hands ('celle de Saint Jean-Baptiste sur son plat d'argent aux mains d'Hérodiade)': T. Gautier, 'Salon de 1866' (*Le Moniteur universel* 135, 15 May 1866), p. 576. Chesneau noted in 1868 that 'she is reminiscent of the Salome of the scriptures, who also contemplated, with a quite different gaze, the severed head of Saint John the Baptist' ('Elle rappelle la Salomé des livres saints qui contemplait, elle aussi, mais de quel autre regarde, la tête coupée de saint Jean-Baptiste'): E. Chesneau, *Les Nations rivales dans l'art* (Paris, 1868), p. 203. Lacambre (1998a), p. 98, speculates that Chesneau's comparison of the two themes may have been prompted by conversations with Moreau, although the artist's interest in Salome may not have developed until the early 1870s. I am grateful to Luke Houghton for reminding me of the parallels between the two subjects.

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French and his voracious and catholic taste for French literature; although the only references to Huysmans in his letters appear long after *Salome*, it seems plausible that Wilde may have encouraged him to read not only *À rebours* but sources that influenced Moreau's picturing of Salome such as Flaubert's *Salammô* – sources which the playwright claimed as having moulded *his* Salome in turn.⁶⁶

Wilde's text – which, we should bear in mind, was originally written in French – could be considered an attempt to render in words the lapidary qualities of Moreau's painted *Salomé*. The ritualistic repetition of certain phrases has the contradictory effect of underscoring the clashing, all-powerful obsessions that rule all the characters, and of draining them of humanity, of any hint of flesh-and-blood realism. Under these cascades of jewelled language, which blasphemously rework the extravagant prose of the *Song of Songs*, Salome, Herod, Herodias, Iokanaan, even relatively minor characters like Narraboth and the Page harden into ciphers, their movement and development limited by envelopes of verbal ornamentation. This was precisely the effect Moreau himself desired when he created Salome's costume; rejecting 'old classical Greek frippery' as inappropriate for 'the figure of a sibyl and religious enchantress with a mysterious character', he 'conceived of a costume like a shrine'.⁶⁷ Nowhere is this enshrinement (or imprisonment) of a character in layers of language more apparent or effective than in Salome's litany of desire for Iokanaan, the climax

of which is worth quoting at length:

It is thy mouth that I desire, Iokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy, are not so red. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press. It is redder than the feet of the doves who inhabit the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found

⁶⁶ As early as 1890 Beardsley boasted to King that 'I can read French now almost as easily as English' (letter to A. W. King, 4 January 1890, in *ibid.*, p. 18). André Raffalovich seems to have tried to interest Beardsley in Huysmans's novels, even attempting to engineer a meeting which appears never to have taken place (letter to André Raffalovich, 13 April 1897, in *ibid.*, p. 302), but with little success, Beardsley finally confessing that 'I never like Huysmans' (letter to André Raffalovich, 21 February 1898, *ibid.*, p. 434). However, Beardsley's dislike may have been reserved for Huysmans's later, neo-Catholic writings such as *La Cathédrale*, which seem to have been part of Raffalovich's arsenal in his attempts to convert Beardsley to Catholicism.

⁶⁷ 'Je suis obligé de tout inventer, ne voulant sous aucun prétexte me servir de la vieille friperie grecque classique. [...] Ainsi, dans ma Salomé, je voulais rendre une figure de sibylle et d'enchanteuse religieuse avec un caractère de mystère. J'ai alors conçu le costume qui est comme une chasse': Cooke (2002), p. 99.

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in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings!... It is like the vermilion that the Moabites find in the mines of Moab, the vermilion that the kings take from them. It is like the bow of the King of the Persians, that is painted with vermilion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth... Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.⁶⁸

This 'enshrinement' of the body of Iokanaan in metaphorical jewels, this tension between eroticism and decorative artificiality exemplified here is also, according to Arthur Symons, one of the defining characteristics not only of Moreau's *Salomé*, but of his portrayal of women in general: '[Salomé] is not a woman, but a gesture, a symbol of delirium; a fixed dream transforms itself into cruel and troubling hallucinations of colour; strange vaults arch over her, dim and glimmering, pierced by shafts of light, starting in blood-red splendours, through which she moves robed in flowers or jewels, in hieratic lasciviousness'.⁶⁹ Yet Wilde subverts the male artist's prerogative to imprison the body of a desired woman in a bejewelled shrine by endowing Salomé herself with the power the Moreau claimed over her.

Beardsley's response to Moreau's image and Wilde's text is a complex and uneasy mixture of allegiance and parody, further complicated by the fact that elements of Wilde's text are themselves parodic (notably Salomé's rhapsody of desire, which parodies the Song of Songs). The textual parody has already been explored extensively, with sometimes contradictory conclusions, by Linda Gertner Zatlín and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, and I shall only touch upon it briefly here.⁷⁰ Beardsley comes closest to out-and-out caricature of Moreau's tendency to encrust every surface, human and architectural, with gems in the title page and border for the list of pictures [Figures 91, R.274 and 92, R.276], in which imbricated, stylised, highly sexualised roses are substituted for stones, swarming over every surface; the parody is most grotesque in the looping of garlands of roses across the chest of the chortling herm – possibly a twist on the statue of Diana of Ephesus looming in the shadows behind Herod's throne in Moreau's *Salomé*? – to whom Beardsley has given extra eyes in place of nipples and navel.⁷¹ Indeed, the self-consciously excessive decorativeness of

the *Salome* illustrations, coupled with a greater familiarity with Moreau's stylistic

⁶⁸ O. Wilde, *Salome* (London, 1894), p. 53.

⁶⁹ Symons (1906), p. 76. Symons was ultimately critical of Moreau's vision, considering it sterile and repetitive, but conceding that 'at least he lived his own life, among his chosen spectres' (p. 86).

⁷⁰ Kooistra (1995), pp. 130-46; L. G. Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 90-96.

⁷¹ Zatlin (1997), p. 65, also notes the possible influence of another Moreau (the 18th-century engraver Moreau le Jeune) on the roses in *Salome*.

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quirks, may help to explain why Beardsley's reputation blossomed so quickly in France, with remarkably little of the lag that characterised the cross-Channel spread of the reputations of some of his contemporaries.⁷² Conversely, Beardsley's emphasis on the theatrical and the grotesque appears to amplify, to the point of parody and subversion, conservative British (mis)perceptions of Moreau's art. French and Belgian critics as early as 1893 singled out the decorative nature of Beardsley's work for praise, rather than condemning it as frivolous grotesquery devoid of moral or philosophical import.⁷³ Gabriel Mourey, one of the most influential advocates of antirealist

British art in the 1890s, went still farther to characterise the essence of Beardsley's work as 'intensely decorative cruelty', making the interesting assertion that this was a product of Beardsley's North-European origins.⁷⁴

Mourey's emphasis on the foreignness of Beardsley's elegantly grotesque art represents the flipside of the attacks of the conservative British press on Beardsley's perceived 'Frenchness'. Matei Calinescu has pinpointed the notion of otherness or foreign origin as central in perceptions of the origins of Decadence; nowhere is this better illustrated than in evolving French and British perceptions thereof.⁷⁵ As early as 1856, Delacroix was musing on the inherent tendency toward decadence in England and the Nordic countries and praising Shakespeare as the acme of refinement in times of decadence, presaging Mourey's comments on Beardsley.⁷⁶ Yet Beardsley, in his native country, was frequently the victim of xenophobic hostility; although such attacks increased, not surprisingly, following Wilde's disgrace and his involuntary entanglement therein, he and his work (inseparable in moralising Victorian criticism) were judged dangerously foreign, for which read French or Francophile. Harry Quilter vilified Beardsley as a harbinger of evil foreign influence in his attack on the ⁷² See J. Lethève, 'Aubrey Beardsley et la France', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (December 1966), pp. 343-50, for an outline of Beardsley's reception in France during his lifetime, and more recently, J. H. Desmarais, *The Beardsley Industry: the Critical Reception in England and France, from 1893 to 1914* (Aldershot, 1998).

⁷³ See for example 'L'Image', *Le Livre et l'image 2* (August 1893), pp. 47-64, and G. Combaz, 'Aubrey Beardsley', *L'Art moderne* (1 April 1894), pp. 101-103.

⁷⁴ 'Une cruauté intensément décorative dans sa manière de s'exprimer, le dénote septentrional': Mourey (1895), p. 269.

⁷⁵ M. Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC, 1987), pp. 167-69.

⁷⁶ Delacroix wrote: 'On the need of refinement in times of decadence. The greatest spirits cannot avoid it. . . . The English, the Germanics have always pushed us in that direction. Shakespeare is very refined. Painting with a great depth of feeling which ancient artists neglected or did not know, he discovered a small world of emotions which all men in all times have experienced in a state of confusion' (*Journal*, ed. A. Joubin, Paris 1932, p. 439, cited in Calinescu (1987), p. 167).

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latest wave of anti-realist art, 'The Gospel of Intensity';⁷⁷ most famously, Margaret Armour, after savaging the 'ugliness' and 'corruption' of Beardsley's drawings and forecasting in them Britain's impending moral downfall, proposed the following novel solution: 'Why not hoist the Decadents altogether off our shoulders and saddle them

on to France? She has a nice broad back for such things, and Mr. Beardsley won't be the last straw by many.'⁷⁸ Beardsley's warmer reception in France – perhaps bolstered by the parallels between his work and that of Moreau, an artist both sanctioned by the Académie and the darling of Decadent and Symbolist circles – unwittingly gives credence to her recommendation.

Japanese art was viewed with as much, if not more, suspicion as French by conservative British critics,⁷⁹ and Beardsley's open and diverse borrowing of its motifs and technique has often been considered part of his project to *épater les bourgeois*.⁸⁰ Yet the Japoniste flourishes on which Beardsley prided himself – and to which Wilde strenuously objected – represent not so much a riposte to Moreau's ornamental eclecticism as a means of entering into a dialogue with the painter's work and ultimately destabilising it. For Moreau, while not an enthusiastic collector of Japanese objects like some of his contemporaries, had also absorbed some of the lessons of Japanese art, and although it only seems to have overtly informed his work during a relatively brief period in the late 1860s and early 1870s, some of what he had learned filtered into his later work in subtler form. His eyes were opened to Japanese woodblock prints by the displays at the 1867 Exposition Universelle, and shortly thereafter he purchased an album of Edo-period prints, *Ô Yamato Azuma Nishiki-e*, from the noted Parisian Japanese art dealer Desoye.⁸¹ He only made two direct watercolour copies after prints, in 1869; significantly, given his fascination with androgynous figures, the images he chose to copy were a portrait of a male Kabuki

⁷⁸ Armour (1896), p. 11.

⁷⁹ On Victorian anxiety over the perceived 'indecent' of Japanese art, see T. Watanabe, *High Victorian Japonisme* (Bern, 1991), pp. 146, 161-62. One of the harshest detractors of Japanese art in Britain was the American James Jackson Jarves, who, in an article in the *Art Journal*, not only deplored 'the obscene Art of Japan' but went so far as to claim that such obscenity was a logical result of 'wrong culture' and the primitivism of the Japanese people who had 'no true sense of the beautiful': J. J. Jarves, 'Japanese Art', *Art Journal* 7 (June 1869), p. 182. The parallels with contemporary culturally based

criticism of French art scarcely need be pointed out.

⁸⁰ It was certainly seen as such during Beardsley's lifetime; the 'Japanee-Rossetti girl' on his poster for *A Comedy of Sighs* was derided in verse ('Ars Postera') by Owen Seaman in *Punch* (April 21 1894).

⁸¹ Paris, Grand Palais and Tokyo, National Museum of Western Art, *Le Japonisme*, exh. cat. (1988), p. 149.

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actor [Figure 93] and two *onnagata*, or female impersonators [Figure 94].⁸² Yet the album seems to have led to the lightening and brightening of his palette, which up to this point had more or less bowed to academic dictates and had avoided pure, unmixed colour. His debt to Japanese prints is clearest when we place *Sapho*⁸³ alongside a print from the album by Kunisada, *Genji taking the air in summer on the Sumida* [Figure 95]. As Lacambre has noted, Moreau adapted the red-and-blue floral kimono of the woman in the foreground and the graceful, mannered pose and gesture of the woman in the boat in the middle distance for *Sapho*,⁸⁴ conflating classical subject, Renaissance setting and Japanese motifs. While examinations of Moreau's Japonisme normally cease with *Sapho*, I would argue that undercurrents continue to be felt in some of his later work, most significantly in *L'Apparition*. Salome's highly artificial posture – the torso twisted towards the viewer, the head bowed in profile, the arm extended sideways – is a modification of the pose of the woman in the middle ground in Kunisada's print, a pose which appears in various forms in Edo prints and, while often the province of women, was not reserved solely for them, as is the case for the

servant boy in this illustration by Sukenobu [Figure 96].⁸⁵ Beardsley, the devotee of *ukiyo-e*, could well have been cognisant of the same sources as Moreau and have perceived their influence on his work.

The prevalence of androgynous figures in both Moreau's representations of Salome and in the Japanese art on which he and Beardsley drew provides a useful lens through which to view Beardsley's responses to Moreau's figuration of the narrative and character of Salome. The role of costume in revealing or disguising a figure's sex is crucial in all three cases. As Zatlin notes, the fact that both men and women wore kimono and the subtle differences between male and female hairstyles meant that for the uninitiated Western viewer (and even some initiated ones), it was all but impossible to distinguish between male and female figures.⁸⁶ Although the androgynous qualities of Moreau's male figures has received some attention, the

⁸² Both sheets are inscribed at the bottom, 'Exposition japonaise – Palais de l'Industrie'; the originals are unknown, but may be the work of Utagawa Kunisada: *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁸³ Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Raffalovich correspondence, letter dated 9 September 1873; see also Sloan (2006), pp. 328 and 331. *Sapho*, incidentally, was the first of Moreau's works to be subjected to the attentions of a *litterateur* when its first owner, Marie Raffalovich, wrote a florid, morbidly romantic fairy tale after it

⁸⁴ Lacambre (1998a), p. 113.

⁸⁵ On Sukenobu's influence on Beardsley, see Zatlin (1997), p. 123.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-67. This does not, of course, apply to shunga (erotic prints) in which both men and women are depicted with outsize genitalia (a feature adopted by Beardsley in his illustrations for *Lysistrata*).

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capacity of costume and ornament to denote, disguise or even blur gender also informs *Salomé* and *L'Apparition* to a degree heretofore little examined. This is perhaps a consequence of the blinding power of Huysmans's virtuoso description of the paintings in *À rebours*, which Peter Cooke has justly described as their 'literary prison'.⁸⁷ We may assume, however, that Beardsley, who would have known both the paintings (if only in reproduction) and *À rebours*, would have been alive to the inconsistencies in Huysmans's vision, and his *Salomé* illustrations suggest that he eagerly seized on these contradictions. Place both pictures alongside the celebrated passage, and the degree of license taken by Huysmans is remarkable:

(on *Salomé*:) With a withdrawn, solemn, almost august expression on her face, she begins the lascivious dance which is to rouse the aged Herod's dormant senses: her breasts undulate, the nipples hardening at the touch of her whirling necklaces; the strings of diamonds glitter against her moist flesh; her bracelets, her belts, her rings spit fiery sparks . . .

(on *L'Apparition*:) With a gesture of horror, Salome tries to thrust away the terrifying vision which holds her nailed to the spot, balanced on the tips of her toes; her eyes dilate, her right hand claws convulsively at her throat. She is almost naked . . . A gorgerin grips her waist like a corselet, and like an outsize clasp a marvellous jewel sparkles and flashes in the cleft between her breasts; lower down, a girdle encircles her hips . . . finally, where the body shows bare between gorgerin and girdle, the belly bulges out, dimpled by a navel which resembles a graven seal of onyx, with its milky hues and its rosy fingernail tints.⁸⁸

Huysmans not only deliberately eroticises Salome's body and gestures, he introduces details and actions from his own imagination inimical to Moreau's principles of *belle inertie* (beautiful inertia) and anti-theatricality.⁸⁹ Moreau's Salome, first of all, does not actually dance; her static pose and blank expression, as well as being anti-theatrical, suggests the continuing influence of Japanese prints. She is

instead depicted in a hieratic and physically impossible pose, almost floating on the tips of her toes, her drapery hovering behind her as if frozen rather than as a result of
⁸⁷ Cooke (2003), p. 131. Symons was also wary of Huysmans, suspecting him of latching onto Moreau's work because he was 'the painter of all others best suited to evoke his own eloquence' (Symons, 1906, pp. 72-73).

⁸⁸ Huysmans (1884), pp. 143, 147.

⁸⁹ My use of this term is informed by Michael Fried's essay 'Art and Objecthood' (*Artforum* 5, Summer 1967, pp. 12-23); although Fried's arguments centre on Minimalist sculpture, his location of 'theatricality' in the ability of a work of art to both distance and confront the viewer is equally applicable in the case of Moreau. For a discussion of the origins of the anti-theatrical in Moreau's work, see Cooke (2003), pp. 104-110.

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whirling movement;⁹⁰ although her dance is the painting's ostensible subject, its choreography is left to the imagination and only suggested symbolically. We should recall that Wilde also tells us nothing of the Dance of the Seven Veils – the central action of the play – beyond the fact of its performance.⁹¹ Secondly, this majestically hieratic figure enshrined in her jewels and opaque, metallic veils is far from being the voluptuous feminine ideal described by Huysmans. Not only are her breasts chastely concealed by her costume (so much so that her torso appears flat), her arms and shoulders are as muscular as those of the executioner, although significantly paler – Moreau apparently nodding to the archaic convention of giving women fairer skin than men – and almost as solidly columnar as the pillars supporting Herod's palace. Her face is a smooth, impassive mask, with a faint suggestion of melancholy, not unlike that of the Thracian maiden in *Orphée*. Its counterpart in Beardsley's *Salome* is not to be found in any of the depictions of Salome herself, but in the face of the ephebic, homosexual Page in *A Platonic Lament* [Figure 97, R.284], mourning over the body of Narraboth who had killed himself out of unrequited love for Salome. That the dead Narraboth is supported by a jester who appears to be masturbating with his free hand while casting a lewd glance at the viewer neatly implicates the reader as voyeur and subverts expectations of the nature of the object of desire.⁹²

If Salome-by-way-of-Huysmans exists at all in Beardsley's world, she appears not in the guise of Salome herself, but as the ferociously brazen but ultimately pathetic Herodias. By rotating the figure from profile to full face, the decorous selfcontainment of Moreau's Salome gives way to aggressive confrontation. Beardsley inflates the rigid hieratism of *Salomé* to an outrageous degree in Herodias's columnar, phallic body, jewel-studded hair and haughty expression; the 'jewelled gorgerin' described by Huysmans as emphasising Salome's breasts is given to her instead to support the outsize globular breasts whose appearance corresponds more closely to

⁹⁰ In most of Moreau's studies from life for the dancing Salome, the model is shown supporting her weight on one or both flat feet; due to the impossibility of posing a model on point for any length of time, he fashioned a wood and wax model in that pose and seems to have used it not only in the 1876 *Salomé* but in the later variants in which she appears on point (Lacambre, 1998a, p. 160).

⁹¹ See Kooistra (1995), pp. 144-45, on the symbolic significance for Wilde of the invisible dance; it is worth noting that in March 1893 (the month before Beardsley's homage to the play, *J'ai baisé ta bouche Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche*, was published in the inaugural issue of *The Studio*), he inscribed a presentation copy of the original French edition, 'For Aubrey: for the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance' (cited in *ibid.*, p. 131).

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 135, notes the prevalence of the technique in the *Salome* illustrations, which includes the caricature of Wilde in *Enter Herodias*, the putti in *The Eyes of Herod*, and the lute player in *The Stomach Dance*.

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Huysmans's overheated portrait than to Moreau's depiction. (Even in *L'Apparition*, when Salome is shown semi-nude, her breasts and belly are devoid of the sensuous modelling on which Huysmans dwelt at length and which on close examination seems

to be the product of wishful thinking.) Yet, as Kooistra points out, Herodias's power is revealed, on close examination, to be illusory: armless and apparently legless, she depends on the foetal grotesque, who tugs at the outlines of her sleeve as if upon the strings of a marionette, for support;⁹³ the effeminate page's noticeable lack of arousal in the first, suppressed, version of the scene undermines her sexuality, the only power she and her daughter wield in a patriarchal society. The image functions as an ironic critique of Moreau's self-conscious, wooden hieratism, Huysmans's overwrought prose, and Wilde's portentous drama at once.

Of course, Beardsley's clearest reworking of *Salomé* and *L'Apparition* comes in his renderings of the same scenes, *The Stomach Dance* [Figure 98, R.280] and *The Climax* [Figure 99, R.286]. As much as Wilde may have objected to Beardsley's deliberate dashing of the reader's expectations of a mystical, symbolic ritual dance by substituting the more earthbound 'Stomach Dance', the illustration in fact serves as proof that Beardsley understood Wilde's text and its departure from the tradition represented by Moreau. One of Wilde's most shocking innovations was to transform Salome from the pawn of Herodias who dances to fulfil her mother's desire, as recounted in the biblical tale and adhered to by artists for centuries, into an independent woman who acts on her own terms, motivated by her own sexual desires.⁹⁴ Beardsley reflects this paradigm shift in *The Stomach Dance* by substituting for Moreau's full-profile pose, which, in tandem with her lowered eyelids, deprives Salome of agency and reduces her to being the object of the dual gaze of Herod and the viewer of the painting, a confrontational frontal pose which places Salome in control and a steely, passionless glare that confounds Herod's, and by extension the viewer's, impulse to objectify her. Yet Beardsley has chosen to retain and amplify several features of Moreau's image, most notably the motionlessness of Salome's body and her unnatural pose, not merely balanced on the tips of her toes but apparently floating, possibly inspired by the prevalence of floating figures in Japanese

⁹³ Ibid., p. 139. Zatlin (1990), p. 87, conversely sees Herodias as a figure of power and nonconformity, but one whose use of her body to control Herod brings her no pleasure.

⁹⁴ Indeed, Wilde also portrays Herodias with greater sympathy, or at least with greater ambiguity, showing her not only refusing to collude with Herod's lust for Salome but actively discouraging her from dancing for him (pp. 80-90).

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prints; the only suggestion of movement is in the outward thrust of her stomach and the single outswung veil. For whom, or what, is this Salome dancing? For dominance over her hated stepfather, for the right to his power? For the achievement of her vengeful desire for Iokanaan's head? For her own pleasure? Although the veil projecting from between her thighs and apparently spouting a stream of roses has been likened to an erect penis ejaculating,⁹⁵ her frozen attitude, her cold, almost unappealing semi-nudity and her stony expression belie any enjoyment of pleasure. She remains as enigmatic, albeit in different terms, as Moreau's Salome.

The Climax, however, represents an explicit challenge to the rigid antitheatricity of *L'Apparition*. Although one might balk at my describing the latter work as anti-theatrical, given the dramatic event depicted, I would argue that Salome's expression of horror, while more emotive than that which Moreau usually gave his female protagonists, remains mask-like and conventional, the blood coating the floor as much a part of the scene's decorative scheme as the wall mosaics. Beardsley again opts for an exaggeratedly weightless Salome, this time suspended in midair, and retains Moreau's unorthodox depiction of the head of John the Baptist afloat rather than resting on a silver charger; the treatment of the streaming blood is, if anything, even more boldly decorative. Yet his Salome, rather than recoiling from the head in

horror, grasps it in both hands as a cruel smile distorts her features. Significantly, in contrast to the unveiled, semi-naked Salome of *L'Apparition*, sexualised by her immoral actions, this Salome is draped neck to ankle, all indications of gender effaced, the consequence of her being stripped of her sexuality – or at least, the means of satisfying it – at the moment she achieves her revenge. Indeed, Beardsley goes a step further than Moreau in the final image, the supremely ironic *cul-de-lampe* [Figure 100, R.283]. Depicted as literally the direct result of Herod's terse order, 'Kill that woman!', the image is positioned directly beneath the stage direction 'The soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields Salome, daughter of Herodias, princess of Judea' and is, significantly, the only time Salome is shown completely naked. This is also the only time her body conforms to contemporary notions of beauty (or at least to Symbolist notions thereof, with her slender limbs, small breasts and abundant hair in snail-shell curls); as Zatlin suggests, it makes a mocking commentary on Victorian sexual politics, in that Salome's beauty and femininity, sacrificed when she insisted on

⁹⁵ I. Fletcher, *Aubrey Beardsley* (Boston, 1987), p. 87.

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assuming power, are only legitimised by the total passivity of death.⁹⁶ Perhaps not even Moreau would have dared go as far.

Symons, paying tribute to Beardsley, declared that 'in the *Salome* drawings, in most of *The Yellow Book* drawings, we see Beardsley under this mainly Japanese influence; with, now and later, in his less serious work, the but half-admitted influence of what was most actual, perhaps most temporary, in the French art of the day'.⁹⁷ While he never specified what French art had shaped Beardsley's oeuvre, it seems fair to assume, given his own knowledge of the Symbolist and Decadent literary and artistic milieu, that he detected in Beardsley's catholic borrowing and rebellious, mould-breaking intermingling of disparate sources a debt to Moreau's art greater than he might ever have been willing to acknowledge.

⁹⁶ Zatlin (1990), p. 95.

⁹⁷ A. Symons, *From Toulouse-Lautrec to Rodin, with Some Personal Impressions* (London, 1929), p. 189.

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Chapter 6

The Condition of music: Fantin-Latour, Redon, Beardsley and Wagnerian prints

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it.¹

In 1890, Henri Fantin-Latour exhibited one of his most important paintings inspired by Wagner's operas, *Scène première de l'Or du Rhin* [Figure 101], at the Royal Academy.² To judge from the mass of press notices assiduously assembled by Fantin's wife, Victoria, it met with the approval, albeit the misunderstanding, of the majority of London critics, as epitomised by this notice from the *Athenaeum* which praised his painterly skill but dismissed the picture as a mere representation of a theatrical scene:

Full of beautiful colour and tone, vigorous, and graceful, but not quite innocent of the theatre (for this the subject may be responsible), is M. Fantin-Latour's *Première Scène du 'Rheingold' de R. Wagner* (1109). The nymphs are disporting themselves in the richly toned light and shadow of the rocky bank above the Rhine, as they hover over the concealed treasure and glitter in the golden beams of sunlight slanting from above; the evil genius watches them from below.³

This was not the first time Fantin had displayed work inspired by Wagnerian themes in London; he had been quietly submitting prints to the annual Black and White Exhibitions at the Dudley Gallery since 1877, the year after he first began to devote himself seriously both to the technique of transfer lithography and to subjects drawn from Wagner's oeuvre. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, notice in the British press was consistent but limited, and, as Michel Hoog has remarked, is better used as a barometer of Fantin's position on the critical radar rather than as an indicator of a growing acceptance or appreciation of his programme.⁴

¹ Pater (1986), p. 86; original emphasis.

² Fantin occasionally titled his Wagnerian pictures with the original German; otherwise he translated the titles into French. I have preserved these idiosyncrasies.

³ 'The Royal Academy (Third and Concluding Notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 3265 (24 May 1890), p. 678. It is worth bearing in mind that more progressive commentators, such as Arthur Symons, concurred with this reviewer in their dissatisfaction with the inability of Fantin's imaginative subjects to totally transcend any suspicion of theatricality; Symons lamented that 'the lithographs snatch a filled cup too hastily and part of the music is spilled' and '[they are] rarely, I think, on a level, as pictorial invention, with the music which [they] set [themselves] to interpret': A. Symons, *Studies on Modern Painters* (New York, 1925), pp. 31-32.

⁴ The single greatest compendium of contemporary criticism of Fantin is to be found in the three volumes of press cuttings assembled by his wife Victoria, now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale 201

If Fantin's Wagnerian subjects were deemed interesting oddities by mainstream British observers among the portraits and floral still lifes that served as his bread and butter,⁵ their significance, along with those of Odilon Redon, was not lost on British art's only noteworthy Wagnerite, Aubrey Beardsley. Beardsley's fascination with Wagner dates from the outset of his brief career; his letters attest to the dedication with which he attended performances at Covent Garden and, tellingly, one of his earliest surviving drawings, heavily influenced by his then-mentor Burne-Jones, depicts a despairing Tannhäuser struggling toward Rome and the hope of absolution [Figure 102, R.19]. However, subsequent renderings of Wagnerian subjects, especially scenes drawn from *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhäuser* and *Das Rheingold* show Beardsley moving away from the meticulously detailed medievalism of Burne-Jones towards a new aesthetic that reveals the influence of the French Wagnerites Fantin and Redon.

Beardsley's Wagnerian pictures have occupied a crucial place in recent monographic studies.⁶ Yet remarkably, the most comprehensive study of his Wagnerism to date, Emma Sutton's *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (2002) makes virtually no reference to either Fantin or Redon, or to the debates on Wagner, music and the visual arts that galvanised the French avant-garde in the 1880s and 1890s.⁷ The blame for this lacuna does not lie entirely with Beardsley scholars. Redon's presence and reception in Britain remains little studied, and as for Fantin, although his crucial sojourns in London in the 1860s have been a topic of scholarly discourse ever since the publication of Adolphe Jullien's biography in 1909, his links with Britain in later life – that is, after Wagnerian and other musical subjects de France (henceforth BNF ACP). For Hoog's comments on its usefulness, see Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 22.

⁵ As with other French antinaturalists, Claude Phillips was more open to Fantin's art than most of his peers, although, in common with many French critics, he complained that Fantin's later musical subjects lacked inspiration and conviction; see for example C. Phillips, 'The Salons. Salon of the Champs Elysées', *Magazine of Art* 17 (1894), p. 327. It is also interesting to note that at least two British critics considered Fantin's imaginative works similar but inferior to those of Watts; see BNF ACP vol. 2, cuttings from *Fashions of Today* (1886) and *The Times* (1886), p. 234.

⁶ See for example M. Heyd, *Aubrey Beardsley: Symbol, Mask and Self-Irony* (New York, 1986), pp. 169-90, Zatlín (1990), pp. 75-79 and 195-201, and C. Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley: Dandy of the*

Grotesque (Oxford, 1995), pp. 33, 139-41, 166-68.

⁷ Sutton mentions Fantin twice in passing, Redon and the *Revue wagnérienne* only once (E. Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s*, Oxford 2002, pp. 4, 12, 182). While I do not wish to demean Sutton's discoveries and arguments, which have been invaluable to my research for this chapter, I contend that her exclusion of French Wagnerism from her discussion impedes a fuller contextual understanding of Beardsley's Wagnerian pictures and prose.

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began to occupy more and more of his production – have received far less attention.⁸ Furthermore, the protean nature of his oeuvre and the impossibility of pigeonholing it – naturalist? Symbolist? Realist? proto-Impressionist? conservative? avant-garde? – has meant that modernist readings of his work have focused on the portraits and still lifes, which conform more closely to notions of 'progress', to the exclusion of the apparent aberrations of the imaginative works. Likewise, recent scholarship on Beardsley's Wagnerism, although it serves as a corrective to the Francocentric outlook that has coloured the standard accounts of Wagner's role in the development of Symbolism,⁹ unintentionally echo the prejudices and parochialism of British critics in the 1890s by concentrating on the relationship of Beardsley's work to British debates on Wagner and on Germany, the performance of Wagner's operas in London, and Victorian sexual politics, with little reference to the impact of French Wagnerism on this most ardently Francophile of British artists.

Although I do not wish to discount the importance of these issues in shaping Beardsley's response to Wagner's operas, I would argue that his Wagnerism needs to be viewed through the lens of concurrent developments in France to be fully understood. With his voracious appetite for French art and literature, his extensive contacts in Parisian artistic and literary circles and his close working relationships with key ambassadors of the French avant-garde such as Arthur Symons, Beardsley almost certainly absorbed his Wagnerism coloured by French concerns, assumptions and debates. Moreover, his adoption of a French Rococo style for both some of his Wagnerian images and for his unfinished retelling of *Tannhäuser*, *Under the Hill* resulted, as I aim to demonstrate, as much from the influence of Fantin's favoured mode for his own imaginative subjects and the embrace of the eighteenth century by the French avant-garde as it did from Beardsley's own explorations in this field. This chapter does not attempt to present either an exhaustive survey of Wagnerism in France and Britain, or of Wagnerian imagery in either artist's oeuvre. Instead, my intention is to examine some points of interaction between Beardsley and France in

⁸ A. Jullien, *Fantin-Latour: sa vie et ses amitiés* (Paris, 1909), pp. 11-40 and 91-103, is particularly important in respect to Fantin's links with Britain in the 1860s in its inclusion of correspondence from this period. Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 212-14, discuss several of Fantin's Wagnerian pictures (including *Scène première de l'Or du Rhin*) in relation to Beardsley's work, but not in much depth.

⁹ See for example C. Morice, *Demain, questions d'esthétique* (Paris, 1888), pp. 26-27, and idem, *La littérature de toute à l'heure* (Paris, 1889), pp. 195-200; Mauclair (1901), pp. 171-73; and Lehmann (1968), pp. 195-96. Raynaud (1918), vol. 1, pp. 117-18 and vol. 3, pp. 166-68, discusses both the centrality of British Aestheticism and Wagner to the development of Symbolism in France, but makes no mention of Wagner's influence across the Channel.

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general, and Beardsley, Fantin and Redon, in order to throw more light on the complex mixture of political, social and aesthetic discourses that informed all three artists' interest in the intersection of music and the visual arts and their Wagnerian pictorial languages. I have limited my discussion primarily to images inspired by *Tannhäuser* and *Das Rheingold*. By exploring several elements of this interchange – the shifting political ramifications of Wagner's operas on both sides of the Channel from the 1870s onward; theoretical debate on the synthesis of the arts; performance practices; the impact of innovations in printmaking technique and the dissemination of

artistic reputations through prints – and culminating with a case study of Fantin’s and Beardsley’s reworking of eighteenth-century motifs in their interpretation of *Tannhäuser*, I hope to demonstrate the significance of French Wagnerism to Beardsley’s own.

A Composer for all seasons: Wagner in French and English

As I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, artists and their work sometimes undergo ‘translation’ in foreign countries. Yet if the French perception of Rossetti was fairly benign, Wagner outside his own country prompted an altogether more visceral response, and a corresponding need to mould him in the image of whatever cause he was perceived to serve.¹⁰ Yet any survey of Wagnerism in France and, to a lesser extent, in Britain, uncovers a bewildering variety of cultural and political factions who embraced (or rejected) Wagner for wildly varying reasons.¹¹ How – and why – did the same composer inspire Fantin’s nebulous lithographs and Georges Rochegrosse’s spectacularly vulgar 1894 Salon showpiece *Le Chevalier des fleurs* [Figure 103], provide the soundtrack for both the first Salon de la Rose + Croix and the decidedly more earthbound setting of the bourgeois salon, provoke Baudelaire’s paeon to the voluptuous and orgiastic paganism of *Tannhäuser* and P. T. Forsyth’s earnest tribute

¹⁰ My outline of the politics of Wagnerism in France is much indebted to G. D. Turbow, ‘Art and politics: Wagnerism in France’, in D. C. Large and W. Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca and London, 1984), pp. 134-66.

¹¹ Two such surveys on Wagnerism in the arts in France are M. Kahane and N. Wild, eds., *Wagner et la France* (exh. cat., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1983) and Paris, Musée du Petit Palais and Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, *Marianne et Germania, 1789-1889. Un siècle de passions francoallemandes*

(exh. cat., 1997). The only comparable survey of Wagnerism in England is A. D. Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (London, 1979), which is chiefly concerned with Wagner’s sociopolitical significance rather than his impact on the visual arts (perhaps not surprisingly, given that Wagnerian art in Britain had a sole serious practitioner, Beardsley).

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to Wagner as a herald of the return of Christianity to art?¹² And how did a nation which accorded Wagner such a shabby reception during his lifetime come to be the crucible of Wagnerian art and theory?

It is my contention that the flowering of Wagnerian art and criticism in France over the last quarter of the nineteenth century constituted a means of neutralising Wagner’s revolutionary and, in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, dangerously German qualities. This depoliticising of Wagner led to the gradual disappearance of Wagner the composer, subsumed into a collection of conceptual tenets that could be, and were, co-opted by an avant-garde that became increasingly conservative as the century drew to a close. It is worthwhile reviewing Wagner’s reception and shifting political significance in France from the 1840s, charting against it some of the landmarks of his adoption by artists and writers.

Against the turbulent backdrop of the revolutions of 1848 and 1851, Wagner paradoxically enjoyed the support not only of Napoléon III and his circle, but also of revolutionaries and republicans – much discussed at republican salons such as Juliette Adam’s, he was even dubbed ‘the Courbet of music’ by Champfleury.¹³ However, at this point his operas had yet to receive a full-scale production in Paris, and his supporters were in essence backing a composer whose works they knew either on paper, in the form of chamber performances for which they had never been intended, or not at all. The composer himself, during his 1859-1861 sojourn in Paris, had conducted a concert, attended by Fantin and apparently well received, of extracts from *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Lohengrin*;¹⁴ buoyed by this success, his hopes of Parisian acclaim were dashed by the disastrous staging of

Tannhäuser in 1861, which was greeted with jeers and brawling and was forced to close after only three performances. Wagner's ill fate in France might have been sealed if not for the passionate advocacy of Baudelaire, whose article 'Richard

¹² Baudelaire's comparison of the overtures of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* is notable for his use of an analogy to painting, perhaps the first in French criticism: 'dans la partie voluptueuse et orgiaque de l'ouverture de *Tannhäuser*, l'artiste avait mis autant de force, développé autant d'énergie que dans la peinture de la mysticité qui caractérise l'ouverture de *Lohengrin*' (Baudelaire, 1992, p. 466).

¹³ Turbow (1984), pp. 140-46.

¹⁴ V. Bajou, *Fantin-Latour et ses musiciens, La Revue de la musicologie* 76, no. 1 (1990), p. 46. The concerts took place 25 January, 1 and 8 February 1860 at the Théâtre des Italiens. Michèle Barbe claims that Fantin in fact first heard Wagner's music (the Wedding March from *Lohengrin*) at one of Padeloup's *concerts populaires*, either 3 January or 13 February 1861: M. Barbe, 'Fantin-Latour et la musique' (Ph.D. thesis, Université de Paris IV, 1992), vol. 1, p. 63. In any case, we may safely assume that Fantin had heard Wagner's music performed before the disastrous premier of *Tannhäuser* on 13 March 1861.

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Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris' appeared in the 1 April issue of the *Revue européenne* and, with its explication of Wagner's theory of the total work of art informed by his own vision of the synthesis (not the union) of the arts in his 1857 poem 'Correspondances', mediated most subsequent Symbolist responses.¹⁵ Fantin apparently had bought a ticket to the cancelled fourth performance.¹⁶ The following year, never having attended a full production of the opera and having only heard a few further extracts from the above-mentioned operas at Jules Etienne Padeloup's recently inaugurated *concerts populaires*, he chose as the subject of his first attempt at lithography the second scene of the first act of *Tannhäuser*, reworking the scene in a large-scale oil shown at the 1864 Salon [Figure 104].¹⁷ Largely ignored by critics – partly because overshadowed by the controversial *Hommage à Delacroix* but also, one suspects, because of the anti-Wagnerian sentiment still aroused by memories of the 1861 debacle¹⁸ – the painting was purchased by Alexander 'Aleco' Ionides, brother of the forward-thinking collector Constantine Alexander Ionides and, perhaps more importantly in the present instance, brother-in-law of the German musician Edward Dannreuther, a key promoter of Wagner in Britain and, in the 1870s, a recipient of Fantin's Wagnerian lithographs. Thus, from the outset of his career as a Wagnerian artist, Fantin was implicated as much in the evolution of Wagnerism in Britain as in France.

Such associations were to deepen in the 1870s and 1880s, although not without considerable struggle. Following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Wagner's music was banished from Parisian concert halls, not least thanks to the fiercely Francophobe composer's rubbing of salt in French wounds with the 1870 publication of his malicious screed 'A Capitulation'; even in 1876, a performance of excerpts at one of Padeloup's concerts was roundly booed.¹⁹ Yet if Wagner's *music* met with a frosty reception in the wake of the defeat, his *theories* – or to be more accurate, interpretations thereof – were fast gaining ground. Translation into French

¹⁵ Morice (1889), pp. 196-98, lamented Wagner's emphasis on a union, rather than a synthesis, of the arts, no doubt informed by a Baudelairean paradigm, but he seems to have been motivated by a concern to keep poetry, rather than music, at the top of the hierarchy of the arts ('C'est le malheur de l'Art qui a voulu que Wagner fût plus musicien que poète').

¹⁶ Bajou (1990), p. 46.

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the painting's genesis and initial reception, see Druick and Hoog (1982), pp. 159-60.

¹⁸ On perceptions of *Tannhäuser* in 1864 and Fantin's response to Wagner's brand of 'realism', see J. House, 'Fantin-Latour in 1864: Wagner and Realism', in P. Andraschke and E. Spaud, eds., *Welttheater. Die Künste im 19. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 1992), pp. 248-53.

¹⁹ Turbow (1984), pp. 155-56.

of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* in the 1870s provided not only an alternative vision to the materialism and positivism of Comte and Taine, but a basis for understanding Wagner's theory of the total work of art.²⁰ Schopenhauer posited a hierarchy of the arts, through which man passed in his temporary escape from the tyranny of the Will, with music at the top; whereas the other arts expressed ideas (the objectification of the Will), only music directly expressed Will itself. Pater propounded an essentially Schopenhauerian hierarchy, with each art form 'aspiring' to the state of the increasingly abstract one above it, in 1877, when he added 'The School of Giorgione' to the second edition of *The Renaissance*.²¹ Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, although reliant upon this tradition, challenged it by insisting on the fusion of the different arts at the point at which their individual limits coincided. Yet a full-fledged attempt to formulate a theory of Wagnerian painting would have to wait until the gradual depoliticising of Wagner in the 1880s which paved the way for the founding of the *Revue wagnérienne* in 1885.²²

When Teodor de Wyzewa used his review of the 1885 Salon as a platform on which to propound a definition of Wagnerism in the visual arts, his decision to crown Fantin as the standard-bearer of the new painting was hardly surprising. Rejecting the mass of official Salon painting as hollow and un-Wagnerian, Wyzewa declares, M. Fantin-Latour has consoled us in this misery: first of all, he is a conscious Wagnerist, he knows, admires and celebrates the Master, but above all he has the extreme glory that alone, today, he has resolutely understood the double work possible to the painter: in his great paintings, each of which represents a new victory, he has reproduced, more exactly than all others and more entirely, the objective, real and total life of forms: and he has, in beautiful drawings, written a poem of plastic emotion, communicating strangely gentle and mild emotions to the soul, through a fanciful combination of lines and tints.²³

²⁰ On the significance of Schopenhauer to the development of Wagnerian theory in France, see Kearns (1989), pp. 67-68.

²¹ Pater's essay would probably have been read by key exponents of Wagnerism in France; Mallarmé is recorded as an admirer. See also Chapter 3 on Pater's reception in France.

²² Turbow (1984), pp. 155-56, dates this shift to around 1880; however, Fantin, as I shall discuss further on, returned to Wagnerian subjects several years earlier. That Wagner's music had not entirely lost its controversial charge is demonstrated by the cancellation of a Paris production of *Lohengrin* (only the third production of a Wagner opera in Paris before 1900) in 1887 after a single performance due to fears that it would fuel Boulangist unrest. For a discussion of the *Revue wagnérienne*'s position within the ever-changing constellation of Symbolist *petites revues*, see F. Lucbert, *Entre le voir et le dire. La critique d'art des écrivains dans la presse symboliste en France de 1882 à 1906* (Rennes, 2005).

²³ 'M. Fantin-Latour nous a consolé de cette misère: celui-là, d'abord, est un Wagnériste conscient, connaît, admire, célèbre le Maître, mais il a, surtout, cette extrême gloire, que seul, aujourd'hui, il a résolument compris la double tâche possible au peintre: il a, dans de grands tableaux, dont chacun montre une victoire nouvelle, reproduit, plus exactement que tous et plus entièrement, la vie objective, réelle, totale des formes: et il a, en d'adorables dessins, écrit le poème de l'émotion plastique, communiquant aux âmes des émotions étrangement douces et tièdes, par une combinaison fantaisiste

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Although his definition of Wagnerian painting is embedded in a Salon review, it is interesting to note that all of Wyzewa's Wagnerian artists are French and, for the most part, avant-garde and anti-naturalist: 'a new pastel by M. Degas . . . a painting by M. G. Moreau, the symphonist of refined emotion, or some horrifying drawing by M. Redon, or the exhibition of Old Masters at the Louvre . . . are Wagnerian acts'.²⁴ As James Kearns remarks, 'the tradition which anticipates modernity is a familiar manoeuvre in modernist criticism', and Wyzewa's analysis is a case in point.²⁵ But Wyzewa did more than merely attempt to ground the new painting in a time-honoured

tradition. His claiming of Wagner for French painters and, by extension, France, can be seen as an attempt to not only neutralise the nationalistic controversy stirred by Wagner's music and theory (in itself a political move), but also to sideline Wagner the man and the composer, leaving a set of concepts to be appropriated and, indeed, improved upon by French artists and writers; as A. G. Lehmann put it, 'Wagner's reputation thrived on the absence rather than on the presence of his works in France'.²⁶ This subsuming of Wagner and his music proved the start of a trend, as the *Revue wagnérienne*, over the course of its print run, devoted increasing column inches to poets and critics whose work scarcely pertained to Wagner and laid itself open to charges that it had become a mouthpiece for Symbolism rather than Wagnerism. Wagner's political significance, when raised at all, was only discussed in the most abstract terms.

If Wyzewa's understanding of Fantin's art and his motives for promoting it were shaped by his own agenda, the *Revue wagnérienne* was crucial in consolidating Fantin's reputation as an anti-naturalist painter-printmaker and in bringing this still little-understood portion of his oeuvre to the attention of an avant-garde audience. While Fantin had been exhibiting his lithographs at the Salon and the Dudley Gallery since 1876, and, as the album of press cuttings makes clear, they had begun to attract critical attention, the size of the Salon and the bias of most mainstream reviews *des lignes et des teintes*. T. de Wyzewa, 'Peinture wagnérienne: le salon de 1885', *Revue wagnérienne* 1 (8 July 1885), p. 155.

²⁴ 'Un pastel nouveau de M. Degas . . . un tableau de M. G. Moreau, le symphoniste des émotions affinées, ou quelque dessin épouvantant de M. Redon, ou cette exposition des vieux Maîtres ouverte au Louvre . . . sont des faits Wagnériens': Ibid.

²⁵ Kearns (1989), p. 73. In 1886 Wyzewa went still further, identifying as Wagnerians 'avant la lettre' Leonardo, Rubens, Rembrandt, Watteau, Delacroix, Puvis, Degas and (surprisingly) Albert Besnard, further extending Wagnerism's French credentials: T. de Wyzewa, 'Notes sur la peinture wagnérienne et le Salon de 1886', *Revue wagnérienne* 2 (8 May 1886), pp. 100-113.

²⁶ Lehmann (1968), p. 195.

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towards oil paintings meant that it was difficult to appreciate them as part of an ongoing body of work.²⁷ However, the magazine not only used Fantin's Wagnerian lithographs as *hors-texte* illustrations, the 8 December number also advertised nineteen of Fantin's lithographs, which, although not intended to be purchased as a group, conveyed a more complete conception of Fantin the Wagnerian, and Fantin the innovative graphic artist,²⁸ a strategy augmented by Adolphe Jullien's decision to use his lithographs to illustrate his biography of Wagner published the following year in Paris and London.

The *Revue wagnérienne*'s British connections have received little attention, but they are worth highlighting to demonstrate the laying of the groundwork for a cross-Channel exchange in this arena. Two of the periodical's founding members were the music critic Houston Stewart Chamberlain (who happened to be Wagner's son-in-law) and the playwright Louis N. Parker, the latter of whom contributed a regular column charting Wagner's fortunes in Britain. In his first column, Parker lamented the current unfashionability of Wagner's operas in his country, which he considered musically backward: 'as for musical drama, it is twenty years behind the times here'. However, he hailed, in distinctly revolutionary terms, the salutary effect he anticipated Wagner would have on British musical life once his music had been disseminated to all those souls sensitive enough to appreciate it:

As for musical drama, here it is twenty years behind the times. We find ourselves in a state of transition; we endeavour to push forward into the light, but we are held back by a crowd of feuilletonists, organists and choir-masters

who know only too well that their reign will cease as soon as we are emancipated. What is most encouraging is that the taste for Wagnerian music begins to be disseminated among the real people. [...] The English people have for Wagner a high respect mixed with a shy curiosity, and a great desire to become acquainted with his work.²⁹

²⁷ Many of the press clippings from the 1870s and early 1880s characterise Fantin's prints as 'fanciful' or 'charming', the implication being that they are minor works (BNP ACP, vol. 1, passim).

²⁸ The lithographs advertised for sale at the offices of the *Revue wagnérienne* were as follows: *Le Vaisseau fantôme, scène finale* (H.60); *Tannhäuser: Scène du Venusberg* (H.1), *Elisabeth* (H.), *L'Etoile du soir* (H.65) and a variation thereof (H.); *Lohengrin: Prélude* (H.39); *Le Rheingold: Les Filles du Rhin* (H.69), *Scène finale* (H.18); *La Walküre: Scène première* (H.23), *Scène finale* (H.24); *Siegfried: Erda* (H.20, H.54, and H.57); *Götterdämmerung: Siegfried et les filles du Rhin* (H.31 and H.72); *Parsifal: Evocation de Kundry* (H.73), *Klingsor et Kundry* (H.43), *Parsifal et les Filles-Fleurs* (H.59); and an allegorical composition, *Musique et poésie*.

²⁹ 'Quant au drame musicale, il est ici de vingt ans en arrière. Nous nous trouvons dans un état de transition; nous nous efforçons de pénétrer plus avant dans la lumière, mais nous sommes retenus par une foule de feuilletonistes, d'organistes et de maîtres de chapelle qui ne savent, que trop bien, que leur règne cessera dès que nous nous serons émancipés. Ce qu'il y a de plus encourageant, c'est que le goût pour la musique wagnérienne commence à se disséminer parmi le vrai peuple. [...] Le peuple anglais a, 209

Following the demise of the *Revue wagnérienne* in 1888, Parker and Chamberlain helped to found a British Wagnerian review, the *Meister* (1888-1895), which like its French precedent devoted as much space to Wagner's philosophy as to his music.³⁰ Chamberlain published a definitive and lavishly illustrated biography of Wagner in German in 1896; the English translation (1897) found its way into Beardsley's collection of Wagneriana, which included a vocal score of *Tristan*, four volumes of the English translation of Wagner's prose works, a copy of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzifal* (the text on which Wagner based his opera) and, significantly, a French collection of illustrated libretti.³¹ Although Beardsley does not mention Jullien's biography or the *Revue wagnérienne* in his letters, there is no reason to suppose that, as an avid Wagnerite and frequenter of book and print shops in both London and Paris, he would not have encountered either the biography, back issues of the magazine, or Fantin's lithographs.

To understand Fantin's own appropriation of Wagner for a French milieu, and the significance of Fantin's Wagnerian imagery on Beardsley, we need to cast our gaze back to 1876. This year proved a turning point for Fantin for three different, but closely intertwined reasons: he first saw a staged production of the *Ring* cycle at the first Bayreuth festival, he married his longstanding fiancée Victoria Dubourg, and he began to experiment with, and soon adopted, a new lithographic technique. All three events would converge to create the Wagnerian artist lauded by Wyzewa a decade later, a contradictory amalgam of cultural conservatism and formal innovation whose originality would in turn inspire Beardsley's work.

Fantin was keenly aware of being one of the few Frenchmen in the audience at Bayreuth, but his awe in the face of his first full-blown experience of Wagner's operas quickly trumped any political misgivings.³² Having only heard excerpts performed at Padeloup's and Lamoreux's concerts, he found the performance of *Das Rheingold* a revelation:

pour Wagner, un haut respect mêlé d'une curiosité timide, et un grand désir de connaître ses oeuvres': L. Parker, 'Correspondance – Angleterre', *Revue wagnérienne* (14 March 1885), pp. 53-54.

³⁰ For an outline of the journal's history, see Sessa (1979), pp. 38-44. Volume 6 (1893) mentions the Wagnerian etchings of Ricardo de Egusquiza, a Spanish artist associated with the Salon de la Rose + Croix, which were apparently selling well in London; perhaps Fantin's lithographs had set a precedent for him?

³¹ Maas et al. (1970), pp. 164, 351, 372, 380. According to Sutton (2002), p. 6, n. 18, the French

volume in question was *Quatre poèmes d'Opéras: 'Le Vaisseau Fantôme', 'Tannhaeuser', 'Lohengrin', 'Tristan et Iseult', Précédés d'une lettre sur la musique de Richard Wagner* (Paris: A. Durand et fils et Calmann Lévy, 1893).

³² Jullien (1909), p. 115.

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There is nothing in my memory more fairy-like, more beautiful, more complete. The movement of the Rhinemaidens swimming about and singing is perfect. The Alberich who climbs up and steals the gold; the lighting, the glimmer of the gold in the water, everything is ravishing. There, as in all the rest, it is the sensation, not the music, not the scenery, not the subject, but something that grips the spectator, or perhaps I should say the listener – although that's not the word either, it is all that, mixed together.³³

Not the least startling element of the experience was something that would seem to an opera-goer today so commonplace as not to merit a mention: Wagner insisted that the house lights be lowered before the performance began, sweeping away mundane reality and enveloping the audience in the music and drama. Much, however, as Fantin would have liked to believe that, in the darkened theatre, 'The house no longer exists; the men and women next to us don't count; . . . even the Kaiser himself is forgotten',³⁴ he discovered to his bitter surprise that in Paris Wagner's music lacked the power to transcend the still-raw wounds of 1870 when, shortly after his return from Bayreuth, he attended the *concert populaire* at which excerpts from several operas were roundly booed. Although he understood that this hostility was the result of political tensions rather than philistinism, Fantin's response was to retreat: as he explained to his friend, the German painter Otto Scholderer, he felt 'a desire to go and live alone, away from all artists, as I don't feel I am like them'.³⁵ His marriage to Victoria Dubourg, a talented pianist who also happened to be fluent in German, allowed him to do precisely this. From this point onward, his experience of Wagner's music shifted from the concert hall and theatre to the privacy of his home.³⁶ This shift from the public and expansive to the domestic and intimate paralleled Fantin's search for a new method of marrying music and the visual.

The first work to emerge from the trip to Bayreuth was a lithograph of the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* [Figure 105, H.8]. The choice of lithography was in itself unusual: etching had been established as the technique of choice for the artist-
³³ 'Je n'ai rien dans mes souvenirs de plus féérique, de plus beau, de plus réalisé. Le mouvement des Filles du Rhin qui nagent en chantant est parfait. L'Alberich qui grimpe, qui ravit l'or ; l'éclairage, la lueur que jette l'or dans l'eau, tout est ravissant. Là, comme dans tout le reste, c'est de la sensation. Pas la musique, pas le décor, pas le sujet ; mais un empoignement du spectateur. Ce n'est pas le mot qu'il faut que spectateur, ni auditeur non plus, c'est tout cela mêlé': Ibid., p. 112.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Fantin to Scholderer, 3 November 1876, quoted in Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 275.

³⁶ Fantin became increasingly reclusive following his marriage, eventually curtailing his concert-going entirely. Jacques-Emile Blanche recounted an episode (presumably in the 1890s) when the artist decided at the last minute to miss a performance of *Les Troyens* for which he had booked tickets, because 'la nuit, le froid, la chaleur, la foule, tout le troublait, dans la perspective de cette sortie inusitée': J.-E. Blanche, *Propos de peintre de David à Degas* (Paris, 1919), p. 37.

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printmaker for the past two decades. Lithography, which had experienced a heyday in France in the 1830s in the hands of caricaturists such as Daumier and Gavarni, was regarded as outmoded by the artistic establishment and treated with suspicion, if not scorn, by many artists because of its popular and commercial roots.³⁷ Furthermore, Fantin was almost certainly aware that the process had been invented by a German, Aloys Senefelder; whether or not he was conscious of it, he was not only taking on German subject matter but a German medium, with the same impulse toward

transformation and appropriation. For his next Wagnerian print, a revisiting of his 1862 lithograph *Tannhäuser: Venusberg* [Figure 106, H.9], Fantin turned to an unorthodox variant – transfer lithography. Although the technique of drawing on a specially prepared paper which, when transferred to the lithographic stone, precluded the age-old problem of the reversal of the image in the finished print, had been employed since the 1860s, its use had been limited to the reproduction of drawings and it was not considered worthy of exploiting for its own innate qualities.³⁸ However, Fantin immediately recognised elements of the process which uniquely suited it to musical subjects. If laid on a textured surface, the thin transfer paper picked up the underlying pattern, and he discovered after experimenting with placing heavy laid paper under the transfer paper before drawing on it that he could combine multiple textures – the fine parallel lines of the laid paper and a coarse and a fine granular texture that could subtly convey the modelling of flesh. Moreover, once the design was transferred to the stone, it remained open to change, and Fantin took advantage of this mutability by further developing the images on the stone with crayon, stump and scraper. Thus, although the lithographs were printed by a master printer, Fantin not only retained control of the image up until its printing, but his chosen process privileged the Romantic ideals of spontaneity of inspiration and artistic autonomy. This affinity with the Romantic trope of genius and inspiration was recognised and reinforced by commentators such as Léonce Bénédicté, who attributed Fantin's preference for the lithographer's crayon to the fact of 'the brush [being] too

³⁷ The 'artificial flavour of 1830' of Fantin's lithographs was in fact a frequent target of unsympathetic British critics; see for example 'Current Art', *Magazine of Art* 10 (1887), p. 110 and 'Current Art', *Magazine of Art* 11 (1888), p. 111. On the status of lithography relative to etching in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Bann (2001), pp. 66, 87, 92-93.

³⁸ According to Germain Hédiard (1906), p. 18, Fantin had first been introduced to transfer lithography by Belfond, Lemercier's master printer. However, he probably first became acquainted with the possibilities of the thin transfer paper supplied by Lemercier for twelve transfer lithographs of Corot's drawings in 1872, and would have been aware of Alfred Robaut's use of the technique for a series of reproductions of Delacroix's drawings, 1864-1870; see Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 283.

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slow today for his hand, impatient to fix instantly to canvas or paper these tender and vibrant improvisations, the continuous dreams of his mind'.³⁹

Still more significantly, the richly varied textures and tonal gradations achieved by this new method gave Fantin the means to pursue a synaesthetic union of music and image.⁴⁰ Gustave Geffroy was one of the first to recognise the importance of his innovations, when Fantin exhibited another scene from *Tannhäuser*, *L'Etoile du soir* [Figure 107, H.48], along with three other musical lithographs, at the 1884 Salon: The artist has attempted the union of the two arts; he has sought by means of the vibrations obtained with black and white to represent scenes he has glimpsed in the harmonies of the musicians he likes; he can be said to have often succeeded; some of these sketches create a musical impression for those who enter into this mysterious world, where feminine figures emerge and evaporate, where heroes suddenly appear. The artist's method is simple: large areas covered in hatching, with tonal gradations and highlights; very smooth transitions between transparent blacks and pure whites. The dream figures appear in the shadows and in the light; they tremble, move, fade away like the musician's languid phrases; they stand out against brilliant backgrounds and suggest . . . an impression of ringing short notes; some of them are as serene and pure as the penetrating melodies of Wagner; others have the sorrowful charm of certain phrases of Berlioz. They represent an astonishing transposition of art, and it required all the skill of Monsieur Fantin-Latour to

accomplish it.⁴¹

Geffroy's mixing of musical and painterly metaphors indicates the success of Fantin's efforts, but it is worth looking more closely at these three lithographs to discover the extent of the 'correspondances' between image and music. The 'vibrations obtained by black and white' not only correspond to Wagner's description of the Rhine in the opening scene with its three levels of sunlit water, dark water and gloomy depths, they

³⁹ 'Le pinceau est trop lent aujourd'hui à sa main impatiente, ces tendres et vibrantes improvisations, qui fixent à chaque instant sur la toile ou sur le papier les rêves continus de son cerveau': L. Bénédite, 'Artistes contemporains: Fantin-Latour', *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* (10 January 1899), published in *Fantin-Latour* (Paris, 1903), p. 21.

⁴⁰ That Fantin considered transfer lithography the province of Wagnerian and other music subjects is borne out in Hédiard's catalogue of his lithographs; out of 193 lithographs, all but a handful (one still life and a few figure groups) are musical subjects.

⁴¹ 'L'artiste a tenté l'union des deux arts; il a voulu représenter par les vibrations obtenues à l'aide du noir et du blanc, les scènes entrevues par lui dans les harmonies de musiciens qu'il aime; on peut dire qu'il y a souvent réussi; certaines de ces esquisses donnent une impression musicale à qui pénètre dans l'air mystérieux où naissent et s'évaporent les formes féminines, où surgissent les héros. Le travail de l'artiste est simple; de grandes surfaces couvertes de hachures, avec des dégradations et des éclaircies; des transitions très douces entre des noirs transparents et des blancs purs. Les figures du rêve apparaissent dans ces ombres et dans ces lumières; elles tremblent, se meuvent, s'effacent comme les phrases alanguies du musicien; elles se profilent sur des fonds éclatants et font... songer aux appels des notes brèves; quelques-unes ont la sérénité et la pureté des mélodies aiguës wagnériennes; d'autres disent le charme souffrant de certaines phrases de Berlioz. C'est là une étonnante transposition d'art, et il a fallu toute la maîtrise de M. Fantin-Latour pour la réaliser.' G. Geffroy, 'Salon de 1884: Treizième article – dessins, aquarelles, pastels', *La Justice* (23 June 1884).

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give visual form to the quivering vibrato of the string sections. One of Wagner's major innovations had been the use of the leitmotif to denote certain characters or milieus; Fantin's awareness of this technique and his desire to create an optical equivalent is apparent in the broken, diffuse, feathery lines echoing the watery leitmotif that pervades the scene. Interestingly, a single drawing in Beardsley's surviving oeuvre – a portrait study in red chalk of the actress Réjane [Figure 108, R.265] – suggests that he may have made a half-hearted stab at imitating Fantin's feathery, oscillating touch. However, this seems to have been a one-off experiment, and the broken, blurred strokes were inimical to Beardsley's elegantly linear style. But Beardsley's technique, if not identical to Fantin's in the letter, reveals similarities in the spirit. Like Fantin, his preferred medium – the line block – was one previously little exploited by artists, and he was the first British artist to use it with a thorough understanding of its capabilities and its differences from wood engraving. Although the line block did not allow for the illusion of shading produced by the conventional method of hatching, it had the advantage of transferring the artistdesigner's

lines from drawing to print with virtually no alteration to the original appearance; the problem of artistic intention mediated by the hand of the engraver, endemic to wood engraving, was thus sidestepped. Thus, despite the fact that Beardsley, from very early on in his career, tailored his drawings to the limitations of the line block, he paradoxically found liberation in its constraints. Although he had used the technique for a vast array of subjects, it is worth noting that his discovery of the full potential of the line block (particularly the possibility of introducing 'tones' of grey with the aid of patterns of lines and dots) reached its full flower in 1896, when Wagnerian subjects took centre stage in his work. And if the printing process itself seems clinically precise, Beardsley's drawing practice, as described by Robert Ross, appears to have tapped into the same Romantic sensibility as Fantin:

He sketched everything in pencil, at first covering the paper with apparent scrawls, constantly rubbed out and blocked in again, until the whole surface became raddled with pencil, indiarubber, and knife; over this incoherent surface he worked in Chinese ink with a gold pen, often ignoring the pencil lines, afterwards carefully removed. So every drawing was invented, built up, and completed on the same sheet of paper.⁴²

Of course, Beardsley overlaid this Romantic procedure with the self-consciously decadent practice (albeit originally the product of necessity, when his only free time

⁴²R. Ross, *Aubrey Beardsley* (New York, 1909), pp. 38-39.

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for drawing was at night) of working in a dark room by the light of a single candle, drawing together both the high-flown idealism embodied by his subject matter and the pessimistic decadence which Wagner was perceived by conservative commentators to embody.⁴³

Beardsley's greatest stylistic debt to Fantin appears to have been in the latter's use of line to reproduce both the aural experience of Wagner's music and its appearance on the page. Both artists' experience of Wagner's music, we should recall, was shaped as much by reading scores or transcriptions as by concert- and opera-going. In the spiralling upward procession of the gods in one of his earlier Wagnerian lithographs, *Finale du Rheingold* [Figure 109, H.18], Fantin skilfully merged the tendency toward transposing sound into form with the more literal rendering of the patterns of the notes on the staves in that scene's key leitmotif.⁴⁴ Significantly, Beardsley's most formally experimental Wagnerian images were his unfinished suite of illustrations for a projected 'Comedy of the Rhinegold'. The frontispiece [Figure 110, R.450] displays the most overt borrowing from Fantin. As Victor Chan notes, Beardsley's *Rhinegold* drawings are distinguished by the softening of the harsh angularity of his Japoneseque early style in favour of a 'new classicism' characterised by flowing curves.⁴⁵ Much as Fantin had done in his renderings – print, pastel and painting – of the opening scene, Beardsley eschews straight lines in all parts of the design apart from the borders and lettering, evoking with undulating lines and carefully graded blacks and whites both the watery leitmotif and the libretto's description of the scene. The marriage of musical and visual line is made still more explicit in the *Third* and *Fourth Tableaux of 'Das Rheingold'* [Figures 111, R.430 and 112, R.438]. The velvety, closely packed pattern of lines that composes the background of the underground world of Nibelheim in the *Third Tableau* appear to be the most overt homage to Fantin's characteristic vibrating textures. While the swirling, heavily stylised lines of Loge's hair and garments and Alberich's dragon

⁴³ Beardsley's nocturnal working habits also seem to have been knowingly modelled on the practices of Des Esseintes; combined with his adoption of Huysmans's protagonist's colour scheme of orange and black for the decoration of the house he shared with his sister Mabel in Pimlico, he vividly illustrates Praz's contention that Decadence was the logical outcome of Romanticism.

⁴⁴ Indeed, Fantin saw fit to transcribe the Valhalla theme (which is also Wotan's leitmotif) on the stone, below the image; see Barbe (1992), vol. 2, p. 138. Fantin seems to have taken an interest in the correspondence not only of line to sound, but of colour; the palette of *Tannhäuser: Venusberg* (1864) corresponds to the tonal colours of the orchestration of the related scene (ibid., vol. 2, p. 157).

⁴⁵ V. Chan, 'Aubrey Beardsley's Frontispiece to "The Comedy of the Rhinegold"', *Arts Magazine* 57 (January 1983), p. 89. Chan attributes this 'new classicism' to the influence of Charles Ricketts and Jan Toorop; strangely, Fantin barely merits a mention in passing in the entire article.

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body are often cited as precursors of Art Nouveau's hallmark whiplash curves,⁴⁶ a comparison of the pictures with the corresponding musical passages reveals a deliberate attempt to match the stroke of lines in ink to lines of music. Loge's

extraordinary flame-shaped chest hair in the fourth tableau contains an even more explicit reference to its corresponding leitmotif. This motif has generally been interpreted biographically, as both a visualisation of the torment of Beardsley's ravaged lungs and as evidence of his identification with the mischievous, amoral fire god.⁴⁷ Yet, as Sutton points out, the flames form a graphic counterpart to the flickering chromatic semi-quavers which characterise Loge's leitmotif in this scene.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Loge's flames may be read as bringing together a self-referential alignment of artist and subject, an attempt to translate musical language into graphic expression, and an allusion to Pater's notorious injunction to the aesthete 'to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame' – a connection reinforced by Beardsley's ironic comment to a friend, 'I never wear an overcoat, I am always burning'.⁴⁹ However, Pater's spirit, whether knowingly or not, suffuses Beardsley's *Rheingold* images as much as it does Fantin's. When Pater speaks of painting 'aspiring to the condition of music', one possible reading is that painting aspires to slough off its material form. Both Fantin and Beardsley, in their Wagnerian images, seek to translate, or at least transpose, form – especially the human form – into sound by dematerialising it. Their superficial differences of approach would appear to give the lie to this assumption, and both Sutton and MaryAnne Stevens fall into this trap when they assert, respectively, that 'in contrast to the impressionistic mythic Wagnerian images . . . of Fantin-Latour's work, hailed . . . as a realisation of "Wagnerian painting", the *Rheingold* drawings are an idiosyncratic fin-de-siècle exploration of a "Wagnerian" (i.e. leitmotivic) style of composition'⁵⁰ and that 'unlike the somewhat etiolated linear style of Beardsley's Wagnerian renderings which seem to dwell . . . specifically upon the narrow, sinister aspects . . . Fantin's more fully modelled forms capture the vast dimension of the human drama which Wagner lays out in his tetralogy'.⁵¹ Yet this draws a false distinction between the artists' work and obscures a common goal accomplished by divergent means. It is certainly difficult to

⁴⁶ See for example Reade (1967), p. 358.

⁴⁷ For examples of this reading, see Reade (1967), p. 357, and Snodgrass (1995), p. 33.

⁴⁸ Sutton (2002), p. 181.

⁴⁹ Cited in Snodgrass (1995), p. 33.

⁵⁰ Sutton (2002), p. 182.

⁵¹ Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 213.

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deny that Fantin's gods, mortals and nymphs are rendered with softly rounded bodies and limbs, delicately modelled by the play of light and shadow; their apparent corporeality initially appears the polar opposite of Beardsley's wraithlike figures who seem composed less of flesh and blood than of empty space precariously moulded into human form by a few exquisitely economical strokes of the pen. But the corporeality of Fantin's figures seems just as tenuous as that of Beardsley's; the pulsating interplay of light and shadow, of pattern against solid, renders his figures' existence perhaps even more contingent and insubstantial than that of Beardsley's, amorphous forms that detach themselves temporarily from the protean flow of the music before melting once again into the background.

While characteristic within the broader context of antinaturalism, this shared concern with dematerialisation and abstraction in Wagnerian images also indicates an underlying ambivalence towards contemporary, and more specifically German, operatic performance practice. Concurrent, more literal, representations of Wagnerian opera scenes indicate that the jocular stereotype of the stout, buxom Teutonic goddess in armour and horned helmet had its origins in the productions of the day.⁵² Not only would the overt nationalism of such aspects of the staging have presented a conflict of

loyalties for a French artist (even an ardent lover of German culture such as Fantin) tackling Wagner so soon after *l'année terrible* of 1870, but the earthbound aspect of the performers and sets gave rise to the sort of slavishly literal, narrative-bound renderings (of which Rochegrosse's *Parsifal* is an extreme) at odds with the transcendent music. Indeed, Fantin's account of the performance at Bayreuth tellingly devotes the most space to the least tangible aspect of the staging – the lighting.⁵³ His figures are, for the most part, clad in flowing classical drapery rather than Germanic costume, as if in an attempt to (re)inscribe Wagner's music into a Latin tradition.

Of all of Wagner's operas, *Tannhäuser*, and especially the episode of the Venusberg, was the subject which most captured Fantin's imagination and compelled him to seek a solution to the seemingly intractable dilemma of being a French artist taking on Wagnerian subject matter. His rather unorthodox solution was to recast Wagner in a distinctively French and apparently inimical style – the Rococo. While

⁵² See for example the illustrations of the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* (1876) reproduced in Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 281.

⁵³ Jullien (1909), pp. 111-19. Such was Fantin's fascination with the play of coloured light in the Bayreuth production of *Das Rheingold* that he printed several impressions of *Scène première du Rheingold* on different coloured papers so as to capture the sensations of the performance (Druick and Hoog, 1982, p. 283).

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Fantin's vision of the Venusberg, in the 1862 lithograph and the 1864 oil, invokes the Romantic discourse on the choice between the temptations of Life and the rigours of Art by means of the melancholic figure of Tannhäuser resting a hand on his lyre and glancing away from the reclining Venus,⁵⁴ his deviation from Wagner's description of the setting muddies the moral struggle. Rather than place his figures in the dark grotto specified in the libretto, Fantin shifts the scene into a verdant, sunlit meadow.

Although the 1876 lithograph retains the same composition as the earlier versions of the subject, Tannhäuser's resistance to Venus's charms is subtly diminished by the change in the position of his head and the direction of his gaze; the nymphs dancing around him seem to have emerged from one of countless Rococo prints of bathers in a landscape, their generously fleshed but strangely weightless bodies devoid of the moral menace of the fin-de-siècle femme fatale. In place of a Christian knight and poet, torn between shouldering his moral and artistic responsibilities and abandoning himself to the pleasures of the senses, we are presented with a scene of pure, frivolous merrymaking suffused with a breath of melancholy, an image whose composition and mood owe explicit debts to Watteau's *fêtes galantes* and especially *The Embarkation for Cythera* [Figure 113].⁵⁵ Tannhäuser was far from the only Wagnerian subject Fantin treated in a Rococo manner. The mischievous Rhinemaidens in the various permutations of the first scene of *Das Rheingold*, particularly the 1888 oil version, echo another favourite Rococo trope, that of the young woman on a swing watched admiringly (and often lasciviously) by her reclining lover; Fantin has substituted water for a swing and the threatening, semi-concealed Alberich for the more usual swain, but the similarities with a painting such as Fragonard's *The Swing* [Figure 114] are arresting – not least in Fragonard's blurred, almost visionary treatment of the foliage and Fantin's parallel dematerialised rendering of the water and riverbed.

Even in London in 1892, where the politics underpinning Wagner's operas were, at least on the surface, a less sensitive issue, Beardsley had little time for the conventional and typically German theatrical trappings. Although, unlike Fantin, he evinced as great an interest in the spectacle of the audience and the behind-the-scenes mechanics of performance as in the operas themselves, almost from the start he took

⁵⁴ Druick and Hoog (1982), pp. 153-54.

⁵⁵ Fantin did in fact spend time in the Louvre copying *The Embarkation for Cythera* (as well as Titian's *Concert champêtre*) in preparation for the painting *Tannhäuser: Venusberg* (Druick and Hoog, 1982, p. 160). His Tannhäuser subjects also exhibit more general similarities with the popular Rococo theme of female bathers in a landscape; relevant examples would be too numerous to list here, but one with which both Fantin and Beardsley would have been conversant is Fragonard's *Bathers* of 1765 (Louvre).
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telling liberties with the representation of actual performers. His 'portrait' of the Hungarian soprano Katharina Klafsky in the role of Isolde [Figure 115, R.28] does bear a superficial resemblance to publicity photographs of the singer,⁵⁶ but he transforms her voluptuous presence into a lean, hieratic apparition with a profile that hovers between sensitive and severe, all but enveloped in kimono-like robes; as Zatlin has demonstrated, the result displays greater affinities with a Japanese kakemono than with anything likely to be seen onstage at Covent Garden.⁵⁷

This tension between a faithful, literal record of a performance and a desire to transcend conventional theatricality comes to the fore in Fantin's and Beardsley's approaches to *Tristan und Isolde*. Fantin's very choice of *Tristan* as a subject implies his adoption of a common strategy of French Wagnerians for defusing political controversy, that of privileging the operas drawn from Franco-Celtic rather than Teutonic legend.⁵⁸ *Signal dans la nuit* [Figure 116, H.67] takes as its point of departure a scene from the second act of *Tristan*, one of the less obviously dramatic episodes in the opera; no hint of the stirring emotion of scenes such as the drinking of the love potion or the celebrated *Liebestod*. Rather than bathe the figure of Isolde in a dramatic spotlight, Fantin engulfs her in shadow, her contours barely delineated by the faint glow of moonlight; the viewer must work to pick her out of the gloom. The deliberate anti-theatricality is reinforced by the fact that Isolde is shown from the back, thus concealing any display of emotion; indeed, without knowing the print's title, Isolde could be any young woman standing alone in a moonlit night and it would be all but impossible to identify it as a scene from any opera, let alone *Tristan*.

Beardsley takes the opposite tack: rather than effacing theatricality, he heightens it to almost to the point of parody. *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* [Figure 117, R.105], although conceived as an illustration for Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, is unswervingly Wagnerian in its inspiration.⁵⁹ The episode illustrated is arguably the most suspenseful in the opera; Tristan has agreed to drink a draught of poison offered by Isolde in atonement for slaying her lover as Isolde, torn

⁵⁶ Heyd (1986), pp. 171-72. Klafsky sang Isolde in the 9 July performance of *Tristan* in 1892 at Drury Lane, which Beardsley attended; a photograph of her in that role was published in the *Illustrated London News*, 23 July 1892 (p. 102).

⁵⁷ Zatlin (1997), p. 34.

⁵⁸ *Parsifal*, whose origins can be traced to *Le Chanson de Roland*, was also considered 'safer' and more congenial in France, particularly among composers; Debussy, for example, incorporated elements of the song of the Flower Maidens into *La Damselle élue* (see Holloway, 1979, pp. 36-37).

⁵⁹ For further discussion of the Tristan and Isolde designs for *Le Morte d'Arthur*, see Sutton (2002), pp. 40-44.

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between desire and hatred, looks on, both of them unaware that her maid Brangäne has replaced the poison with a philtre that will cause them to fall into each others' arms. As Sutton observes, Beardsley has substituted for Malory's description of the setting as the cabin of the ship Wagner's specification that the action occurs in a 'tentlike

apartment on the fore-deck of a ship, richly hung with tapestries',⁶⁰ and the background at first glance appears to adhere to this description, with the sun setting over the deck visible through a gap between two ornately embroidered tapestries.

However, the utter disregard for modelling and the creation of an illusionistic threedimensional space calls attention to the flatness and artificiality of the scene; the floorboards on which Tristan and Isolde tread are as much the joists of a stage as they are the planks of a ship's deck, the hangings as much flats and drop-curtains as they are tapestries. Yet in this parodistically theatrical setting, Tristan and Isolde, with their identical sensual yet ascetically hard profiles, are curiously frozen; if their gazes crackle with psychological tension, more of the scene's nervous energy resides in the writhing tendrils and flowers crawling around the border. By exposing the scene designer's conjuring tricks, Beardsley both subtly ridicules Wagnerian theatrical practice and privileges the static and the visual over the music-drama's forward impetus of narrative and music.⁶¹

If Fantin's Wagnerian prints, and his negotiation of the pitfalls of literal representation of performance, provided Beardsley with an apposite model, the uncanny stasis of the figures and their austere, enigmatic, androgynous profiles in *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* seem utterly foreign to Fantin's diaphanous classicism. They suggest that Beardsley found in France another source of inspiration whose fascination with androgyny and sense of the grotesque paralleled his own – Odilon Redon.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 41-42; R. Wagner, *Tristan and Isolde* (London, 1993), p. 52.

⁶¹ Beardsley adopted this tactic more overtly in his *Rheingold* drawings by entitling them *tableaux*, a word guaranteed to evoke the popular entertainment of *tableaux vivants*. However, as Sutton observes, even the *tableau vivant* suffered from a split personality by the 1890s, alternately derided by forwardthinking

critics for its simplistic melodrama and appreciated for its proto-Symbolist qualities by avantgarde playwrights and directors; furthermore, the tactic of performing Wagner's operas as a series of static images was favoured by Cosima Wagner from 1883 until 1906 (Sutton, 2002, pp. 190-91).

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Austerity and the Grotesque: Redon in London

Redon's impact on anti-naturalism in Britain, and specifically on Beardsley, remains surprisingly understudied. With the exception of one conspicuous instance of Beardsley more or less directly lifting the motif of the monstrous spider from Redon's repertoire of grotesques for his early drawing *La Femme incomprise* (R.257), the affinities between the two artists' work has been little remarked upon, and possible points of contact scarcely mentioned.⁶² However, Beardsley's brief career coincided with Redon's most protracted effort to raise his profile in Britain, and if Redon was a rather reluctant Wagnerian in comparison to Fantin, both his small output of Wagnerian subjects and several of the core themes of his oeuvre seem to have informed Beardsley's own.

In 1890, Charles Morice wrote to Redon to introduce him to 'an English poet of no mean talent . . . who desires the honour of your acquaintance, with the goal of writing a study of your work for an English review'.⁶³ The poet in question was the apostle of French Symbolism in England and Beardsley's future collaborator and biographer, Arthur Symons, and his article appeared in the *Art Review* in July of that year.⁶⁴ Symons, no doubt informed by the contemporary penchant for drawing comparisons between British and French artists, introduced Redon to his readers as 'a French Blake', perhaps in an effort to ground Redon's seemingly outlandish vision in a recognisable tradition;⁶⁵ the better part of the text, possibly informed by Huysmans's meditation on *Hommage à Goya* in *Croquis parisiens* (1886), is devoted to an explication of Redon's second suite of lithographs inspired by Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint-Antoine* and illustrated with two of the plates, *La Chimère* and *Saint Antoine*: ...

à travers ses longs cheveux qui lui couvraient la figure, j'ai cru reconnaître Ammonaria... [Figure 118, Mellerio 95]. Although not a Wagnerian subject, the scene would probably have struck a chord with Beardsley, who was likely to have been

⁶² Snodgrass (1995), p. 309, is one of the few exceptions, noting that Beardsley is likely to have seen Redon's prints both on his visits to Paris and when Redon exhibited in London in 1893.

⁶³ 'Un poète anglais d'un beau talent . . . désire l'honneur de vous connaître, dans le but de faire sur votre oeuvre une étude pour une revue anglaise': A. Redon and R. Bacou, eds., *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren . . . à Odilon Redon* (Paris, 1960), letter from Charles Morice, 1890, p. 198.

⁶⁴ Symons's piece should be considered the first *successful* attempt to publicise Redon's art in a British periodical. Huysmans worked briefly and disastrously with Harry Quilter on the *Universal Review* in March 1888; his plans to write and publish an illustrated survey of Redon's work came to naught. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶⁵ Symons did, however, stress the differences between Redon and Blake, particularly the fact that Redon's universe was 'a lower heaven than [Blake's] where the morning stars sing together': A. Symons, 'A French Blake: Odilon Redon', *Art Review* (July 1890), p. 207.

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familiar with the literary source; as well, the sinuous lines of Ammonaria's hair and the torturer's flail appear to presage those of the *Rheingold* illustrations. Symons continued to promote Redon's work in later writings, and if he despaired of the artist's continued obscurity on both sides of the Channel, which he attributed to his refusal to 'conciliate the average intelligence',⁶⁶ it seems reasonable to assume that he would have discussed Redon with colleagues likely to appreciate him, not least Beardsley. Redon's profile continued to rise, albeit with less fanfare in Britain than in France and Belgium, over the next five years. In 1891 the Belgian critic Jules Destrée published a catalogue raisonné of his *noirs*, bringing together a previously scattered production and introducing a new audience to the complete body of Redon's work. The catalogue may have contributed to Redon's discovery by three British collectors, Albert Edward Tebb, Campbell Dodgson and Mortimer Mompes; Mompes, a printmaker and student of Whistler, met Gauguin in Brittany in 1894, asking him to request of Redon 'the complete collection', regardless of cost, which suggests that he had seen the catalogue,⁶⁷ while Tebb was so taken with Redon's prints that he visited the artist in both Paris and Peyrelebade to buy new work.⁶⁸ The enthusiasm of these amateurs gave Redon hope of critical and commercial success in Britain; as he wrote to his Dutch patron Andries Bonger in 1894, he was counting on an exhibition in London the following year and 'I have been advised to set my sights on that side [of the Channel], I sense a success in England'.⁶⁹ His high hopes were to be disappointed, for when he exhibited four lithographs at Dunthorne's Rembrandt Head Gallery in November 1895, the few critics who chose to write about the show responded with alarm and perplexity.⁷⁰ The gallery, however, was around the corner from the offices of the Bodley Head, and although Beardsley makes no mention of the exhibition in his letters, it is certainly possible that he could have seen Redon's prints there.

⁶⁶ A. Symons, *From Toulouse-Lautrec to Rodin, with Some Personal Impressions* (London, 1929), p. 170.

⁶⁷ Redon and Bacou (1960), p. 196, letter from Gauguin to Redon, April/October 1894. Although Gauguin cautioned Redon that Mompes's motives may have been commercial as well as connoisseurial ('Pour votre gouverne je crois vous dire que cet artiste les achètera dans un but de spéculation ayant lui-même pour ses eaux-fortes un éditeur à Londres'), Redon sold Mompes an edition of *Songes* plus thirteen other lithographs for 150 francs in October 1894.

⁶⁸ 'Depuis votre lettre, un amateur de Londres vint *ici* me trouver, et il m'acheta même. Voilà un fait tout nouveau dans ma vie': S. Lévy, *Lettres inédites d'Odilon Redon* (Paris, 1987), p. 31, letter to Andries Bonger, 15 September 1895.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18, letter to Andries Bonger, 9 June 1894. Redon wrote to Bonger again on 5 June

1895, 'On me fait des risettes de l'Angleterre et même de l'Amérique' (p. 28).

⁷⁰ For further discussion of Redon's reception in Britain and his efforts to promote himself there, see Hobbs (1977), pp. 91-97.

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Beardsley thus had multiple opportunities to encounter Redon's oeuvre, and there is evidence to suggest that it did. But what of Redon the Wagnerian? Redon had never embraced Wagner as wholeheartedly as Fantin and, although his correspondence indicates that he regularly attended performances of the composer's music (such as the Concert Lamoureux), his response to the production of *Die Walküre* he saw during his stay with Tebb in London was decidedly lukewarm: 'the actors are too theatrical, without really being actors; no sense of scene, but a sense of drama which seems to me innate, even in the extras'.⁷¹ He evinced an even lower regard for Fantin's Wagnerian art, deriding the 'vague Germanic sentimentalism' of his 'limp blond sketches' and questioning the validity of attempting to transpose music into painting: 'no colour can translate the musical world, which is uniquely and completely internal and has no hold on the natural world'.⁷² Redon's disdain for Fantin should probably be read at least partly as a pose, as integral to his reluctance to align himself with any of his contemporaries; this discomfort was amplified by the fact that Redon found himself, from 1878, very much in the older artist's debt, as it was Fantin who introduced him to the process of transfer lithography, which remained his preferred technique for his *noirs*.⁷³ Redon was also drawn into the orbit of the *Revue wagnérienne*, which advertised his (unrelated) lithographic albums, and for which he produced his first Wagnerian subject, *Brünnhilde* [Figure 119, Mellerio 68]. Two further explicitly Wagnerian images, *Brünnhilde (crépuscule des dieux)* [Figure 120, Mellerio 130] and *Parsifal* [Figure 120], followed after the periodical's demise. Although Redon employed the same medium as Fantin for his Wagnerian subjects, he used it for very different ends. Where Fantin's lithographs evoke the agitated movement of musical phrases, Redon's suggest a hushed interior stillness and, in common with much of his 1890s work, a hermetic mysticism, sometimes – particularly in the case of *Parsifal* – imbued with Christian overtones. *Parsifal*, incidentally, enjoyed a vogue among British Wagnerians in the 1890s, touching as it

⁷¹ 'Des acteurs qui le sont trop, sans l'être; aucun sens de la scène, mais un sens du drame, qui me semble inné, même chez les figurants': Leblond (1923), p. 26, letter to Maurice Fabre, 8 October 1895.

⁷² 'Vague sentimentalisme german'; 'blondes et molles esquisses'; 'nulle couleur ne peut traduire le monde musical qui est uniquement et seulement interne et sans nul appui dans la nature réelle': Redon (2000), pp. 156-57.

⁷³ Redon and Fantin had met in the salon of Berthe de Rayssac in 1877, where Fantin introduced him to the transfer process either that year or in 1878 (letters to Mellerio in 1898 and Bonger in 1909 suggest different dates). See Mellerio papers, Series XIII, Fox FF.15.7 ('Fantin-Latour me donna l'excellent conseil de les reproduire à l'aide du crayon gras, il me passa même, de bonne grâce, une feuille de papier report, pour le calque').

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did on the considerable overlap between the Wagnerian movement and the Christian revival.⁷⁴ Beardsley never took up Wagner's last opera as a subject – no doubt the story of a holy fool's redemption of sinners held little appeal for him⁷⁵ – but the serene, androgynous visage of Redon's portrayal of its hero, and of his two versions of *Brünnhilde*, may have struck a chord. Both *Brünnhildes* owe as much to Redon's all-encompassing fascination with the 'ethereal profile' as they do to the character from the *Ring* cycle, and it has been frequently noted that the 1894 version betrays a strong Pre-Raphaelite influence;⁷⁶ in contrast to the hazy, generalised faces of Fantin's Rhinemaidens and Valkyries, the sensitive yet rigid profiles of Redon's *Brünnhildes*

convey a forceful, conflicted personality not unlike Beardsley's Isolde. The androgyny of Beardsley's Tristan and Isolde also seems an echo of Redon's Brünnhilde and Parsifal; both artists' depiction of these characters taps into the fascination with 'female-dominated androgyny' that not only informed much antinaturalist art, but has also been identified by musicologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez as integral to Wagner's symbolic use of tonality.⁷⁷ However, Beardsley seems unable to resist the temptation to parody Redon's example. *Flosshilde* [Figure 122, R.446] flaunts the same austere, androgynous profile (albeit fixed in a cynical smirk) as Brünnhilde, but in endowing the clever, flirtatious, manipulative ringleader of the Rhinemaidens with the same cast of feature as the noble, self-sacrificing Brünnhilde, Beardsley punctures the mystical pretensions of the French artist.

Conversely, Beardsley saw fit to borrow with greater reverence from Redon's more grotesque imagery. Brian Reade has compared *Alberich* [Figure 124, R.451] to Caliban, a comparison which aptly suggests the dwarf's combination of human and animal characteristics and his ability to inspire both revulsion for his bestiality and malevolence and pity for his victimisation by more powerful characters.⁷⁸ What he did not add (and may not have known) is that Beardsley may have had a specific

⁷⁴ On *Parsifal*'s appeal to religiously-minded British Wagnerians, see Sessa (1979), pp. 118-39.

⁷⁵ The sole reference to *Parsifal* in Beardsley's oeuvre is the apparently asexual orchestra conductor Titirel de Schentefleur in *Under the Hill*, almost certainly intended as a parody of the opera's (and its champions') promotion of platonic love and the renunciation of the self.

⁷⁶ See for example Hobbs (1977), p. 54. M. H. Spielmann used it to illustrate an article on the lithography revival on the Continent, suggesting that it was 'a possible origin of some of Mr Aubrey Beardsley's lineal eccentricities' but criticising Redon for '[losing] his art in extravagant fancies' and 'always straining after an idea which he does not so often succeed in communicating': M. H. Spielmann, 'Original Lithography. The Revival on the Continent', *Magazine of Art* 20 (January 1897), p. 150.

⁷⁷ J.-J. Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyny: A Study in Interpretation*, trans. S. Spencer (Princeton, 1993), pp. 294-98.

⁷⁸ Reade (1967), p. 358.

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Caliban in mind – Redon's [Figure 124]. Alberich and Caliban are almost mirror images of each other, with their seated poses and raised arms and their not-quitehuman

heads grafted onto hirsute animal bodies, but the similarities are accompanied by intriguing oppositions. Redon's Caliban, with his preternaturally huge eyes and pensive smile, seems at one with his surroundings; this is probably a prelapsarian Caliban, at peace in his natural surroundings before the arrival of Prospero. Alberich, bound, grimacing and cursing, could just as easily be Caliban subdued and enslaved. Numerous commentators have pointed out the possibility of Beardsley's autobiographical identification with the grotesque, gargoyle-like yet peculiarly compelling Alberich, whose name, by a curious coincidence, is the German form of Aubrey.⁷⁹ In Redon's sympathy for the devil, he doubtless found a kindred spirit, whether that devil was Shakespearean or Wagnerian.

Redon's contribution to Beardsley's formulation of a Wagnerian aesthetic was clearly more significant than has generally been assumed, although their shared interest – and sympathy with – the grotesque and the mysterious would on the surface appear to make Redon a more obvious source of inspiration than Fantin. However, Beardsley's most ambitious Wagnerian project, *Under the Hill*, his unfinished retelling of *Tannhäuser*, not only reveals an even greater debt to Fantin and to French Wagnerism in general, it represents one of the strangest and most subversive attempts to appropriate Wagner for France, through the lens of a style whose perceived frivolity was seemingly inimical to the entire Wagnerian project – French Rococo.

‘Wagner’s brilliant comedy’: *Tannhäuser* and the Rococo turn

Under the Hill has suffered a split personality since its conception: it has been characterised as a ‘romantic novel’ (Beardsley), a ‘Rabelaisian fragment’ (Yeats), a ‘spoof of pornography’ (Zatlin) and, most recently, ‘a parody of *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism, and of antiquarianism’ (Sutton). To this list I would add: an exercise in Francophilia that simultaneously mocks the political foibles of French Wagnerism and colludes with its efforts to enact a cultural revenge. While Sutton argues persuasively that *Under the Hill* skews and subverts British conceptions of the respectability and

⁷⁹ See for example B. Brophy, *Black and White: A Portrait of Aubrey Beardsley* (London, 1968), p. 64; Chan (1983), pp. 92-93; and Sutton (2002), p. 184, all of whom have noted the similarities between Alberich’s profile and Beardsley’s. It is also worth noting that another variation of Aubrey (‘elf-king’) is Oberon; Beardsley was probably aware of his kinship with the fairy king of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

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erudition of Wagner and German culture as a whole by recasting it in the ostensibly antithetical mould of the French Rococo, it is my contention that *Under the Hill* is, on another level, a homage-cum-parody of the project of French Wagnerism and its own, little-discussed, alignment with the aesthetic and political concerns of the eighteenth century.

Few studies of Beardsley fail to comment on the eighteenth-century flavour of his mature style;⁸⁰ the underlying assumption of most of these discussions is that this stylistic shift resulted from the disastrous aftermath of the Wilde trial and that Beardsley’s attempts to distance himself from Wilde and the *Yellow Book* and his new association with Symons and the *Savoy* led to the disavowal of his earlier, Japoneseque style and its replacement with a new classicism. However, Beardsley had shown an interest in the Rococo and especially, and significantly, in Watteau, from at least 1893.⁸¹ That his experimentation with a style informed by the art of eighteenth-century France coincided with the period of his most intense Wagnerian activity – the writing and illustration of *Under the Hill* and the semi-related *Rheingold* drawings – invites further examination. For although *Under the Hill* is riddled with references to the literature and *objets d’art* of incongruous styles, national schools and periods (itself a parody of the eclecticism that characterised both Aestheticism and mainstream Victorian culture, as well as Wagner’s aesthetic), it is the French Rococo that predominates. Beardsley sprinkles his text with self-consciously archaic French turns of phrase to both heighten the decadent mood and attenuate the outrageous nature of the novella’s polymorphous sexual activity,⁸² lampoons the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* by having Tannhäuser bathe with his homosexual attendants in a bathroom straight out of ‘the well-known engraving by Lorette that forms the frontispiece to Millevoye’s “Architecture du XVIIIe Siècle”’, and hangs the Chevalier’s bedroom with erotic Rococo prints which demonstrate his wide-ranging knowledge of the genre (the print described in most detail resembling Fragonard’s notorious painting of a girl playing not-quite-innocently with a puppy, *La*

⁸⁰ For example, Symons (1929), pp. 188-89 and Chan (1983), p. 89. I use the term ‘mature’ advisedly in reference to an artist whose career and life were over before his twenty-sixth birthday; it is generally acknowledged that the extraordinary pace of Beardsley’s stylistic evolution allows for the identification of a ‘mature’ phase.

⁸¹ ‘I have just found a shop where very jolly *contemporary* engravings from Watteau can be got quite cheaply’: Maas et al. (1970), p. 54, letter to William Rothenstein, September 1893.

⁸² It is worth noting that this is an idiosyncrasy that carries over from Beardsley’s personal correspondence; many of his letters to Leonard Smithers yield the odd snatch of ‘franglais’.

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Gimblette).⁸³ In the longest and most explicit allusion to Wagner, Tannhäuser retires

to bed with the score of *Das Rheingold*, reading it in a manner strongly informed by his surroundings:

Tannhäuser had taken some books to bed with him. One was the witty, extravagant *Tuesday and Josephine*, another was the score of *The Rheingold*. Making a pulpit of his knees he propped up the opera before him and turned over the pages with a loving hand, and found it delicious to attack Wagner's brilliant comedy with the cool head of the morning. Once more he was ravished with the beauty and wit of the opening scene; the mystery of its prelude that seems to come up from the very mud of the Rhine, and to be as ancient, the abominable primitive wantonness of the music that follows the talk and the movements of the Rhine-maidens, the black, hateful sounds of Alberich's love-making, and the flowing melody of the river of legends. But it was the third tableau that he applauded most that morning, the scene where Loge, like some flamboyant primaeval Scapin, practises his cunning on Alberich. The feverish insistent ringing of the hammers at the forge, the dry staccato restlessness of Mime, the ceaseless coming and going of the troupe of Nibelungs, drawn hither and thither like a flock of terror-stricken and infernal sheep, Alberich's savage activity and metamorphoses, and Loge's rapid, flaming, tonguelike movements, make the tableau the least reposeful, most troubled and confusing thing in the whole range of opera. How the Chevalier rejoiced in the extravagant monstrous poetry, the heated melodrama, and splendid agitation of it all!⁸⁴

The slyly self-referential quality of the episode aside – most of the scenes described are those treated by Beardsley in the illustrations – one of the most striking aspects of Tannhäuser's reading is its strong emphasis on the visual. Although it is stated that the Chevalier is reading a musical score, the description of his perusal of it, particularly the reference to a 'tableau', gives the impression that he is instead poring over an album of prints – if not by Beardsley, perhaps by Fantin. The 'primaeval' splendour and sweep of Wagner's drama is consistently undercut by reference to its 'wit', extravagance, and exquisitely bijou qualities; this recalls not only Nietzsche's perverse characterisation of Wagner as 'our greatest *miniaturist* in music',⁸⁵ but also shifts Wagner's work from the realm of the public and collective experience to that of the private, the interior and the dilettantish, qualities which the Rococo was widely considered to embody.⁸⁶ I would argue, however, that Beardsley was guided in his

⁸³ A. Beardsley, *Under the Hill and Other Essays in Prose and Verse* (London, 1904), pp. 54-55.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

⁸⁵ F. Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *'The Birth of Tragedy' and 'The Case of Wagner'*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York, 1967), p. 171, original emphasis.

⁸⁶ A further instance of Beardsley's Rococo-inflected interpretation of Wagner may be found in comparing his dandyish *Abbé* (R.423) with its possible prototype, Watteau's *Gilles* (Louvre). The exquisite, delicate costumes of Gilles and countless other male figures in Watteau's oeuvre would have

recasting of Wagner's drama into a Rococo aesthetic as much by Fantin's precedent, discussed above, as by his interest in the French avant-garde's contemporaneous cult of the Rococo and his well-documented enthusiasm for Watteau.⁸⁷

Embedding Wagnerian subjects in the aesthetic of a lost aristocratic regime is also, however, a loaded political choice, especially when one is working within the framework of a republic or a constitutional monarchy, and Beardsley seems to have been very much alive to the contradictions of cloaking an artistic revolution in politically (and artistically) retrograde forms. The curious interdependence of

aesthetic avant-gardism and political conservatism that so profoundly informed antinaturalism as a whole holds a special significance for both the Rococo revival, Wagnerism, and their eventual intertwining, especially by the 1890s. By the time Beardsley came to write *Under the Hill*, Wyzewa had transformed himself into one of the breed of arch-conservatives typical of 1890s France – railing against the Third Republic, endorsing elitism and the neo-Catholic revival, and yearning for a return to the values of the Ancien Régime.⁸⁸ Even Fantin, although no political animal – characteristically, during the Franco-Prussian War he neither fled to London nor fought for France, but hid in his father’s house in the middle of Paris – revealed his artistically conservative bent when the Salon split in 1890; rather than exhibit with the more progressive Salon du Champ de Mars, he remained staunchly loyal to the conservative Salon des Champs Elysées, showing his musical and imaginative subjects (which critics came to see as increasingly trite) in decidedly conventional company. Beardsley’s creation of a hermetic, amoral, over-aestheticised and, ultimately, trivial setting for his retelling of the tale of Tannhäuser may be just as ironic a comment on the conservative impulse of the Rococo revival and French Wagnerism as an attempt to *épater les bourgeois anglais* by reformulating the high moral seriousness and metaphysical pretensions of Wagner – and of British Wagnerism – in terms bound to be seen as decadent and degrading by a Francophobic British public.

I would suggest a further contemporary French rereading of the Rococo as vital influence on Beardsley’s reinterpretation of *Tannhäuser*. The Rococo did not flounder in the face of Victorian notions of masculinity in dress, no small attraction to Beardsley, whose fascination with androgyny and desire to shock his audience went hand in hand.

⁸⁷ On the Rococo revival in France, and especially the role of the Goncourt brothers, see Silverman (1989).

⁸⁸ On Wyzewa’s conservatism, see Marlais (1992), pp. 55 and 103.

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capture only the imaginations of painters, designers and art critics; poets caught the bug as well, and none more so than Verlaine. Beginning in the late 1860s, he wrote the suite *Fêtes galantes*, inspired by, but not directly imitative of, Watteau’s paintings. Verlaine’s conception of Watteau was very much of his time, not only in its highlighting of the paintings’ delicate artificiality and melancholy but in its emphasis on the interchange of image and sound, its conflation of colour and musical harmony. ‘Mandoline’ is the most explicit instance of this approach and is worth quoting at length:

Les donneurs de sérénades
 Et les belles écouteuses
 Echantent des propos fades
 Sous les ramures chanteuses.
 [...] Leurs courtes vestes de soie,
 Leurs longues robes à queues,
 Leur élégance, leur joie
 Et leurs molles ombres bleues
 Tourbillonnent dans l’extase
 D’une lune rose et grise
 Et la mandoline jase
 Parmi les frissons du brise.⁸⁹

Music pervades every element of the poem – the singers, the mandolin, the trees, even the evening breeze. But most significantly, music engenders dematerialisation: the

poem's personages dissolve into 'soft blue shadows' whirling in the moonlight to the tune of the mandolin, insubstantial clouds of colour and sound. This is, moreover, emphatically not the bombast of the opera house, but the silvery, ephemeral melodies in a minor key suited to the drawing room or the garden. It was precisely this effect sought – and not always achieved – by Wagnerian painting, and which Beardsley, who was not only conversant with Verlaine's poetry, but with the man himself,⁹⁰ seems to have aimed for in the 'romantic dream' and 'brilliant comedy' that was *Under the Hill*.

⁸⁹ Verlaine (1962), pp. 115-16.

⁹⁰ Beardsley met Verlaine in London in November 1893 and, with his characteristic blend of archness and admiration, described him as 'a dear old thing': Maas et al. (1970), p. 58. The text of the lecture Verlaine gave, along with his account of his travels in England, was published in the *Savoy* in January 1896.

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Beardsley may have found in Wagner's reputation and pretensions a ripe target for brilliant satire, but his relationship with Wagner's *music* was considerably more nuanced. Concealed and complicated by layers of irony and mischievous subversion lay a sincere admiration and respect that seemed to increase with the growing inevitability of his approaching death. Writing to Leonard Smithers from his first extended exile in vain search of recovery, he confessed with unwonted seriousness that 'Wagner alone consoles me somewhat',⁹¹ and in an interview published in the *Idler* in March 1897, the author juxtaposed the blunt observation that 'according to medical opinion, he has not long to live' with the statement that 'Beardsley had two grand passions in life. One was for Wagner's music, and the other . . . for fine raiment'.⁹² Even when he found himself in dire financial straits in the last six months of his life and was forced to ask Smithers to sell most of his library, he requested that his copies of Wagner's prose be kept back.⁹³ Fittingly, in light of his Rococo-tinted vision of the composer, Watteau, in the form of Adolf Rosenberg's illustrated biography given him by André Raffalovich, became his other great source of comfort.⁹⁴ Beardsley may well, as I have argued, have arrived at this re-visioning of Wagner through the work of Fantin-Latour, of Redon, of Verlaine. But he did as much as any of these Frenchmen in reclaiming Wagner – for France.

⁹¹ Maas et al. (1970), p. 171, letter to Leonard Smithers, 26 September 1896.

⁹² A. H. Lawrence, 'Mr Aubrey Beardsley and his Work', *Idler* 11 (March 1897), pp. 189-90.

⁹³ Maas et al. (1970), p. 380, letter to Leonard Smithers, 22 October 1897.

⁹⁴ Beardsley wrote to Raffalovich, 'I can't tell you how much pleasure the little Watteau has given me [...] I really feel better since I opened the parcel'. *Ibid.*, p. 232, letter of 24 December 1896.

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Conclusion

In the two decades covered by this study, antinaturalism mounted a serious challenge to the perceived separateness of British and French art. This paradigm shift took place most visibly in the 1878 and 1889 Expositions Universelles and, to a lesser extent, in exhibitions at private galleries such as the Grosvenor, Georges Petit, and Goupil. The opportunity of seeing original works by artists such as Burne-Jones and Moreau juxtaposed stimulated a critical reappraisal – albeit more in France than in Britain – of the links and rivalries between the two countries and, despite the fact that as late as 1895 a leading critic like Sizeranne insisted that British art was inherently independent from its continental counterparts, the acknowledgment of complex cross-Channel dialogues and interchanges between antinaturalist artists. Moreover, the ways in which Burne-Jones, Watts, Moreau and Puvis positioned themselves – consciously or not – within these exhibitions established common goals of resistance

to the socio-political norms of the Third Republic and of Victorian Britain. Of course, many fruitful exchanges also took place outside the major exhibitions; many of these highlight the centrality of relationships between the arts, particularly between painting and literature, painting and music, or all three. Some were the result of writers' interest in particular artists – Symons in Moreau and Redon, Rod in Burne-Jones, and Sarrazin in Rossetti, to name only a few – and were inevitably coloured by contemporary perceptions of a hierarchy of the arts in which literature took precedence over painting. Others were more reciprocal, as in the case of Denis's collaboration with Debussy in their reinterpretation of *The Blessed Damozel*, while some occurred in a spirit of parody and subversion, as in the case of Beardsley's responses to Moreau, Fantin and Redon.

Throughout this thesis, I have insisted on the role played in these dialogues by reproductions and translations. Sometimes, as with Burne-Jones, Watts or Moreau, reproductions functioned as they were meant to – as substitutes for original works of art – whereas with Rossetti, given the inaccessibility of his work, they became an end in themselves. Reproductions are, by their very nature, imperfect renderings of the original, and this distortion is an essential characteristic of the cross-Channel dialogue, not least because it paved the way for creative reinterpretations on both sides. These are dialogues based as much upon misunderstanding as upon common ground, but they resulted, however briefly, in rapprochement and the pursuit of shared objectives.

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Coda

1900: Towards a new internationalism

The past is never dead; it's not even past.¹

As the Exposition Universelle of 1900, the last and largest of the nineteenth century, opened, still incomplete, on 14 April, the walls of the newly-built Grand Palais provided the backdrop for the final encounter of a different sort. This was the last time new works by Moreau, Puvis, Burne-Jones, Watts and Fantin would be exhibited together,² and commentary from critics on both sides of the Channel was flavoured by a contradictory blend of the valedictory and the contemptuous, shaped by the events of two years previously. 1898 had been antinaturalism's *année terrible*. Within less than twelve months of each other, Burne-Jones expired in Rottingdean; Puvis, mourning the Princesse Cantacuzène, and Moreau, putting the last arrangements in place for his house-museum, died in Paris, along with Mallarmé; Beardsley, fittingly for an artist who wore his allegiance to France on his impeccable sleeves, breathed his last in Menton. Fantin and Watts would both live on until 1904, Watts to produce the startling *Sower of Systems* [Figure 125] while Fantin, who had long since given up Wagnerian subjects, soldiered away at increasingly backwardlooking

soft-focus scenes of nymphs and bathers. Of the other survivors, Redon remained loyal to his antinaturalist objectives, although as the new century dawned he definitively turned away from the dark dream world of his *noirs* toward vibrant visions of intense colour; Denis, meanwhile, announced his new allegiance to the renewal of a classicism whose impersonal gravitas rejected the highly individual, mystical antinaturalism tinged with the medieval that had dominated the first decade of his career. The major publishers of reproductions – Dietrich, Braun, Hanfstaengl, Swann – continued to print and sell monochromes after Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Moreau, but demand was dwindling. This wave of deaths, coupled with the new avenues sought by the survivors, only served to reinforce the general sentiment that an

¹ W. Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (1951).

² Burne-Jones exhibited *The Dream of Lancelot, Cupid's Hunting Fields* and seven watercolours,

including *The Prioress's Tale*. Watts was represented by a *View of Naples*, and Beardsley by a single drawing, *Venus and Tannhäuser*. In the Centennale, Fantin was represented by his first imaginative subject, *Féerie*, as well as *Coin de table*, *La Famille Dubourg*, *La Brodeuse*, a self-portrait and a sketch (*La Tapisserie*); Moreau by *Salomé*, *Vénus*, *Enlèvement de Déjanire*, *Saint Sébastien* and *Jason*; and Puvis by *La Toilette*, *La Famille du pêcheur*, a reduced version of *Pro patria ludus* and *La Vigilance*. None of them showed work in the Décennale (although Emile Sulpis showed two reproductive etchings of Moreau's paintings), despite all being eligible to exhibit there.

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era had drawn to a close and, if anything, antinaturalism's obituary had been in the writing for at least the last five years, as capricious former defenders like Jean Lorrain turned against it and commentators across the spectrum began to grouse that the new work of its elder statesmen was hackneyed, reactionary and obsolete. Burne-Jones's wearily resigned summing-up of his destiny could, at least on the surface, aptly be applied to the fate of antinaturalism as a whole by 1900: 'I must be prepared for public weariness about me. I've had a good innings . . . the rage for me is over'.³

If it seems perverse to conclude this study of antinaturalist painting by looking at an event two years after its ostensible date of death, my choice of the last of the great Expositions – the ultimate manifestation of the positivism that powered the nineteenth century and against which antinaturalism had always rebelled – is deliberate. It is my contention that the state of the art world in 1900, and particularly as exemplified by the displays and debates of the Exposition Universelle, provides a vital insight into the legacy of antinaturalism and of the cross-Channel dialogues which were essential to its development. We must look beyond the common assumption of modernist histories of art that 1900 represents a period of rupture which saw the definitive triumph of the giants of the new order over the old and the outworn; the reality was much less clear-cut. Robert Rosenblum's exhortation to reconsider the artistic production of turn of the century as embodying flux rather than rupture, when the old, the new and the in-between rubbed shoulders, acquires particular urgency in the case of antinaturalism.⁴ A consideration of multiple aspects of the Exposition, including but not limited to the fine art displays, reveals that if many of antinaturalism's original French and British adherents had died, they left heirs in unexpected places. Perhaps the most noticeable example was Moreau's star pupil and the inaugural curator of the Musée Gustave Moreau, Georges Rouault, whose *L'enfant Jésus parmi les docteurs* [Figure 126], exhibited in the Décennale, fused Moreau's penchant for fantastical architecture with his own tendency toward anatomical exaggeration and expressive ugliness. Another case in point was the Belgian Fine Art section, almost universally lauded for its freshness and vitality; among the obvious avant-garde names like Emile Claus, Théo van Rysselberghe, Eugène Laermans and Henri Evenepoel (the last another student of Moreau) were the antinaturalists Fernand

³ G. Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, p. 323.

⁴ R. Rosenblum, 'Art in 1900: Twilight or Dawn?', in R. Rosenblum, M. Stevens and A. Dumas, *1900: Art at the Crossroads* (exh. cat., London, Royal Academy and New York, Guggenheim Museum, 2000), pp. 27-53.

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Khnopff, an artist who made no secret of his Anglophilia and admiration for Burne-Jones in particular, and Jean Delville, whose paintings were markedly *not* victims of the accusations of backwardness heaped by British and French critics alike on their fellow countrymen.⁵ Not coincidentally, Belgium had been a major crucible of artistic exchange since the 1880s, most obviously in the international exhibitions of Les XX and La Libre Esthétique to which many French and British antinaturalists (including Watts, Beardsley, Denis, Fantin and Redon) contributed but just as significantly in its position as a centre in the reproductive print trade. Jean Clair's argument that

Belgium should be considered the true international crossroads of Symbolism⁶ can be further honed by adding that it was specifically the crossroads of the cross-Channel exchange.

Nor was the demarcation between the antinaturalism of the nineteenth century and the ineluctable march of new 'isms' the unbridgeable gap that High Modernist histories would have us believe. Both inside and outside the Exposition, albeit more perceptibly in Paris and on the Continent than in Britain, the young artists of the avant-garde selectively absorbed the lessons of their antinaturalist predecessors. Puvis's influence on Matisse and Picasso is now more or less a given, but his effect on British modernists such as Augustus John and Stanley Spencer has only recently begun to be discussed,⁷ doubtless due to the long shadow cast by the deep-seated disdain for antinaturalism of the Bloomsbury critics. The young Picasso's attraction to Burne-Jones is occasionally mentioned in passing but rarely discussed in depth; as Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone rightly point out, echoes of this fascination, possibly spurred by seeing Burne-Jones's work in the flesh at the Exposition, can be traced in the pale profiles and all-pervading blue atmosphere of some of his Blue Period portraits.⁸ Further confirmation of the continuing influence of French and British antinaturalism can be found in the work of Hodler, Klimt, and Munch, to name

⁵ Indeed, Khnopff, who served as a correspondent for the *Magazine of Art* in the late 1890s, had published a eulogy to Burne-Jones therein: F. Khnopff, 'A Tribute from Belgium', *Magazine of Art* (August 1898), pp. 520-26.

⁶ See Introduction.

⁷ The most wide-ranging survey to date of Puvis's influence on modern art is Lemoine (2002), although Lemoine's insistence that Puvis was not a Symbolist/antinaturalist (pp. 17-47) needs to be treated with suspicion, especially in light of Lemoine's general antipathy toward nineteenth-century art. Robert Upstone's essay in the same volume, 'Echoes in Albion's Sacred Wood: Puvis and British Art' (pp. 277-90) is one of the few in-depth discussions to date of Puvis's influence, both contemporary and posthumous, on British art. To Upstone's study I would add that, ironically, considering Bloomsbury's hostility toward antinaturalism, some of Duncan Grant's *Bathers* betray a strong hint of Puvis's classical idylls.

⁸ Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 32-33, 272.

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only a few. In an era when the avant-garde was increasingly questioning the representational, 'antinaturalism' becomes a particularly slippery term, but if the naturalism against which antinaturalism had originally rebelled had also waned, aspects of the antinaturalist impulse – the fascination with dream and myth, the rejection of narrative and exterior reality – retained their relevance for the new generation.

However, to uncover the most powerful evidence of antinaturalism's staying power in the new century, we need to leave behind the fine art displays in the Grand Palais and move toward the displays of the decorative arts. One need only look at the pavilion given over to Art Nouveau Bing [Figure 127], the bizarre, amorphous, writhing walls of Loïe Fuller's pavilion [Figure 128] and the displays of glass, ceramics and metalwork to see that many of the shared guiding principles of antinaturalism – the impulse toward a fusion of the arts, the collapse of the boundary between the 'fine' and 'decorative' arts, the rejection of the quotidian in favour of the spiritual and the mystical, and the undertones of masochism in the decorative – had simply passed into the realm of three-dimensionality. Indeed, some Art Nouveau objects made explicit allusions to antinaturalist paintings. Charles van der Stappen's *Sphinx mystérieux* [Figure 129], with its ivory flesh encased in a swirling silver garment and its air of impenetrable enigma, is a clear descendent of Burne-Jones's beggar maid, down to the undercurrents of masochistic idolatry. The impact of both

Britain and France on the direction taken by this overtly international style has been frequently acknowledged, but perhaps because of the deeply entrenched, though (at least in the present situation) false distinction drawn by art historians between fine and decorative art, the role of antinaturalist painting and graphic arts in the development of Art Nouveau has not been fully explored.⁹ However, if we consider Art Nouveau as a continuing manifestation of the antinaturalist impulse, the notion, increasingly commonplace in recent studies, that antinaturalism was driven underground in 1900 by the impulse to formalist abstraction, only to re-emerge around 1920 in the guise of Surrealism, is ripe for reassessment. Alan Bowness's characterisation of Symbolism/antinaturalism as the bridge between Romanticism and Surrealism

⁹ An important exception to this rule is P. Greenhalgh, ed., *Art Nouveau: 1890-1914* (exh. cat., London, Victoria and Albert Museum and Washington, D. C., National Gallery of Art, 2000), which not only emphasises the overt internationalism of Art Nouveau but includes essays on the influence of painting generally, and British painting (with special attention to Rossetti and Whistler) in particular.

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remains valid,¹⁰ but, taking Art Nouveau into account, this bridge extends all but unbroken up to the eve of the First World War.

Given the centrality of the Expositions and their politics to the development of cross-Channel artistic dialogues, it seems only fitting to bring this study to an end with a brief examination of contemporary commentary on the health of the arts as represented – or not – at the Grand Palais. A perusal of much of the press coverage, at all points on the spectrum, is likely to give us a strong feeling that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*: the grumbling that the displays resembled an 'odious bazaar',¹¹ the ceaseless wrangling over the allotment of exhibition space to the various nations, the carping by critics of all nationalities (including French!) that France had, once again, allocated the best part of the exhibition space for itself, the furious debates about the primacy of French art, could just as easily belong to 1878 or 1889 as to 1900. Yet a new note of internationalist rapprochement crept into the reviews of some of the more forward-thinking observers. Although in 1878 the British journalist George Augustus Sala had acerbically cautioned the Exposition-goer against 'yield[ing] to the pleasing hallucination that International Exhibitions have anything to do with politics',¹² one could legitimately argue that the Expositions had played a significant role in the creation of artistic internationalism. The breakdown of boundaries between national schools was not always greeted as a positive development, and the perceived French monopoly on every aspect of the visual arts – from education to the market – was often blamed for the homogenisation of contemporary art; as Arsène Alexandre noted, 'internationally, we observe that the peculiarities of style are little by little dwindling and melting away in the most diverse countries. Even the tyro can nowadays at a glance distinguish between an old Italian and a Flemish or a German painting; but it is by no means certain that the most practised eye will hereafter be able to make a distinction between a German, a French and a Flemish work of our own time'.¹³ But perhaps the best summation of the

¹⁰ See Introduction.

¹¹ The description is Camille Pissarro's, cited in M. Stevens, 'The Exposition Universelle: "This vast competition of effort, realisation and victories"', in Rosenblum, Stevens and Dumas (2000), p. 59. Gustave Geffroy's criticism of the Exposition took the form of a debate between two imaginary philosophers, of whom the negative one also chose to characterise not only the Exposition, but Paris as a whole, as 'nothing more than a bazaar': G. Geffroy, 'Revue des idées: L'Exposition de 1900 et les Expositions: Plaidoyers pour et contre', *Revue encyclopédique* 10, p. 610.

¹² G. A. Sala, *Paris Herself Again in 1878-9* (London, 1879), vol. 1, p. 192.

¹³ A. Alexandre, 'Continental Pictures at the Paris Exhibition', *The Paris Exhibition 1900, Art Journal* (London, 1901), p. 323.

international situation in 1900, with all its optimism and doubts, is provided by the Belgian poet and critic Emile Verhaeren:

[Ever since the time of David], France has monopolised the vast production of art. There is only the École, unique and always the same, whether in London, Berlin, Brussels [...] Modern painting, on the contrary, lives on blues and violets; it breaks down sombre or dazzling light according to time of day and the movement of clouds and sun, it favours a delicate and vibrating facture. It has been adopted by all who wish to emancipate themselves from routine, it has won over Europe and even Asia and America. One paints, in accordance with this style, in Tokyo as well as in New York. But in time, precisely because it has been adopted by painters lacking in genius, it has become as banal as it is universal. Notwithstanding those great individuals who have amplified it, it has yet to inspire other masters. [...] Uniformity reigns supreme. And truly, covering the kilometres of carpet which determine the route through the Grand Palais . . . always the same from room to room, country to country, one finds the emblematic representation of the monotonous art of our time.¹⁴

Verhaeren's and Alexandre's fears that the dissolution of national difference augured the rise of bland uniformity were to prove unfounded, but their pinpointing of the increasing irrelevance of national schools to modern art is worth dwelling on. In the years immediately following the exhibition, slotting the younger generation of artists – for whom fertile dialogues with their counterparts in other countries were vital – into national schools became increasingly inappropriate, the inevitable outcome of the endless tug-of-war between nationalism and internationalism that coloured every aspect of life in the later nineteenth century. The rich and contentious dialogues between antinaturalist artists in Britain and France discussed herein can be viewed both as a microcosm of this paradigm shift and as one of its causes. In their wake, Europe's artistic landscape would never again be the same.

¹⁴ 'Dès ce moment, la France monopolise la grosse production de l'art. Il n'y a que l'école, unique et toujours la même, qu'elle soit à Londres, Berlin, Bruxelles [...] La peinture moderne, tout au contraire, vit de couleurs bleues et violettes; elle décompose la lumière sombre ou éclatante suivant les heures et la marche des nuages et du soleil, elle affectionne la facture menue et vibratile. Elle est adoptée par tous ceux qui veulent s'émanciper des routines, elle a gagné l'Europe et même l'Asie et l'Amérique. On peint, suivant son mode, à Tokyo aussi bien qu'à New York. Mais à son tour, précisément parce qu'elle est adoptée par des peintres sans génie, elle devient aussi banale qu'universelle. A part les individualités hautes qui l'ont magnifiée, elle n'a point encore suscitée ailleurs d'autres maîtres. [...] L'uniformité règne partout. Et vraiment, à parcourir le tapis kilométrique qui fait le tour du Grand Palais . . . toujours la même de salle en salle, de pays en pays, on y trouve la représentation emblématique de l'art monotone de notre temps.' E. Verhaeren, 'Chronique de l'Exposition', *Mercur de France* (June 1900), reprinted in E. Verhaeren, *Écrits sur l'art (1893-1916)*, ed. P. Aron (Brussels, 1997), pp. 779-81.

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Cross-Channel Dialogues:

Antinaturalism in Britain and France, c. 1878-1898

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2

Abstract

Symbolism was the first overtly international artistic movement, in the broadest sense of the word. To date, however, much Symbolist scholarship, shaped by the seminal Modernist accounts of Chassé, Goldwater and Lövgren, has focused on the achievements of French artists and writers to the exclusion of the equally significant contributions made by artists from other countries. British artists in particular have been sidelined, despite frequent contemporary acknowledgment of the importance of key artists such as Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts and Beardsley. Unfortunately, recent attempts to redress this imbalance, notably the 1997 Tate Gallery exhibition *Symbolism in Britain*, have erred toward the opposite extreme, claiming that Symbolism had first evolved in Britain, only to be appropriated by France. Furthermore, the retroactive application of the term Symbolism to British artists is problematic. By adopting the broader definition of antinaturalism and creating a series of case studies focusing on pairs or trios of artists whose interactions highlight important aspects of this cross-Channel exchange, this thesis aims to look anew at a major strand of cultural thought that transcended national boundaries.

This thesis seeks to recover an understanding of both the mutually beneficial, if occasionally contentious, cross-Channel dialogue and the mechanisms that made it possible. In the first half of the thesis, I consider the role of international exhibitions, especially the 1878 and 1889 Expositions Universelles, in promoting dialogue and disseminating artistic reputations, with particular emphasis on Burne-Jones, Watts, Moreau and Puvis de Chavannes. The second half considers antinaturalist exchange in the private sphere, with particular attention to the importance of reproductive and original prints in the reception and interpretation of artists and their work on both sides of the Channel. I also examine the role played in this exchange by poetry and music and the impulse toward a synthesis in the arts, with special emphasis on Debussy as a mediator between Rossetti and Maurice Denis and on the Wagnerian prints of Fantin-Latour, Redon and Beardsley. Returning once again to the arena of the Exposition Universelle, my thesis concludes with a consideration of critical perceptions of a new internationalism in the Exposition's fine art displays, and an assessment of the impact of the cross-Channel antinaturalist exchange in this development.

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Illustrations

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C: Pierre Cailler, *Catalogue raisonné de l’oeuvre gravé et lithographié de Maurice Denis* (1968)

H: Germain Hédiard, *L’oeuvre lithographique de Fantin-Latour* (1906)

Mathieu: Pierre-Louis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau: monographie et nouveau catalogue de l’oeuvre achevé* (1998)

Mellerio: André Mellerio, *Odilon Redon* (1913)

R: Brian Reade, *Aubrey Beardsley* (1967)

S: Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné* (1971)

Figure 1. Gustave Moreau, *L’Apparition* (Mathieu 186), 1874-6, watercolour on paper, 106 x 72.2 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, département des Arts graphiques.

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Introduction

Cross-Channel Dialogues

At the conclusion of his exhaustive history of Symbolism, *La Mêlée symboliste*, the critic Ernest Raynaud made the following surprising claim: Charles Morice is wrong to claim that the Symbolist movement was French in origin. It was no more so than Romanticism, of which it is a variety, and like Romanticism, of Anglo-German origin. [...] Aestheticism signified the cult of the form, with all concern for teaching and utilitarianism banished. It signified a spiritualised art, absolute art, art for art's sake, as understood by our poets inspired by them, Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire; these were the fundamentals of what we have since called the religion of beauty. All the refinements of Symbolism were implied in this formula: the hatred of the vulgar and the common, the search for rare sensations, the taste for the precious, archaisms, neologisms, unusual and coruscating words. In this order of ideas, the English aesthetes had anticipated everything.¹

Raynaud's vision of Symbolism, albeit largely centred upon its evolution in France, acknowledges the fundamental role that British writers and artists played in its development. Nor was he alone among his contemporaries in recognising the importance of international, and more specifically cross-Channel, exchanges to Symbolism's growth. Camille Mauclair's *L'Art en silence* (1901) paid frequent tribute to the impact of artists such as Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti on the Symbolist imagination, while two decades earlier, Joris-Karl Huysmans had paid ironic but genuine homage to the visionary paintings of George Frederic Watts in *À rebours* and Gabriel Sarrazin had devoted much ink in *La Revue indépendante* (1884) and in a monograph on English poetry (1885) to the parallels between the goals of the 'Aesthetic School' and his fellow Symbolists. Meanwhile, in London, Henri Fantin-Latour, who had been quietly exhibiting imaginative lithographs at the Dudley Gallery's Black and White Exhibitions since the 1870s, began to garner praise in the 1880s and 1890s for the Wagnerian subjects he showed at the Royal Academy, while

¹ 'Mais Charles Morice a tort de prétendre que le mouvement symboliste fut d'origine française. Il ne le fut pas plus que le romantisme dont il est une variété. Il est, comme lui, d'origine anglo-germaine. [...] L'esthétisme, cela signifiait le culte de la forme, tout souci d'enseignement et d'utilitarisme écarté. Cela signifiait l'art spiritualisé, l'art absolu, l'art pour l'art, tel que l'entendirent chez nous les poètes inspirés d'eux: Théophile Gautier et Charles Baudelaire; c'étaient les fondements jetés de ce qu'on a appelé depuis: la religion de la beauté. Tous les raffinements du symbolisme étaient impliqués

dans cette formule; la haine du vulgaire, du commun, la recherche des sensations rares, le goût du précieux, des archaïsmes, des néologismes, des mots insolites et coruscants. Dans cet ordre d'idées, les esthètes anglais ont tout prévu.' E. Raynaud, *La Mêlée symboliste* (Paris, 1918-1920), vol. 3, pp. 166-68. All translations from the French are mine, unless otherwise noted.

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Odilon Redon was making a bid to break into the London art market at a gallery near the offices of the influential publisher John Lane. Meanwhile, Aubrey Beardsley was not only praising the art of his French contemporaries to Arthur Symons and André Raffalovich, but also boasting of his contacts with such luminaries as Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. Over the last three decades of the nineteenth century, an era during which the impulse towards international rapprochement and dialogue coexisted uneasily with rising militarism and competing nationalisms, artistic exchange formed a vital, if frequently contentious, backbone in the evolution of a Symbolist aesthetic, and its importance was repeatedly, albeit sometimes grudgingly, acknowledged by commentators on both sides of the Channel.

This was not, however, the account of Symbolism put forward by the object of Raynaud's criticism, Charles Morice. Morice, in his 1889 treatise *La Littérature de toute à l'heure*, claimed that Symbolism's origins were 'Baudelairean and Verlainian' and thus wholly French and that its purity was only lately being polluted by the deleterious influence of foreigners.

Jean Moréas, a Greek; Jules Laforgue, long influenced by English and German poetics; Gustave Kahn, a Semite: to these foreign origins I attribute this neglect of the French, Latin genius, which, more than all others, loathes this systematic neglect of natural laws.²

It has been said that the ability to name something carries with it the privilege of ownership. Symbolism is a powerful case in point. It was arguably the first ever overtly international artistic movement – and I use the word 'artistic' in the broadest sense possible – yet it has suffered a curious fate at the hands of history and scholarship. In part because it was first formally named and its principles set forth by Jean Moréas in his 1886 'Manifeste de Symbolisme', and many of its most vocal and articulate practitioners were French, much subsequent scholarship on Symbolist literature and art has been strongly Francocentric, to the detriment or, on occasion, exclusion of the contributions of other countries. However blatantly nationalistic Morice's views were, his Francocentrism and that of many of his colleagues set the prevailing tone in the historiography of Symbolism for the greater part of the

² Jean Moréas, grec; Jules Laforgue, longtemps influencé par les poétiques anglaise et allemande; Gustave Kahn, sémite: à ces origines étrangères j'attribue cet oubli du génie français, latin, qui, plus que tout autre, répugne à cet oubli systématique des lois naturelles': C. Morice, *La Littérature de tout à l'heure* (Paris, 1889), p. 316. He adds in a note that 'c'est une des singularités du mouvement dit décadent que, si français par son origine baudelairienne et verlainienne, il fut, en ces derniers temps de sa plus retentissante période, comme capté par des écrivains jeunes de races étrangères à la nôtre' (p. 319).

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twentieth century. Nowhere does this hold truer than in the case of the France's beloved enemy, Britain. Yet the idea that French Symbolism engaged in a monologue rather than a dialogue with other nations is nowhere more erroneous than in regard to its longstanding cross-Channel rival. The eclipse of the contributions of British artists and writers has only recently begun to be challenged. It is my aim, in this thesis, to recover a deeper understanding of the dialogues, in word and image, conducted by Symbolist artists on both sides of the Channel, and in so doing reveal a more balanced and complex relationship between the two countries than has previously been acknowledged.

Why has the international, and more specifically the Anglo-French, character of Symbolism been so consistently sidelined? A number of factors have shaped the entrenchment of French pre-eminence. British insularity, on the part of both artists – notably those who dominated the New English Art Club (ironically, those very painters who promoted a British brand of Impressionism) at the turn of the century – and critics must surely bear part of the blame. However, the ascendancy of

littérateur art

critics such as Morice gave rise to two apparently contradictory problems that have long dogged efforts to re-evaluate Symbolism's position as a cultural phenomenon and art historical current. In a major artistic centre in which decades of institutional upheaval had contributed to the ascent of a dealer-critic system as best suited to the interests of the avant-garde, the art critic had accumulated tremendous influence; nowhere did this hold truer than in Symbolist circles, in which affiliations between poets and painters were prevalent and exceptionally strong, and it was the rare poet or novelist who did not practice art criticism at some point in his career.³ The eloquence and dominance of literary critics in France ensured the entrenchment of a new aesthetic hierarchy: in place of the hierarchy of genres that had reigned over the Salon and, to a lesser extent, the Royal Academy exhibitions, a pecking order of the arts arose, with music, the least mimetic, at the top, followed by poetry, with painting, deemed inextricably tied to the material world, at the bottom.⁴ Painting and the

³ For explorations of the changing role of art criticism in 19th century France, see C. and H. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York, 1993); J.-P. Bouillon, ed., *La critique d'art en France 1850-1900* (Saint-Etienne, 1989); and M. Orwicz, ed., *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France* (Manchester, 1994).

⁴ My discussion here and throughout this thesis of debates on the relative merits and objectives of literature and the visual arts is informed by Linda Goddard's investigation of inter-arts rivalries in France at the fin-de-siècle: L. Goddard, 'Aesthetic Hierarchies: Interchange and Rivalry Between the Visual Arts and Literature in France, c. 1890-c. 1920', Ph.D. thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art (London, 2004).

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graphic arts were consistently subordinated to literature, with the implication that where poet-critics led, painting simply followed and conformed to their aesthetic objectives. Most significantly, the authority of Symbolist critics has meant that the appropriateness of the very term Symbolism – a concept coined to define a nascent current in literature, rather than the visual arts – as a framework for thinking about this strand of late-nineteenth century art has, as I shall argue below, too long gone unquestioned and has considerably obstructed attempts at reassessment.

In turn, the 'literary' nature of Symbolist art, and its ostensible dependence on both literary subject matter and exegesis, has earned the distrust and neglect of Modernist critics. Combined with its bewildering stylistic diversity, its 'perverse' embrace of the past, its apparent flouting of the High Modernist doctrines of flatness and the drive to abstraction formulated and enforced by powerful critics like Clement Greenberg, and the dominance of France as the norm against which all modern art was judged (and often found wanting), this has long ensured that when Symbolism was studied at all, it was treated selectively and, ultimately, misleadingly.⁵ Earlier surveys of Symbolism, such as those by Charles Chassé (1947), Sven Lövgren (1959), and Robert Goldwater (1979), focus not merely on France, but on the formal innovations of a few avant-garde heroes such as Paul Gauguin, the Pont-Aven group and the Nabis, whose non-representational art conforms to Modernist notions of artistic progress.⁶ Given the normative position of French art, British antinaturalism, which could boast no obvious counterparts to Gauguin, was bound to suffer in comparison.⁷ Although in the 1950s Jacques Lethève and Robert Rosenblum both wrote seminal

⁵ Several of the artists I examine did, in fact, push the boundaries of representation, although the ends to which they applied such innovations are in themselves often controversial. Maurice Denis's conservative *nouveau classicisme* is a well-documented case in point, and the status of Gustave Moreau's so-called 'abstract' paintings, although frequently cited by apologists alongside his position as the teacher of Matisse, Rouault and Marquet as a key Modernist credential, is open to debate; see C. Scassellati Cooke, 'The ideal of history painting: Georges Rouault and other students of Gustave Moreau at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 1892-1898', *Burlington Magazine* 148, no. 1238 (May 2006), pp. 332-39, for a penetrating re-evaluation of such assumptions.

⁶ While Goldwater does extend his discussion to include Belgian, Dutch and Norwegian artists, British artists occupy a decidedly marginal position in his arguments. The Belgian art historian Robert Delevey proposed a somewhat more pan-European view in *Journal du Symbolisme* (Geneva, 1977), but his arguments still focus on the Francophone nations.

⁷ Dianne Sachko Macleod has cogently argued that British modernism must be assessed on its own terms, as a product of its political and cultural milieu, rather than measured against a French yardstick; her emphasis on the impact of Britain's political stability under Victoria's reign on the development of a modern idiom, versus the effect of periodic revolution in France on the French avant-garde, has informed my discussion, particularly in Chapters 1-3 (D. S. Macleod, 'The dialectics of modernism and English art', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, no. 1, 1995, pp. 1-14).

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analyses of its reception and influence in France, such advocates were the exception rather than the rule.⁸

As scholarly interest in Symbolism began to revive in the 1970s, awareness of its manifestations beyond France and the need for a reassessment that took them into account grew. Writing in the catalogue of the 1972 Arts Council exhibition of French Symbolist painting, Alan Bowness called for a reconsideration of Symbolism as an 'alternative tradition' that functioned as a bridge between Romanticism and Surrealism and existed alongside Impressionism in opposition to academic norms, rather than as a retardataire aberration.⁹ However, the most dramatic challenge to the traditional view of France as the source and centre of Symbolism, around which other nations orbited as satellites basking in its reflected light, was not mounted until 1995, in the form of the exhibition organised by Jean Clair, *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*.¹⁰ Casting its net to cover Symbolisms from Spain to Russia, the exhibition considered their development from a bewildering array of angles. However, the vast size of the undertaking guaranteed that breadth trumped depth and relatively little was added to an understanding of cross-Channel artistic interchange. The most recent survey of Symbolism, by Rodolphe Rapetti (2005), takes a similarly pan-European approach and, although Rapetti accords British artists more attention than many of his predecessors, he tellingly categorises Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Watts as 'guiding spirits' rather than key players.¹¹ At the same time, scholars of Victorian art began to shake off the parochialism that had long prevailed in the field with investigations into the impact of Pre-Raphaelitism (an equally problematic term which I shall address below) on the Continent; however, many of them continued to adhere to the conventional line that the British artists had inspired their European peers without

⁸ J. Lethève, 'La connaissance des peintres préraphaélites anglais 1855-1900', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (May-June 1959), pp. 315-28 ; R. Rosenblum, 'British Painting vs. Paris', *Partisan Review* 24 (Winter 1957), pp. 95-100.

⁹ A. Bowness, 'An Alternative Tradition?', in *French Symbolist Painters: Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, Redon and their Followers* (exh. cat., London, Hayward Gallery and Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, 1972), pp. 14-20.

¹⁰ J. Clair, ed., *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe* (exh. cat., Montreal, Musée des beaux-arts, 1995).

Clair runs counter to tradition by identifying the centre of Symbolism as Belgium, rather than France, on the basis that, by virtue of geography and culture, it is the crossroads of Latin and Germanic Europe.

¹¹ R. Rapetti, *Symbolism*, trans. D. Dusinberre (Paris, 2005), pp. 21-32. Rapetti also claims that 'points of contact [between British and Continental artists] were few and far between' (p. 21), an assumption which, this thesis will demonstrate, is groundless.

themselves absorbing any lessons from their contemporaries,¹² and focused study of France's impact on British art has lagged behind.¹³

The most significant, and certainly the most public, challenge to the longestablished perception of France as leader and Britain as follower was mounted by the 1997 Tate Gallery exhibition *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910*.¹⁴ Although its stated goal – to restore the imaginative, antirealist

strand of Victorian art to its rightful place in a European context and to correct the longstanding bias toward France – was admirable, the exhibition's title alone inadvertently lays bare the numerous problems with which it and its thesis were fraught. By expanding Symbolism's accepted lifespan of the last two decades of the nineteenth century more than twofold, the curators not only lost focus but, more alarmingly, simply subverted the old formula, implying that Symbolism had in fact originated in Britain decades before its traditional birth date and had been appropriated by the French. Not only are several of the essays and catalogue entries suffused with a palpable John Bullishness,¹⁵ the representation of major French artists by either one or two minor works, if at all, reinforced the misleading impression that where Britain led, France merely followed. More troubling was the authors' insistence on imposing a narrow and simplistic definition upon a movement – or, to be more accurate, a current – that was characterised from the start by its nebulousness, by its ability to elude classification and by its key players' elliptical pronouncements;¹⁶ if they opened out Symbolism's timeframe, the corresponding constriction of its import closed off avenues to a real reassessment of Britain's place in the Symbolist constellation. And most troubling of all was their imposition of the term 'Symbolist' on British art.

Edmund Wilson claimed, in 1931, that 'the battle of Symbolism was not fought out in English', and, as MaryAnne Stevens points out, his remark is largely

¹² See, for example, S. P. Casteras and A. C. Faxon, eds., *Pre-Raphaelite Art in its European Context* (London, 1995) and T. Tobin, ed., *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism* (New York, 2004).

¹³ Edward Morris's encyclopedic study, *French Art in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, was only published in 2005. Its approach is almost exclusively documentary and, while invaluable as a survey of the whole century, contains relatively little material on Symbolism.

¹⁴ A. Wilton and R. Upstone, eds., *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910* (exh. cat., London, Tate Gallery, Munich, Haus der Kunst and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1997).

¹⁵ A notable exception is MaryAnne Stevens's essay, 'Symbolism: a French Monopoly?', in *ibid.*, pp. 47-63.

¹⁶ Indeed, A. G. Lehmann opens his study of Symbolist literature in France with the admission that it is far easier to say what Symbolism is not than to define what constitutes it: A. G. Lehmann, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 14-18.

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justified.¹⁷ Furthermore, as Caroline Arscott suggests, the application of a term with a French pedigree to British art is perhaps more an expression of critical insecurity regarding its stature in comparison with its continental rivals than a legitimate revisionist reading.¹⁸ The first significant study of Symbolism in English, Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, was only published in 1899, and centred on French Symbolism, Symons admitting that 'France is the country of movements, and it is naturally in France that I have studied the development of a principle'.¹⁹ If literary Britain lagged behind France in giving rise to, much less acknowledging, a native Symbolist movement – the countless *petites revues* put out by rival cénacles that proliferated in Paris in the 1880s only found their analogue in

Britain in the 1890s in such short-lived publications as *The Pageant* and *The Savoy* – then the British art world lagged still further. A thorough survey of art periodicals covering the last two decades of the nineteenth century does not turn up any instances in which British artists who were admired and emulated by French Symbolists, such as Burne-Jones and Rossetti, are termed ‘Symbolist’. A corresponding survey of French art criticism, both mainstream and avant-garde, is similarly fruitless. Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts and sometimes Beardsley are often mentioned in the same breath as, and praised (or derided) for the same qualities as, their French counterparts, but even thoroughgoing Anglophiles such as Robert de la Sizeranne and Gabriel Mourey never acknowledged them as Symbolists, preferring the term ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ and terming them instead ‘idealist’ or ‘imaginative’ artists.²⁰ Clearly, any attempt to re-categorise the artists more popularly known as Pre-Raphaelites as Symbolists in the French sense is at best retroactive and at worst wishful thinking. Although they were recognised – at least in France – as having a similar objective and aesthetic as ‘Symbolist’ painters, they were never, for a variety of reasons, regarded in their own day as Symbolists.

¹⁷ E. Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York, 1931), p. 32, cited by Stevens in Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 47.

¹⁸ C. Arscott, ‘Signing off’, *Tate* 13 (1997), p. 88.

¹⁹ A. Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London, 1899), p. 5.

²⁰ ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ is, of course, just as slippery a term as ‘Symbolist’, considering its frequent misapplication and the radical differences between the hyper-realistic, socially engaged art of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the sensuous, allusive imagery developed by Rossetti and his followers after the disintegration of the Brotherhood; see E. Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 87-131, for a thorough discussion of the origins and mutations of the term in Britain. The term is even more problematic in a nineteenth-century French context, as critics tended to use it with little understanding, to the extent that it sometimes served as a blanket term for all contemporary British art. I have tried to restrict my usage of the terms ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ and ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’ to quotations from historical sources.

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Indeed, the validity of Symbolism as a term for the visual arts as a whole is ripe for reconsideration. It is worth rehearsing its etymology here. Although Jean Moréas is widely credited with inventing the term in the notorious manifesto published in *Le Figaro* on 18 September 1886, as well as with defining its central tenet as ‘cloth[ing] the Idea with a sensible form which, nevertheless, would not be a goal in itself but, at the same time as it served to express the Idea, would remain subject to it’, this was not in fact the first time it had been applied to either poets or artists, not least by Moréas himself.²¹ The previous year, in a riposte to Paul Bourde’s article on Decadent poets, he had urged that Mallarmé, Verlaine, Laurent Tailhade, Charles Vignier, Morice and, not least, himself instead be grouped under the heading ‘symbolists’.²² In both cases, his definition of Symbolism gave primacy to literature, although the principle of ‘subjective deformation’ was later co-opted by Maurice Denis in his own manifesto, significantly not on Symbolism but *néo-traditionnisme*. One could argue that Moréas had not genuinely broken with centuries of precedent in defining Symbolism in literary terms: Larousse’s *Grand Dictionnaire Universel* (1876) included exhaustive entries on symbol and symbolism, but in the mass of examples, drawn from literature, rhetoric, chemistry, religion and mythology, the sole reference to pictorial symbolism came at the end of the entry in a brief discussion of Egyptian art.²³

‘Symbolism’, with a lower-case s, was apparently used for the first time to characterise an artist’s style in the same year, when Emile Zola, reviewing the 1876 Salon, grumbled that ‘Gustave Moreau has launched himself into symbolism’, while

the critic Léonce Duboscq du Pesquidoux noted in his review of the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition Universelle that it had become a commonplace to accuse Moreau of ‘wanting to practice philosophical symbolism’.²⁴ As with Louis Leroy’s ‘impressionism’, its purpose was decidedly derisive. In the hands of the committed Naturalist Zola, implicit in the condemnation is that Moreau practiced a literary, rather than painterly art, concerned with the fantastical to the exclusion of the grit and grime of modern life. Although in the 1880s, Symbolist writers forged strong

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links with painters whose aesthetic they considered commensurate with their own principles, particularly Moreau, Puvis and Redon, pictorial Symbolism only received a thorough theoretical treatment in 1892 – the year after Symbolism had both been crowned the victor over Naturalism in Jules Huret’s compilation of interviews with writers, *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire*, and pronounced dead by none other than Moréas²⁵ – when the controversial young art critic Gabriel-Albert Aurier published his seminal tract, tellingly titled ‘Le Symbolisme en peinture – Paul Gauguin’.²⁶ Aurier’s definition, although it acknowledged the debts owed by painters like Gauguin and followers such as Emile Bernard to the previous generation (including Moreau, Puvis and the Pre-Raphaelites), hinged specifically on the radical formal innovations of Gauguin and largely excluded other forms of pictorial Symbolism.²⁷ To confuse the matter still further, Aurier’s contemporary, André Mellerio, published *Le Mouvement idéaliste in peinture* four years later, in which most of the artists mentioned by Aurier were grouped under the heading of ‘Idealists’, while in the intervening years the critic Henri Mazel went on record with the declaration that ‘Symbolism is foreign to the plastic arts’, on the basis that painting could never transcend the confines of material reality.²⁸ Given the frequent highhandedness of Symbolist writers with regard to the visual arts, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the French artists associated in the public and literary imagination with the movement actively resisted the label. There were of course exceptions, like Denis. More typical, however, was Moreau, adulated by Symbolist and Decadent writers from Huysmans to Robert de Montesquiou, Francis Poictevin and Joséphin Péladan, but whose lack of reciprocal admiration is attested to in the countless autographed editions of Symbolist poetry and prose in his library with the pages uncut, while Redon was, with good reason, compulsively suspicious of writers’ attempts to appropriate his oneiric imagery for their own ends. Given the inadequacy of Symbolism as a label for the visual arts and the fact that most of the artists most deeply involved in the cross-Channel nexus of ‘Symbolism’ would either have not recognised or refused outright the label

²⁵ J. Huret, *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire* (Paris, 1891).

²⁶ Aurier had, in fact, planned to publish the article in 1889, to coincide with Gauguin’s exhibition at the Café Volpini.

²⁷ For an exhaustive study of Aurier’s art criticism and relations with artists, see J. Simpson, *Aurier, Symbolism and the Visual Arts* (Bern, 1999).

²⁸ ‘Le symbolisme est étranger à l’art plastique’: ‘Saint-Antoine’ [Henri Mazel], ‘Qu’est-ce que le symbolisme?’, *L’Ermitage* (June 1894), p. 335. Henri Peyre echoes Mazel’s point in his study of the same name: H. Peyre, *Qu’est-ce que le symbolisme?* (Paris, 1974), pp. 212-28.

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‘Symbolist’, and that it is patently mistaken to suppose that such a current did not

exist before the advent of Moréas, Aurier et al., it makes sense to seek a more openended term that allows us to look anew at the vast, protean current that exercised such a strong influence over the second half of the nineteenth century and to better understand the channels of influence and artistic interchange that evolved between Britain and France. Michael Marlais has suggested grouping the artists variously classed as Symbolists, Synthetists, Idealists and Idéistes under the broad category of antinaturalism, used as a blanket concept for the intellectual mood that resisted naturalism's predilection for the material, the factual and the ordinary and embraced the imaginative and the intangible.²⁹ I have adopted antinaturalism as a means of stripping away the baggage long associated with Symbolism and Pre-Raphaelitism, in order that we might look with fresh eyes at an important strand of cultural thought that transcended national boundaries. I have also found antinaturalism a useful means of extricating the visual from the dominance of the literary that is sustained by two of the most recent investigations, by Annie Dubernard-Laurent (1996) and Laurence Brogniez (2003), of Symbolism in Britain and France.³⁰ While an inquiry into the fertile and contentious bonds between writers and artists forms a significant portion of my study, close visual analysis informs my arguments just as strongly.

My investigation of cross-Channel exchanges among antinaturalist artists is not intended as a comprehensive historical survey; an attempt at an exhaustive study of such a protean movement within the scope of a doctoral thesis would privilege breadth over depth and ultimately contribute little to an understanding of this rich and complex international nexus. Rather, I have chosen to structure my enquiry as a series of six case studies focusing on key elements in this cross-Channel dialogue. In so

²⁹M. Marlais, *Conservative echoes in fin de siècle Parisian art criticism* (University Park, 1992), p. 6. Marlais contends that Symbolism and the revival of idealism should be seen as 'two sides of the same coin'. I should add that my use of the term 'antinaturalism' must not be taken as typifying a polar opposition between antinaturalism and naturalism; as Sharon L. Hirsh demonstrates in her social history of Symbolism, Symbolists were motivated by many of the same sociopolitical concerns, such as urban decay, mental illness, the power of the crowd and feminism, as their Naturalist counterparts: S. L. Hirsh, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (Cambridge 2004).

³⁰Dubernard-Laurent's thesis covers the period 1855-1900 and, in fact, her most innovative arguments centre on the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites at the 1855 Exposition Universelle and their influence on the realism of Courbet; her coverage of Symbolist exchange at the end of the century is primarily a rehearsal of much of the information covered in *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts* (A. Dubernard-Laurent, 'Le Pré-Raphaélisme en Angleterre, les arts et les lettres en France. Essai d'étude comparative', Ph.D. thesis, Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, 1996). Brogniez broadens her focus to include Belgium and her exploration of the role of writers in promoting British painters on the continent is extremely detailed, but her approach is primarily literary (L. Brogniez, *Préraphaélisme et Symbolisme. Peinture littéraire et image poétique*, Paris 2003).

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doing, I have necessarily been obliged to delimit both a time frame and my selection of contributors to the exchange. While compelling arguments have been advanced for setting the birth date of antinaturalism either, as Bowness does, as early as 1856, hard on the heels of the death of Théodore Chassériau³¹ and a year before Baudelaire penned his celebration of synaesthesia, 'Correspondances', or as late as 1886, as Clair does,³² and evidence of exchanges, albeit sparse and sporadic, between French and British artists certainly exists from the mid-1850s, I have chosen to take as my starting point the first significant point of contact between France and the so-called second wave of Pre-Raphaelitism, the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris, and to bring my study to a conclusion in 1898, upon the deaths of many leading antinaturalist figures and at a time when the critical consensus assumed that antinaturalism/Symbolism had run its course.³³ I have also limited the artists under discussion to those who

participated most in this exchange of ideas, whether on the strength of written or visual evidence, and whose work displays noteworthy affinities with their cross-Channel counterparts. The reader will therefore only find Gauguin in these pages as a go-between for Redon and his London patron Mortimer Menpes; other luminaries such as Sérusier, Bernard and van Gogh are absent. I have chosen to discard the commonplace but ultimately facile Modernist division of Symbolist/antinaturalist artists into two camps, followers of Moreau (those who clothed new subject matter in traditional forms) and followers of Puvis (those who recognised that new subject matter demanded a new visual vocabulary), for although some of the artists I examine here (Moreau, Rossetti, Burne-Jones) clearly fall into the former category and others (Puvis, Redon) are superficially allied with the latter,³⁴ others, like Watts, Beardsley and Fantin-Latour, are difficult to categorise, while Denis, whose anti-literary emphasis on form in his 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme' at first glance marks him as an obvious follower of Puvis, displays remarkable affinities with Rossetti and Burne-Jones in his interest in poetry and mysticism and his quasi-devotional idealisation of women.

³¹ Bowness (1972), p. 14.

³² Clair (1995), p. 17.

³³ These chronological boundaries are somewhat fluid, particularly with respect to my discussion of Rossetti, whose career reached its apogee long before 1878 and whose influence in France was by and large posthumous; see Chapter 4.

³⁴ M. Stevens, 'Towards a definition of Symbolism', in J. Christian, ed., *The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art* (exh. cat., London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1989), p. 35.

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Contrary to conventional accounts of Symbolism, which treat it as aspiring to an ivory-tower isolation from the turmoil of contemporary society, the first half of this study seeks to uncover the role of the public arena in the evolution of a cross-Channel dialogue. My first chapter focuses on the reception of Burne-Jones and Watts's painting at the 1878 Exposition Universelle – its first outing in France – and sets it within the wider context of the Exposition and contemporary debates concerning the state and relative positions of French and British art in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. Studies of cross-Channel antinaturalism traditionally give primacy to the 1889 Exposition as a site of artistic exchange but, I contend, the enthusiastic reception which Burne-Jones and Watts found in Paris in 1889 could not have occurred without the initial discovery of 1878. My examination of the consequences of the earlier Exposition sets the stage for the second and third chapters, the first of which investigates the position occupied by antinaturalism in the physical and political milieu of the 1889 Exposition and focuses on the display of paintings by Puvis and Watts. I argue that, rather than representing a retreat from the Exposition's crass materialism and triumphalist politics, Puvis and Watts engage with the fantasy vision of the Third Republic promoted by the Exposition's organisers by delivering a stinging critique and offering an alternative dream. The last chapter in this sequence is a case study of Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and Moreau's *Galatée*; in addition to analysing their significance in the context of the 1889 Exposition, where both were exhibited, I consider the affinities between Burne-Jones and Moreau, beginning with the genesis of both works, and examine their mutual use of Renaissance prototypes to the end of creating a new and perverse type of religious art.

Of course, many important exchanges occurred beyond the exhibition hall, and the second half of my thesis tracks the flow of influence in the more private milieux of personal connections, specialist periodicals and the print trade. The dissemination of

artistic reputations between Britain and France through reproductive prints and the corresponding problems of visual mistranslation engendered by technological limitations remain a little-studied area but, while the evidence is necessarily anecdotal, my contention is that it proved a vital channel of influence. The importance of reproductions and their inherent limitations particularly informs my fourth chapter, which looks at the posthumous reputation and influence of Rossetti in France, as both poet and painter, and more specifically on Denis's and Redon's responses to

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reproductions of his art, as well as on Denis's collaboration with Claude Debussy on a musical setting of Rossetti's poem 'The Blessed Damozel'. I suggest that the Rossetti who was known and emulated in France was the product of translation and would, in some ways, have been unrecognisable in his native Britain. Conversely, in the fifth chapter I examine the British response to Moreau, especially to the exhibitions of his work in London at the Grosvenor Gallery (1877) and the offices of the art publisher Goupil, and I explore the impact of his depictions of Salome on Beardsley, whom Oscar Wilde accused of flouting his own Moreau-influenced conception of this character but whose engagement with Moreau's Salome in fact informed his apparently parodic illustrations for the play *Salome*. My final chapter explores the spread of Wagnerian imagery in Britain through the medium of Fantin-Latour's and Redon's transfer lithographs and their influence on the Wagnerian imagery of Beardsley, the only major British artist to participate in this aspect of antinaturalism, as well as Fantin's role in transmitting a Rococo-inflected Wagnerian aesthetic to Beardsley. Finally, my coda considers the state of antinaturalism and cross-Channel artistic exchange around 1900, and suggests that reports of antinaturalism's death have been greatly exaggerated.

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Chapter 1

'Strange but striking poetry': the reception of British antinaturalist painting at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1878

In 1867 the English school . . . was in the midst of indecision. The Pre-Raphaelites stopped, and another branch, still enclosed in the secret of a bud, was preparing to burst from the trunk . . . A fog hovered over English art, hiding its imminent transformations, which we see today.¹

When the 1878 Exposition Universelle opened its gates, some observers scoffed that it was but a pitiful shadow of its glittering elder sisters. Subsequent scholarship on the Expositions has followed suit. The Expositions of 1855, 1867, and especially 1889 and 1900 have benefited from in-depth studies, while the 1878 Exposition has languished in relative obscurity.² Most attempts to explore the Exposition's problems and complexities have tended to be founded on erroneous assumptions about its political backdrop and to treat the 1878 Exposition as a minor event in comparison with its predecessors and successors, as a sort of insignificant lull. This oversight has likewise affected study of the Expositions' contribution to the development of the fine arts in Europe. What critical attention the 1878 Exposition's displays of fine art have received has focused almost wholly on the French section, with little significant attention thus far given to the involvement of other participating nations, particularly Britain.

At first glance, this lacuna may not seem exceptional. The 1878 Exposition Universelle was the most troubled of the Expositions organised under the aegis of the
¹'En 1867 l'école anglaise . . . était en pleine indécision. Les préraphaélites s'arrêtaient, et un autre rameau encore renfermé dans le secret du bourgeon, se préparait à s'élancer du tronc. . . . Une brume planait au-dessus de l'art anglais, cachant de prochaines transformations, celles que nous voyons

aujourd'hui.' E. Duranty, 'Exposition Universelle: Les écoles étrangères de Peinture. Troisième et dernier article: Belgique et Angleterre', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1878), p. 298. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the French are my own.

² Exceptions to this reluctance to discuss the events of 1878 include J. M. Roos, 'Within the "Zone of Silence": Monet and Manet in 1878', *Art History* 11, no. 3 (1988), pp. 374-407, and L. Straarup-Hansen, 'French Painting at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, 1878' (MA dissertation, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 2002). Paul Greenhalgh and Raymond Isay both include the 1878 Exposition in their broader discussions of the phenomenon of Expositions Universelles and similar events, but neither gives it as much importance as its cousins: P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: the Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions, and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 115-16; R. Isay, *Panorama des Expositions Universelles* (Paris, 1937), pp. 137-75. Miriam R. Levin also touches on the 1878 Exposition in *Republican Art and Ideology in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Ann Arbor, 1986); however, her refusal to attach any importance to the fact that the Republicans were not in full control of the government before 1879 and her underlying assumption that the 1878 Exposition took place more or less under similar political circumstances to that of the 1889 Exposition are highly problematic.

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Third Republic;³ Daniel Halévy's characterisation of the Third Republic as 'a regime of discord tempered by festivals' has more than a grain of truth in it.⁴ Furthermore, despite the pomp and glitter of the opening festivities and the general air of desperate gaiety which reigned over the duration of the Exposition,⁵ the French Fine Art section could not be said to show French artistic achievement at its acme. For a variety of reasons, including political infighting, aesthetic conservatism, and the packing of the selection committee with Academicians and other official artists who acted in their own interests, the distinctly unrepresentative French Fine Art exhibition gave the general public and art critics alike the impression that the best France had to offer was stale, backward-looking history painting.⁶ French art critics were unanimous in voicing despair at what they saw, as well as fear that France had been irreparably weakened by the recent loss of so many great artists and the ordeals it had suffered during the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune.⁷ France's artistic supremacy, which it and other European nations had for so long taken for granted, seemed for the first time to be under genuine threat.

France's temporary fall from its pedestal had an unexpected but significant side effect. Artists and critics were suddenly compelled to look more closely and with a more open mind at the art of other nations, not least at that of its neighbour on the other side of the Channel. 1878 was not, of course, the first time that contemporary British painting had had a forum in France. Constable had found numerous admirers when he exhibited at the Salon in the 1820s and was acknowledged as a key influence on the Barbizon painters; the British Fine Art section at the 1855 Exposition, particularly the works by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, had caused a great stir, with critics struck by the Pre-Raphaelites' acid colour and insistence on

³ For summaries of the political situation in France during the first decade of the Third Republic, see J. P. T. Bury, *France 1814-1940*, 5th ed. (London and New York, 1985); *idem*, *Gambetta and the Making of the Third Republic* (London, 1973); G. Chapman, *The Third Republic of France: The First Phase, 1871-1894* (London, 1962); J. Chastenet, *Histoire de la Troisième République: L'Enfance de la Troisième* (Paris, 1952); and D. Halévy, *La République des ducs* (Paris, 1937).

⁴ D. Halévy, 'Après le Seize Mai. Une année d'Exposition: 1878', *La revue universelle* 16 (1936), p. 423.

⁵ For contemporary accounts of the opening festivities, see especially R. Delorme, ed., *L'art et l'industrie de tous les peuples à l'Exposition Universelle de 1878* (Paris, 1878), pp. 11-15, and L. Gonse, 'Coup d'oeil à vol d'oiseau sur l'Exposition Universelle', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1878), pp. 481-3.

⁶ Straarup-Hansen (2002), pp. 50-1. For a discussion of differences between 'academic' and 'official' painting, see A. Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 1986), pp. 15-21.

⁷ See, for example, P. Mantz, 'Exposition Universelle: La Peinture française', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (October 1878), pp. 417-20 (hereafter Mantz 1878a).

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near-microscopic detail.⁸ However, in both 1855 and 1867, British painting, Pre-Raphaelite in particular, was generally treated more as a curiosity distinguished by its quaint naïveté than as a school of art worthy of consideration on a level with its French counterpart. As well, as Edmond Duranty pointed out in his review of the British section at the 1878 Exposition, the intervals of eleven or twelve years between Expositions were bound to produce a disjointed view of the changes and progress occurring in the British school.

However, 1878 was to be different from British painting's previous outings in Paris. Over the previous eleven-year interval, after what critics generally agreed had been a disappointing exhibition in 1867, Edward Burne-Jones and George Frederic Watts had emerged as stars of the secessionist Grosvenor Gallery and talents to be reckoned with; the 1878 Exposition Universelle marked the first exhibition of their works in France.⁹ In fact, the so-called second Pre-Raphaelite school was represented in force in the British section, with contributions from many painters considered followers of Burne-Jones, including Grosvenor regulars John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, Marie Spartali Stillman, Walter Crane, Albert Moore, and Thomas Armstrong. Critics were struck by, and consistently remarked on, these artists' strong group identity and idiosyncratic common points, namely, a preference for literary and imaginative subjects, an emulation of early Renaissance style and technique, a disregard for academic correctness in drawing, and an emphasis on atmosphere and suggestion at the expense of concrete narrative.

I do not want to fall into the anachronistic trap of dubbing Burne-Jones and Watts 'Symbolists', not least because, as noted in the Introduction, this primarily literary term is generally acknowledged to have been coined, and its principles elucidated, in Jean Moréas's 1886 'Manifeste du Symbolisme', well after the Exposition. Yet subjecting painting to the same rule as literature obscures the

⁸ For French critical judgments of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings displayed at the 1855 Exposition Universelle, see for example C. Baudelaire, 'Salon de 1859', in *idem, Critique d'art* (Paris, 1992), p. 269, which specifically praises John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*; E. Chesneau, *La peinture anglaise, 1730-1882* (Paris, 1882), Duranty (1878), and E. Rod, 'Les Préraphaélites anglais (1^{er} article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1887), pp. 177-95. Note that the term 'Pre-Raphaelite' could be used very loosely, and sometimes without much understanding, by French critics in the nineteenth century; sometimes it was used as a blanket term to refer to all English painting from 1850 onward.

⁹ Edward Burne-Jones was born Edward Burne Jones and only began to hyphenate his surname in 1886, eventually formalising the change in 1894 when he received his baronetcy. For the sake of consistency, I shall refer to him as Burne-Jones, except in direct quotations. This is particularly important in cases where uncertainty about the correct spelling highlights a critic's lack of familiarity with the artist.

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divergent development of a Symbolist, or rather antinaturalist, tendency in visual art. In fact, the first traced use of the term 'symbolism' in relation to painting occurs in Emile Zola's complaint in 1876 that 'Gustave Moreau has launched himself into symbolism'.¹⁰ The committed Naturalist Zola did not intend this as a compliment, and repeated his disparaging remarks in his review of Moreau's 'symbolist' paintings at the 1878 Exposition. On a more positive note, the Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn, apologist for Moréas and an important art critic in his own right, took 1878 as the starting point of his biographical sketch of the movement, 'Les Origines du Symbolisme'. While Kahn devoted relatively little space to the visual arts in his account, he noted that the brightest hopes for a movement that could emerge from the

crushing domination of the Naturalists and the Parnassians were to be found in the painting of the Impressionists and the quintessential French antinaturalist painter, Moreau:

‘Painting was the impressionists exhibiting wonders in vacant apartments for three months. It was, at the Exposition of 1878, a marvellous panel by Gustave Moreau, opening onto legend a door worked in niello, damascening and gold . . .’¹¹

Symbolist-penned histories of the movement are notorious for painting conflicting pictures of its origins and for giving personal rivalries and one-upmanship free rein; Kahn’s version is rather unusual in locating Symbolism’s origins almost as much in painting as in literature, although the visual arts quickly cede their place in his account to fellow poets.¹²

Conversely, while Symbolism may never have boasted the spokesmen or the articulated programme in Britain that it enjoyed in France, it is worth pointing out that the critic Frederick Wedmore, in his *Studies in English Art*, published in book form in 1880, wrote of Burne-Jones that ‘in some sense it is to his disadvantage that he has set himself so especially to the art of symbolism, and the realisation of classic or mediaeval story’.¹³ Although Wedmore noted that Burne-Jones’s ‘symbolism’ alienated many viewers, he maintained that it also set him apart from the stale

¹⁰ ‘Gustave Moreau s’est lancé dans le symbolisme’. Zola (1959), p. 187.

¹¹ ‘La peinture c’était les impressionnistes exposant des merveilles dans des appartements vacants pour trois mois. C’était, à l’exposition de 1878, un merveilleux panneau de Gustave Moreau, ouvrant sur la légende une porte niellée et damasquinée et orfèvrée . . .’ G. Kahn, ‘Les Origines du Symbolisme’ (1900), in *idem*, *Symbolistes et Décadents* (Geneva, 1977, 1936), p. 17.

¹² See Goddard (2004) for an in-depth discussion of Symbolist debates on the position of the visual arts in relation to literature.

¹³ F. Wedmore, *Studies in English Art: Second Series* (London, 1880), pp. 210-11.

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conventionalism of many of his peers. Furthermore, Burne-Jones and Watts were embraced by Symbolist poets and critics in France after 1886 and comparisons were frequently drawn between their work and that of French antinaturalist painters, in particular Moreau and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. Tellingly, the Anglophile writer Robert de la Sizeranne noted in the introduction to *La Peinture anglaise contemporaine* (1895), unfortunately without indicating a date for the beginning of this trend, that ‘for a long time, at meetings of symbolists, the names of Watts and Burne-Jones have been pronounced with reverence, and many accept them and repeat them as magic words whose virtue requires no explanation’.¹⁴ Although they were not recognised as Symbolist artists per se by their contemporaries, their work was acknowledged as displaying a kinship with the French antinaturalist artists embraced by Symbolist writers.

Curiously, the importance of the appearance of Burne-Jones and Watts at the 1878 Exposition, and its impact on the establishment of a dialogue between antinaturalist artists in Britain and France, have been either ignored or downplayed in favour of the 1889 Exposition, almost from the start. As early as 1898, Sizeranne, arguably the chief contemporary chronicler of British Symbolism in France, dismissed Burne-Jones’s works at the 1878 Exposition as ‘an attraction to critics, but not to the public’;¹⁵ this assessment was echoed six years later by Georgiana Burne-Jones in her biography of her late husband.¹⁶ The classic starting point of twentieth-century scholarship on the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites in France, Jacques Lethève’s ‘La Connaissance des peintres préraphaélites anglais 1855-1900’,¹⁷ ascribes little importance to 1878, and most subsequent studies have followed suit.¹⁸

¹⁴ ‘Depuis longtemps, dans les cénacles symbolistes, on entend prononcer avec recueillement les noms

de Watts et de Burne-Jones, et beaucoup les acceptent et se les transmettent comme on fait d'un vocable magique dont la vertu dispense de tout éclaircissement'. R. de la Sizeranne, *La Peinture anglaise contemporaine* (Paris, 1895), pp. 5-6.

¹⁵R. de la Sizeranne, 'In Memoriam: Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Bart. (Born Aug. 28, 1833; Died June 17, 1898.) A Tribute from France', *Magazine of Art* (August 1898), p. 513.

¹⁶G. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, (London, 1904), vol. 2, p. 85.

¹⁷Lethève (1959), pp. 318-19.

¹⁸Two such studies are C. Allemand-Cosneau, 'La fortune critique de Burne-Jones en France', in J. Munro, ed., *Burne-Jones, 1833-1898: Dessins du Fitzwilliam Museum de Cambridge* (exh. cat., Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts and Charleroi, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1992), pp. 69-80, and L. des Cars, 'Burne-Jones and France', in J. Christian and S. Wildman, eds., *Edward Burne-Jones, Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (exh. cat., New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Birmingham, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and Paris, Musée d'Orsay 1998), pp. 25-39. Both authors cite Charles Blanc's evaluation of *The Beguiling of Merlin* but say little else about contemporary critical reactions to Burne-Jones's work in 1878.

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The continuing disregard of the 1878 Exposition Universelle has, unfortunately, hindered a deeper understanding of this cross-Channel dialogue. The Francocentrism of most previous analyses has unjustly obscured the complex, and above all, cosmopolitan nature of the exhibitions. While British antinaturalism, represented in this instance by Burne-Jones and Watts, excited noticeably less attention in 1878 than it did in 1889, it would be incorrect to view the outpouring of enthusiasm for their work at the later Exposition as an Athena-like phenomenon, sprung fully formed from nowhere. Rather, as I hope to demonstrate here, not only did the political circumstances in 1878 provide favourable conditions for it to take root, the appearance of British antinaturalist painting at the Exposition Universelle was vital to the generation of an exchange of ideas between Britain and France.

'Great tranquilliser' or temporary nepenthe? The organisation of the French Fine Art Section

In announcing the new International Exposition to the world, France affirms her confidence in her institutions; she declares her willingness to persevere in the ideas of moderation and wisdom that have inspired her politics over the last five years; she proclaims that she wants peace, which alone has the power to render human activity truly fecund in giving it security.

– Teisserenc de Bort, 1876¹⁹

The erroneous assumption common to most studies of the 1878 Exposition Universelle is that the Exposition had been an overwhelmingly, if not purely, Republican project from its very beginnings. Even two of the more even-handed examples, Daniel Halévy's 'Après le Seize Mai. Une année d'Exposition: 1878'²⁰ and Jane Mayo Roos's 'Within the "Zone of Silence": Monet and Manet in 1878', fall victim to the conviction that the Exposition's creation represented a triumph by the Republicans over their conservative detractors. In fact, the intent to hold an Exposition had been declared on 4 April 1876, more than a year before the Seize Mai crisis and when the government's overall composition still merited Halévy's label 'the Republic of dukes'. The decree was signed on 13 April by none other than the

¹⁹'En annonçant au monde la nouvelle Exposition internationale, la France affirme sa confiance dans les institutions qu'elle s'est données; elle déclare sa volonté de persévérer dans les idées de modération et de sagesse qui ont inspiré sa politique depuis cinq ans; elle proclame qu'elle veut la paix, qui a seule le pouvoir de rendre l'activité humaine vraiment féconde en lui donnant la sécurité'. Teisserenc de Bort, Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, in his 1876 proposal for the 1878 Exposition Universelle, quoted in Delorme (1878), p. 3.

²⁰Halévy (1936), p. 423.

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President, Maréchal MacMahon, a staunch monarchist.²¹ Furthermore, although the

Exposition's commissioner, Jean-Baptiste-Sébastien Krantz, was a committed Republican, Teisserenc de Bort, the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce under MacMahon, who was also closely involved in the Exposition's planning, had also served under Thiers and tended towards conservatism.

Given the potential of the Exposition to act as a 'great tranquilliser' on a France still recovering from the twin nightmare of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune and on a government characterised by ceaseless party struggles,²² politicians of all stripes stood to benefit from involving themselves with the Exposition. Hence, strong emphasis was placed upon the new, hard-won peace and on values such as moderation and wisdom – values that presumably did not already come clothed in specific ideological colours, and which could easily be tailored to suit either end of the political spectrum. Indeed, Teisserenc de Bort's favourable reference to France's politics 'over the last five years' could well be understood as advocating the repression that characterised the governments of Thiers and MacMahon.

Promoting moderation and trumpeting peace and prosperity might have made good political sense for the Exposition as a whole, but it did not necessarily translate into good policy in the selection of paintings for the French Fine Art section.

Although the exhibition was intended to portray the official state of the modern French school, with no work dating from before the last Exposition in 1867 admitted,²³ restrictions placed upon the types of work selected prevented the creation of a complete survey of the decade. One of the most troubling constraints was a ban on all images of the Franco-Prussian war or, indeed, any contemporary military subjects.²⁴ Furthermore, the opening notice in the official exhibition catalogue was essentially a celebration (a premature one, as it turned out) of the rehabilitation of history painting in the grand tradition.²⁵ Glossy, highly finished historical canvases by

²¹The decree is reprinted in *Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners for the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878, to the Queen's most excellent Majesty*, (London, 1880), vol. 1, p. 151. For a summary of the events surrounding the so-called Seize Mai crisis, see Bury (1973), pp. 398-417.

²²Chapman (1962), p. 189.

²³P. Vaisse, *La troisième république et les peintres* (Paris, 1995), p. 125.

²⁴Ibid., p. 56-57. The list of excluded works is kept in the Archives nationales, Versement de la direction des Beaux-Arts au ministère de l'Instruction publique: F21 524. Military paintings were given a small exhibition at the private Galerie Goupil, concurrent with the Exposition.

²⁵'Notice Sommaire', *Exposition Universelle internationale de 1878, à Paris: Catalogue officiel, publié par le Commissariat Général. Tome I: Groupe I, Oeuvres d'Art, classes 1 à 5*, (Paris, 1878), p. 5.

Vaisse (1995), p. 125, surmises that the author of the unsigned notice was Philippe de Chennevières, the current Director of Fine Arts for the Third Republic and a notorious conservative, both in politics

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leading Academicians such as Cabanel, Delaunay, and Bouguereau held sway in the French section; many more innovative artists whose work fell outside these boundaries found their works rejected by the jury. A major case in point is the Barbizon School. While their deliberately mundane and naturalistic depictions of the French countryside had garnered critical acclaim and state support in the 1860s,²⁶ they were poorly represented at the Exposition; work by three of the most illustrious Barbizon painters, Théodore Rousseau, Jean-François Millet, and Narcisse Diaz de la Peña, was not included at all. Other 'independents', including Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Henri Fantin-Latour, abstained from submitting, choosing to send their work to the Salon instead.²⁷ In effect, the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition verged on conservatism in its ostensible desire to appear apolitical; in its attempt to turn the clock back eleven years, it acted as a nepenthe on the eyes and minds of its audience, wiping away the troubles – and the innovations – of the intervening years. Paul Greenhalgh has asserted that the centrality of the visual arts at

this Exposition was vital to France's presentation of itself as having fully recovered from the defeat of 1871;²⁸ if this was so, then, judging by the content of the French Fine Art section and the critical response, the ploy failed miserably.

This shunning of current trends toward realism and contemporary subjects produced one unintended and little-noted side effect. While the selection of paintings in the French section seemed on the whole to privilege historical painting, in the sense of depictions of actual historical events (so long as they were far enough in the past not to dredge up painful memories), the selection committee's distaste for realistic and contemporary subjects left the door open for imaginative subjects – images based on literature, on people and events which had never existed except in the imagination or on the page. Collective trauma often awakens a need to escape the present and the and in art; his arrogant mismanagement of the French Fine Art exhibition at the Exposition ultimately resulted in his dismissal. See also P. Mainardi, *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 47-48.

²⁶For a discussion of the French state's attitudes toward landscape painting as reflected in its purchasing policy, see J. M. Roos, 'Herbivores versus herbiphobes: landscape painting and the State', in J. House, ed., *Landscapes of France: Impressionism and its Rivals*, (exh. cat., London, Hayward Gallery and Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), pp. 40-51.

²⁷Fantin exhibited one group portrait (*The Dubourg Family*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and four musical subjects in pastel and lithograph at the 1878 Salon (D. Druick and M. Hoog, *Fantin-Latour*, exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, and San Francisco, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, 1982, p. 356). Puvis sent two panels of his Panthéon murals to the 1878 Salon (S. Lemoine, ed., *Toward Modern Art: From Puvis de Chavannes to Matisse and Picasso*, exh. cat., Venice, Palazzo Grassi, 2002, p. 536).

²⁸Greenhalgh (1995), p. 116.

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immediate past by effacing the contemporary with images of the distant past or the imaginary; the milieu of the first post-war Exposition was no exception.²⁹ Thus it was that a 'literary painter' such as Gustave Moreau, whose fantastical mythological and Biblical scenes had proved as perplexing to critics as they were difficult to ignore, found his way into the French section with no less than eleven works.³⁰ Although Moreau presumably scraped in under the rubric of history painting, pictures such as *L'Apparition* [Figure 1, Mathieu 186] and *Salomé* [Figure 2, Mathieu 184] bore little resemblance to the fussy meticulousness of detail and readily deciphered narrative that characterised much of the 'grande peinture' in the French section. Paul Mantz declared him the most imaginative and fascinating painter in the entire section, although he confessed bewilderment as to their meaning.³¹

The irony, of course, is that four of Moreau's submissions to the Exposition were profoundly informed by the Franco-Prussian War and its after-effects. While *Salomé*, *Hercule et l'Hydre de Lerne* (Mathieu 176) and *L'Apparition* had already marked his triumphant return to the Salon in 1876, he had in the intervening years conceived a cycle of biblical subjects – *Moïse exposé sur le Nil* (Mathieu 202), *Jacob et l'Ange* (Mathieu 199), and *David* (Mathieu 201) – intended to symbolise both the ages of man and contemporary circumstances in France. As Moreau explained his intentions to his friend Alexandre Destouches, 'The [angel in] *Jacob* would be the guardian angel of France, checking her in her idiotic course toward the material', while Moses represented 'the hope of a new law represented by this tender and innocent infant raised by God' and David, 'the sombre melancholy of the past age of tradition so dear to great spirits weeping over the great modern decay, the angel at his feet ready to inspire him if there should be an agreement to listen to God'.³² A large-

²⁹My argument here is informed by Adrian Rifkin's account of the effects of the Occupation on Parisian popular song and cinema: A. Rifkin, *Street noises: Parisian pleasure, 1900-1940* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 25-26. Although Rifkin deliberately excludes 'high culture' from his discussion, I contend

that his reading offers an effective approach to the jury's apparently 'escapist' (mis)interpretation of Moreau.

³⁰ On Moreau's struggles with the label of 'literary painter', see P. Cooke, 'Text and Image, Allegory and Symbol in Gustave Moreau's *Jupiter et Sémélé*', in P. McGuinness, ed., *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin de Siècle: French and European Perspectives*, (Exeter, 2000), pp. 122-3.

³¹ Mantz (1878a), pp. 427-28.

³² 'Le Jacob serait l'ange de la France l'arrêtant dans sa course idiote vers la matière. Le Moïse, l'espérance dans une nouvelle loi représentée par ce mignon d'enfant innocent et poussé par Dieu. Le David, la sombre mélancolie de l'âge passé et la tradition si chère aux grands esprits pleurant sur la grande décomposition moderne, l'ange à ses pieds prêt à rendre l'inspiration si on consent à écouter Dieu'. P. Cooke, ed., *Ecrits sur l'art par Gustave Moreau* (Fontfroide, 2002), vol. 1, p. 111. Moreau apparently wrote this explanation between 1876 and 1877. See also G. Lacambre, ed., *Gustave*

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scale watercolour depicting the fall of Phaëton (Mathieu 205) reflected even more explicitly Moreau's disillusionment with early Third Republic society. Phaëton, having recklessly driven the chariot of the sun (the State) too close to the sun, plunges with his terrified horses into a dark abyss out of which surges the grotesque and triumphant serpent Python. Python's head is a fusion of serpent and bird of prey – a none-too-subtle reference to the eagle of Prussia. Indeed, *Phaëton* could be viewed as a macabre and fantastic counterpart to Puvis's 'real allegory' *Le Pigeon* of 1871, in which a woman clutches a dove protectively to her breast while trying to ward off the menace of the Prussian eagle. Moreau's rage over the current state of affairs in France is palpable. Indeed, this was not his first attempt to give artistic vent to his anger; almost immediately after the French defeat in 1871, he began to plan a vast polyptych entitled *France Vanquished*. He abandoned it after making some preliminary sketches, however, probably regarding the project as excessively allegorical. Instead, he cloaked his indignation in the academically-sanctioned forms of mythological and religious painting and in the dazzling colour and welter of bejewelled detail that had by this date become his hallmarks. Hoodwinked by Moreau's esoteric and exotic style, and lulled by his evident adherence to officially accepted subjects, the jury allowed social commentary, so heavily veiled in symbolism as to be almost illegible, entrance to an otherwise 'apolitical' and 'ahistorical' exhibition.

Whatever the intention of the exhibition's commissioners, and despite the triumphalism in evidence on numerous broadsheet front pages on opening day, critics were less than impressed with the results. Those who were tied more closely to the planning of the French Fine Art section found themselves scrambling to put a good face on things; the aforementioned notice in the official catalogue was at pains to point out that despite the deaths of many leading lights of French painting since 1867, artistic production had nonetheless been increasing at a steady rate, unintentionally vaunting quantity over quality.³³ Charles Blanc, who, for political reasons completely opposed to those of Chennevières, was an ardent promoter of grand-tradition history painting, proffered perhaps the most creative (or far-fetched) explanation for the weakness of the present French school: 'Painting isn't an indigenous art in our

Moreau: between epic and dream (exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais, Chicago, Art Institute and New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), pp. 179-82 (hereafter Lacambre 1998a).

³³*Catalogue officiel* (1878), p. 5

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country, as it is in Italy. . . . The French have always been better sculptors and architects than painters and musicians'.³⁴

Others were less ready to offer excuses. Paul Mantz, a respected moderate critic who reviewed the French painting exhibition for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, opened his exposé with a three-page-long tirade against not only the sorry state of French painting at the Exposition, but the inferiority of the exhibition spaces to those

of other countries; he pronounced the prevailing spirit of the exhibition to be ‘a certain sadness . . . an art whose spirit does not flourish freely.’³⁵ Bertall, a caricaturist notorious for his parodies of pretentious academic paintings in the *Journal amusant*, went even further, urging readers in a piece published in *L’Artiste* to visit the concurrent *Exposition retrospective de tableaux et dessins de maîtres modernes* at the Galerie Durand-Ruel instead. He claimed that this exhibition, which featured the work of Courbet, Corot, and the Barbizon painters, was more representative of the French school and more interesting than anything to be found in the galleries of the Champ de Mars besides.³⁶ Even Blanc, before making his implausible apology for current French painting, found himself gazing wistfully at the Austro-Hungarian Fine Art section, envying its ‘youth, abundance, sap, greenness which are not found at all in our [art].’³⁷

Blanc was not alone in casting a resentful (and, perhaps, fearful) eye at the fine art exhibitions of other nations at the Exposition. France might welcome other nations to display their art at its Expositions, so long as they did not threaten its acknowledged superiority in that sphere. Not all critics were as alarmist as one writing under the pseudonym ‘Lord Pilgrim’, who issued this dire warning:

No one can fail to notice the decadence of the French school if one judges it by the Exposition Universelle of 1878. . . . But let [the artists] beware. The foreign schools, so self-effacing in 1855, scarcely alive in 1867, are on the point of taking first place.³⁸

³⁴ ‘La peinture n’est pas chez nous ce qu’elle est en Italie, un art indigène. . . . Les Français ont été toujours plus sculpteurs et plus architectes qu’ils n’étaient peintres et musiciens’. C. Blanc, *Les Beaux-Arts à l’Exposition Universelle de 1878* (Paris, 1878), pp. 183-4.

³⁵ ‘D’une certaine tristesse . . . d’un art où le coeur ne s’épanouit pas librement’. Mantz (1878a), p. 420.

³⁶ Bertall [Albert d’Arnoux], ‘La Tribune de l’école française’, *L’Artiste* (September 1878), p. 155.

³⁷ ‘Une jeunesse, une abondance, un suc, une verne qui ne sont point dans la nôtre’. Blanc (1878), p. 177. It is probably not coincidental that the country to which Blanc chose to compare France is Germanic.

³⁸ ‘Nul ne peut nier la décadence de l’école française si on en juge par l’Exposition Universelle de 1878. [...] Mais qu’ils y prennent bien garde. Les écoles étrangères, si effacées en 1855, à peine vivantes en 1867, sont sur le point de prendre le haut du pavé . . .’ ‘Lord Pilgrim’, ‘Premier avertissement aux artistes’, *L’Artiste* (September 1878), p. 149.

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However, one thing was becoming clear, and was grudgingly acknowledged: France could no longer afford to dismiss the artistic production of her neighbours³⁹ – including that of Britain, long a political and economic rival, but up until this point taken for granted as an artistic inferior. Little did it realise that the innovations, both in art and in exhibition policies, that had been fomenting for the past two years in London were not in line with what it had been primed to expect by the two previous Expositions.

Britain: a cross-Channel rival

In France, the State is ever-present, even in the arts, but there are countries where the State is nowhere to be seen, and in the arts even less. [...] England, which we may invoke as an example of what can be accomplished in large part due to private initiative, has given us an illustration of a response of this type.

– Charles Tardieu, 1877⁴⁰

The Belgian critic Charles Tardieu’s 1877 contribution to the debate on the level of government involvement in the arts, an increasingly hot topic in the decade leading up to the demise of the Salon, was far from original in using Britain’s relative dearth of state support for the arts as an opposing model to the French paradigm. While Tardieu concluded that neither system was perfect,⁴¹ and each country’s envy of the benefits of the other’s model exemplified the tendency to covet what one did

not have, his choice of France and Britain to illustrate the argument was telling. Guy Chapman characterised Franco-British relations throughout the first decades of the Third Republic as ‘never friendly, rarely splenetic’.⁴² Wilhelmine Germany presented a much greater source of anxiety to France in the wake of the Franco-Prussian defeat; Britain was not so much feared as alternately envied and disdained. While the two nations had not been in open conflict with each other since the fall of Napoleon I, a simmering resentment continued to colour France’s relations

³⁹Literally, as Antonin Proust, who became the Minister of Fine Arts under Jules Grévy, warned in an address to the Chamber of Deputies on the state of the arts, particularly the decorative arts, after the close of the Exposition (see Mainardi 1993, p. 64).

⁴⁰‘En France, l’État est partout, même en art, mais il est des pays où l’État n’est nulle part, et en art moins que partout ailleurs. [...] L’Angleterre, dont nous avons raison cependant d’invoquer l’exemple pour montrer ce que peut dans une large mesure l’initiative privée, l’Angleterre nous a donné le spectacle d’une réaction de ce genre’. C. Tardieu, ‘L’Art et l’État’, *L’Art* 8 (1877), p. 159.

⁴¹Tardieu ultimately came down on the side of state intervention in the arts, for the novel reason that, if nothing else, it inspired and fuelled rebellion, which ultimately kept art vital (‘Elle crée l’opposition, c’est-à-dire la lutte, c’est-à-dire la vie’): *ibid.*, p. 160.

⁴²Chapman (1962), p. 345.

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with Britain. The peace, imperial power, and economic dominance that Britain had enjoyed while France first succumbed to Prussia’s armies, then struggled to rebuild itself, as well as its apparent disregard of other European nations, stirred the latter’s jealousy.⁴³ Some of the French envy of Britain was a case of the grass being greener on the other side, for the view within Britain in the 1870s was considerably less green, with the first signs of the diminution of its economic might and imperial strength, and the spectre of the Russo-Turkish War in 1876.⁴⁴ Still, ‘egotistical England,’ to borrow Gambetta’s unflattering nickname,⁴⁵ however disliked it might have been on the other side of the Channel, was difficult to ignore.

The relative political stability certainly seems to have contributed to the far smoother organisation of the British section of the Exposition Universelle. There appears to be no evidence of wrangling over finances or of any shortages of cash; in fact, the British section as a whole occupied a much greater space on the Champ de Mars (21,826 square metres) than that allotted to any other foreign country (Belgium came a distant second, with 9,494 square metres of exhibition space),⁴⁶ and no expense was spared on the Fine Art section, despite the fact that it ultimately cost five times the original estimate.⁴⁷ Although we have no record of how much space was allotted to the fine arts within the British section, the fact that the size of Britain’s art exhibition (726 works in total) vastly exceeded that of all other foreign countries, and that critics consistently praised the spacious hang, would suggest that the exhibition space was generous.⁴⁸ In contrast to the French art exhibition, the Fine Art committee, which had been appointed not by an elected official but by the Prince of Wales, was not only much smaller, but, as might be expected in a nation in which involvement in the arts was still largely a private affair, only half of its members were

⁴³On Anglophobia in the French press, 1871-77, see Bury (1973), pp. 340-1.

⁴⁴On British foreign policy in the 1870s, see D. Read, *The Age of Urban Democracy: England 1868-1914* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 189-200. It is worth noting that the Russo-Turkish War marked what seems to have been the only period of political activity in the life of Burne-Jones, although apparently he had to be spurred into action by William Morris; G. Burne-Jones (1904), pp. 83-4.

⁴⁵Bury (1973), p. 340.

⁴⁶*Report of Her Majesty’s Commissioners* (1880), p. 32.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁸The official catalogue of the Exposition gives the categorical breakdown of the British Fine Art section as 283 oils, 191 paintings and drawings in other media, 46 sculptures, 170 architectural

drawings and models, and 36 engravings and etchings. The French Fine Art display comprised 2,071 works, and the Belgian section, the second-largest foreign exhibition, contained 431 works. Most other European nations contributed between 100 and 300 works.

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artists; the remainder were aristocratic amateurs.⁴⁹ All of the former, except the architect Charles Barry, were academicians; this also held true of the three-man jury for Paintings, which consisted of Frederick Leighton, Edward Armitage and William Dobson.⁵⁰ Considering the presence of academicians on both the jury and the committee, one might have expected an exhibition as dominated by academic painting as the French Fine Art section; however, this did not prove to be the case. To be sure, the work of academicians and other painters who regularly graced the walls of the Royal Academy, such as Leighton, Millais, and Herkomer, formed a sizable portion of the exhibition, but artists who either could not or chose not to exhibit at the Royal Academy received stronger representation than did their French counterparts.

Notably, one of the members of the Fine Art committee was Sir Coutts

Lindsay, the wealthy amateur and founder of the recently opened Grosvenor Gallery [Figure 3]. Unfortunately, no record of his exact contribution to the final shape of the British Fine Art section survives, but given the parallels between his own venture and the nature of the British art exhibition in Paris, we can surmise that he was at least partly responsible for its more innovative aspects.⁵¹ Although the British galleries were probably not decorated in the lavish Aesthetic style of the Grosvenor, French critics' praise of the galleries' calm and lack of clutter and the sympathetic hang of the pictures would suggest that his insistence, revolutionary at the time, on treating paintings as aesthetic objects worthy of contemplation in harmonious surroundings, informed the display. More importantly, it was likely due to his influence, and to his probable desire to do for his preferred British artists abroad what he had done for foreign artists at home,⁵² that a goodly number of the artists whose work he had

⁴⁹ The members of the Fine Art committee were the Duke of Westminster (chairman), the Lord de l'Isle and Dudley, Sir Coutts Lindsay, Sir Richard Wallace, Sir Francis Grant, P.R.A., Sir John Gilbert, R.A., Colonel Arthur Ellis, Charles Barry, Sir Frederick Leighton, R.A., and W. Calder Marshall, R.A. (*Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners*, 1880, p. 54).

⁵⁰ Ibid. Originally four artists and one architect – Sir John Gilbert, Sir Frederick Leighton, W. Calder Marshall, Charles Barry, and Sir Francis Grant – were on the 10-member committee. Grant died in 1877, decreasing the total to four.

⁵¹ In the last decade Sir Coutts Lindsay and the Grosvenor Gallery have attracted increasing attention; the foremost studies include S. P. Casteras, ed., *The Grosvenor Gallery: a Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1996); C. Denney, 'The Role of Sir Coutts Lindsay', in Casteras and Faxon (1995), pp. 61-80; and *idem*, *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890* (London, 2000). Unfortunately, none of them discuss Lindsay's role in the organisation of the 1878 Exposition, although all three highlight the overt internationalism of his own exhibition policies.

⁵² Lindsay's support of foreign artists exhibiting in London was groundbreaking for its time; the Grosvenor played host to a significantly more cosmopolitan roster of artists throughout its existence than any other exhibition venue in London. See B. Bryant, 'G. F. Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery: "poems painted on canvas" and the new internationalism', in Casteras (1996), pp. 117-21, for further discussion.

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personally selected for the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition the previous year were invited to contribute to the British Fine Art section. Thus, Burne-Jones was represented by the most admired of the eight works with which he had made his 1877 reappearance at the Grosvenor Gallery, *The Beguiling of Merlin* [Figure 4]⁵³ – incidentally, a depiction of an episode in a French, rather than an English, Arthurian romance – as well as by two large watercolours, *Love among the Ruins* [Figure 5] and *Love Disguised as Reason*.⁵⁴ Watts was represented by a much wider range of work – in addition to six portraits, one Biblical scene, and one sculpture, he sent *The Three*

Goddesses [Figure 6]⁵⁵ and, most notably, his star picture from the first Grosvenor exhibition, *Love and Death* [Figure 7].⁵⁶ Although no photographs of the British galleries have surfaced thus far, the schematic layout published in the illustrated catalogue gives a fair idea of Lindsay's probable influence over the hang. One of his innovations at the Grosvenor had been to group all works by a single artist together, thus privileging the artist as a singular creative talent.⁵⁷ He also insisted that at least six, and preferably twelve, inches of space be left between pictures to alleviate the visual cacophony prevalent in conventional hanging practice; this had the added benefit of further privileging the individual work of art as an autonomous aesthetic object worthy of contemplation in and of itself. Although the hang in the British galleries at the Exposition was rather denser than Lindsay would have favoured at the Grosvenor, he almost certainly had a hand in choosing prime locations in the display for the artists he championed; *The Beguiling of Merlin* hung almost dead centre on the

⁵³Exhibited at the Exposition under the title *Merlin et Viviane* (no. 121).

⁵⁴*Love Among the Ruins* (no. 84) was the only one of Burne-Jones's works to have its title translated literally. I have chosen to focus my discussion of Burne-Jones on *The Beguiling of Merlin* and *Love among the Ruins*, as *Love Disguised as Reason* (c. 1870, Cape Town, South African National Gallery; listed in the Exposition catalogue as *L'Amour docteur*, no. 85) barely figures in most reviews. For a complete listing of works by Burne-Jones and Watts exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, see C. Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁵⁵Exhibited at the Exposition as *Pallas, Junon et Vénus* (no. 265). Duranty, however, refers to it as *Le Jugement de Paris*, despite the absence of the figure of Paris, and when it was first exhibited at Deschamp's Gallery in 1876, it went by the title *The Three Graces*. See Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 114, for a complete history of the painting's title.

⁵⁶Watts painted multiple versions of *Love and Death* (no. 267), and which version was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery and in the Exposition Universelle is a matter of some uncertainty. The canvas now in the Whitworth Gallery at the University of Manchester, reproduced here, is generally accepted as the 1878 painting; however, Colleen Denney argues that the earliest version (1875), now in the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, was the painting exhibited, based upon records in that museum's archives (Denney 1995, p. 79). While this version may have been the one shown in Paris, I doubt that it was exhibited at the Grosvenor, as it lacks the dove in the lower right corner remarked upon by several critics, in particular Oscar Wilde in his review of the exhibition in the *Dublin University Magazine*, and present in the Whitworth's version.

⁵⁷Denney (2000), pp. 50-51.

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end wall of the large central gallery, with *Love and Death* above it to the left and the rest of Watts's paintings nearby.⁵⁸ While it would be an exaggeration to claim that Lindsay managed to transport the Grosvenor's aesthetic and programme wholesale to the Exposition – certainly, he would have been obliged to bow to the wishes of other committee members and accept the work of Academicians inimical to the Gallery's aesthetic – it would be fair to say that he was able to preserve crucial elements of its spirit in both the selection and the hang. The reverence for the individual artist as creative genius, the preference for literary and mythological subjects guaranteed to appeal to an elite audience, and the formation of an identifiable group of artists with common concerns translated remarkably well in Paris.

Initial French reactions to Britain's presence at the Exposition gave little indication that attitudes were on the cusp of change. The Rue des Nations (the 'international main street' to which most of the nations represented at the Exposition had contributed façades intended to represent typical national architecture), in which Britain was represented by a row of Tudor-revival houses, provided Charles Blanc with an opportunity to scoff at the lack of originality in British architecture. He attributed this to Britain's being 'the land of individualism,' which, in his estimation, meant that the only area of innovation in which Britons were capable was domestic

architecture. Moreover, he asserted that most of what was best about British architecture had actually been imported from France.⁵⁹ On a more light-hearted note, the cartoonist Cham, who had made a speciality of lampooning Paris's Salons and other exhibitions, made a single, telling reference to Britain in his collection *L'Exposition pour rire* [Figure 8]: captioned, in English, 'SHOCKING!', it skewered stereotypical British prudishness in the shape of a heavily clothed and bonneted matron shrinking in horror in front of a display of meerschaum pipes in one of the Industrial Arts sections with the caption 'British modesty lowering its eyes before pipes without trousers!'⁶⁰ However, once inside the British Fine Art section, it proved more difficult for critics to find ready targets for mockery. Not only did they consistently comment favourably on the spaciousness, comfort, and attractiveness of

⁵⁸H. Blackburn, *Exposition Universelle, Paris 1878. Catalogue illustré de la section des beaux-arts: école anglaise* (Paris, 1878), p. 3.

⁵⁹Blanc (1878), pp. 43-47.

⁶⁰'La pudeur britannique baissant les yeux devant les pipes qui ne sont pas culottées!' Cham, *L'Exposition pour rire*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1878). The double meaning of 'pipe' (slang in French for penis) would have made Cham's caption especially risqué for his French readership.

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the gallery itself, especially in comparison to its French counterpart,⁶¹ they found themselves confronted with what, to eyes whose last sight of British painting had been eleven years past, was something new and strange. They were witnessing, several years behind Britain, what Pierre Bourdieu has termed a period of rupture, during which a new grammar of form is devised and a consequent demand for a new critical vocabulary, and the great variation in responses indicates the sort of a challenge it presented.⁶²

'A slightly strange but striking poetry': Burne-Jones at the Exposition Universelle

We French turned [for inspiration] more willingly to the Flemish primitives, to the van Eyck brothers, to Holbein. But the English found [in the Italian Primitives] a derivative of their poetic fantasy – *fancy* – that is sharper and bolder than our own. We don't have *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in our theatre, and a French brain couldn't conceive of a creature as spiritually mad as Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. – Philippe Burty, 1869⁶³

While the 1878 Exposition Universelle marked the first occasion on which the works of Burne-Jones and Watts were displayed in France, neither artist was an entirely unknown quantity in that country. The first known mention of Burne-Jones in a French periodical appeared in Philippe Burty's review of the 1869 Royal Academy summer exhibition, in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*; Watts was discussed in the same article, although as a frequent exhibitor at the Royal Academy throughout the 1860s it was probably not the first time his name had figured in the pages of the *Gazette* or other French art periodicals. However, both artists had more recently found a much stronger ambassador and advocate in the shape of Joseph Comyns Carr, exhibitions assistant at the Grosvenor Gallery and *directeur pour l'Angleterre* for the new periodical *L'Art*.⁶⁴ Carr had contributed a three-part review of the first Grosvenor

⁶¹See for example Gonse (1878), p. 492.

⁶²P. Bourdieu and A. Darbel, *The Love of Art*, trans. C. Beatty and N. Merriman (Cambridge, 1991), p. 43.

⁶³'Nos Français sont allés plus volontiers aux primitifs Flamands, aux van Eyck, à Holbein. Mais les Anglais ont trouvé là un dérivatif à leur fantaisie poétique – *fancy* – qui est plus aiguisée, plus hardie que la nôtre. Nous n'avons pas dans notre théâtre le *Songe d'une nuit d'été*, et un cerveau français ne saurait pas concevoir un être aussi spirituellement fou que le Mercutio de *Roméo et Juliette*'. P. Burty, 'Exposition de la Royal Academy', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July 1869), p. 53. Note that 'fancy' appears in English in the original text.

⁶⁴On the role of Comyns Carr as a promoter of Burne-Jones and Watts in France, see B. Bryant, 'G. F. Watts and the Symbolist Vision', in Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 65-82 and *idem*, 'G. F. Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery: "Poems Painted on Canvas" and the New Internationalism', in Casteras (1996), pp. 109-28.

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Gallery exhibition to *L'Art* in 1877, in which he eloquently praised Burne-Jones and Watts, devoting particular attention to *The Beguiling of Merlin* and to *Love and Death*.⁶⁵ Although none of Watts's work was illustrated, the third instalment featured an excellent etching by Adolfe Lalauze after *The Beguiling of Merlin* [Figure 9]. It seems reasonable to assume that the major critics – Blanc; Duranty and Alfred de Lostalot, whose reviews appeared in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*; Paul Mantz, who covered the foreign fine art sections for *Le Temps*; Arsène Houssaye, writing in *L'Événement*; and Ernest Chesneau, writing in *Le Moniteur universel* – who reviewed the British Fine Art section would have come across Carr's articles and the engraving. It is a truism that a picture is worth a thousand words; nevertheless, the decision to commission a reproduction of a work by a then-unknown artist by a leading engraver suggests how much Lindsay and Comyns Carr staked on establishing Burne-Jones's reputation in France. That out of the profusion of different techniques then available they chose etching, one of methods most highly regarded in France, even as it was being superseded by newer, cheaper, quicker processes, speaks volumes.⁶⁶ Still, no matter how finely wrought, a small black-and-white etching could only give a bare idea of the impact of the paintings themselves in their true size and colours.⁶⁷

Within all of the above-mentioned reviews of the British section lay the implicit acknowledgment that British painting, in particular the strand represented by Burne-Jones and Watts, required a different critical vocabulary. The words *poésie* and *poétique* were, at this date, seldom applied to the visual arts, with the important exception of Corot's late work; Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e Siècle* in 1874 lists numerous literary definitions and contexts for *poétique*, but only one example, at the end of the entry, of usage in the context of the visual arts.⁶⁸ These observers could well have been using the word literally, as Burne-Jones's paintings, to name one of the more obvious examples, were largely inspired by poetry and made no

⁶⁵J. Comyns Carr, 'La Saison d'art à Londres: la "Grosvenor Gallery"', *L'Art* 9-10 (1877), pp. 265-73, 3-10, 77-83.

⁶⁶Although Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay is a useful point of entry into the problems of reproductive prints, it envisions reproductive technique as evolving in a lockstep fashion and emphasises photography at the expense of other methods: W. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *idem*, *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn (London, 1999), pp. 211-44. Stephen Bann has presented a convincing case for examining the rivalries between multiple, concurrent methods of reproduction: S. Bann, *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 8-11.

⁶⁷One of the etching's flaws is a slight alteration in the direction of Nimuë's gaze from that in the painting, lessening the intensity of the confrontation between Nimuë and Merlin.

⁶⁸'*Poétique des beaux-arts*, Exposition de ce qu'il y a d'élevé, d'idéal dans les beaux-arts'. P. Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e siècle*, vol. 12.2 (Paris, 1874), p. 1245.

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overt reference to contemporary life. However, most of them imply that it captures a quality of British painting that sets it apart from its Continental cousins: 'a slightly strange but striking poetry,' for Duranty, summed up the efforts of the second wave of Pre-Raphaelites.⁶⁹ Houssaye went even further, declaring that '*Messieurs les Anglais* are restless men and poets', breaking down the heretofore implied separation of the roles of painter and poet.⁷⁰

Indeed, issues of nationality and national characteristics were running themes in the majority of the reviews. The notion of British artists' technical inferiority to the

French, and their mediocre training, received frequent attention.⁷¹ Alfred de Lostalot, a notoriously conservative critic who reviewed the Drawings and Watercolours section for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, was the most scathing in his assessment, scornfully remarking of *Love among the Ruins*, 'It's a curious work, but we seek vainly to understand why the painter entrusted a subject of this size to paper rather than to canvas, because it multiplied the difficulties for no good reason', and finally conceding, rather patronisingly, of the entire British section of watercolours, that while they possessed a certain naïve charm, they were 'perhaps without eminently plastic qualities, but one can't have everything.'⁷² Ironically, Ernest Chesneau transformed the evident ignorance of technique and disregard for orthodox methods of 'M. Jones Burne' into a positive virtue, claiming,

⁶⁹'Une poésie un peu bizarre mais d'accent très net'. Duranty (1878), p. 299.

⁷⁰'Messieurs les Anglais sont des inquiets et des poètes'. A. Houssaye, 'Les Beaux-arts à l'Exposition Universelle (V): Messieurs les Anglais', *L'Événement* (4 October 1878).

⁷¹Indeed, Burne-Jones, who was almost entirely self-taught, apart from some lessons in drawing from Rossetti, received no formal training whatsoever. Watts's case is slightly different: while he was briefly a student at the Royal Academy Schools as a teenager (and was ultimately elected an academician in 1867 on the strength of his portraits), he received almost no teaching and his attendance was desultory. A subsequent informal apprenticeship to the sculptor William Behnes constituted the remainder of his training. See W. Blunt, *'England's Michelangelo': a biography of George Frederic Watts, O.M., R.A.* (London, 1975), pp. 7-10, for a more thorough, if rather anecdotal, account of his early years and education.

⁷²'C'est cependant un curieux travail que l'*Amour dans les ruines* de M. Burne Jones, mais nous cherchons vainement à comprendre pourquoi le peintre a confié au papier plutôt qu'à la toile un sujet de cette taille, car c'était accumuler à plaisir les difficultés'; 'Ce ne sont peut-être pas des qualités éminemment plastiques, mais on ne peut pas tout avoir': A. de Lostalot, 'Exposition Universelle: aquarelles, dessins et gravures', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (October 1878), pp. 644-5. Lostalot was not the only Frenchman to be baffled by Burne-Jones's unorthodox working methods; *Love Among the Ruins* was badly damaged in a Paris photographer's studio in 1893 because the photographer's assistants mistook it for an oil painting and gave it an egg white wash in preparation for photography. Burne-Jones subsequently produced a replica in oils (now in the Bearsted Collection, Wightwick Manor).

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Moreover, here, – and it must be said in general, about all English painting, – the process isn't governed by law as it is in France, the methods of facture are not limited, the medium isn't valued at much, only the result counts for something. Is the desired effect obtained? *All right*. So much the better.⁷³

The English physiognomy, particularly as embodied by Burne-Jones's gaunt, lantern-jawed Vivien, drew snide criticism from Duranty:

The lean type with large hollow eyes that M. Burne-Jones and M. Richmond have given the Vivien of the Middle Ages and the antique Ariadne is yet again an English type, the type of poetic souls *par excellence*, but still with the strongly accentuated jaw that is fond of rare meats and a hard undercurrent of fierceness that makes itself felt even from afar.⁷⁴

Yet he also conceded that the English type had its saving graces, chiefly 'the beauty and height of the forehead, the nobility of the nose and the penetrating firmness of the gaze,' remarking, not without a hint of envy, that such traits could not but reflect the power and intelligence of the English race.⁷⁵ Blanc (who persisted in referring to the artist as 'Burnes Jones' throughout his review) took a more charitable view, but dodged the issue of the 'English type' by describing the figure of Vivien as a fusion of the styles of Mantegna and Prud'hon.⁷⁶

Duranty's somewhat jaundiced take on the peculiarities of Burne-Jones's 'Englishness', while echoed by other critics, may to an extent reflect his discomfort with a type of painting at odds with his own preferences – he is best remembered as a

champion of the Impressionists and an habitué of Manet's circle at the Café Guerbois. The two most sympathetic reviewers, Chesneau and Mantz, instead ascribed the *merits* of *The Beguiling of Merlin* to its creator's nationality. Chesneau went even further, writing that '[Burne-Jones's] adoration of the true, when placed at the service of a high imagination, brings to the things it interprets thus a singular appreciation, an emotion, a poetic transfiguration, alas! sought in vain from the "truth" of young French painters which comes from academic traditions which are nothing but studio

⁷³'D'ailleurs, ici, – et il faut le dire en général, de toute la peinture anglaise, – le procédé n'a pas de lois comme en France, les modes de factures ne sont pas limités, le moyen n'est considéré pour rien, le résultat seul compte pour quelque chose. L'effet voulu est-il obtenu? *All right*. Tout est pour le mieux'. E. Chesneau, 'Exposition Universelle. Beaux-arts: les écoles étrangères (I)', *Le Moniteur universel* (4 July 1878). Note that 'All right' appears in English in the original text. Chesneau later incorporated his critique of Burne-Jones in this article, verbatim, into *La peinture anglaise* (p. 238).

⁷⁴'Le type maigre aux grands yeux caves que M. Burne-Jones et M. Richmond ont donné à la Viviane du Moyen-Age et à l'Ariadne antique, est encore un type anglais, le type des âmes poétiques par excellence, mais toujours avec la mâchoire accusée et amie des viandes saignantes, et toujours avec un arrière-sentiment dur et farouche, sensible quoique lointain.' Duranty (1878), p. 306.

⁷⁵'La beauté et l'élévation du front, la noblesse du nez et la fermeté pénétrante du regard'. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁷⁶Blanc (1878), p. 335.

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formulae'.⁷⁷ Mantz correctly identified Leonardo as the source of Burne-Jones's androgynous figures, and, while allowing that 'such refinements rather disconcert the spectator accustomed to obvious things', he added that they 'are possible, and at home, in the land of Shakespeare'.⁷⁸ Ironically, this very aspect of Burne-Jones's work had been decried by British critics as 'effeminacy' and 'morbidly'; no doubt it was to more open-minded critics like Mantz that Burne-Jones's first biographer Malcolm Bell referred when he wrote that it had taken the appreciation of French critics to belatedly open the eyes of their British colleagues to Burne-Jones's genius.⁷⁹ More intriguing still are the visual correspondences between *The Beguiling of Merlin* and Moreau's *L'Apparition* and *Salomé*, works which were appearing together for the second time at the Exposition, after their first pairing in the previous year's Grosvenor Gallery exhibition. Apart from the obvious similarities in composition and narrative – a sinuous, serpentine femme fatale confronting (or, in the case of *L'Apparition*, being confronted by) her male victim – the facture of the surfaces of both paintings also displays revealing parallels. The surfaces of both *L'Apparition* and *Salomé* appear encrusted with jewels (a particularly remarkable feat in the former case, as its medium does not allow the impasto possible with oil), a glittering *horror vacui* that heightens the atmosphere of hothouse exoticism and sexual terror; *The Beguiling of Merlin* is similarly encrusted, though with hawthorn blossoms rather than jewels. It would be easy to attribute the welter of obsessively drawn detail in Burne-Jones's painting to his Pre-Raphaelite heritage; here, however, the blossoms have a stylised, decorative quality, as if made of extremely fine enamel.⁸⁰ In fact, their fragile artificiality and their hard, enamel-like finish contribute to the scene's leaden,

⁷⁷'Cette adoration du vrai, quand elle est mise au service d'une haute imagination, apporte aux choses interprétées de la sorte une singulière plus-value, une émotion, une transfiguration poétique, hélas! vainement demandée en dehors de la vérité partant de jeunes peintres français à des traditions d'académie qui ne sont que des recettes d'atelier': Chesneau (1878).

⁷⁸'De tels raffinements déroutent un peu le spectateur ami des choses claires; ils sont possibles, ils sont à leur place dans le pays de Shakespeare'. P. Mantz, 'Exposition Universelle. Les Écoles étrangères (X): Angleterre', *Le Temps*, 11 November 1878 (hereafter Mantz 1878b).

⁷⁹M. Bell, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones. A Record and Review* (London and New York, 1892), p. 5.

⁸⁰Note that the word 'decorative' had different, and more positive, connotations in British and French art criticism of the late nineteenth century than it does today; not only was it used as a complimentary term by contemporary advocates of Aestheticism, 'art décoratif', in the sense of monumental painting

intended for an architectural setting, was generally considered to be the highest genre to which an artist could aspire in France.

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airless atmosphere of dread in much the same way as Moreau's jewel-encrusted canvas.⁸¹

British observers had maintained a curious silence about *L'Apparition* when it graced the walls of the Grosvenor Gallery's East Gallery – no doubt a disappointment to the managers of the Grosvenor, who appeared to have put a considerable effort into securing its loan.⁸² Comyns Carr himself only mentioned it in passing in his review in *L'Art*, perhaps less because of a lack of interest than because he probably saw no need to extol at length a work that had already occupied so many column inches in its own country the year before.⁸³ In London, however, the only references to Moreau's presence at the Grosvenor are a passing mention in an article in the *Academy* by William Michael Rossetti (disposed perhaps by his relationships, familial and professional, with the Pre-Raphaelites to notice him)⁸⁴ and a brief allusion to 'the flashy attractions of M. Gustave Moreau's picture', erroneously described as depicting the head of Christ, in an unsigned review in the *Athenaeum*.⁸⁵ Oddly enough, Moreau garnered more attention from British reviewers at the 1878 Exposition, although references were brief and sometimes patronising; a critic for the *Art Journal* drew parallels between his colour and, bizarrely, that of William Etty.⁸⁶ Although Duranty did not make the connection between the two artists in his 1878 review, another realist critic, Jules Castagnary, did, noting that in his visit to the British exhibition, he perceived 'here and there certain vague resemblances to some of our painters – thus it is that M. Jones in his *Merlin and Vivien* evidently concerns himself with Gustave

⁸¹ Burne-Jones's maternal grandfather, Benjamin Coley, was the head of a jewellery firm in Birmingham, and it is tempting to speculate on what role this heritage played in the painter's style and methods, especially given Burne-Jones's comment that he 'love[d] to treat [his] pictures as a goldsmith does his jewels' (quoted in Wildman and Christian 1998, p. 42). The bejewelled quality of Moreau's paintings and his concept of 'richesse nécessaire' was a common topic of discussion among his contemporaries – not always flatteringly. For example, the heated (although possibly apocryphal) exchange between Moreau and his former friend Degas, as recorded by Paul Valéry: Moreau is said to have demanded of Degas, 'Do you have pretensions to restoring art through dance?' only to receive the rejoinder, 'And you're claiming to revive it with jewellery?'

⁸² Comyns Carr arranged the loan through his connections at *L'Art*; the dealer Léon Gauchez, in whose possession it was in 1877, wrote for the magazine under the pseudonym Paul Leroi, and Moreau's address in the exhibition catalogue was listed as the London office of *L'Art* – coincidentally, next door to the gallery in New Bond Street. Lindsay's decision to hang it, with the work of a wide array of other foreign artists, in the first room gallery-goers entered is indicative of his overt internationalism; see Bryant (1996) in Casteras (1996), pp. 120-21.

⁸³ Comyns Carr (1877), p. 270.

⁸⁴ Bryant (1996), p. 121.

⁸⁵ 'The Salon, Paris (second notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2586 (19 May 1877), p. 647.

⁸⁶ 'International Art at the Universal Exposition, Paris', *Art Journal* 18 (1878), p. 198. The reviewer singled out *Moses exposed on the Nile* and *Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra* as typical of Moreau's style.

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Moreau'.⁸⁷ Duranty picked up this thread in a review of the Grosvenor Gallery's summer exhibition in 1879 – the first instance in which the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* had asked its *correspondant d'Angleterre* to cover the Grosvenor exhibition alongside that of the Royal Academy – when he characterised Burne-Jones's work as 'loaded with intentions and implications which recall the complications of the imagination of M. Gustave Moreau'.⁸⁸ These were the first recorded comparisons of Burne-Jones and Moreau – the first, as it turned out, of many over the next two decades.

Watts and the Shadow of Puvis de Chavannes

Watts's imaginative works proved more problematic for the critics – somewhat surprisingly, since he drew upon more conventional academic models than Burne-Jones did, and his stylistic references originated mainly in the Cinquecento painting embraced by the critical and academic establishments in both Britain and France. Indeed, Blanc passed over them entirely in his review, simply praising Watts as a skilful and sensitive portraitist.⁸⁹ As with Burne-Jones, the majority of French critiques were formalist, rather than moralising. Where Watts's reputation at home had benefited from the high-minded tone of critics in the broadsheet and periodical press who cast his art as a 'manly' and 'healthy' alternative to the effeminacy and morbidity of Burne-Jones's style and subject matter while giving less weight to formal flaws,⁹⁰ French critics evinced less interest in Watts's masculine rectitude and focused instead on his peculiarities as a painter – often to his detriment. Chesneau, who had waxed so enthusiastic over Burne-Jones, dismissed *The Three Goddesses* as 'thoroughly mediocre' and scoffed, 'No doubt M. Watts has made an interesting

⁸⁷ 'Une surprise que nous avons éprouvés dans notre promenade a été de constater çà et là certaines velléités de quelques-uns de nos peintres. C'est ainsi que M. Jones dans son *Merlin et Viviane* se préoccupe évidemment de Gustave Moreau'. J. Castagnary, 'L'Exposition (XIV). Beaux-arts – Angleterre', *Le Siècle* (24 May 1878).

⁸⁸ 'Chargée d'intentions, de sous-entendus, et qui rappelle les complications de l'imagination de M. Gustave Moreau'. E. Duranty, 'Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor-Gallery, à Londres', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (October 1879), p. 372.

⁸⁹Blanc (1878), p. 336.

⁹⁰ See, among many examples this anonymous review of Burne-Jones's paintings in the 1878 Grosvenor exhibition: 'As to the value, in a larger sense, of this art, and of the poetry which is its companion, we most seriously protest against it (with a reverence for its genius and a tenderness for its beauty) as unmasculine; [...] it is fresh strenuous paganism, emasculated by false modern emotionalism'. ('The Grosvenor Gallery: Second Notice', *Magazine of Art*, 1878, p. 81.) By contrast, the same reviewer (presumably) characterised Watts's paintings in the exhibition as 'noble' and 'lofty' ('The Grosvenor Gallery: First Notice', *Magazine of Art*, 1878, p. 50).

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attempt in his picture *Love and Death* [. . .] but utterly for naught';⁹¹ most of the other reviewers followed suit, praising his imagination and the sincerity of his efforts while condemning Watts's faulty grasp of anatomy, his dry facture and his bizarre colour schemes.

Duranty discussed Watts's imaginative subjects at length, but he was at a loss as to how to categorise the artist, coining the term 'post-Raphaelite' to describe him, in recognition of his affinities with the Pre-Raphaelites and his stylistic debt to Michelangelo and other artists of the High Renaissance. While he seemed to feel qualified to comment upon the sculptural quality of Watts's drawing and on his eccentricities and deficiencies as a colourist,⁹² he had little to say about the content of either *Love and Death* or *The Three Goddesses*. His one brief comment on the latter is telling. While Watts originally entitled the painting *The Three Goddesses*, and it was listed in the official exhibition catalogue as *Pallas, Juno and Venus*, Duranty refers to it as *The Judgment of Paris*.⁹³ Yet Paris is nowhere in evidence – unless, by a stretch of the imagination, the viewer is meant to place himself in the role of Paris – and none of the three figures bears any of the traditional attributes of those goddesses. It seems as if, faced with an image devoid of any readily evident narrative and populated only by three mysterious, impassive nudes, Duranty clutched at straws to give some semblance of a conventional meaning to the painting.

The salient characteristics of *The Three Goddesses* – the suppression of meaning and the monochrome palette – appear to reveal the origins of a dialogue with another artist whose style, programme and aspirations closely paralleled those of Watts. While *Love and Death*, by virtue of its imposing size and dramatic subject,

garnered more critical attention than Watts's other works in the British Fine Art section, *The Three Goddesses* displays more compelling links with French antinaturalism, and in particular with the work of Puvis de Chavannes, which have thus far received surprisingly little attention. While Puvis absented himself,

⁹¹ 'Fort médiocre'; 'Sans doute M. Watts a fait une tentative intéressante dans son tableau de *l'Amour et la Mort* [. . .] mais absolument en vain'. Chesneau (1878). Chesneau subsequently softened his criticism of Watts in *La peinture anglaise*, praising both *The Three Goddesses* and *Love and Death* for expressing 'a real poetic sentiment' ('un réel sentiment poétique', pp. 265-66), but, in common with most other French critics who wrote on that artist, he continued to assert that Watts's imaginative reach exceeded his technical grasp.

⁹² It is worth bearing in mind that *Love and Death* looked much darker when Duranty saw it at the Exposition than it does today. Watts subsequently reworked it, lightening the colours considerably; see Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 167-8. For a contemporary account of Watts's working methods, see C. Monkhouse, 'The Watts Exhibition', *Magazine of Art* (1882), pp. 181-2.

⁹³ Duranty (1878), p. 310.

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apparently voluntarily, from the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition, precluding comparisons of both artists' works, a parallel reading of French criticism from 1878 and the following decade demonstrates that mainstream critics responded similarly to the work of both artists, faulting both for their divergence from academic ideals and slavish emulation of archaic models (in Puvis's case, Giotto and Benozzo Gozzoli), but rarely raising the issue of subject matter or narrative inscrutability.⁹⁴ Although Puvis would presumably have seen Watts's work in 1878, he never exhibited in Britain during his lifetime, and Watts would almost certainly not have seen any of his paintings before he began work on *The Three Goddesses*. He may, however, have had access to reproductions; line drawings of Puvis's work regularly featured in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*,⁹⁵ and an etching after his *Death and the Maidens* (1872) [Figure 10] was published by Durand-Ruel in 1873 and available for sale in London, at which time he had just completed the painting. The engraving gives a poor idea of Puvis's chalky colour and the sculptural solidity of his figures, but in the static poses and pensive gazes of the two girls in the lower right, to say nothing of Puvis's sophisticated twist on traditional allegorical iconography, Watts would probably have recognised a kindred spirit. Significantly, Watts first exhibited *The Three Goddesses* in 1876 at the Deschamps Gallery, a venue linked with Durand-Ruel's and favoured by Whistler, where French and British art were shown side by side; thus, he underlined that painting's experimental nature.⁹⁶ Louis Huth, the collector who purchased the work from Deschamps and lent it to the British exhibition at the Exposition Universelle, was a devotee of this particular aspect of Watts's oeuvre and a keen collector of the work of other artists working in a similar vein. Thanks to Huth's generosity, *The Three Goddesses* enjoyed a greater and longer-lived reputation in France than it did in Britain. As well as lending it to the Exposition Universelle, he allowed an etching to be made after it to illustrate Comyns Carr's review of the 1880 Grosvenor Gallery exhibition for *L'Art* [Figure 11], thus increasing its audience and

⁹⁴ These tendencies were particularly evident in reviews of Puvis's 1879 Salon submissions; see M.-T. de Forges, 'Un nouveau tableau de Puvis de Chavannes au musée du Louvre', *Revue du Louvre* 20, no. 4 (1970), p. 248. Like Watts, Puvis had foregone an orthodox academic education, opting for a wandering apprenticeship in the 1850s in the ateliers of Henri Scheffer, Delacroix and Couture; see A. B. Price, *Pierre Puvis de Chavannes* (exh. cat., Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1994), pp. 11-12, for further particulars of his training.

⁹⁵ Reproductions of Puvis's work in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* before 1878 include a heliogravure after *La Fantaisie*, *GBA*, June 1866, p. 510; an engraving after *L'Été*, *GBA*, June 1873, p. 477; and a fold-out line-engraving of *Sainte Geneviève*, *GBA*, June 1876, facing p. 692.

⁹⁶ Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 115.

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extending its presence in the public eye. The article itself is notable for gliding over the painting's subject and concentrating on Watts's treatment of the nude – a theme rare in current British art but of key importance in France – and his 'spiritualisme raffiné', concerns which, as Barbara Bryant notes, prefigured the language of Symbolist criticism in the coming decade.⁹⁷

Duranty stated at the beginning of his review of the British section that of all the national art exhibitions, it was 'the most interesting in terms of national character, distinctive spirit, and the characteristic aspect of its works, although insular English art has ties with the Continent that one can easily see'.⁹⁸ Ostensibly he was referring to its ties with Continental art of the past – drawing comparisons between Burne-Jones and Florentine painting of the Quattrocento and, more unusually, Albrecht Dürer, as well as between Watts and the High Renaissance and Mannerism – but it is tempting to wonder whether he detected any common ground between Watts and Puvis, the contemporary artist whose work came closest in spirit to his own. Might he have seen, for example, similarities between *The Three Goddesses*, with its monumental yet strangely flat figures, limited tonal range, matte surface, and lack of an obvious narrative, and the easel paintings of Puvis de Chavannes, which had been praised and ridiculed in equal measure for the same qualities? Watts's trio of impassive nudes, while betraying debts to the contemporary life class, classical images of the Three Graces, and Dürer's *Four Witches*,⁹⁹ may not only echo some of Puvis's earlier work, but have served as an inspiration – not previously noted – for one of his most iconic and frequently-reproduced canvases, *Jeunes femmes au bord de la mer* [Figure 12]. This painting, exhibited with the subtitle 'panneau décoratif' at the 1879 Salon, portrays three statuesque, half-draped young women – goddesses or mortals, there is nothing to indicate which might be the case – disposed in attitudes that almost exactly reiterate those of Watts's goddesses, the key differences being the reclining poses of the two outer figures, and the bold cropping of the woman on the right. Although Puvis's palette includes more vivid hues than he ever used in his murals,¹⁰⁰ the

⁹⁷ J. Comyns Carr, 'La Royal Academy et la Grosvenor Gallery', *L'Art* 12 (1880), p. 172; B. Bryant, 'G. F. Watts and the Symbolist Vision', in Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 67.

⁹⁸ 'La plus intéressante par le caractère national, par l'esprit tranché et par l'aspect tout particulier de ses oeuvres, bien que l'art insulaire anglais ait avec le continent des attaches que l'on peut voir aisément'. Duranty (1878), p. 298.

⁹⁹ Albrecht Dürer, *Four Witches*, engraving, Vienna, Albertina, 1497. I am grateful to Glyn Davies for drawing my attention to the parallels between Dürer's engraving and *The Three Goddesses*.

¹⁰⁰ De Forges (1970), p. 248.

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relatively limited tonal range and dry, chalky finish recall those of *The Three Goddesses* (which Mantz had disparaged as 'terreuse'),¹⁰¹ as does the strangely bare, conventionalised landscape with a few sparse sprigs of vegetation, which hovers ambiguously between the idyllic and the desolate.

Although Puvis had by 1878 established himself as one of the foremost monumental painters in France, he was no stranger to smaller-scale decorative allegory; in 1866 he had completed a suite of decorative panels for the Paris home of the sculptor and writer Claude Vignon. This set of four panels depicts 'four symbolic figures': *Fantasy* (*La Fantaisie*), *Vigilance* (*La Vigilance*), *Meditation* (or *Reminiscence – Le Recueillement*) and *History* (*L'Histoire*),¹⁰² portrayed as classically draped female figures in generalised bucolic settings. *Meditation* stands out as the only figure not assigned a time-hallowed identifying attribute; even so, she, like her sisters, is labelled with a *trompe l'oeil* plaque, ensuring correct interpretation. *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, however, removes all signposts that might help the viewer

interpret what he sees. The title and its tag of ‘panneau décoratif’ may go some way to explaining why critics at the 1879 Salon rarely questioned the strangeness of the scene or even tried to supply a narrative of their own; Roland Barthes’s theories on the ability of an image’s ‘linguistic message’ to anchor and guide its interpretation are particularly apposite here.¹⁰³ Directed to view the work as purely decorative, both in the sense of being intended for installation in an architectural scheme (even though, in actual fact, it was neither commissioned nor ever used in a decorative scheme)¹⁰⁴ and of lacking a clear narrative, most observers naturally placed more weight on its formal qualities than on trying to puzzle out a narrative; given a title devoid of any reference to classical mythology, that simply described the figures as ‘young girls by the seashore’, critics could not neatly slot it into the rubric of mythological or history painting.

The significance – and mutability – of titles is another point of commonality between *Jeunes filles* and *The Three Goddesses*. Watts’s painting, exhibited a total of

¹⁰¹Mantz (1878b).

¹⁰²Puvis’s first biographer, Marius Vachon, lists the ensemble as consisting of *La Fantaisie*, *La Vigilance*, *Le Rêve*, and *La Poésie* (M. Vachon, *Puvis de Chavannes*, Paris 1895, pp. 77-78); see Price (1994) for further detail on the commission of the decorative scheme. The panels are now divided between the Musée d’Orsay and the Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki, Japan.

¹⁰³R. Barthes, ‘Rhetoric of the Image’, in idem, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), pp. 40-41.

¹⁰⁴Puvis did not even find a purchaser for the painting immediately after the Salon; it was eventually bought after its third exhibition at his one-man show at Durand-Ruel’s in 1887 by an M. Boivin.

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six times during his lifetime, appeared under four different names. From its first outing in 1876 as *The Three Graces*, it became *Pallas, Juno and Venus* (Paris, 1878), then *The Three Goddesses* (Grosvenor Gallery, 1880), then *Ida* (Paris, 1883), before finally settling for the next twenty-two years into the guise of *The Judgment of Paris* (Glasgow, 1888; Wolverhampton, 1902; Royal Academy, 1905).¹⁰⁵ What role Watts himself played in the fluctuation of the title is unknown. As we have already seen, however, even the critics reviewing the exhibitions did not always respect the title given them in the catalogue, imposing their own title on the work and with it, a different reading of the scene. Describing the figures as Graces, personifications of beauty and harmony, or as a trio of anonymous goddesses might conjure up either an ‘art for art’s sake’ celebration of female beauty and cause us to read the expression of the figure on the left as calm or even indolent; call them Pallas, Juno and Venus and state (or simply imply) that they are being judged by Paris, and a connection with a classical epic is established, while the left-hand figure’s expression, if we presume that she is Venus, takes on an air of brazen self-confidence or mocking triumph. Puvis’s title underwent a smaller but crucial alteration which subtly shaped the stories critics chose to impose upon it. Exhibited at the 1879 Salon as *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, a title it retained at the 1883 Exposition Nationale, it was then shown at the 1887 Durand-Ruel exhibition as *Femmes au bord de la mer*.¹⁰⁶ The change in French from ‘filles’ to ‘femmes’ implies an increase in maturity and experience, probably (although not necessarily) the product of the loss of virginity. Although most commentators at the 1879 Salon refrained from attempts at exegesis,¹⁰⁷ the caricaturist Stop could not resist trying to explain just what these young girls were doing at the seaside; in a parody of the picture published during the Salon’s run in the *Journal amusant* [Figure 13], he not only lampooned Puvis’s bold cropping by lopping the left-hand figure in half at the waist, but changed the two distant seagulls into vicious birds attacking the girl in the centre, explaining that she was trying to defend herself against them by using her abundant tresses as a flail. Eight years later,

¹⁰⁵ Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 114 ; see also Note 55 above.

¹⁰⁶ De Forges (1970), p. 241.

¹⁰⁷ One notable exception to this trend was the poet Théodore de Banville, who described the young girls as both ‘pure as the azure waves’ and yet seeming ‘despairing like Baudelaire’s Damned Women; they might wish to go still farther away, near a calmer sea unruffled by either the flight of great birds or the gaze of human eyes’ (‘pures comme l’onde azurée’; ‘désespérées comme les Femmes Damnées de Baudelaire; elles voudraient aller encore plus loin, près d’une mer encore plus tranquille et que n’aurait effleurée ni le vol des grands oiseaux ni le regard des yeux humains’). T. de Banville, ‘Salon de 1879’, *Le National*, May 1879, quoted in De Forges (1970), p. 248.

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confronted by *Femmes au bord de la mer* (no longer labeled ‘panneau décoratif’), Gustave Kahn argued that the minimalist title ‘forces us to see a poem, an allegory analogous to that of the Sirens’.¹⁰⁸ He elaborated on this claim, constructing a tale of loss and unfulfilled longing in which the young women, whose inscrutable mien he interpreted as weary and desolate, wait on the shore, tired of singing as they await the arrival of a ship bearing a hero that never comes. Kahn even went so far as to claim that the three women in fact represented three different physical and emotional states of the same woman.¹⁰⁹ This latter judgment echoes those made by Chesneau and Duranty six and ten years earlier – about *The Three Goddesses*.

After-Effects: The 1883 Exposition Internationale and the Literary Publicity Machine

If Burne-Jones’s and Watts’s appearance at the 1878 Exposition Universelle did not make such a resounding splash as their next outing at the 1889 Exposition, it produced instead the effect of two small stones dropped side by side into a pond, whose waves reverberate, rebounding and spreading. The general acclaim accorded the British art exhibition, as Michael Orwicz has demonstrated, played a small but crucial role in the loosening of the stranglehold of conservative ‘grande peinture’ in the Salon and other major exhibitions; fearing that Britain’s ascendancy would seriously threaten French domination of the art market, Jules Ferry’s regime (the so-called

‘Republic of the Republicans’), from 1879 onward, actively promoted a wider array of styles.¹¹⁰ Watts felt the impact first: he was awarded a first-class medal at the Exposition, the only British artist, apart from Alma-Tadema, to receive that honour. While Burne-Jones was content to wait until the 1889 Exposition to exhibit again in France, Watts’s work made two return visits shortly afterward. No doubt because of his coup at the Exposition, his *Orpheus and Eurydice* was accorded a prominence at the 1880 Salon rarely given to a British artist, its fame increased by an etching published the previous year in *L’Art*; reviewing the Salon for the *Gazette des Beaux-*
¹⁰⁸ ‘[Il] force nous est d’y voir un poème, une allégorie analogue à celle des Sirènes’. G. Kahn, ‘Exposition Puvis de Chavannes’, *Revue indépendante* 6, no. 15 (January 1888), p. 144.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹¹⁰ M. Orwicz, ‘Anti-academicism and state power in the early Third Republic’, *Art History* 14, no. 4 (December 1991), pp. 571-74. Orwicz notes that the personal interests and tastes of those members of republican parties involved in arts administration during the 1880s played a significant part in government policy; especially important in this regard was Antonin Proust, who would organise the Centennale exhibition at the 1889 Exposition Universelle.

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Arts, Philippe de Chennevières, the disgraced director of the French Fine Art section in 1878, confessed that what he had seen of Watts both two years ago and at present made him ‘jealous for our Gustave Moreau, of whom he appears the fortunate rival’.¹¹¹ More significantly, the seven works – including *The Three Goddesses*, now renamed *Ida* – which he exhibited at the 1883 Exposition Internationale at the Galeries Georges Petit caught the eye of J.-K. Huysmans, who was then in the midst

of writing his seminal novel of the Decadence, *À rebours*.¹¹² Soon thereafter Huysmans placed Watts, whose work he characterised as ‘sketched by an ailing Gustave Moreau, painted in by an anaemic Michelangelo and retouched by a Raphael drowned in a sea of blue’, in his protagonist Des Esseintes’s exclusive pantheon of contemporary artists, in the company of Moreau, Rodolphe Bresdin, and Odilon Redon.¹¹³ Meanwhile, across town in the Palais des Champs-Élysées, four of Puvis’s key panel paintings – *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, *Femme à sa toilette*, *L’Enfant prodigue*, and *Le pauvre Pêcheur* were on view, as were two of his new paintings at the Salon, a melancholy portrait of his companion Marie Cantacuzène and *Le Rêve* – another trio of female figures, albeit decidedly more celestial, whom he designated in the *livret* as Love, Glory and Riches (significantly, the three prizes offered Paris, and personified by, Watts’s Venus, Pallas, and Juno).¹¹⁴

Huysmans’s embrace of Watts, however jaundiced, is indicative of a key development in the fortunes of British antinaturalists in France, but whether this change would have happened when it did, much less at all, without the impetus of the 1878 Exposition is doubtful. Significantly, in 1879 the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* sent Duranty to London to review the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition for the first time; although the magazine had had a London correspondent almost since its inception in 1859, there had been no coverage of the first two Grosvenor shows. Except for a

¹¹¹ ‘J’en étais jaloux pour notre Gust. Moreau, dont il parut alors le rival heureux’. P. de Chennevières, ‘Le Salon de 1880 (troisième et dernier article)’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July 1880), p. 66.

¹¹² The other paintings Watts sent to the Exposition Internationale were a portrait of Swinburne (National Portrait Gallery), *Paolo and Francesca*, *The Denunciation of Cain* (both Watts Gallery, Compton), and three *Eves*, one of which is almost certainly a version of ‘*She Shall Be Called Woman*’ (Walker Art Gallery). See Bryant in Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 67.

¹¹³ ‘Esquissé par un Gustave Moreau malade, brossés par un Michel-Ange anémié et retouchés par un Raphaël noyé dans le bleu’. J.-K. Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris, 1884), pp. 173-74. Huysmans, at the outset of his career as an art critic, wrote a review of the British Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition for *L’Artiste*, but mentioned neither Watts nor Burne-Jones by name and dismissed the exhibition as a whole as embodying eclecticism run mad – ‘modern, medieval, antique, everything rubs shoulders as if at a masked ball’ (‘moderne, moyen âge, antique, tout s’y coudoie comme en un bal masqué’). Huysmans, ‘Exposition universelle: l’Ecole anglaise’, *L’Artiste* no. 22 (2 June 1878), p. 167.

¹¹⁴ *Le Rêve*, 1883 (Musée d’Orsay).

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break in 1880, presumably due to Duranty’s untimely death, the *Gazette*’s London correspondents covered every Grosvenor show up until the gallery’s demise in 1890, also turning their eyes toward the New Gallery, which Carr and Charles Hallé had set up in 1887 following disagreements with Lindsay over the increasing commercialisation of the Grosvenor and where Burne-Jones and Watts henceforth exhibited their new work. Comyns Carr continued to publish lengthy accounts of the Grosvenor exhibitions in *L’Art* until the end of his tenure there in 1882, and other French art periodicals began, sporadically, to follow his lead. With increased journalistic coverage of the antinaturalist trend in Britain came an ever greater number of reproductions of paintings, more often than not of rising quality. Where Comyns Carr left off, Chesneau took up the slack, publishing *La peinture anglaise, 1730-1882* in 1882 and, a truly dreadful engraving after *The Beguiling of Merlin* notwithstanding, augmenting Burne-Jones’s reputation in France.

It was at about this time that, while journalists and critics continued to write, increasingly favourably, about this strand of contemporary British art, that Symbolist and Decadent novelists and poets in France began to gravitate towards the oeuvre of Burne-Jones, Watts, and the recently deceased Rossetti.¹¹⁵ While Huysmans, Edouard Rod, and Paul Bourget promoted them in prose, the dandy-poet Jean Lorrain, who

became one of Burne-Jones's most vocal advocates in the late 1880s and 1890s, included a poem entitled 'Printemps mystique, pour Burne Jones' in his 1887 collection *Les Griseries*. While not alluding to a specific work, from its references to 'bois épineux' and 'pâles aubépines' it would be reasonable to infer that Lorrain had the hawthorn wood of *The Beguiling of Merlin* in mind.¹¹⁶ Bourdieu's contention that the only audience Symbolists aimed at was other Symbolists, generating a hermetic and perfectly autonomous field of cultural production, although a vast oversimplification, highlights the significance of the adoption of Burne-Jones and Watts, and the suggestive, unashamedly elitist and (ostensibly) 'anywhere out of the world' art they produced, by their cross-Channel peers.¹¹⁷ A parallel acceptance of French antinaturalist artists by British writers of similar sensibilities (much less by mainstream commentators) was slower to take root, only coming into full flower after

¹¹⁵ I follow Lethève (1959), pp. 320-21, in the dating of this paradigm shift, although there are a few notable exceptions, particularly in the case of Rossetti; see Chapter 4.

¹¹⁶ J. Lorrain, *Les Griseries* (Paris, 1887), pp. 85-86. Also included in the volume is 'Printemps classique, pour Gustave Moreau' (pp. 131-32). For further discussion of Lorrain's writings on Burne-Jones and Moreau, see Chapter 3.

¹¹⁷ P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. R. Johnson (Cambridge, 1993), p. 39.

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the 1889 Exposition, and was marked by recurrent nationalistic backlash.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, 1878 proved to be a pivotal moment in British antinaturalism's dialogue with France.

Whether British painting would have been taken as seriously as it was at the 1878 Exposition Universelle had the French school not sunk to such an apparent low point, and had the general mood not dictated a reaction against contemporary subjects and a turning toward art that depicted a past that only existed in the imagination, is open to speculation. But if 'misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows,' it also, in this case, initiated a dialogue between two neighbours and long-time rivals.

¹¹⁸ The most well-known example of this backlash is the bitter debate, initiated by Chesneau with his open letter 'The English School in Peril', played out in the *Magazine of Art* 1887-88, and culminating in W. P. Frith's excoriation of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists, whom he blamed for polluting the moral and technical purity of English art. It is significant that he should have conflated these two particular movements, as, while there was often little love lost between them, they represented two sides of the same coin of rebellion against the positivism and striving for objectivity that characterised establishment art in both countries.

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Chapter 2

'The revenge of art on life': Republican fantasia and antinaturalist escapism at the 1889 Exposition Universelle

Marius Vachon, Puvis de Chavannes's first biographer, recalled a visit he made to the 1889 Exposition Universelle with the artist that had left a strong impression on him. Strolling through the vast Galerie des Machines, Vachon noticed a mounting unease take hold of Puvis, until, finding it too much to bear, he cried, 'My children, there is no more art to be made. How can a painter or a poet fight against the social influence, the power of all this over the imagination? Let us go!' When Vachon anxiously sought him out in his atelier the following day, Puvis was in low spirits. 'I was sick from that visit,' he told Vachon. 'I had nightmares all night. What's to become of us artists in the face of this invasion of engineers and mechanics?'¹ Leaving aside the irony that Puvis himself had originally been destined for a career as an engineer and that his rapidly ascending star as a muralist assured that demand for his own work would not flag, this apocalyptic vision of art and the imagination menaced by technology, however poignant, has become such a familiar

trope in studies of Symbolism and other fin-de-siècle anti-realist movements that its uncritical acceptance hinders a deeper understanding of the ways in which antinaturalism responded to political and social change.

Robert de la Sizeranne, the Anglophile critic whose *La peinture contemporaine anglaise* (1895) rapidly became the key text on contemporary British painting, and antinaturalist painting in particular, on both sides of the Channel,² offered a radically different view of antinaturalism's position at the 1889 Exposition. Reminiscing in 1898 about his visit to the British Fine Art section, he eulogised the cathedral calm of the galleries, hung with eight canvases by Watts flanking Burne-Jones's masterpiece *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, as a refuge from all things commercial and vulgar:

As we came out of the Gallery of Machinery . . . we found ourselves in the silent and beautiful English Art Section, and we felt as though everywhere else in the exhibition we had seen nothing but matter, and here we had come on the exhibition of the soul . . . It seemed as though we had come forth from the

¹ 'Mes enfants, il n'y a plus d'art à faire. Comment un peintre, un poète, pourrait-il lutter avec cela d'influence sociale, de puissance sur les imaginations? Allons-nous en! [...] J'ai été malade de cette visite [...] j'en ai eu le cauchemar toute la nuit. Qu'allons-nous devenir, nous artistes, devant cette invasion d'ingénieurs et de mécaniciens?' M. Vachon, *Puvis de Chavannes* (Paris, 1895), p. 16.

² The book was published in a translation by H. M. Poynter as *English Contemporary Art* in 1898.

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Universal Exhibition of Wealth to see the symbolical expression of the Scorn of Wealth. All round this room were others, where emblems and signs of strength and luxury were collected from all the nations of the world – pyramids, silvered or gilt, representing the amount of precious metal dug year by year out of the earth; palaces and booths containing the most sumptuous products of the remotest isles – and here behold a king laying his crown at the feet of a beggar-maid for her beauty's sake! . . . It was a dream – but a noble dream – and every young man who passed that way, even though resolved never to sacrifice strength to right, or riches to beauty, was glad, nevertheless, that an artist should have depicted the Apotheosis of Poverty. It was the revenge of art on life.³

Sizeranne posits antinaturalist painting as constituting a spiritual oasis for sensitive souls at the margins of an increasingly secular and mechanised society; once again Art is pitted against Life, but in his scenario, Art achieves a small but decisive moral victory. It is as tempting to fall into Sizeranne's trap as into Vachon's; both set antinaturalist art – French and British – in polar opposition to contemporary society. Both of these views, however, pinpoint an important aspect of the immense appeal that antinaturalist art held for audiences at the 1889 Exposition Universelle – its offer of a rarefied escape from the quotidian and the overtly 'modern'. Although, as I have demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the presence of British antinaturalism at the 1878 Exposition was more influential on the current's subsequent development than has been previously acknowledged, the 1889 Exposition has overwhelmingly been viewed, then and now, as the moment antinaturalism truly 'arrived'.⁴ In order to better understand why 1889 was such a pivotal moment, both in the development of an anti-realist idiom and in the evolution of a dialogue between artists in Britain and France, however, we may need a different approach from the ones proposed above, one which delves beneath the Exposition's ostensible deification of science and technological progress. Jennifer L. Shaw's argument may provide a more appropriate model; she contends that the formation of a national identity under the Third Republic hinged on using public artworks – in particular, those of Puvis, whose work was

claimed equally by conservatives and the avant-garde – to harness individual

³ R. de la Sizeranne, 'In Memoriam, Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Tribute from France', *Magazine of Art* (August 1898), p. 515.

⁴ This is particularly true of most twentieth-century studies of the reception of British antinaturalism (especially Burne-Jones) in France; apart from Lethève (1959), these include Des Cars, in Wildman and Christian (1998) and C. Allemand-Cosneau, in Munro (1992). Wilton and Upstone (1997), on the other hand, by stretching the chronological boundaries of Symbolism back to 1860 and as far ahead as 1910, dilute the significance of the exchanges taking place around the 1889 Exposition.

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subjectivity and personal fantasy in creating a sense of collective identity.⁵ Where the previous Exposition had been an intended balm for wounded national pride and a show of resilience to the rest of the Western world, the 1889 Exposition Universelle, with its fantastical, polychrome architecture and its exploitation of technology for the purpose of whimsy (especially in the nightly light-and-water shows), may be read as much as a dream – a collective fantasy of the modern state – as the antinaturalist paintings exhibited within its grounds.

Reading the work of Puvis, Moreau, Watts and Burne-Jones as an alternative fantasy responding to, or subverting, the collective dream formulated by the Exposition may allow us to better appreciate the growing complexities of the cross-Channel dialogue. Following three seemingly separate but ultimately intertwined threads, from the Exposition's socio-political milieu to its architectural and sculptural programme, to the positioning of antinaturalist art within the framework of the Centennale and British fine art section, to, finally, the paintings of Puvis and Watts themselves,⁶ I aim to demonstrate not only the increasing influence of French and British antinaturalists upon each other and the implications for the continuation of their dialogue in the 1890s, but also how they were beginning to self-consciously locate themselves within a defined artistic tradition. The antinaturalist reaction to the positivist, public-spirited dream of the Third Republic as embodied by the Exposition constituted not so much a total retreat into a private dream-world as a reflection 'in a glass darkly' of their surroundings.

The Gentle Art of Making Enemies: Nationalism and the Exposition's Politics

In order to gain a purchase on the reception of these works, and the alternative fantasy they proposed, we need to examine the socio-political milieu of the 1889 Exposition, the so-called 'Republic of Republicans', with a particular eye to the Exposition's repercussions for Franco-British relations (still, at this point, characterised primarily by cordial dislike).⁷ The preceding decade, which had

⁵ J. L. Shaw, *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* (New Haven and London, 2002), pp. 10-11.

⁶ While I will make some reference to Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and Moreau's *Galatée* in this chapter, I have reserved much of my discussion of these artists for Chapter 3.

⁷ I am indebted in my approach in this section, as I was in the preceding chapter, to Paul Greenhalgh's insistence that the works in the Fine Art sections of the Expositions cannot be considered independently

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witnessed the ascendancy of a centre-left Republican government, increasing economic prosperity and colonial power, and a measure of relative calm at home and abroad, yet which had also witnessed the mounting threat of Boulangism, gave rise to a potent blend of optimistic positivism, nationalist pride, and fearful distrust that was in some ways a far cry from the national mood in 1878, in other ways uncomfortably familiar.

I have spoken already of the hoped-for tranquillising effect of the 1878

Exposition in the wake of the Seize Mai crisis;⁸ the organisers of the 1889 Exposition seem to have begun with the intention of calming one source of discontent, and ended

by playing a central role in averting another, unforeseen, crisis. The Exposition was, among other things, intended as a soporific for the fantasies of *revanche* that had never entirely faded since the humiliating defeat of 1871.⁹ However, it found itself in the unlikely position of keeper of peace and saviour of the government when the premature possibility of *revanche* and rebellion reared its head in the shape of Boulangism.¹⁰ This is not the place to discuss the complexities of Boulangism; it will suffice to note that one of its most remarkable qualities was the appeal of its extreme nationalist and anti-establishment platform to both ends of the political spectrum. That Boulanger could have inspired such hero worship and captured the imagination and loyalties of such diverse and divergent groups bespeaks a deep-seated discontent with the Republican agenda, driven by its fundamental beliefs of democracy, equality, and science.

Ironically, given its conciliatory posture, the Exposition also managed to drive a wedge between France and many of the countries invited to take part. The significance of its date at the centenary of the Revolution, and indeed the overt initial staging of the Exposition as a commemoration of the Revolution and celebration of its ideals, were not lost on the monarchies invited to participate – not least, Britain.¹¹ of the Exposition's physical fabric and social setting, although I strongly disagree with his dismissal of the art displays as having had little impact on artistic innovation (Greenhalgh, 1988, p. 218).

⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹ See R. Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 169-222, on the sublimation of *revanche* in the last decade of the century and its manifestations in visual culture.

¹⁰ For detailed accounts of Boulangism's rise and fall, see Chapman (1962), pp. 265-91 and R. Tombs, *France 1814-1914* (London, 1996), pp. 447-53. Jacques Chastenet insists most succinctly on the Exposition's role in 'giving the coup de grace to Boulangism' (Chastenet, 1952, p. 214).

¹¹ French monarchists and legitimists were also, understandably, upset by the conflation of centenary and Exposition; an unsigned editorial in the rightwing *La Patrie* expressed strong reservations about the appropriateness of combining the two events, and the newspaper appears to have acted on its

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Queen Victoria refused to attend the opening, even recalling her ambassador to ensure that no representative of the British government was in Paris for the opening.¹² (The Prince of Wales, a popular fixture of the 1878 Exposition, was, however, permitted to attend, and made as favourable an impression on the French press as he had done eleven years before.) The Queen was far from being the only Briton not amused by the implications of an Exposition that paid tribute to the overthrow of a monarchy: the British press's coverage of the preparations for the Exposition's opening ranged from mild disdain to open scorn, though few matched the mix of hostility and nationalistic one-upmanship of an unsigned article in the *Saturday Review*:

The French have made a bad start with their Exhibition. The first circular issued by the Government, with its tall talk about the Hegira of the First Revolution – there have been so many that it is indispensable to distinguish them by numbers – set all Monarchical Governments against it; and though this unfortunate document was subsequently disavowed, they have failed to obtain that recognition for their venture which Royal and Imperial commissions can alone confer.¹³

Even a retroactive attempt by the opposition to censure the British government for its diplomatic faux pas in banning the British ambassador from the opening ceremonies came to grief, and was met with bemusement and scepticism in France; a journalist writing for *Le Moniteur universel* commented tartly that 'as agreeable as these flatteries are, we prefer, for our part, that foreigners not occupy themselves with our domestic affairs, and Mr Gladstone's congratulations do not make up for the

impression given us by Bismarck's small-talk in the Reichstag'.¹⁴ Perhaps, a month into the Exposition's run, observers on both sides were beginning to realise the inherent ludicrousness of what was fast becoming a tempest in a teapot. The rightwing neo-Catholic writer Eugène Melchior de Vogüé summed up the situation most succinctly, remarking cynically that both the republican grandstanding and the convictions by devoting relatively little space to coverage of the Exposition, particularly in comparison with 1878. 'L'Exposition Universelle', *La Patrie* (2 May 1889).

¹² Greenhalgh (1988), pp. 35-36. An article in *Le Temps*, published the day after the Exposition's opening, notes that Britain's sole representative at the ceremonies was Austin Lee, first secretary to the embassy of England, whereas most other participating countries were represented by ambassadors and ministers, although not, with the sole exception of Belgium, by their monarchs ('Dernières nouvelles: Inauguration de l'Exposition Universelle de 1889', *Le Temps*, 7 May 1889).

¹³ 'The Paris Exhibition', *Saturday Review* 67, no. 1748 (27 April 1889), p. 506. The writer goes on to note, with no small satisfaction, that 'Great Britain alone is fairly forward in her arrangements' and is likely to be one of the few national sections ready in time for the opening (p. 507).

¹⁴ 'Mais, quelque agréables que soient ces flatteries, nous aimons mieux, pour notre part, que les étrangers ne s'occupent pas de nos affaires intérieures, et les félicitations de M. Gladstone ne rachètent pas l'impression que nous laissent les menus propos du prince de Bismarck au Reichstag'. L. L., 'Le Parlement anglais et l'Exposition de 1889', *Le Moniteur universel* (2 June 1889).

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monarchist backlash were lost on the average Exposition-goer, who viewed the Exposition as a celebration of industry and technology first, and of France's superiority second.¹⁵

Given the adverse British reaction to the Exposition's commemoration of the Revolution's centenary, and France's awareness of it, it is strange, to say the least, that the radical nature of the British Fine Art section's star exhibit – a king removing his crown and paying homage to a humble beggar – merited no mention in any contemporary reviews.¹⁶ Silence on such a thorny subject is probably to be expected in British journals; silence in French criticism is rather more surprising. Perhaps, in view of the charged atmosphere, there was a tacit agreement among critics not to raise such a touchy issue. More likely, the unfamiliarity of the subject matter and its unusual rendering overshadowed the work's subversive implications.

Britain was not, of course, the only nation guilty of chauvinistic posturing. In the years leading up to the opening of the Exposition, a growing chorus of opposition in the French government grumbled that the Exposition would only serve as a vector for 'deleterious' foreign ideas, particularly from countries more progressive in the arts and industry.¹⁷ Conversely, some Republican critics expressed bemusement tinged with annoyance at what they perceived as the resolutely nationalistic and insular character of the paintings displayed in the British Fine Art section, implying that after three previous Expositions, the British ought to have learned something from their neighbour's superiority in that arena and applied those lessons to improving their own art. Sizeranne later summed up these critics' perplexity in the face of such apparent intransigence with a revealing military analogy: 'The assaults of realism and impressionism break against their aesthetic like the squadrons of Ney upon the squares of Wellington'.¹⁸

The ill-feeling stirred up by the Exposition's 'revolutionary' nature obscures the fact that, in the decade since the last Exposition, Britain and France had been moving gradually toward an artistic rapprochement, or at least a growing openness to

¹⁵ E. Melchior de Vogüé, *Remarques sur l'Exposition du Centenaire* (Paris, 1889), pp. 6-8.

¹⁶ At least, no traced mention: I refer here to the major newspapers and art periodicals, of which I have made a thorough survey.

¹⁷ G. P. Weisberg, 'The Republican Style in the Age of the Eiffel Tower', in M. Levin and G. P. Weisberg, eds., *1889: When the Eiffel Tower Was New*, exh. cat. (South Hadley, Mount Holyoke

College Art Museum, 1989), p. 2.

¹⁸ 'Les assauts du réalisme, de l'impressionnisme se brisent sur leur esthétique comme les escadrons de Ney sur les carrés de Wellington'. Sizeranne (1895), p. 3.

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what the other had to offer. The *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and the *Magazine of Art* may serve as a useful barometer of this détente. The *Gazette's* coverage of the Grosvenor Gallery exhibitions and its devotion of ever greater space to articles on contemporary British art, particularly the art of the Pre-Raphaelites, have already been discussed.¹⁹ The *Magazine of Art* was somewhat slower to catch up, and its interest in art across the Channel did not grow in a predictable upward trajectory. Its growing openness to contemporary French art owed much to the efforts of the critic Claude Phillips, an avowed Francophile whose pivotal role in opening eyes and minds on both sides of the Channel has yet to be examined adequately. Phillips not only served as *correspondant pour l'Angleterre* for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* from 1885, but he also published a series of articles in the *Magazine of Art* in 1885 on Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, and Burne-Jones (the first two being among the first serious studies of those artists in a British art periodical), evidence of a growing, if sometimes grudging, interest in French art, including antinaturalism. If, as the decade drew to a close, there were occasional retrenchments and rumblings of reactionary discontent, most notably in 1888 when W. P. Frith rounded on the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists with a hysterical tirade against what he saw as their technical incompetence and immoral subject matter, it is significant that these detractors conflated and confused progressive tendencies in both Britain and France.²⁰ Furthermore, photographs of the installations of some of the galleries in the Centennale exhibition (notably the Galerie Rapp) indicate that the French Fine Art section's organisers appear, grudgingly or otherwise, to have taken some inspiration from the comparatively sparse hang, probably influenced by that of the Grosvenor Gallery, of the British Fine Art section from the previous Exposition.²¹

Britain's own waning political and economic ascendancy, and its attempts to refashion its image and re-present itself in a way that took the sting out of these changes, also needs to be considered here. Although Britain's colonial and economic might was still the object of resentful envy in France, the nation was in fact, by the time of the Exposition, at the midpoint of the long Indian summer of its world dominance that characterised the last two decades of Victoria's reign. In an attempt to

¹⁹ See Chapter 1.

²⁰ W. P. Frith, 'Crazes in Art, "Pre-Raphaelitism" and "Impressionism"', *Magazine of Art* 11 (1888), pp. 187-91.

²¹ See Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, Paris Album 4o 28 (*Exposition Universelle de 1889*, H. Blancard, 1889), nos. 686 and 687.

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recoup some of the glory it now saw receding inexorably into the past, Britain did precisely that – look to its history. As Anne Helmreich has demonstrated, the swing of the pendulum from unvarnished modernity to nostalgia for a lost golden age can be charted in the reversion to imitation-Tudor architecture for the British sections of the Expositions of 1878, 1889 and 1900.²² Gone were the days of the Crystal Palace; now cutting-edge iron architecture had become the province of France, and Britain staged its identity as a pre-industrial, pre-democratic, and, by extension, pre-Reformation utopia, with the centrepiece of its fine art section a tour-de-force by Burne-Jones, an artist by now a byword for his medievalising tendencies²³ – a jarring intrusion indeed into an Exposition hosted by a Republic that aggressively styled itself as modern and secular.

‘Ces palais féeriques’: the Exposition as capital of Republican fantasy

As the first Exposition Universelle held during the Third Republic’s truly republican phase, the 1889 Exposition offered the state unparalleled opportunity for self-promotion. After the lacklustre architecture of the last Exposition, whose sole new edifice – the Palais du Trocadéro – had inspired derision and whose overall effect had been, as Louis Gonse recalled, ‘a bit thin, monotonous, and grey . . . [like] a series of juxtaposed hangars’,²⁴ the Republic and its chosen designers, Gustave Eiffel, Stephen Sauvestre, Charles-Louis-Ferdinand Dutert and Jean-Camille Formigé, worked in close partnership to formulate a tightly integrated architectural and decorative programme in which fancy and (closely regulated) imagination played as important a role as hard science in promulgating the values of the Republic. Most explorations of the Exposition’s design have focused on its exploitation of iron and glass and its break with historicist style, particularly in its most iconic structures, the

²² A. Helmreich, ‘The Nation and the Garden: England and the World’s Fairs at the Turn of the Century’, in *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, ed. M. Facos and S. Hirsh (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 39-64. Although Helmreich focuses on the 1900 Exposition Universelle and the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, her arguments are equally applicable in the context of 1889.

²³ Burne-Jones’s medievalism was frequently parodied in the British satirical press; *Punch*’s typically deflationary caricature of *King Cophetua* during its showing at the Grosvenor Gallery cast the beggar maid as a limp and emaciated Pallid Maiden to whom a Mediaeval Royal Personage (Cophetua) complains, ‘Oh I say, look here, you’ve been sitting on my crown’, with the caption, ‘Yes, and she looks as if she had, too, poor thing!’ For further discussion of British parodies of the picture, see Wildman and Christian (1998), pp. 197 and 254-55.

²⁴ ‘Un peu maigre, monotone et gris [...] c’était une série de hangars juxtaposés’: L. Gonse, ‘Exposition Universelle de 1889. Coup d’oeil avant l’ouverture’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (May 1889), p. 355.

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Tour Eiffel and the Galerie des Machines.²⁵ I want instead to investigate the other weapons in the designers’ arsenal – colour, light, moving water – and how they created a fantasia that was critiqued and ultimately subverted by the Symbolist artists exhibiting within it.

The guiding principles of the Exposition’s design were, simply put, to throw off the fusty historicism that had characterised much of the century’s public architecture and to do so with the aid of cutting-edge materials and design. Naturally, economic concerns played a central role; the extensive use of iron was intended to bolster ailing national industry in the face of American and German competition and to proclaim France’s expertise in engineering (and, by implication, military technology) to the world.²⁶ Yet iron edifices stripped of ornamentation, no matter how strongly they might appeal to the most progressive elements of the architectural world, were not guaranteed to charm the broader public.²⁷ The tower and the machine hall remained unadorned, but for the rest of the halls of the Champ de Mars, Formigé enlisted the help of the tile manufacturer Emile Muller to fashion a polychrome skin of enamelled tile to cover the metallic skeletons of the buildings.²⁸ While the result of their efforts is difficult to discern in contemporary photographs of the Exposition, some of Formigé’s surviving designs for the decoration of the cupola of the Palais des Beaux-Arts [Figure 14] reveal vivid juxtapositions of warm yellows and cool blues and greens, an explicit borrowing of Neo-classical vocabulary and a careful interweaving of republican motifs into the overall scheme. Judging from

²⁵ Examples include C. Mathieu, *1889: La Tour Eiffel et l’Exposition Universelle* (exh. cat., Paris, Musée d’Orsay, 1989); D. L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989) and Levin and Weisberg (1989). T. Burollet, ed., *Quand Paris dansait avec Marianne*, (exh. cat., Paris, Musée du Petit Palais, 1989) instead concentrates on the iconography of the Republic’s symbol Marianne, a point which I shall discuss in Chapter 3.

²⁶ Silverman (1989), pp. 52-54.

²⁷ The controversy incited by the winning design for the Tour à 300 mètres (the Eiffel Tower) is notorious; a group of prominent and mostly conservative artists, writers and composers published an open letter to Adolphe Alphand, the director of works for the Exposition, in *Le Temps* on 14 February 1887, protesting his decision to erect ‘a vertiginously ridiculous tower, dominating Paris, like a gigantic black factory chimney, crushing Notre-Dame, the Sainte-Chapelle, the Tour Saint-Jacques, the Louvre, the dome of the Invalides, the Arc de Triomphe with its barbarous bulk, all our humiliated monuments, all our belittled architecture will disappear in this stupefying dream’ (‘une tour vertigineusement ridicule, dominant Paris, ainsi qu’une noire et gigantesque cheminée d’usine, écrasant de sa masse barbare Notre-Dame, la Sainte-Chapelle, la tour Saint-Jacques, le Louvre, le dôme des Invalides, l’Arcde-

Triomphe, tous nos monuments humiliés, toutes nos architectures rapetissées, qui disparaîtront dans ce rêve stupéfiant’). As this brief excerpt demonstrates, much of their quarrel with the winning design was the way it seemed to elevate industry above high culture, history and religion (the latter of which will be discussed further in Chapter 3).

²⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the role of polychromy in the Exposition’s architecture, see C. Mathieu, ‘Architecture métallique et polychrome’, in C. Mathieu (1989), pp. 59-73.

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contemporary accounts, classicising sobriety and bright hues combined to striking effect.

One of Formigé’s most enthusiastic partisans was the architect and critic Frantz Jourdain, an advocate of unvarnished modernity. Writing in the *Revue des arts décoratifs*, he congratulated the Exposition’s architects on their refusal to disguise the nature of their materials and their successful integration of structure and decoration. His review, which borders on rhapsody, is worth quoting at length.

Contemporary industry, so rich, so intelligent, so inventive and thus far so parsimoniously employed, has this time collaborated greatly in the final success: staff, faïence, enamelled lava, tinted brick, glazed tile, lacquered zinc, coloured plaster, glimmering mosaics, flashing glass, all kinds of terra cotta, used in profusion, throw a sparkling gold powder over these fairylike palaces, which effervesce under the sun like French wines and sing of the triumph of Gallic gaiety and of rationalism over a morose and antediluvian scholasticism.²⁹

An anonymous writer for *La Construction Moderne*, an architectural periodical not ordinarily noted for its expressive prose, was no less fervent in his praise, particularly for the illuminated fountains (an invention first constructed for the London Exhibition of 1884):

On the Champ de Mars, the festival is no less beautiful. The Tower, whose arcs and platforms are bordered with luminous cords, is ablaze with Bengal lights which give it a truly impressive aspect, both fantastic and grandiose. The iron colossus rises in the night enveloped in blood-red flames, while at the summit shines the tricolour beacon and electric reflectors project their blue rays over Paris. Finally, the illuminated fountains launch their sparkling spray toward the heavens. The water takes on the colours of a prism one by one . . . Blue, red, green succeed each other or blend together. Then the light, penetrating the liquid mass, gives it the appearance of molten silver which falls back in droplets in the basin.³⁰

²⁹ ‘L’industrie contemporaine, si riche pourtant, si intelligente, si inventive et si parcimonieusement mise jusqu’ici à contribution, a largement collaboré, cette fois, au succès final: les stafs, les faïences, les laves émaillées, les briques teintées, les tuiles vernissées, les zincs laqués, les enduits colorés, les mosaïques chatoyantes, les verres flamboyantes, les terres cuites de toutes natures, employés à profusion, jettent une étincelante poudre d’or sur ces palais féeriques, qui pétillent sous le soleil comme des vins de France et chantent le triomphe de la gaieté gauloise et de rationalisme sur une morose et antédiluvienne scolastique’: F. Jourdain, ‘La décoration et le rationalisme architecturaux à l’Exposition universelle’, *Revue des arts décoratifs* 10 (August 1889), p. 36.

30 'Au Champ-de-Mars, la fête n'est pas moins belle. La Tour, dont les arcs et les plates-formes sont bordés de cordons lumineux, est embrasée de feux de bengale qui lui donnent un aspect fantastique et grandiose véritablement impressionnant. Le colosse de fer se dresse dans la nuit enveloppé de flammes sanglantes, tandis qu'au sommet brille le phare aux trois couleurs et que des réflecteurs électriques projettent leurs rayons bleus sur Paris. Enfin, les fontaines lumineuses lancent vers le ciel leurs gerbes étincelantes. L'eau emprunte tour à tour les couleurs du prisme [. . .] Le bleu, le rouge, le vert se succèdent ou se mélangent. Puis la lumière pénétrant seule dans la masse liquide la fait paraître de

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Both Jourdain and the writer for *La Construction Moderne* were careful to underpin their panegyrics with references to the aspects of republicanism that had made possible the construction of these 'fairy palaces': technological innovation (the synthesis of new materials and new methods of construction and electricity), rationalism and positivism, and colonialism (Jourdain and Gonse credited the steady influx of goods from the Orient with marked improvements in design and ornamentation at home). Sympathetic commentators echoed these praises, frequently imputing moral values to the glittering domes and towers of the Champ de Mars. Emile Monod boasted that they were an affirmation of the Republic's 'pacific genius, creative power and, in many cases, its still incontestable superiority'; although such hyperbole smacks of the flag-waving of a government functionary, similar examples were scattered liberally throughout the pages of republican newspapers and the numerous one-off publications brought out to celebrate the Exposition's opening.³¹ This city of dreams, they implied, represented the apotheosis of the Republic and the liberal values in which it was grounded, which in turn would feed the desire of all who experienced it to keep France on the path to ever greater glory – a self-perpetuating cycle of dream and reality.

Not everyone was prepared to buy into this official fantasy, however, and the Exposition's architecture proved a double-edged sword in the hands of its detractors. Much as the Exposition's champions evoked its metallic and polychrome architecture as proof, because of its beauty, whimsy and modernity, of the Republic's greatness, its critics used these same features to mock the Exposition's, and by extension, the Republic's, philistinism, corruption, and, most significantly, its flimsy impermanence and unreality – the dark underside of the collective dream. J.-K. Huysmans penned a blistering attack on the Exposition, 'Le Fer', in which he mocked the tastelessness of the palaces of the Champ de Mars as 'heavy and garish, emphatic and mediocre, evoking in a different medium the theatrical painting of Makart so cherished in l'argent fondu qui retombe en gouttelettes dans le bassin': *La Construction Moderne*, vol. 4, no. 31 (11 May 1889), p. 362.

³¹ 'Le génie pacifique, la puissance créatrice et, dans bien des cas, la supériorité encore incontestable, sinon toujours incontestée': E. Monod, *Beaux-arts et merveilles de l'industrie à la fin du XIXe siècle (Exposition universelle de 1889): grand ouvrage illustré historique, encyclopédique, descriptif* (Paris, 1889), vol. 1, p. ix. For further examples of republican enthusiasm for the appearance of the Champ de Mars, see especially M. Huart, 'L'Inauguration', *L'Événement* (8 May 1889), Gonse (1889) and E. Bergerat, 'Paris!', in F.-G. Dumas and L. de Fourcaud, eds., *Revue de l'Exposition Universelle de 1889* (Paris, 1889), p. 6.

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Hamburg in the superfluous splendour of bordellos'.³² In a single sentence Huysmans turned republican pride and moral rectitude on its head, comparing the palaces' ornamentation not merely to that of a brothel but to a *German* brothel decorated by the Austro-Hungarian Empire's chief exponent of academic pomposity. In inventing this tawdry fantasy, he insinuated, France had lowered itself to the level of its mortal enemy, for while Germany might be a colossus of blood and iron, France had always consoled itself, especially in the face of humiliating military defeat, on its unimpeachable superiority in the arts and general good taste. Edmond de Goncourt

was scarcely more forgiving; making his way through the crowds on opening day, he admired the sunset ablaze with fireworks and the obelisk on the place de la Concorde bathed in white light ‘with the rosy colour of a champagne sorbet’ while noting with waspish amusement the ecstatic-looking ladies queuing for the public toilets, ‘their bladders overcome by emotion’.³³ This crude detail neatly undermines both the highflown

rhetoric of the event and the dignity and aesthetic appeal of the setting, highlighting Goncourt’s disgust with all for which the Republic stood.³⁴

Other commentators, more predictably, made the Tour Eiffel [Figure 15] the target of their criticisms. Despite the mass protest of conservative cultural figures against the possibility of the tower making a permanent blot on the skyline of Paris,³⁵ a significant part of the criticism painted it as inherently precarious, an overconfident iron giant bound to crumble into a scrap heap. A tongue-in-cheek exposé entitled ‘Elle a trois cents mètres!!!’ which appeared in *L’Art* shortly before the Exposition opened playfully deflated the hubristic mythmaking already engulfing the tower by affecting comparisons with the pyramids and the great cathedrals, pagodas and Roman palaces, before ending with the *memento mori* that it would one day be reduced to a pile of rust and its worshipers would all be dead.³⁶ Beneath its sly humour, the article

³² ‘C’est lourd et criard, emphatique et mesquin; cela évoque en un art différent la peinture théâtrale de Mackart [sic] si chère à Hambourg au faste redondant des maisons de filles!’: J.-K. Huysmans, ‘Le Fer’, in *idem, Certains* (Paris, 1889), p. 173.

³³ ‘Avec la couleur rosée d’un sorbet au champagne’; ‘la vessie émotionnée’: E. de Goncourt, *Journal* (Paris, 1989), entry for Monday, 6 May 1889, vol. 3, p. 267.

³⁴ He adds, in the entry for 14 July 1889, ‘Today, the anniversary, thundering from all the cannons of the good city of Paris, of the Revolution of ’89, of this revolution which made of the great France of yesteryear the small and ridiculous France of today’ (‘Aujourd’hui, l’anniversaire, tonitruant par tous les canons de la bonne ville de Paris, de la Révolution de 89, de cette révolution qui a fait de la grande France d’autrefois la petite et ridicule France d’aujourd’hui.’) *Ibid.*, p. 295. As a descendant of the aristocracy, Goncourt could scarcely be expected to approve of the celebrations for the centenary of the Revolution.

³⁵ See note 26 above.

³⁶ L. Augé de Lassus, ‘Elle a trois cents metres!!!’, *L’Art* (1889), pp. 164-67.

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underscored some of the unnerving contradictions on which the tower was grounded. For the Tour Eiffel, that much-vaunted symbol of progress, actually represented a technological dead end, a sort of funeral monument to itself. As Richard Guy Wilson has pointed out, the tower and the Galerie des Machines were already outmoded by the time they were built; for France’s greatest rivals, Germany and America, steel construction had by then taken precedence over iron.³⁷ Even if one were unaware of the implications for French industry, it was hard to ignore the disturbing fact that the tower, which fast became the symbol of the Exposition and, by extension, of Paris and of France, was utterly devoid of functional utility – which rather undermined the Republic’s identification with utilitarianism and progress, outdated technology harnessed to create a reflexive, useless memorial to itself. ³⁸ Viewed thus, the collective dream spun by the Exposition was unsettlingly empty. Goncourt wrote of his unease as he gazed on the Champ de Mars from the Trocadéro in just such terms: ‘It is as if it puts you in a dream. This Exposition has no reality . . .’³⁹

Horizons of expectation: the position of antinaturalism at the Exposition

Inside the Palais des Beaux-Arts, the Republic was busy shoring up its standing, seriously threatened at the last Exposition, as the artistic leader of the civilised world with not one but two fine art exhibitions – the jury-selected Décennale displaying French artistic production since the 1878 Exposition, and the retrospective

Centennale, chosen by an individual, showing an ostensibly balanced history of the French school since the Revolution of 1789. Whether its avant-garde artists were willing to go along with this grandiose publicity exercise, and where they chose to position themselves within it, was another question.

The organiser of the Centennale was former Fine Arts minister Antonin Proust, a vocal supporter of Realism and a friend and patron of Manet and Monet.

Disappointed by the trite conservatism that reigned in the French art exhibition in 1878, he had been lobbying to stage a centenary retrospective in addition to the Décennale since the early 1880s. Unlike the Décennale, which operated under the time-honoured system of a jury composed of Academicians and other officially

³⁷R. G. Wilson, 'Challenge and Response: Americans and the Architecture of the 1889 Exposition', in A. Blaugrund, ed., *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposition* (exh. cat., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989), p. 104.

³⁸Silverman (1989), p. 3.

³⁹'Ça vous met comme dans un rêve. Cette Exposition n'a pas la réalité': Goncourt (1989), entry for Saturday, 8 May 1889, vol. 3, p. 271.

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recognised artists, the Centennale can be read as a record of Proust's personal predilections, complicated by his role as a promoter of republican values. The Centennale's most remarked-upon features were its showcasing of Courbet and the Barbizon school, as if to compensate for the shoddy treatment accorded them in 1878, and its inclusion of recent work by Manet and Monet (a first at an Exposition Universelle).⁴⁰ Raymond Isay defined the spirit of the 1889 Exposition as a contradictory melange of conservatism and progress, novelty and tradition; nowhere is this more evident than in the French Fine Art exhibitions.⁴¹ Ironically, while the Décennale avoided the humiliating debacle of the previous Exposition, the exhibition of contemporary art still came off as staid and conservative while the retrospective succeeded in uniting tradition and innovation.

Although Fantin-Latour showed five Wagnerian paintings in the Décennale,⁴²

Puvis and Moreau preferred to exhibit only in the Centennale, apparently in the face of protests from their colleagues on the Décennale jury. Puvis made the token gesture of allowing the mention of his recent decorative schemes for the New Sorbonne and the museums of Amiens and Lyon in the Décennale catalogue while otherwise absenting himself from the exhibition (a fact much lamented by critics).⁴³ He reserved his easel paintings, two of which (*Jeunes filles au bord de la mer* and *L'Enfant prodigue*) fell within the Décennale's purview, for the walls of the Centennale's Galerie Rapp. Moreau, despite his eligibility as a member of the jury and a newlyelected

member of the Institut to show in both exhibitions, and despite the urging of his colleagues, refused to submit work to the Décennale and appeared solely in the retrospective with the bookends of his Salon career: his 1865 success *Le Jeune homme et la Mort* and the 1880 *Galatée*.⁴⁴ A perusal of the catalogue of the Décennale offers

⁴⁰On Proust's role in the creation and organisation of the Centennale, see Vaisse (1995), pp. 126-28.

⁴¹Isay (1937), p. 188.

⁴²Fantin-Latour's works in the Exposition excited little comment in the press on either side of the Channel, although what notices he received were complimentary. His Wagnerian pictures will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

⁴³The works listed in the French Fine Art catalogue were *Pro patriâ ludus* [sic], *Vision antique*, *Inspiration chrétienne*, *Le Rhône et la Saône*, *Le Bois Sacré*, and the mural for the great hemicycle of the Sorbonne; all were unnumbered: *Exposition Universelle internationale de 1889: Catalogue officiel. Tome I: Groupe I, Oeuvres d'Art, classes 1 à 5*, (Lille, 1889), p. 46).

⁴⁴Moreau's attitude toward the Académie des beaux-arts had always been ambivalent; he craved the recognition that membership would guarantee while cherishing his equivocal status as an outsider and

frowning upon the facile, market-friendly classicism it sanctioned. Objections on the grounds of principle were intertwined with personal rivalries: he had put his name forward for election in 1882, only to be beaten out by Gustave Boulanger, who had defeated him in the Prix de Rome competition in 1849. Elected to fill the seat vacated by Boulanger's death in 1888, Moreau was always a reluctant Academician; indeed, the memorial speech he was obliged to deliver for Boulanger upon his election

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an explanation for their actions: the exhibition was dominated by the diluted justemilieu

naturalism of the recently deceased Bastien-Lepage's followers, with painters such as Léon Lhermitte, Alfred Roll and Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret taking pride of place. Rather than mix with company whose principles stood in diametric opposition to their own, it appears that Puvis and Moreau elected to throw their lot in with history and wished their work to be seen as belonging to a tradition rooted in the Romanticism of Delacroix and Chassériau – even if, as one of the few surviving installation views of the grand staircase [Figure 16] reveals, Puvis's early allegory *L'Automne* ended up sharing wall space with Courbet's *Stonebreakers*.⁴⁵

The decision of Puvis and Moreau to anchor their work within tradition indicates a sea change that had been unfolding since 1878. Hans Robert Jauss's theory of the 'horizon of expectations' may be most useful in helping to understand how and why this change occurred. Jauss posits the reception of a new work of literature (or art) as bound up in a complex network of previous aesthetic experience, which directs the reader's or viewer's perception; the horizon of expectations shifts subtly and incrementally with the accumulation of new experiences.⁴⁶ It was just such a gradual but accelerating accretion of new experience, in the form of reproduced images and literary advocacy, that brought about the alteration in the reception of Symbolist painting. By this time, Symbolism was no longer an intriguing aberration without a name (Zola's caustic jibes against Moreau notwithstanding). Moréas's Symbolist manifesto, with its famous proclamation that poetry should 'clothe the Idea in a sensible form which, nevertheless, would not be a goal in itself but which, in serving to express the Idea, would remain its subject' and its avowal that this concept had roots that reached back to the beginnings of literature, had been published in *Le* was a polemic, albeit cloaked in politesse, against the commercialisation of history painting by Boulanger and his ilk. See Cooke (2002), vol. 2, pp. 338-48, for the full text of Moreau's speech.

⁴⁵ As most surviving installation photographs of the Palais des Beaux-Arts show the grand staircase, the hang of the adjoining Centennale galleries is a matter of speculation. Judging from contemporary reviews, it would appear that works by individual artists were exhibited contiguously (or at least within the same gallery), with star pieces (or those works too large for the side galleries) ranged around the grand staircase.

⁴⁶ H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982), pp. 22-25.

Especially important in the present case is his characterisation of the change of the horizon of expectation in the face of a new work: 'If one characterises as aesthetic distance the disparity between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work, whose reception can result in a "change of horizons" through negation of familiar experiences, or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness, then this aesthetic distance can be objectified historically along the spectrum of the audience's reactions and criticism's judgment (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or belated understanding).'

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Figaro in 1886 to cheers and jeers.⁴⁷ Although the applicability of Moréas's theories to pictorial Symbolism has been a matter of some debate, it is worth noting that shortly after publishing his manifesto, he took up his pen in defence of Symbolist painting, anointing Puvis, 'whose work, beyond the narrowness of the impression, flourishes among the coruscating haloes of Pure Symbol', as leader of the movement.⁴⁸ (Ironically, despite the emulation of other Symbolist poets, Puvis always

kept himself at a distance, apparently preferring to think of himself as a rejuvenator of the French tradition of high art – which is what the choice of exhibiting solely in the Centennale implies.)⁴⁹ Although the literary Symbolism promulgated by Moréas and his peers might not have reached its apogee by 1889, the term itself was on enough writers' lips by the time the Exposition opened that, while not often used by critics in mainstream periodicals, terms in a similar vein, such as 'idealist' and 'imaginative' were frequently applied to the work of Puvis, Moreau and Watts. As well, the latter two were by now linked in the public imagination, thanks to Huysmans, to the Decadent phantasmagoria of *À rebours*. The 'period of rupture', to use Bourdieu's term, in which reviewers found themselves lost in 1878 had now begun to move toward becoming the norm – or one of them.⁵⁰

Hand in hand with this surge in literary interest in pictorial Symbolism – particularly as practiced in Britain – came a gradually increasing flow of reproductive prints across the Channel, albeit of varying quality. Arguably, these post-1878 reproductions played a more important role in disseminating the reputation of British Symbolists in France and in changing the horizon of expectations in favour of their work than the few, but vital, engravings circulated before Burne-Jones and Watts appeared in the flesh at the 1878 Exposition. The inherent inadequacies of engravings, in terms of size, technique, and colour, to convey the impact of the original painting could not be fully appreciated until the originals themselves were made available; once made aware of the true appearance of Burne-Jones and Watts's paintings, connoisseurs' demands for more reproductions was complicated by their

⁴⁷ Moréas, 'Le Symbolisme – Manifeste de Jean Moréas', *Le Figaro* (18 September 1886).

⁴⁸ 'Mais hâtons-nous de proclamer la souveraineté du maître Puvis de Chavannes, dont l'oeuvre, hors les

parvités de l'impression, s'essore parmi les halos coruscants du Pur Symbole': J. Moréas, 'Peintures', *Le Symboliste* 3 (22 October 1886), p. 9.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Shaw (2002), p. 128. Puvis's rightwing supporters, such as Ferdinand Brunetière, also stressed his alignment with the classical tradition, wishing to 'rescue' his work from the stigma of the inward-looking mysticism associated with Symbolism.

⁵⁰ Bourdieu (1991), p. 43; see also Chapter 1, n. 62.

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recognition that engravings and photographs were unsatisfactory substitutes for the real thing, whetting the appetite for more and better images which could only be satisfied by seeing, once again, more paintings.⁵¹ Thanks to the Grosvenor Gallery's ties with *L'Art*, its illustrated catalogues were available from the Librairie de l'Art from 1878; the illustrations consisted mainly of simple line drawings by the artists themselves or by Alfred Dawson, intended to serve as aides-memoires only.⁵² According to Philippe Saunier, one of the only known ways for the French amateur frustrated with the poor quality of the catalogues or the sparse illustrations in Ernest Chesneau's *La peinture anglaise* (which went through multiple printings after its 1882 publication), pre-1889, to lay hands on high-quality reproductions was through personal contacts in Britain. Thus, where observers in 1878 responded to the Symbolism of Burne-Jones and Watts with more or less 'innocent' eyes, those in 1889, while unarguably better informed, were depending on a combination of a burgeoning literature on the movement, problematic reproductions, and distant memories of actual paintings.

In any case, French observers' reactions to the British Fine Art exhibition could be broadly characterised as a struggle to negotiate déjà vu and the shock of the new. If French art (at least, the official version of it) had largely recovered its equipose after the humiliation of the previous Exposition, critics were still bewildered at Britain's continued resistance to its influence – not, some of them admitted, that this

was a bad thing. The budding Symbolist critic Albert Aurier sourly congratulated France on its ‘intellectual *revanche*’ on the art of the rest of the Continent, lamenting that, with the exception of a rare few British and Nordic painters, the art of the other nations in the Exposition mindlessly echoed the juste-milieu platitudes of the Salon and the Décennale.⁵³ Others, usually those establishment critics less well-acquainted with advanced British art, registered momentary disorientation upon stepping into the

⁵³ Few comprehensive studies of the trade in reproductions of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in France exist; the most complete thus far is P. Saunier, ‘Les préraphaélites anglais. Les reproductions de leurs oeuvres et leur réception au XIXe siècle en France’, *Revue de l’Art* no. 137 (2002), pp. 73-86. Saunier’s investigation owes a great debt to the pioneering work of Jacques Lethève and is concerned mainly with documentation; he rightly points out the difficulty of mapping the flow of such ephemeral objects, but his insistence that the reproductions were an attraction mainly to writers and exercised little influence on the visual arts is problematic. Furthermore, his concentration on prints and photographs after Burne-Jones and Rossetti entirely sidelines Watts.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 75. A complete collection of the catalogues is conserved in the Bibliothèque d’Art et d’Archéologie Jacques Doucet in Paris.

⁵³ G.-A. Aurier, ‘A Propos de l’Exposition universelle de 1889’, first published in *Le Pléiade* 2, 27 June, 27 July, and 24 August 1889, reprinted in *Textes critiques, 1889-1892. De l’impressionnisme au symbolisme*, eds. D. Mellier, M.-K. Schaub and P. Wat (Paris, 1995), p. 133.

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calm, sparsely-hung galleries; no less than four commentators employed the word ‘dépaycé’ (‘disorientated’, but literally ‘removed from one’s country’) to express the uncanny otherness of the art on view – and nowhere was this more the case than in the second gallery, which amounted to a displaced Grosvenor Gallery, a shrine to antinaturalist painting.⁵⁴

Goddesses and monsters: the antinaturalist dream of Watts and Puvis

While Burne-Jones’s rapturous reception at the Exposition rested on a single picture, Watts dominated the British galleries in terms of the sheer amount of his work on view – eight paintings, more than any other single artist in the exhibition. Leaving aside the portraits, the six imaginative subjects constitute a remarkable survey of the evolution of Watts’s style and concerns over the decade and of the gradual convergence of his approach with that of his French counterparts. Although the allegory *Love and Life* stands as a logical continuation of the aesthetic and conception of *Love and Death* and *Mammon* [Figure 17] falls solidly within the didactic strain that had intermittently characterised Watts’s oeuvre since the 1860s, the Michelangelesque *Diana and Endymion* and the ethereal, opalescent *Uldra* and *The Judgment of Paris* – these last two characterised by Henry Havard as ‘dreamlike fantasies’ – signal a new and, as I shall argue, more cosmopolitan direction in Watts’s work.⁵⁵

Thanks to a schematic plan of the British galleries reproduced in the catalogue of the British Fine Art section, we know that *King Cophetua* occupied a commanding position in the second gallery of oil paintings, on an end wall in the long, narrow space, flanked by Watts’s *Hope* and *The Judgment of Paris*, like the high altar in a church.⁵⁶ Although Sizeranne did not mention any of Watts’s canvases in his tribute to Burne-Jones, his assessment of the effect of *King Cophetua* as an altarpiece

⁵⁴ See for example A. Picard, *Exposition universelle internationale de 1889 à Paris: Rapport général* (Paris 1891), vol. 4, p. 109; Monod (1891), p. 603; M. Hamel, ‘Exposition universelle de 1889: les écoles étrangères (premier article)’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1889), p. 225; G. Lafenestre, ‘La Peinture étrangère à l’Exposition universelle de 1889’, *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1 November 1889), p. 140. The latter three qualify the sensation as ‘agrément dépaycé’.

⁵⁵ ‘Fantaisies rêveuses’: H. Havard, ‘L’Exposition des Beaux-Arts. Les écoles étrangères: l’Angleterre, l’Autriche Hongrie’, in Dumas and Fourcaud (1889), vol. 2, p. 182. It is worth noting that Havard did not intend this as a compliment; he evinced little regard for the type of painting practiced by Watts and Burne-Jones.

⁵⁶ H. Blackburn, *A Complete Illustrated Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture in the British Fine Art Section* (London and Paris, 1889), p. 43. No installation photographs of the British galleries have thus far surfaced.

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celebrating the supremacy of Beauty over Wealth within the British galleries takes on a deeper significance when we consider that *Mammon* hung on the other side of the gallery. Subtitled by the artist, ‘Dedicated to His Worshippers’, this grotesque and brutal personification of wealth, nursing moneybags on his lap and impassively crushing the life from two naked youths, was unambiguously posited as an antialtarpiece;

in fact, Watts, who in his 1880 article ‘The Present Conditions of Art’ had railed that ‘material prosperity has become our real god, but we are surprised to find that the worship of this visible deity does not make us happy’,⁵⁷ had earlier expressed a wish to erect a statue of the monster in Hyde Park, in the hope that ‘his worshippers would be at least honest enough to bend the knee publicly to him’.⁵⁸ Of all his paintings at the Exposition, *Mammon* clung the closest to conventional types – here, the grand manner portrait and the retable⁵⁹ – and strove the hardest for legibility in a contemporary context.⁶⁰ It was also, crucially, the most overt rebuke to the bloated materialism and vulgar disregard for the spiritual that characterised mainstream Victorian society, a lament which, if the aforementioned criticisms of the Exposition are any indication, retained the same urgency in Third Republic France.

In spite, or because of, the pointed criticism which *Mammon* might have been construed to contain, it is curious that this was the painting by Watts most often singled out by republican critics for lengthy discussion, if not praise. André Michel, writing in the *Journal des débats*, dubbed it ‘at once the most characteristic and the least good of his eight exhibited works . . . a Couture translated into English’,⁶¹ no doubt an allusion to the French master’s enormous tour-de-force of moralising history painting, *Les Romains de la décadence* (1847), which held court on the grand staircase of the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Notwithstanding this unflattering conclusion, Michel conceded that he found it difficult to pull his eyes away, and that despite Watts’s

⁵⁷ G. F. Watts, ‘The Present Conditions of Art’, *The Nineteenth Century* (February 1880), p. 243.
⁵⁸ M. S. Watts, *George Frederic Watts: Annals of an Artist’s Life* (London, 1912), vol. 2, p. 149.
⁵⁹ Veronica Franklin Gould draws attention to an interesting parallel between *Mammon* and Watts’s portrait of Cardinal Manning (1882, National Portrait Gallery): V. Franklin Gould, ed., *The Vision of G. F. Watts OM RA (1817-1914)*, (exh. cat., Compton, Watts Gallery, 2004), p. 74. As a sought-after portraitist, Watts was certainly conversant with the conventions of grand portraiture and seems to have skilfully manipulated them to heighten the picture’s impact.
⁶⁰ Colin Trodd argues that in *Mammon*, as opposed to Watts’s more allusive Symbolist works, ‘The job of allegory is to find the symbolic form of the real, to provide the conditions in which this manifestation is understood as a bringing together of the past and the present, and to make a public for art confront who they are by questioning the role of the image in modern life’; C. Trodd, “‘To intensify the sense of teeming life’: Watts and the twilight of transcendence”, in C. Trodd and S. Brown, eds., *Representations of G. F. Watts* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 66.

⁶¹ ‘A la fois le plus caractéristique et le moins bon de ses huit tableaux exposés [...] on dirait un Couture traduit en anglais’: Michel (1889).

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heavy-handedness with both brush and message, ‘nothing he does leaves one indifferent; one does not forget what one has seen’.⁶² Perhaps *Mammon* carried a less potent charge in Paris than it had in London because it seemed so *English*, rather than universal; Michel and his colleagues were amused (and perhaps comforted) by what they saw as Watts’s *très anglais* use of an allegorical subject to justify the inclusion of nude figures, and, as ever, the inadequacy of his technique to his grand ideas became a favourite talking point.⁶³ Possibly, though, republican commentators gravitated

toward *Mammon* for precisely the reasons outlined by Michel: despite the clumsy execution, the meaning was readily deciphered, its historical credentials were impeccable, and most importantly, its moral message – that love of money to the exclusion of all else is the root of all evil – could be willingly embraced by upholders of the Republic. Barbara Bryant’s claim that *Mammon* held a fascination primarily for the more extreme fringes of Symbolist and Decadent circles because of its rendering of destruction and evil only tells part of the story; it held as much attraction for those establishment critics suspicious of paintings whose meaning came veiled in allusion and suggestion.⁶⁴

If *Mammon*, despite its timely subject and nightmarish subversion of the fantasy promoted by the Exposition’s organisers, had no real equivalent in French Symbolism, deepening affinities between Watts and Puvis are discernible in two of the former’s most recent works, *The Judgment of Paris* [Figure 18] and *Uldra* [Figure 19] and Puvis’s *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, on its fourth outing in a decade. I have already discussed the possible influence of Watts’s *Three Goddesses* on *Jeunes filles*;⁶⁵ reversing the direction of the comparison draws out a growing convergence of concerns with the blurring of boundaries between the physical and the intangible, the concrete and the poetically allusive. For if Watts’s experimental, quasi-decorative composition and suppression of meaning may have influenced Puvis’s enigmatic classical-yet-not-classical ‘panneau décoratif’, *Jeunes filles*, and the poets’ plaudits it attracted, may have combined to push Watts still further toward poetic suggestion.⁶⁶

⁶² ‘Rien de ce qu’il fait n’est indifférent ; on ne l’oublie pas quand on l’a vu’: Ibid.

⁶³ Charles Bigot, for instance, wrote of *Mammon*, ‘C’est surtout en regardant la peinture de M. Watts que l’on peut voir quelles différences sépareront toujours le génie anglais et le génie français’: C. Bigot, ‘Les Beaux-arts à l’Exposition. L’Angleterre’, *Le Siècle* (24 June 1889).

⁶⁴ Bryant in Upstone and Wilton (1997), p. 170.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 1.

⁶⁶ Much of the following argument is informed by Jennifer L. Shaw’s persuasive analysis of *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer* as the site of poetic potentiality and unfulfilled desire (Shaw 2002, pp. 14-32).

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Jeunes filles, along with *L’Enfant prodigue* and *Le Pauvre pêcheur*, became one of Puvis’s calling cards in the 1880s, for both aesthetic and practical reasons; this repeated exposure brought Puvis to the attention of Claude Phillips. In one of the most sympathetic and insightful analyses of his work to come from either side of the Channel during the 1880s, Phillips debunked the now firmly entrenched perception that Puvis was an incompetent draughtsman; pointing to a group of masterly sketches, he argued that Puvis’s project was one of purifying simplification.⁶⁷ The article was accompanied by numerous illustrations which, despite their limitations, give the reader a fair sense of Puvis’s style. While Phillips may have seemed a voice in the wilderness, and while he himself drew no comparisons with Watts (although he did with Burne-Jones, to the latter’s detriment), many of his insights into Puvis’s recent work are also applicable to two of the paintings on which Watts was at work when his article appeared.

The bridge between *The Three Goddesses* and *The Judgment of Paris* would seem to be *Uldra*, an atypically modest half-length ‘portrait’ of a Scandinavian water sprite (*uldra* or *huldre* – contrary to critical assumptions, the subject of the painting was not a specific figure, but one of a type).⁶⁸ Wreathed in swirling veils of pale, shimmering vapour, the blond sprite, whose hair appears to dissolve into the mist, gazes upward, the direction of her eyes implying inner vision. The facture plays a key, and unsettling, role in etherealising the figure. Watts was by now notorious for his idiosyncratic methods and penchant for scumbling and scrubbing the paint onto –

or into – his canvases, and in *Uldra* the paint surface is thickly and unevenly built up so that it catches the light, causing the mist to sparkle in imitation of the spray of a waterfall yet also drawing the spectator's attention to its very material presence. The tension between the materiality of the paint and the immateriality of what it depicts is still greater in Watts's rendering of the sprite's body, its contours scarcely delineated, the breasts – the only indication of gender – defined only by the palest of shadows; the body has less physical substance than the insistently plastic paint from which it is created. Shaw has pointed to a parallel tension between potential facture and the illusory physicality of figures in *Jeunes filles*, in which the overall scraped roughness of the surface and the overemphatic black outlines drawn around the left and centre

⁶⁷ C. Phillips, 'Puvis de Chavannes', *The Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), p. 62.

⁶⁸ Indeed, a reviewer in *The Magazine of Art* (incorrectly) described *Uldra* as a portrait when it was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery.

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figures deny the illusion of three-dimensionality and bodily presence.⁶⁹ The dreamlike atmosphere engendered by this unresolved conflict between line and form was much remarked upon. Symbolist poets and theoreticians Théodore de Banville and Gustave Kahn celebrated the painting's allusiveness and oneiric reverie, while more conservative critics, especially the *Revue des deux mondes*'s Ferdinand Brunetière (an admirer himself, if for completely different reasons) vigorously minimised these same aspects, which he considered dangerous to the health of society because they might be seen to promote narcissistic contemplation over responsibility and action. For perhaps the same reasons, *Uldra* proved a greater attraction to Symbolist and Decadent writers than to republican and conservative commentators; René Doumic, writing in *Le Moniteur universel*, lumped it together with *The Judgment of Paris* and *Hope* as an incomprehensible exercise in coloured nothingness, 'what M. Whistler would call a real painting'.⁷⁰ Jean Lorrain, on the other hand, although by taste and temperament a much stronger partisan of Burne-Jones, singled out *Uldra* and *The Judgment of Paris* for praise, delighting in their opalescent colour harmonies and describing in detail the sensuous reverie they sent him into – precisely the sort of 'ill effects' which so worried an establishment critic like Brunetière.⁷¹ *The Judgment of Paris* may be viewed as the outcome of cross-fertilisation between *Uldra* and *Jeunes filles*, though of course it traces its roots in Watts's oeuvre back to *The Three Goddesses*. Yet those earlier goddesses seem positively fleshly and earthbound when confronted with those in *The Judgment of Paris*. Rather than place his figures in a conventionalised landscape, as before, Watts surrounds them in billowing clouds, from which, much like *Uldra*, they emerge as if they were a part of them; once again, the boundary between solid flesh and formless, liquid atmosphere is eroded, dissolved. This dissolution is especially striking when we consider the disparity between the goddesses' heads and bodies. The profile of the left-hand figure (tentatively identified as Minerva, although she is stripped of any identifying attributes) and the face of the central figure (probably Juno) are both unexpectedly solid, with firm outlines and sharply-cut, marmoreal features which would not be out of place on the shoulders of a Greek statue. The bodies, however, are wraithlike and almost androgynous, with the bare minimum of detail to suggest that we are gazing

⁶⁹ Shaw (2002), pp. 22-24.

⁷⁰ R. Doumic, 'Les beaux-arts à l'Exposition: l'Angleterre', *Le Moniteur universel* (25 September 1889).

⁷¹ J. Lorrain, *Mes Expositions universelles* (Paris, 2002), p. 148.

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upon the goddesses of antiquity rather than on disembodied spirits. The disjunction

resolves in a surprising manner in the third figure. Presumably Venus, Watts has given her the same insubstantial body as her sisters, and the vaporous golden hair and visionary gaze as his water sprite. Thus, he pushes Puvis's refusal to resolve the conflict between convention and dream, between the material and the dematerialised, almost to breaking point. Yet, like Puvis, he was passionately engaged, in both these pictures, in calling forth the spiritual through the activation of matter – a pursuit central to Symbolism's goals. With all markers of narrative and meaning banished (despite the clues provided by its title), *The Judgment of Paris* demands that we see it as an inner vision, a suggestive fantasy in which the mind of the individual viewer wanders at will. Nothing, it seemed, could be more inimical to the collective fantasy promoted by the state through the Exposition.

Between Hope and Despair

The inward turn seen in *The Judgment of Paris*, *Uldra* and *Jeunes filles*, however subtly contrary to republican goals, carries a less explosive charge than a second pair of Exposition works by Puvis and Watts. Of Watts's submissions to the Exposition, *Hope* [Figure 20] excited the most critical notice and the most debate. And well it might, for none of his subjects diverge so sharply from what its title purported to represent. The entry in the official Exposition catalogue listed the title as "*Hope!*", as if the exclamation mark was required both to clarify the picture's subject and to reinforce its tenuous meaning.⁷² G. K. Chesterton described the painting in 1904 as a representation of 'Despair' rather than 'Hope'⁷³; André Michel, seeing *Hope* at the Exposition, had a similar reaction:

Hope, her eyes bandaged, enveloped in a greenish dress, is seated, slumped rather, on the globe which turns in desolate space. She clutches to her heart, in a desperate embrace, her lyre, of which all the strings, save one, are broken. It is enough for her to make a song, a prayer, a lament rise in the silence of the night. Her infinite lassitude has not killed her faith; . . . in the depths of the immutable ether, a star twinkles and appears to respond to her . . .⁷⁴

⁷² *Catalogue général officiel* (1889), p. 206, no. 163.

⁷³ G. K. Chesterton, *G. F. Watts* (London, 1904), p. 94.

⁷⁴ 'L'Espérance, les yeux bandés, enveloppée d'une robe verdâtre, est assise, affaissée plutôt, sur le globe qui tourne dans l'espace désert. Elle serre contre son coeur, d'une étreinte désespérée, sa lyre, dont toutes les cordes, sauf une, sont brisées. C'est assez pour qu'elle fasse monter dans le silence de la nuit un chant, une prière, une plainte. Son infinie lassitude n'a pas tué sa foi ; . . . au fond de l'immuable éther, une étoile s'allume et semble lui répondre . . .' Michel (1889).

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While Michel was able to discern a faint note of hope in the depths of painting (the twinkling star), he identified the primary mood of *Hope* as a mixture of despair and desperation (both of which are derived from the same French root). Certainly, Watts's incarnation of Hope broke startlingly with the time-honoured conventions of Christian allegory.⁷⁵ Rather than representing her as a theological virtue, posed upright, gazing calmly and directly outward, and holding a symbolic anchor, he blindfolded her (borrowing an attribute more typical of Faith or Justice), pressed her down, as if under a tremendous weight, into an awkward sitting position, and bathed the scene in a vaporous green atmosphere, a colour suggestive of the polar opposites of new growth and decay. Colin Trodd and Stephanie Brown have observed that many of Watts's late figures, *Hope* in particular, appear to be 'struggling to resist the powers of disenchantment in the modern world',⁷⁶ and the figure's intense physicality bears this out; her bowed head and shoulders appear to be straining against a crushing weight, much like one of Rodin's caryatids, while the knuckles of her left hand clutching the broken lyre have blanched a ghastly greenish white from the pressure of her grip.

Although Watts himself explained his unorthodox approach by claiming that ‘it is only when one supreme desire is left that one reaches the topmost pitch of hope’,⁷⁷ his ambiguous portrayal of Hope – desperate, despairing, striving not to be awakened from a consoling dream – places it centrally within a Symbolist tradition of mingling enchantment, despair and melancholy.

Before Watts painted his two versions of *Hope*,⁷⁸ the most famous – or notorious – nineteenth-century portrayal of the subject was Puvis’s *L’Espérance* [Figure 21]. Shown at the 1872 Salon, the first held following the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, it stirred critical outrage with its equivocal depiction of Hope not as an anchor-bearing Christian allegory or as a doughty Marianne figure clad in classicising drapery, but as a frail young girl in white, perched stiffly and precariously on a breached wall before a ruined city. Daring to embody Hope in such a fragile,

⁷⁵ The theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity were, in fact, recurrent subjects in Watts’s oeuvre, although he never represented them as a trilogy; see Gould (2004), p. 78.

⁷⁶ C. Trodd and S. Brown, ‘Introduction: Generations of Watts’, in Trodd and Brown (2004), p. 10.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Gould (2004), p. 78; no source given.

⁷⁸ The first version, painted in 1885 and exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery that year, is now in a private collection (illustrated in Gould 2004, p. 7 and Wilton and Upstone 1997, p. 201); it differs from the second version, under discussion here, in the colour of the drapery (greyish-white rather than green) and in the background, which is brushy rather than diffuse, with a paler, blue-green tonality.

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contingent guise at such a volatile time earned Puvis the wrath of conservative commentators. Victor Cherbuliez’s unflattering assessment is typical:

Shall I speak to you of a certain damsel, scrawny and sickly, dressed in a white tunic or chemise . . . ? [...] This poor little creature represents a great divinity, Hope, at least that’s what M. Puvis de Chavannes insists.⁷⁹

Puvis’s Hope, while not crushed to the earth, is nevertheless semi-recumbent; indeed, the uneven length of her legs makes it doubtful that she could ever rise. While most observers reserved their scorn for the skinniness of her physique, her gaze must have seemed strange in a figure whose ostensible intent was to inspire optimism in the viewer: although she proffers a sprig of oak, her eyes are turned both upward and inward, either unconscious of or deliberately ignoring the viewer, denying the promise of connection implied by her gesture. Another grievous error was the ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ tendencies of Puvis’s style, according to the reviewer for the *Revue des deux mondes*, who sniffed, ‘convenient genre for anyone who can neither draw nor paint’.⁸⁰ Although Watts never saw *L’Espérance* in the flesh, and it is difficult to ascertain whether he could have seen a reproduction before or during work on *Hope*, he certainly could have known it by description; the *Athenaeum*’s article on the 1872 Salon included a detailed account of the picture and insisted, albeit in more positive terms, on its ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ qualities.⁸¹

L’Espérance, both its clothed Salon and slightly later nude versions, continued to be exhibited throughout the 1880s, despite this unpromising beginning; its political charge defused as painful memories of war ebbed and signs of its aftermath effaced from the cityscape, it came to be lauded by Symbolist critics (notably Gustave Kahn) and to serve as inspiration for avant-garde artists including Gauguin, Emile Bernard and Maurice Denis. Although Puvis did not exhibit it in the Centennale, another of his ‘calling-card’ panel paintings, *L’Enfant prodigue* [Figure 22], did appear in the

⁷⁹ ‘Vous parlerai-je de certaine jeune fille, maigre et malingre, vêtue d’une tunique ou d’une chemise blanche [...] ? Cette pauvre représente une grande divinité, l’Espérance, c’est du moins ce qu’affirme M. Puvis de Chavannes’. V. Cherbuliez, *Études de littérature et d’art. Études sur l’Allemagne. Lettres sur le Salon de 1872* (Paris, 1873), p. 261.

⁸⁰ ‘Genre commode pour qui ne sait ni dessiner, ni peindre’: E. Duvergier de Hauranne, ‘Le Salon de

1872', *Revue des deux mondes* (1872), pp. 843-44.

⁸¹ 'The Salon, Paris, 1872 (Second Notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2327 (1 June 1872), p. 692. The reviewer (possibly F. G. Stephens or William Michael Rossetti) adds, 'M. Puvis de Chavannes has, however, out-Heroded Herod, to use a term which is most apt to his case, by carrying what our amazed countrymen fancied was Pre-Raphaelitism to an excess which is almost laughable; and yet his work remains most respectable, because the artist is a man of some power, and so very much in earnest as to persist seriously and steadfastly in modes of design and painting which must surely have occurred to him in a dream'.

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exhibition. Its parallels with *Hope*, not previously noted, may serve to further illuminate the disturbing alternative fantasy spun by both paintings within the Exposition's framework. The comparison I am drawing between these two works is not meant to be the last word on the subject; however, bringing them together in this way may serve to open new directions in interpretation.

Puvis was nothing if not evasive when asked to speak to the significance of his unconventional rendering of biblical parable; Vachon records him explaining the painting's origin as an excuse to use sketches of pigs he had made during a recent trip to rural Burgundy.⁸² Yet this flippant remark points to one of the painting's most unsettling qualities, the near-total disjuncture between figure and landscape. Indeed, it might almost be two paintings joined by accident – on the one hand a modest pastoral landscape, on the other the completely unrelated figure of the Prodigal Son, pushed so far to the right of the composition that he seems to have been caught in the frame by pure chance. The figure is unique in Puvis's oeuvre; in contrast to the generalised masks or averted faces which characterise his pictures, the Prodigal Son's face is sharply delineated. Indeed, the salient lantern jaw, the exaggerated hollows of the cheeks and the deep-set, introspective eyes appear to bear witness to the influence of Burne-Jones (whose *Beguiling of Merlin* Puvis would have seen before he started work on the painting). The young man's slender body is disposed in an attitude of extraordinary vulnerability – a quality which becomes easier to understand when we consider that Puvis took the unusual step of using a female model for preliminary studies of the figure [Figure 23]. Perched uneasily on a fallen tree, staring off into the distance, with his shoulders hunched forward, the Prodigal Son clasps his arms against his chest with startling vehemence, more so than would seem to be warranted in trying to keep off a chill wind.⁸³ We have already witnessed the same violence of gesture in *Hope*'s white-knuckled grip on her lyre, the same bending of head and shoulders beneath an invisible burden. What, one wonders, is the Prodigal Son struggling against? Is he, too, attempting to escape the disenchantment that would maroon him in mundane reality?

My comparison of *Hope* and *L'Enfant prodigue* is not meant to suggest mutual influence – again, it is all but impossible to ascertain whether Watts could have seen a

⁸² Vachon (1895), p. 71.

⁸³ Shaw (2002), p. 32, notes a similar unwonted violence in the disposition of the fisherman's arms in *Le pauvre pêcheur*.

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reproduction of Puvis's work before he began work on his own – but rather to draw out a shared concern for the impossibility of preserving individual dream and contemplation, and a possible common point of inspiration. Both paintings belong to a tradition tracing its origins back to Dürer's defining representation of melancholy, *Melencolia I* [Figure 24]. Watts drew more heavily on the iconography established by Dürer, including two of Melancholy's symbolic accessories, a stringed instrument and a globe, though he transforms the latter from a scientist's tool into a precarious support for *Hope*.⁸⁴ Both unquestionably emulated the hunched posture, the body

beginning to fold in upon itself, and the bleak expression, which Félix Fénéon, upon seeing *l'Enfant prodigue* at the 1883 Exposition Nationale, described as 'one of those dreadfully enveloping melancholies'.⁸⁵

Melancholy's fortunes, however, had changed since Dürer's age, when it was considered, even glorified, as a natural and necessary condition of genius and as the humour most conducive to creativity and intellectual endeavour. As the study of psychology advanced in the nineteenth century, melancholy fell under the cold gaze of medicine. The conversion of its public image from exalted spiritual-intellectual state to psychosomatic illness fed into the fears of creeping degeneration that had haunted France ever since its embarrassing defeat in 1870. Theorists of degeneration, most notably Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau, published dire predictions, and the majority pinpointed melancholy as one of the key symptoms of this alarming trend.⁸⁶ Melancholy, then, represented a threat to the social order, particularly to the vision of progress and harmony promoted by the Republic and the Exposition; introspection and withdrawal, its key symptoms, were dangers to be repressed, averted at any cost. Yet, as we have seen, *Hope* and *L'Enfant prodigue* appear to resist. Bodies compressed in upon themselves as they withstand, in extremis, the forces that would wrench them from their reveries, they represent not so much a retreat from contemporary reality, but a valiant struggle to keep it out.

⁸⁴ *Hope's* composition may also be indebted to Jacob II de Gheyn's 1596 engraving *Melancholicus* (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum), which depicts an old man seated atop a globe, contemplating another smaller globe.

⁸⁵ 'Une de ces mélancolies épouvantablement enveloppantes': F. Fénéon, 'Exposition nationale des beaux-arts (15 septembre-31 octobre)', *La libre revue* 1 (1 October 1883), p. 20.

⁸⁶ On the pathologising of melancholy by the medical profession in the second half of the nineteenth century, see L. Bossi, 'Mélancolie et dégénérescence', in J. Clair, ed., *Mélancolie. Génie et folie en occident* (exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais and Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie, 2005), pp. 398-411.

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The beginning – or the end?

The reverberations of this change in critical fortunes followed closely on the closing of the 1889 Exposition. Watts and Burne-Jones were now firmly established in the firmament of avant-garde painting in Paris, their rise echoing that of Puvis and Watts and occasioning further exchange and collaboration. In 1890, after a decade of acrimonious wrangling after its control was placed in the hands of artists, the official Salon split in two. The more conservative elements remained in their Champs-Élysées quarters as the Société des Artistes Français, while a dissenting group, spearheaded by Puvis and possibly inspired by the secessionist Grosvenor and New Galleries in London,⁸⁷ broke away to form the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts, better known as the Salon du Champ de Mars because it staged its exhibitions in the Palais des Beaux-Arts on the Exposition grounds.⁸⁸ Puvis made a concerted effort to include Burne-Jones in this alternative Salon, which proclaimed its modernity by giving space to the decorative arts and was known for showing artists working in a Symbolist vein;⁸⁹ a series of letters tells the story of his attempt to solicit Burne-Jones's *The Wheel of Fortune* (1883) for inclusion in the 1892 Salon. Although he ultimately had to make do with a selection of drawings in place of the hoped-for painting,⁹⁰ and his wistfully expressed wish for 'a meeting that I have long desired' with Burne-Jones was destined to remain unfulfilled,⁹¹ Puvis was responsible for

⁸⁷ Annie Dubernard-Laurent suggests this connection; certainly, by this date, the example of both galleries was widely known in Paris: Dubernard-Laurent (1996), vol. 4, p. 221.

⁸⁸ The distinction between the kinds of artists who exhibited at the two Salons is not, of course, black and white. Fantin-Latour, for example, remained loyal to the Société des Artistes Français until the end of his life, exhibiting his imaginative pastels and paintings to great acclaim, while one of the key

figures in the decision to secede from the Champs-Élysées was the historical genre painter Meissonier, an academic painter par excellence (albeit not in the traditional sense).

⁸⁹ The Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts broke with centuries of tradition in allowing entry to the decorative arts, and as such became an important breeding ground for Art Nouveau; see Silverman (1989), pp. 207-14, for further discussion of the implications of the Salon's split for the status and development of the decorative arts. Painters associated with the second wave of Symbolism who exhibited with the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts included Eugène Carrière, Edmond Aman-Jean, Armand Point, Alexandre Séon and Louis-Welden Hawkins; many of these artists also exhibited at some point with the Salon de la Rose + Croix.

⁹⁰ A letter from Puvis to Burne-Jones, dated 8 February 1892, indicates that Burne-Jones sent a study for the figure of Fortune ('Merci de tout mon coeur d'artiste pour l'envoi de votre puissant et original symbole de la Fortune. – comme tous ceux que j'ai conviés à le voir j'ai été profondément frappé de son aspect de grandeur.'), but the painting itself was never sent, for reasons that must remain obscure. It appears that the drawings mentioned in following letter, dated 28 April 1892, were the only works included in the Salon (Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Puvis de Chavannes, P.: 9308 Bb-Bc). Puvis's wish was granted nearly a century later, however, when *The Wheel of Fortune* was purchased by the state in 1980.

⁹¹ 'De plus vous me faites espérer une rencontre que je désire depuis bien longtemps'. Fondation Custodia, Puvis de Chavannes, P.: 9308 Bd. In fact, Burne-Jones's final visit to France, in 1878, was also the last time he left England before his death.

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securing Burne-Jones's participation in the Salons of 1893, 1895 and 1896.

Moreover, the respect and admiration Puvis expressed seems to have been reciprocated. When, in 1891, Joséphin Péladan sent a pamphlet to Burne-Jones to solicit his participation in the first Salon de la Rose + Croix, the artist, no doubt taken aback by the Sâr's purple prose and alarming vehemence, wrote to Watts expressing his misgivings, describing the pamphlet as 'disgracefully silly, but I was in the mood . . . to help in anything that upholds the ideals I care for . . . do you know Puvis de Chavannes? Who has lifted the same banner'. Burne-Jones then evidently consulted Puvis, who himself refused to associate himself with the Rose + Croix, and on his advice declined to exhibit.⁹²

Puvis also made inroads into the British cultural conscience, which have thus far passed largely unnoticed, as a result of the Exposition. In 1893, James Hibbert, the architect of Preston's new museum, put forward Puvis's name as a possible decorator for the central lantern. Puvis turned down the commission, explaining that his involvement in the decorative cycle for the Boston Public Library precluded it.⁹³ Had he accepted, the mural would have been the only publicly commissioned decorative ensemble in Britain by a French artist, and a striking parallel to the work of Watts, whose ambitions as a monumental decorative painter had been sadly thwarted but whose high-minded subject matter and seriousness of purpose echoed that of Puvis. In any event, the invitation demonstrates that awareness of, and admiration for, Puvis in Britain was more widespread than previously acknowledged. Sir C. J. Holmes devoted eight pages to his obituary in the *Contemporary Review* in 1898, naming him as one of the three greatest contemporary French artists (along with Moreau and Rodin) and claiming that, while his work displayed affinities with that of his recently deceased peers Burne-Jones and Moreau, Puvis was by far the greatest exponent of 'the pictorial conception of the heroic age'.⁹⁴ Much as had been the case in France, the darker, more introspective visions expressed in canvases such as *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, *L'Enfant prodigue* and *Le Pauvre pêcheur* appealed to artists and

⁹² R. Upstone, 'Echoes in Albion's Sacred Wood: Puvis and British Art', in Lemoine (2002), p. 279.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁹⁴ Sir C. J. Holmes, 'Puvis de Chavannes', *Contemporary Review* no. 396 (December 1898), p. 871. Holmes makes no mention of Puvis's easel paintings, with the exception of *The Death of St John the Baptist*, which had been exhibited at the Guildhall the previous year and eventually entered the National

Gallery as part of the Hugh Lane bequest in 1917. His Puvis is almost exclusively a decorative painter; moreover, he claims that the artist's name is well-known in England because large numbers of visitors to France saw his murals at Amiens, Paris and Lyon.

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writers of a Symbolist bent, while the tranquil, classicising fantasy of the murals earned the approval of establishment critics.

The Exposition and its aftermath also prompted the only known correspondence between Moreau and Burne-Jones. Moreau, who had been instrumental in awarding Burne-Jones a *médaille d'honneur* for *King Cophetua*, apparently asked his patron Charles Ephrussi to put him in contact with Burne-Jones; through the offices of Ephrussi and Burne-Jones's friend Lady Brook, Burne-Jones sent Moreau a photograph of *The Seven Days of Creation* [Figure 25]. The sole surviving letter from Moreau to Burne-Jones is an effusive note of thanks, extolling the work's 'charming and delicate attention [to detail]' and acknowledging Burne-Jones as a kindred spirit whose sympathy was 'one of the rarest and most beautiful recompenses of my long working life'.⁹⁵ While we unfortunately have no record of Burne-Jones's letters, Moreau's affinity with Burne-Jones is attested to not only by this letter, but by the fact that the photograph, the only reproduction of a contemporary work in his personal collection, was still hanging in Moreau's house when he died six years later.⁹⁶ Although the existence of this artefact of an interchange between the two artists is occasionally remarked upon without further comment, both Burne-Jones's choice of a work to send Moreau and the latter's response to it are worth considering. *The Seven Days of Creation* shows Burne-Jones at both his most deliberately archaic, with its polyptych format and austere verticality and his most original and (to conservative eyes) unsettling, with its host of melancholic, androgynous angels who appear to exist at an utter remove from reality. Such characteristics were, of course, salient in much of Moreau's work, and it seems safe to suppose that Burne-Jones deliberately selected as his offering to Moreau the painting he considered to best demonstrate their aesthetic affinities.

Strengthened personal ties were not the only result of the Exposition.

Crucially, the early 1890s also saw the Symbolist press in France embrace British antinaturalism. The *Revue Blanche*, best known as the mouthpiece of the Nabis,

⁹⁵ 'Quelle attention délicate et charmante!'; 'd'une sympathie [qui est] . . . pour moi une des plus rares et des plus belles récompenses de ma longue vie de travailleur': Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Moreau, G.: 9308a, letter to Burne-Jones.

⁹⁶ This evidence of Moreau's admiration for Burne-Jones is somewhat complicated by the fact that a disparaging article on the latter, penned by Robert de Montesquiou in 1894 when Burne-Jones's fortunes in France were on the wane and describing his paintings witheringly as 'des *Christmas-cards* géants et sublimes' was found among Moreau's belongings at his death: R. de Montesquiou, 'Burne Jones', *La Revue illustrée* 18, no. 212 (1 October 1894), p. 48.

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sporadically featured articles on the Pre-Raphaelites, most of them aimed at amateurs seeking to enhance their collections of books and reproductions. In February 1894, for example, Gustave Kahn directed readers to a reissue of the Moxon *Tennyson*, whose illustrators he described as 'then almost unknown, now intellectual celebrities', and to a reproduction of Burne-Jones's *Chant d'Amour* published the previous month in the *Magazine of Art*.⁹⁷

If the *Revue Blanche*'s approach to the Pre-Raphaelites leaned more in the direction of connoisseurship than critical analysis, Aurier's decision to include the Pre-Raphaelites along with Puvis and Moreau in what was becoming an increasingly familiar triad as precursors to the latest wave of Symbolist art was more significant. Having already formulated a definition of Symbolist painting specific to the recent

work of Gauguin and the Pont-Aven circle in ‘Le Symbolisme en peinture – Paul Gauguin’, published in the *Mercure de France* in 1891, Aurier elaborated on his initial ideas in ‘Les Peintres Symbolistes’ the following year, consolidating Symbolism’s status as a reaction against the positivism and scientific advances of the nineteenth century and proclaiming its victory over naturalism and materialism: In vain does exclusively materialist, experimental and immediate art struggle against the attacks of a new, idealist and mystical art. On all fronts it claims the right to dream, the right to the pasturelands of the skies, the right to take flight towards the stars denied by the absolute truth.⁹⁸

As Juliet Simpson has suggested, ‘Les Peintres Symbolistes’ sought to reach – and convert to the Symbolist cause – a much broader audience than Aurier’s previous sally, not only by appearing in a journal with a more general readership than the Symbolist *Mercure de France* but by anchoring pictorial Symbolism firmly within an established tradition of primitive and naïve art.⁹⁹ Aurier was at pains to portray his heroes, ‘Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, the English Pre-Raphaelites’, as having ‘already, in isolation, with glory and victory if without much real doctrine, fought the same fight, claiming the right to dream, flourishing far from materialist swamps and having the courage to proclaim the excellence of the true and good

⁹⁷ G. Kahn, ‘Les Lettres anglaises’, *La Revue Blanche* 6, no. 28 (February 1894), pp. 188, 191. Kahn’s reference to the *Magazine of Art* suggests that by this date, obtaining British art periodicals in France was a relatively simple matter.

⁹⁸ ‘En vain l’art exclusivement matérialiste, l’art expérimental et immédiat, se débat contre les attaques d’un art nouveau, idéaliste et mystique. De toutes parts on revendique le droit au rêve, le droit aux pâturages de l’azur, le droit à l’envolement vers les étoiles niées de l’absolue vérité’. G.-A. Aurier, ‘Les Peintres Symbolistes’, *La Revue encyclopédique* 1, 1 April 1892, pp. 475-87, reprinted in Aurier (1995), p. 96.

⁹⁹ J. Simpson, *Aurier, Symbolism and the Visual Arts* (Bern, 1999), pp. 245-46.

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tradition: that of the Primitives’.¹⁰⁰ Britain’s antinaturalists were no longer an insular curiosity but part of an international vanguard, yet Aurier’s attempt to have it both ways – to portray them both as isolated, misunderstood geniuses and as renovators of a time-honoured tradition – betrays an irrevocable shift toward conservatism. This subtle but telling paradigm shift in Aurier’s criticism is symptomatic both of a trend toward conservatism and an emphasis on tradition in avant-garde circles and of a change in British antinaturalism’s critical fortunes in the 1890s.¹⁰¹ As Burne-Jones became a fixture of the Champ de Mars and the 1894 version of Watts’s *Love and Life* entered the Musée du Luxembourg to hang in the company of *Le Pauvre pêcheur* and Moreau’s *Orphée*, serious studies of their work proliferated in French art periodicals.¹⁰² Common to many of them were an earnest scholarly effort to situate the artists within an overarching tradition and a memorialising tone, indicating a collective sense that an epoch was slipping irretrievably into the past.¹⁰³ Familiarity – and official recognition – often breeds contempt, and antinaturalism was no exception. Indeed, Burne-Jones often found himself the scapegoat for the sins of the entire Symbolist movement, never more so than under the sarcastic pen of the anarchist critic and defender of Impressionism Octave Mirbeau. Beginning in 1895, Mirbeau launched a series of scurrilous attacks in *Le Journal* on Burne-Jones and his lesser French imitators that continued unabated until May 1897. Through the parodic character of Kariste, the *über*-Symbolist martyr to his own art (whose name Mirbeau probably invented for its phonetic similarity to ‘Christ’), Mirbeau poured scorn on this

¹⁰⁰ ‘Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, les préraphaélites anglais avaient déjà isolément, avec gloire et victoire, mais sans bien nette doctrine, combattu le même combat, revendiquant le droit au rêve, à l’essor hors des marécages matérialistes, et ayant le courage de proclamer l’excellence de la vraie et de

la bonne tradition: celle des Primitifs': Aurier (1995), p. 105.

¹⁰¹ Michael Marlais has explored the paradoxical appearance of a conservative, traditionalist tone in anti-naturalist avant-garde criticism from 1889-1900, particularly in the writings of Aurier, Maurice Denis and Camille Mauclair, pinpointing its origins in the Third Republic's aggressive institutionalization of naturalism and materialism: Marlais (1992), p. 7.

¹⁰² Puvis experienced a similar belated recognition in Britain; see, for example, Prince Bojidar Karageorgevitch, 'Puvis de Chavannes', *Magazine of Art* 17 (1894), pp. 73-79, which is notable for the space it devotes to Puvis's easel paintings, including an extended meditation on *Le Pauvre pêcheur* which the Prince considered his masterpiece.

¹⁰³ Notable examples of this trend include P. Leprieux, 'Artistes contemporains: M. Burne-Jones, décorateur et ornemaniste', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 8 (November 1892), pp. 381-99 and L. Bénédite, *Deux idéalistes: Gustave Moreau et E. Burne-Jones* (Paris, 1899). Critics writing in establishment periodicals tended not to class Burne-Jones and Watts as Symbolists, often opting for the designation of 'idéaliste' instead. Richard Thomson suggests that Bénédite, as a state functionary and curator of the Musée du Luxembourg, was especially eager to dissociate Moreau (who had just left his vast personal collection to the nation) from the less salubrious fringes of Symbolism, particularly Lorrain and Huysmans (Thomson 2004, pp. 27-28); this may explain his decision to classify Moreau and Burne-Jones under a heading with more high-minded connotations.

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strand of Symbolism, reserving much of his fire for Burne-Jones, in no less than seven articles.¹⁰⁴ Although Mirbeau's quarrel with Burne-Jones's Symbolism (and, perhaps more to the point, the excessively allegorical mysticism of the Rose + Croix painters) seems to have been partly motivated by its wilful archaism, from which he inferred a corresponding political conservatism, his repeatedly expressed distaste catalysed a turning of the tide amongst Burne-Jones and Watts's erstwhile Symbolist and Decadent defenders, especially Jean Lorrain and Robert de Montesquiou.¹⁰⁵ Of course, British antinaturalism did not lack for advocates in France in the closing years of the nineteenth century. What distinguished these supporters' accounts, however, were both an appreciation of its affinities with its French counterpart and a palpable nostalgia for the irrecoverable loss of a dream.¹⁰⁶ As the Third Republic's policies shifted inexorably toward the right in the wake of the Boulangist crisis and the escalation of anarchy and the elite retrenched against the spectre of socialism, the private, desolate dream-world of cross-Channel antinaturalism appeared less a questioning – or, in the case of *Hope* and *L'Enfant prodigue*, defiant – alternative to the collective Republican fantasy of 1889 than it seemed to be converging with the more conservative Republic of the *ralliement*. Political and artistic radicals such as Mirbeau and Gustave Geffroy naturally found this hard to stomach. Sizeranne's call to arms for 'the revenge of art on life' had been answered, but with results for which he might not have wished.

¹⁰⁴ Mirbeau's anti-Symbolist writings include 'Des lys! des lys!', *Le Journal* (7 April 1895); 'Toujours des lys', *Le Journal* (28 April 1895); 'Intimités préraphaélites', *Le Journal* (9 June 1895); 'Les artistes de l'âme', *Le Journal* (23 February 1896); 'Mannequins et critiques', *Le Journal* (26 April 1896); and the two-part 'Botticelli proteste!...', *Le Journal* (4-11 October 1896) which imagined Botticelli rising from the grave to protest the Burne-Jonesian perversions being painted in his name (all collected in *Combats esthétiques*, eds. P. Michel and J.-F. Nivet, Paris 1993, vol. 2). Although other Symbolists, particularly Denis and Point, also suffered Mirbeau's barbs, he was consistently kind to Puvis, praising him as 'Le peintre de la vie' (*Le Gaulois*, 26 June 1897). Especially curious in this context is Mirbeau's role in launching the reputation of Maeterlinck, a poet with obvious (and openly acknowledged) debts to Pre-Raphaelite poetry and painting.

¹⁰⁵ Lorrain was a notorious fair-weather friend of artists, and his betrayal of Burne-Jones was particularly cruel; having celebrated the artist in numerous articles, poems and short stories, he began to publish articles deriding him in 1894, culminating in his attack in *Madame Baringhel* on Burne-Jones's portrait of the Baronne Deslandes (shown at the Salon du Champ de Mars in 1896) as 'that washerwoman escaped from the wash house, with her rotted flesh and purplish lips . . . why, she's the muse of bleach!' ('Cette lessiveuse en rupture de lavoir, elle, avec ses chairs faisandées et ces lèvres violâtres . . . mais c'est la Muse de l'eau de Javelle [sic]'). J. Lorrain, *Madame Baringhel* (Paris, 1899),

p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ See especially Sizeranne's extended meditation on Burne-Jones's second version of *Love among the Ruins* (Sizeranne 1895, pp. 199-203).

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Chapter 3

Altars of perversity: Burne-Jones, Moreau and the religion of beauty

'The religion of art has established itself on the debris of Faith. This religion wants its priests, its confessors, its martyrs. It raises its basilicas and its chapels. And this, at the very moment when thrones are collapsing, [...] when Renan ironises, when Taine cuts off the flight of the soul by clipping its wings and claims that crime and virtue are the natural products of the brain, like vitriol and sugar . . .'¹

Edward Burne-Jones's 1884 magnum opus, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* [Figure 26], dominates the gallery it now occupies at Tate Britain. With its forlorn king and enigmatic maiden painted in darkly glowing tones, enveloped in an eerie submarine hush, and flanked by gilded pilasters, it presides over its smaller, brighter neighbours with all the *gravitas* of the high altar in a great cathedral. Across the Channel, in the Musée d'Orsay, Gustave Moreau's *Galatée* [Figure 27, Mathieu 226], painted four years earlier, occupies its own wall in the centre of a smaller, more intimate chamber. Although no longer in its original frame, the dazzling Nereid and her grotto are enclosed in a fair reconstruction of the original, an elaborate, columned neo-Renaissance setting.² If *King Cophetua* seems set in a cathedral nave, *Galatée* and its surroundings more closely resemble a small altarpiece set for private contemplation in a chapel or shrine.

This use of the vocabulary of religious imagery is neither casual, nor is it the product of hindsight. Both *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and *Galatée* engage deliberately, subversively, and even perversely with ideas of worship, with the conventions of religious painting, and with the increasingly porous boundary between the sacred and the profane. Although a strong case can be made for these paintings' function as secular altarpieces dedicated to the worship of Beauty and Woman (sometimes inextricable from each other) in their own right, a greater range of meanings emerges when they are considered not only in the context of a dialogue between their creators, but especially in that of the 1889 Exposition Universelle in

¹ 'La religion de l'art s'est installée sur les débris de la Foi. Cette religion veut ses prêtres, ses confesseurs, ses martyrs. Elle dresse ses basiliques et ses chapelles. Cela, au moment même où les trônes s'écroulent, [...] où Renan ironise, où Taine coupe l'essor de l'âme en lui rognant les ailes et prétend que le crime et la vertu sont des produits naturels du cerveau comme le vitriol et le sucre'. Raynaud (1918), vol. 1, p. 44.

² *Galatée*'s original frame was larger and more imposing than its present one, judging from the measurements, which included the frame as well as the painting, that appeared in the 1880 Salon *livret*; see G. Lacambre, 'La *Galatée* de Gustave Moreau entre au musée d'Orsay', 48/14, *La revue du Musée d'Orsay* 6 (spring 1998) (hereafter Lacambre 1998b), p. 50.

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Paris, where they were displayed in their respective nations' fine art exhibitions. The Exposition, the first truly republican one held under the aegis of the troubled Third Republic, an era, as we will recall, aptly characterised by Daniel Halévy as 'a regime of discord tempered by festivals' and by Eugen Weber as 'one long crisis, every lull overshadowed by disbelief that it could last',³ is generally acknowledged by scholars as a high-water mark in the Symbolist dialogue between Britain and France, particularly with regard to the establishment and flowering of Burne-Jones's reputation on the Continent and to his personal and artistic exchange with Moreau.⁴ Yet no study of the 1889 Exposition thus far has focused closely on the parallels between, and resonances generated by, these two paintings.

The Exposition was also an event remarkable for the prevalence of quasireligious

language found in contemporary discussions of it. Keeping in mind Georges Bataille's definition of the festival as a site where the 'aspiration for destruction', particularly sacrifice, is given controlled rein, while at the same time offering all the possibilities of consumption at once,⁵ I shall consider the Exposition as a whole as a religious site to which the masses flocked to worship at the altars of new divinities: Technology, Progress, Commerce, Modernity. In this examination of *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and *Galatée* in relation to their setting in this modern pantheon, I hope to show not only the multiple levels on which Burne-Jones and Moreau engaged in a dialogue with each other, but also how their works respond to the shifting notions of religion and religiosity at play within the Exposition to formulate a new and transgressive mode of devotion.

Prelude: The Grosvenor Gallery, the Salon, and the Origins of a Dialogue

As artists who regularly worked with sacred subject matter in the conventional sense, Burne-Jones and Moreau were in a unique position to test and even violate the established practices of religious art. While explicitly religious paintings occupy a relatively minor position in his oeuvre, Burne-Jones, who had gone to Oxford with the intention of taking orders, was involved in the design of church decoration from early in his career. Moreau, on the other hand, did begin his public career as a religious painter: his first Salon work was a Pietà (1852, Mathieu 11) bought by the French ³Halévy (1936), p. 423; E. Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge and London, 1986), p. 47. ⁴See, for example, Lethève (1959); Allemand-Cosneau in Munro (1992), pp. 69-80; Wilton and Upstone (1997); Des Cars in Wildman and Christian (1998), pp. 25-40; and Dubernard-Laurent (1996). ⁵G. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. R. Hurley (New York, 1989, 1973), pp. 53-54.

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state for the high altar of the cathedral of Angoulême and seven years later, on another state commission, he produced a rather lacklustre *Chemin de Croix* (Mathieu 61-74) for the church of Décazeville, although religious subjects soon gave way to a highly personal interpretation of history painting in the grand manner. In any case, by the time they produced the works under discussion here, both artists had established a long precedent of fusing literary or mythological subject matter with religious, and more specifically, medieval and renaissance Christian compositional conventions. One of Moreau's greatest Salon successes, *Orphée* [Figure 28, Mathieu 84], openly appropriated Pietà imagery, an act which did not pass unnoticed by the critics; Paul de Saint-Victor described the Thracian maiden as resembling 'a female saint of the German school' and declared that 'the head of Orpheus, asleep in its blond hair, angelic and not at all antique, is also that of a Christian martyr'.⁶

While Moreau's borrowing of religious motifs did not initially ruffle many feathers in Catholic France, Burne-Jones, who came of age artistically within the controversy of the Catholic Emancipation Act, the High Church movement and the beginnings of Aestheticism in Britain, sometimes provoked critics at home. For example, his *Laus Veneris* [Figure 29], shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1878, elicited reactions ranging from discomfort to outright anger. Frederick Wedmore attacked it as 'an uncomfortable picture, so wan and death-like, so stricken with disease of the soul, so eaten up and gnawed away with discomfort and desire, is that sad Queen of Love'.⁷ Although he does not say so in the review, the cause of his wrath may well have been Burne-Jones's overt casting of the goddess of Love in the role of the Virgin Mary; Gail-Nina Anderson has described the picture as 'a perverse *Sacra conversazione* where the life of the senses has leached out all spirituality'.⁸ The rose lying on the floor and the crown resting on Venus's knees, both traditional attributes of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven, give credence to this view. Wedmore and his fellow critics would also have been cognisant of the picture's roots in

⁶ ‘Une sainte femme de l’École allemande’; ‘La tête d’Orphée, endormie dans ses cheveux blonds, angélique et nullement antique, est aussi celle d’un martyr chrétien’. P. de Saint-Victor, ‘Salon de 1866’, *La Presse* (13 May 1866), cited in P. Cooke, *Gustave Moreau et les arts jumeaux* (Bern, 2003), p. 83. Cooke also cites several other of Moreau’s pictures that appropriate Christian imagery: *Jason et Médée* (1865), Adam and Eve; *Leda* (various versions), the Annunciation or the Coronation of the Virgin; and *Prometheus* (1869), the Passion. The list is probably not exhaustive. For a different view of *Orphée*’s symbolism, see Chapter 5.

⁷ Wedmore (1880), p. 219; the review originally appeared in *Temple Bar Magazine*, May 1878.

⁸ G.-N. Anderson and J. Wright, *Heaven on Earth: the Religion of Beauty in Late Victorian Art* (exh. cat., Nottingham, Djanogly Art Gallery, 1994), p. 42.

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Swinburne’s poem of the same name, a retelling of the Tannhäuser legend that shifted the emphasis from repentance and the triumph of Christian virtue to a celebration of super-sensuous, amoral beauty in which Venus is exalted above the Virgin (early in the poem, Tannhäuser exclaims, ‘Nay, fair Lord Christ, lift up thine eyes and see; / Had now thy mother such a lip – like this? / Thou knowest how sweet a thing it is to me’);⁹ memories of Robert Buchanan’s polemical attack on Swinburne’s ‘blasphemy [and] wretched animalism’ in *The Fleshly School of Poetry* (1871) may also still have been at the back of their minds. When we take into account the fact that *Laus Veneris* was exhibited in a Protestant country still deeply suspicious of Mariolatry and of the veneration of images in general, its ability to unsettle viewers takes on another shade of meaning.¹⁰

Neither *King Cophetua* nor *Galatée* was a new work by the time of the 1889 Exposition Universelle. In order better to understand the impact of these two works at the Exposition, we need to return to the origins of *King Cophetua* and *Galatée*, examining their inspiration, the environments in which they were first exhibited, and the ways they were first received in their native countries. Both works were a long time in germinating, taking more than two decades each to emerge in their final form;¹¹ we must also consider that, over this germination period, Burne-Jones and Moreau came in contact with each other’s work in the flesh for the first time when they exhibited together at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 and at the 1878 Exposition Universelle – the first time Moreau’s work had been shown in Britain, and Burne-Jones’s first outing in France.¹² When Burne-Jones first encountered Moreau’s *L’Apparition* in 1877, he would have been roughing out the composition of the definitive version of *King Cophetua*, although he did not begin working it up on canvas for another three years – the same year *Galatée* appeared at the Salon. The following year, not only were both artists exhibiting together, they were both themselves in Paris; although we have no written evidence of them meeting then (and

⁹ A. C. Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads* (London, 2000, first published 1866), pp. 9-22. Swinburne dedicated the volume ‘to my friend Edward Burne-Jones’.

¹⁰ On the controversy surrounding the High Church movement and the impact of anti-Catholic criticism on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in the 1840s and 1850s, an impact which would continue to be felt, albeit in muted form, for decades afterward, see J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 20-36.

¹¹ In fact, Moreau did not consider *Galatée* finished even after it had been exhibited at the Salon of 1880 and bought by Edmond Taigny; he asked Taigny to return it to him the following year for minor reworking (Lacambre 1998b, p. 54).

¹² See Chapter 1.

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in Burne-Jones’s case our only record of his activities during this, his last visit to Paris, is, infuriatingly, of his attendance at a *guignol* performance with his teenaged son and William Morris), it seems fair to assume that they saw each others’ work at the Exposition. Reproductions of the work of both artists were also becoming more

readily available. Prints after Burne-Jones in France have already been discussed; reproductions of Moreau's work followed soon after.¹³ Indeed, although he never saw *Galatée* in person, Burne-Jones could have encountered it either in a photograph published by Goupil during the 1880 Salon [Figure 30], and probably available from the firm's London offices; one of Moreau's compositional studies for the painting was also published that year in Philippe de Chennevières's Salon review in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. Reproductions can, of course, only capture so much of the spirit and often little of the physical presence of the original, particularly in the case of artists renowned for their colour and their manipulation of surface effect; in *King Cophetua*, though, the subtle encrustation on the king's armour and crown and especially on the roundels on his cloak seems to indicate that Burne-Jones had closely studied the jewelled, textured surfaces of Moreau's paintings. Thus, although we have no evidence of them meeting or corresponded before 1889, by the time both artists began to work in earnest on these paintings, they were aware of one another's work and also, perhaps, of the comparisons critics were beginning to draw between them. Burne-Jones turned for inspiration to the ballad 'The King and the Beggar Maid' in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and to Tennyson's 'The Beggar Maid', a sixteen-line condensation of the ballad first published in 1842. His first attempt at the subject dates from 1861-62 [Figure 31], relatively early in his career, is a literal transcription of the first six lines of Tennyson's poem:

Her arms across her breast she laid,
 She was more fair than words can say:
 Bare-footed came the beggar maid
 Before the king Cophetua.
 In robe and crown the king stept down
 To meet and greet her on her way.¹⁴

¹³ For a survey of the reproduction of Moreau's work during his lifetime, see G. Lacambre, 'La diffusion de l'oeuvre de Gustave Moreau par la reproduction au XIXe siècle', *Bulletin de la Société J.-K. Huysmans* 94 (2001), pp. 30-51. I shall discuss the role of reproductive prints in establishing Moreau's reputation in Britain in Chapter 5.

¹⁴ C. Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson* (London, 1969), p. 522. 'The Beggar Maid' was written in 1833, the year of Burne-Jones's birth.

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The depiction of action came off awkwardly; realising his failure, Burne-Jones laid the work aside unfinished. When he took up the subject again, apparently around 1875, he settled on a different composition, a scene that featured in neither poem: a moment not yet reached in 'The Beggar Maid' and not actually described in the ballad, that of the king seated in his palace, gazing up in mute admiration at the beggar maid perched above him on his throne.¹⁵ Significantly, the inspiration for the new design appears to have been Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* [Figure 32], which Burne-Jones had first seen at the Louvre in 1855 and of which he is known to have possessed an engraving.¹⁶ But *King Cophetua* takes telling liberties with Mantegna's design, placing the beggar maid higher than the Virgin and Cophetua at the viewer's level, thus very much below the beggar maid and literally beneath her notice. When Burne-Jones exhibited the final version at the Grosvenor Gallery's summer exhibition in 1884 (and it is worth noting in passing that the Grosvenor itself was often spoken of, whether reverentially or in jest, in religious terms, as a 'temple of art'), Théodore Duret was less than impressed, complaining in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* that Burne-Jones's choice of subject was symptomatic of the insularity and parochialism of British art (a criticism which, as we shall see, is unjustified).¹⁷ British critics, however, overwhelmingly hailed it as a masterpiece. Yet oddly, the major reviews

skated over the work's religious and potentially blasphemous overtones; most focused their attention on the figure of the king, whom the critic for the conservative *Art Journal* considered a salutary change of direction in Burne-Jones's oeuvre, which had been dogged up until then by accusations of 'morbidness' and 'unmanliness': Can we in two lines tell of the high humility, the manliness, the chivalry of the noble figure, who, his crown in his hand, sits on the lowest step of the throne, on whose summit he has placed the beggar maid? His gaze is turned towards his love, a gaze of reverence, almost of adoration, for her simple beauty and purity. There is no feeling in Cophetua's mind that he has bent down to this woman.¹⁸

¹⁵ See D. Robinson, Letter to the Editor, *Apollo* (May 1973), p. 626; Robinson dates the origin of the new composition to 1875 based on two sheets of sketches in the Fitzwilliam Museum.

¹⁶ W. S. Taylor, 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid', *Apollo* (February 1973), pp. 151-52. Burne-Jones's debt to Mantegna was noted by at least two contemporary observers in France, Maurice Hamel and Jean Lorrain.

¹⁷ 'Le sujet . . . même avec l'aide du catalogue reste incompréhensible à tout autre qu'un Anglais': T. Duret, 'Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor Gallery', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1884), pp. 534-35.

¹⁸ 'London Spring Exhibitions: The Grosvenor and the Water-Colour Societies', *Art Journal* (1884), p. 189.

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The sentimental and moralising tone of this review effectively silences any transgressive nuances at play in the painting; furthermore, the reviewer shifts the emphasis away from the beggar maid as object of worship/adoration by dismissing her as 'infinitely less moving than her lover . . . she cannot fail to be less interesting than the king', as well as diminishing the interest and significance of the figures' exotic surroundings by claiming that 'it is the idea, the inspiration of this picture that makes it so fine', rather than execution or technique.¹⁹ F. G. Stephens, reviewing the show for the *Athenaeum*, gives a subtler reading, with greater attention paid to the aesthetic and decorative importance of the setting, but still couches the king's attitude in the language of chivalry rather than of religious devotion: 'The swarthy face of the king [...] is turned upwards with chivalric reverence and self-abnegation'.²⁰ As we shall see, the rapturous reaction to *King Cophetua* in 1889 contrasts sharply with the restraint of its first British critics; it was appreciated for reasons on the other side of the Channel that would likely have surprised its original viewers.

Moreau, on the other hand, derived the inspiration for *Galatée* from both verbal and visual sources: the former, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a personal bible since boyhood; the latter, the frescoes by Raphael [Figure 33] and Sebastiano del Piombo [Figure 34] in the Sala di Galatea in the Villa Farnesina, which he visited during his stay in Italy between 1857 and 1859, and of which he owned a print.²¹ Closer to home, a walk in the Jardins du Luxembourg would have taken him past Auguste-Louis Ottin's new sculptural group, *Polyphemus surprising Acis and Galatea* [Figure 35], from which he appears to have derived the composition of Polyphemus watching over a reclining Galatea from above. Yet in opposition to the dynamism of *The Triumph of Galatea*, and the blood-and-thunder theatrics of Ottin's sculpture, Moreau conceived an image of hieratic silence. Apparently drawing on a favourite subject entirely of his own invention, *La Fée aux griffons* [Figure 36] (and possibly on a reproduction of *Laus Veneris*, with which it shares elements of composition and atmosphere) but making a number of significant changes, particularly in the lowered eyelids and more languid, abandoned pose,²² he set a dreaming, solitary Galatea in a

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ 'The Grosvenor Exhibition (First Notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2949 (3 May 1884).

²¹ Both the print after *The Triumph of Galatea* and a 1660 French edition of the *Metamorphoses*, the latter containing sketches and annotations by Moreau, remained in his possession for the rest of his life and are still to be found in the Musée Gustave-Moreau.

²² See P.-L. Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 1994), pp. 142-43, for further discussion of the parallels between *La Fée aux griffons* and *Galatée*.

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fantastic underwater grotto, apparently unaware of being spied upon by the brooding Cyclops.

When *Galatée* appeared at the Salon of 1880, the last at which Moreau would exhibit, observers were alternately dazzled and bemused. One of the critics in the former category was J.-K. Huysmans, who waxed lyrical – and mystical – in his review:

Here above all the magianisms of the brush of this visionary burst forth [...]

This cavern illuminated by precious stones like a tabernacle . . . contain[s] the inimitable and radiant jewel, the white body, breasts and lips tinted rose, of Galatea, asleep in her long pale hair!²³

Fittingly, Huysmans was the founder and spiritual leader in France of an unofficial cult of Moreau and his art; Des Esseintes, the protagonist of his key novel *À rebours* (itself characterised by Arthur Symons as ‘the breviary of the Decadence’), practices what can only be described as the perverse ritual veneration of Moreau’s pictures.²⁴ Other Symbolist and Decadent writers were quick to follow in Huysmans’s steps; by the end of the decade, the poets Jules Laforgue and Francis Poictevin were writing about making ‘pilgrimages’ to the Musée du Luxembourg to gaze at *Orpheus*, Moreau’s only work then in a public collection, and on a more modest scale, devotees could make a similar pilgrimage to see *Galatée* hanging in the home of its owner, Edmond Taigny, who generously allowed access to those interested in viewing it.²⁵ *Galatée* drew a distinctly lukewarm response from the few British critics who responded to it at all; the reviewer for the *Athenaeum* (possibly William Michael Rossetti or F. G. Stephens) grumbled that ‘M. Gustave Moreau has produced pictures which the irreverent call pyrotechnic [...] In [*Galatée*] the subject is a mere excuse for the display of tawdry colour and meretricious sentiment’.²⁶ Even the more sympathetic Francophile critic, Claude Phillips, although he found much to admire in Moreau’s oeuvre and drew favourable comparisons between his work and that of

²³ ‘C’est ici surtout que vont éclater les magismes du pinceau de ce visionnaire [...] cet antre illuminé de pierres précieuses comme un tabernacle et contenant l’inimitable et radieux bijou, le corps blanc, teinté de rose aux seins et aux lèvres, de la Galatée endormie dans ses longs cheveux pâles!’ J.-K. Huysmans, ‘Salon officiel de 1880’, in *L’Art moderne* (Paris, 1883), pp. 136-138. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the French are my own. In the present case, I have followed the translator’s lead in my rendering of ‘magismes’, apparently a neologism of Huysmans’s invention: Lacambre (1998a), p. 191.

²⁴ See Huysmans (1884), pp. 141-49, for the infamous ekphrasis on *Salomé* and *L’Apparition*.

²⁵ We know this thanks to Moreau’s student, Henri Evenepoel, who described a visit to Taigny’s collection in a letter to his father; he evinced little regard for *Galatée*, preferring the watercolour *Les Voix* (see Lacambre, 1998b, pp. 57-58).

²⁶ ‘The Salon, Paris (First Notice)’, *Athenaeum* no. 2741 (8 May 1880), p. 607.

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Burne-Jones, acknowledged *Galatée*’s ‘charming . . . conception of the bright seanymp,

joying in her ever-fresh youth and free from the burdening thoughts and woes of mortality’ but dismissed the picture in the same breath as ‘marred by the accessories . . . which are treated in somewhat childish emphatic fashion’.²⁷ Still, the fact that *Galatée* attracted critical notice at all indicates the inroads Moreau had made into the British press’s consciousness since 1877, when *L’Apparition* appeared

at the Grosvenor Gallery to deafening silence. In a milieu where omitting to mention a painting in a review effectively nullified its existence, bad or indifferent press could be more effective than none at all in the formation of an artist's reputation. And in any case, critical reception notwithstanding, *Galatée* appears to have found its way into Burne-Jones's horizons and may well have been on his mind while he was at work on *King Cophetua*. Placed together within the ostensibly secular milieu of the 1889 Exposition, however, both paintings' reinterpretation of devotional art took on a deeper and more unsettling significance.

Marianne versus La Vierge Marie: Religious Imagery in the Republic of the Republicans and the Exposition as Religious Site

Like many such unequivocal statements, Robert Tombs's assertion that the Third Republic 'set out not to use but to replace the Church' is potentially misleading and needs further qualification; had he finished the sentence with '... with a religion of its own', he might have struck closer to the mark.²⁸ It is certainly true that the Republic entered its truly republican phase (upon the election of Jules Grévy to the presidency in 1879) on a wave of anticlericalism, and that, although church and state would not formally separate until 1905, the power struggle in which they had been involved for much of the century seemed to be tipping definitively in favour of the state under the pressures of Republican reforms. Indeed, the government engaged in open Church-baiting with its appropriation of saints' days for holidays celebrating Republican ideals and of the Panthéon to enshrine the Republic's 'secular saints'.²⁹ But, faced with a vacuum of its own making, the government responded by inventing its own, self-reflexive religion, complete with a complex iconographic programme.

The irony of an ostensibly forward-looking, 'an-iconic regime', in the words of

²⁷ C. Phillips, 'Gustave Moreau', *Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), pp. 230-31.

²⁸ Tombs (1996), p. 139.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

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Maurice Agulhon, needing to invent an iconography for itself gave rise to some disconcerting contradictions.³⁰ The divinity of the Republic was Marianne, consciously modelled, significantly, on a pagan goddess, Ceres. Presumably a figure with classical antecedents was chosen for its associations with Enlightenment ideals and to highlight Marianne's role as an 'anti-Madonna'. However, in actual practice images of the 'goddess' were created, positioned, and treated in much the same way as the Catholic images of the Virgin they sought to supplant; reports of good citizens bending the knee, without a hint of irony, to a bust of Marianne set on a plinth before a *mairie* were quite common,³¹ bearing witness to the elision of Catholic practice and the new cult of the Republic. Not surprisingly, Marianne figured prominently in the architectural decoration and freestanding statuary of the 1889 Exposition; her blandly beneficent presence was as ubiquitous as that of the Virgin in the sculptural programme of a cathedral.³²

A few words should be said at this point about the dramatic changes in status that sacred images and objects underwent from the mid-nineteenth century on both sides of the Channel. I have already spoken of the perceived threat posed by religious images *in a religious context* within Protestant Britain and the need to defuse that threat by decontextualising them, by redirecting the emphasis from doctrine to formal qualities (exemplified by the growing scholarly interest in Renaissance art) and mood (typified by artists involved in Aestheticism). The case in France was rather different. Despite the Republic's hard-edged anticlericalism, which in 1889, on the eve of the *ralliement* (the short-lived and tentative rapprochement between Church and state) was beginning to soften, the state continued to support and commission religious art.³³

However, it championed artists who worked in a Naturalist mode, regarding styles that smacked of archaism as tainted by their associations with the legitimist movement and as harking back to the bad old days of a government dominated by clerics.³⁴ (Indeed,

³⁰M. Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris, 1989), pp. 21-22.

³¹Ibid., pp. 184, 175.

³²For Marianne's presence and significance at the Exposition, and throughout Paris, see Buroillet (1989).

³³On the effects of the *ralliement* of the early 1890s on religious painting, see Thomson (2004), pp. 117-22.

³⁴For a far more in-depth discussion of the status and practice of religious painting under the Third Republic, see M. P. Driskel, *Representing Belief: Politics, Religion, and Society in Nineteenth Century France* (University Park, 1992). Especially relevant here is his tracing of the co-opting of a hieratic, 'Byzantine' aesthetic by the avant-garde from its origins in the authoritarian Ultramontane movement. See also Thomson (2004), pp. 135-39, for a analysis of the ambiguities inherent in modern-life, 103

the predominance of this state-sponsored Naturalism, particularly in the work of Bastien-Lepage and his disciples, in the Decennale exhibition at the Exposition probably played a part in Moreau's decision to show his work exclusively in the Centennale, although as a newly elected Academician and a member of the selection jury, he was entitled to show in both.)³⁵ Among the defining qualities of this officially sanctioned Naturalism were its emphasis on narrative action and its embrace of a modern notion of time very much at odds with the changelessness ordinarily associated with religious images. We may recall Hans Belting's thesis that one of the central themes running through the history of religious imagery is the privileging of the hieratic image, or *imago*, over the narrative, or *historia*;³⁶ Third Republic policy would seem, in its relentless promotion of secular modernity, to be attempting to abolish this time-honoured hierarchy.

At the same time, France and Britain were in the grip of a burgeoning craze for sacred objects, both genuine and counterfeit, as collector's items. Museums in both countries, particularly the Musée de Cluny in Paris and the South Kensington Museum in London, were either set up specifically to house medieval, for which in most cases we may read religious, objects, or collected them in quantities; removed from their original settings in churches and monasteries, these began to acquire an aura of aesthetic mystique divorced from, but also in some ways a subversion or perversion of, their intended function.³⁷ (It hardly seems coincidental that two of the most avid fictional collectors of religious objects were the great Decadent heroes of France and Britain, Des Esseintes and Dorian Gray.³⁸) Conversely, religious adoration began to be displaced onto objects and symbols that had not originally had any sacred content; we have already seen one example of this in the guise of Marianne, and as we shall see in a tour of the grounds of the 1889 Exposition, it could assume a bewildering variety of forms.

Naturalist interpretations of religious subjects and in the concurrent casting of secular subjects in sacred terms by leading Naturalists such as Lhermitte and Cottet.

³⁵See Chapter 2. Moreau's aversion to Naturalism is apparent in much of his art critical writings; see Cooke (2002), vol. 2.

³⁶H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of Images before the Age of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago 1994), p. 20.

³⁷On the collecting of medieval art for art's sake, see E. Emery and L. Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: the Medieval Revival in fin-de-siècle France* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 61-84. See also Weber (1986), pp. 34-35, on the fashion among the elite for decadent mysticism and neo-Catholicism in the late 1880s and 1890s and its relationship to the craze for all things (pseudo) medieval.

³⁸On Dorian's obsessive collecting of copes, descriptions of which were lifted almost verbatim from a guide to the collections of the South Kensington Museum, see O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

(Oxford, 1994, 1891), pp. 114-15.

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Where, then, do Burne-Jones and Moreau's own ideas on religion fit within this highly charged and paradox-ridden milieu? Neither was a conventional Christian; what few tantalising clues they have left us as to their beliefs may shed some light on how they, and their art, responded to these contradictions. Burne-Jones, as has already been mentioned, read theology at Oxford with the intention of taking orders. According to one of his first biographers, Fortunée de Lisle, during his first year at Oxford, Burne-Jones and his new friend William Morris, ablaze with enthusiasm fed by the heady atmosphere of the Tractarian movement, aspired to found a monastery 'in which they might "combine an ascetic life with the organised production of religious art"; – even then they felt that their religious vocation would be incomplete unless it included art'.³⁹ Although within a year he had given up this dream, ultimately deciding that art need not be subservient to religion and could be pursued as an end in itself, and despite the contradiction inherent in his being a decorator of churches who gradually stopped attending church, the inseparability in his mind of aesthetic and spiritual concerns continued to inform his oeuvre. If he took pains to dissociate himself from the sillier expressions of this philosophy by certain followers of Aestheticism, the divinity of art and the artistic value of divinity are nonetheless defining concerns in his work, and particularly in *King Cophetua*.

Moreau's religious ideals are rather more difficult to pin down. The child of agnostic parents who appears not to have received a religious education, he was never a practicing Catholic, and his suspicion of the more outrageous manifestations of the Catholic revival of the 1890s (particularly Sâr Péladan and the Salon de la Rose + Croix) is well documented. However, he does seem to have adhered to a number of typical beliefs of the period, including the cult of the Virgin, the veneration of the blood of martyrs, and hostility to scientific positivism.⁴⁰ The only real clues he left as to his beliefs are a series of jottings that probably date from the 1880s in which he set forth a highly personal *credo*:

Do you believe in God?

I believe *only* in him.

I believe neither in that which I touch, nor in that which I see. I only believe in what I do not see and uniquely in what I feel.

³⁹F. de Lisle, *Burne-Jones* (London, 1904), p. 13.

⁴⁰See Mathieu (1994), pp. 174-76, and Driskel (1992), p. 229.

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My brain, my reason seem ephemeral to me and of a questionable reality; my interior sentiment alone seems eternal to me and incontestably certain.⁴¹

The similarities of sentiment and vocabulary to the concurrent explosion of Symbolist manifestoes, with their privileging of suggestion and inner vision over the positivist insistence that seeing is believing, is striking. At a later date, Moreau elaborated on this Symbolist/religious manifesto, describing the ideal artist as having 'a soul of childlike ingenuity and stupefying complication; this soul, as a function of art, impose[s] on itself the task of showing everywhere and always . . . that which comes directly from God and that which was neither fashioned nor deformed by men'.⁴²

Both his vision and that of Burne-Jones initially seem to locate them outside the prevailing mood, and many are the writers who have fallen into the trap of considering their art in isolation, or as an instinctive recoiling from it.⁴³ I would argue, instead, that both artists' commitment to a religion of aestheticism and an aesthetic vision of religion engages directly and multifariously with contemporary religious debate – nowhere more so than within the Exposition.

A new array of nuances opens up when we consider *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* within the architectural setting of the Exposition Universelle. Although the Exposition's organisers promoted it as an unequivocal celebration of progress, a revival of the expansive spirit of the 1867 Exposition after the lean years of the early Third Republic,⁴⁴ and there is every indication that the majority of the Exposition going

public responded with wholehearted enthusiasm, peeling back the veneer of propaganda reveals a deep ambivalence toward the prevailing Liberal ideology of free trade, material progress, imperialism and capitalism that informed most elements of

⁴¹ 'Croyez-vous en Dieu? Je ne crois qu'à lui seul. Je ne crois ni à ce que je touche, ni à ce que je vois. Je ne crois qu'à ce que je ne vois pas et uniquement à ce que je sens. Mon cerveau, ma raison me semblent éphémères et d'une réalité douteuse; mon sentiment intérieur seul me paraît éternel, incontestablement certain'. Cooke (2002), vol. 1, p. 163. Cooke dates this note after 1880 based on a reference in the remainder of the text to the (apparently recent) death of Flaubert.

⁴² 'Une âme d'une ingénuité enfantine et d'une complication stupéfiante. Cette âme, comme fonction d'art, s'était imposé le devoir de montrer partout et toujours . . . ce qui lui vient directement de Dieu et ce qui n'a pas été façonné ni déformé par les hommes'. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 165. Cooke believes this note may have been a self-penned obituary.

⁴³ Huysmans must bear the blame for originating the stereotype of Moreau as 'un mystique enfermé, en plein Paris, dans une cellule où ne pénètre même plus le bruit de la vie contemporaine qui bat furieusement pourtant les portes du cloître': Huysmans (1883), p. 135. Burne-Jones's definition of his art as 'a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be – in a better light than any light that ever shone – in a land that no one can define or remember, only desire' has often been cited uncritically by scholars as evidence of wilful isolation from society; see for example M. Harrison and B. Waters, *Burne-Jones* (London, 1973) and P. Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones* (Stroud, 1975, 1997).

⁴⁴ Isay (1937), p. 182.

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the Exposition.⁴⁵ This unease becomes painfully apparent when we examine three of the principal architectural spaces in the Exposition grounds: the Palais des Beaux-Arts, the Galerie des Machines, and the Tour Eiffel.

Of the three, the Palais des Beaux-Arts [Figures 37.1-12.4] made the greatest effort to conceal its modern design and construction, draping a historicising skin, complete with allegorical figures of Poetry, Study, Truth and Colour, over its iron framework. Although Frantz Jourdain praised the decorators for their use of modern, industrial materials without attempting to disguise them,⁴⁶ and the architects Dutert, Sauvestre and Formigé for breaking with the teachings of the École des Beaux-Arts, the supposed triumph of ahistorical architecture is not so clear-cut when we examine the building from two different angles, inside and out. Viewed side-on, the palace's exterior displays the streaming horizontality of a contemporary urban train station. Yet viewed from its frontal approach, with its dome of glittering faience tiles, it resembles nothing so much as an Italian Gothic church. Once inside, the central hall and ground floor sculpture galleries extend the impression of streaming forward motion, evoking the anxiety of rushing through a crowd (in this case, of sculptures as well as of people) to catch a train – but again, beneath the dome, as well as in some of the galleries (not least in the British Fine Art section) a reverential calm and stillness reigned. Paul Mantz made this most explicit in his comment that the Palais des Beaux-Arts had 'the calming serenity of a temple', though he was quick to temper any undue religious overtones by qualifying it as a temple of peace where the results of the artistic conflicts since the Revolution now hung in 'fraternity and concord'.⁴⁷

Moving beyond the uneasy compromise between a quasi-sacred past and an ahistorical present, we come to the Exposition's most iconic structures, the Galerie des Machines and the Tour Eiffel. The machine hall [Figures 38.1-2] might be considered an exercise in architectural jingoism: modelled on St Pancras Station, then the largest

freestanding iron structure in the world, it seemed to be trying to beat British technological prowess at its own game.⁴⁸ Beneath its soaring glass and iron vault, rows of machines were ranged like phalanxes of immense idols, technology and

⁴⁵ See Greenhalgh (1988), pp. 23-27, for further discussion of the driving political ideology behind the pre-1914 Expositions.

⁴⁶ Jourdain (1889), pp. 36-38. See also Chapter 2.

⁴⁷ 'La sérénité calmante d'un temple'; 'fraternité et concorde': P. Mantz, 'Exposition universelle de 1889: La Peinture française (1^{er} article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 2 (July 1889), p. 28.

⁴⁸ For the history and design of the Galerie des Machines, see M.-L. Crosnier Leconte, 'La Galerie des Machines', in C. Mathieu (1989), pp. 164-95.

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progress elevated to the realm and status of deities. It was a point not lost on observers, whether or not they approved (although of the key buildings on the Champ de Mars, it was the most consistently praised by otherwise sceptical critics, both British and French) – but in terms of sheer contentiousness it paled in comparison with the Tour Eiffel.

It is easy to forget that the tower, so much a part of Paris's identity for the past century, was once viewed as an unwelcome intruder in the cityscape; before the design had even been agreed, controversy was already swirling around it. Before the design competition opened, a reporter for *La Semaine des Constructeurs* was already scoffing at the very idea as 'an ill-advised rival to the Tower of Babel';⁴⁹ shortly after the winning design, by Eiffel and Sauvestre, was selected, Paul Eudel, writing in *L'Illustration*, again labelled it a 'Tower of Babel', adding, 'personally, I confess I'd willingly swap this heavy piece of iron scaffolding for the chapel of Amboise, the doors of Saint-Maclou, the campanile of Pisa, the spire of the Sainte-Chapelle or the staircase of Chambord'.⁵⁰ Eudel's desire to substitute a piece of ecclesiastical architecture of established aesthetic merit for this unapologetically stripped down and of-the-moment structure betrays an anxiety voiced by other observers that the tower would displace Notre-Dame as the city's symbol (indeed, this anxiety seems to have been compounded by the recognition that the tower's design fused the spire of Notre-Dame and the legs of the Arc de Triomphe), and by extension, exchange the values represented by the church for the empty glamour of progress and commerce.

Huysmans memorably employed the trope of Tour Eiffel versus Notre-Dame in a scathing attack on the Exposition's architecture, declaring,

[The tower] should be the spire of Notre-Dame of the Junk Shop, a spire stripped of bells, but armed with a cannon that announces the opening and closing of the offices, that calls the faithful to the Mass of finance, to the Vespers of the bank charge, a cannon which sounds, with its volleys of powder, the liturgical feast days of Capital!⁵¹

⁴⁹ 'Malencontreuse rivale de la Tour de Babel': *La Semaine des Constructeurs* 10, no. 45 (May 1886), p. 537.

⁵⁰ 'Personnellement j'avoue que je troquerais ce lourd échafaudage en fer, pour la chapelle d'Amboise, les portes de Saint-Maclou, le campanile de Pise, la flèche de la Sainte-Chapelle, ou l'escalier de Chambord': P. Eudel, 'Les Projets du concours pour l'Exposition de 1889', *L'Illustration* 87, no. 2258 (5 June 1886), p. 395.

⁵¹ 'Elle serait la flèche de Notre-Dame de la Brocante, la flèche privée des cloches, mais armée d'un canon qui annonce l'ouverture et la fin des offices, qui convie les fidèles aux messes de la finance, aux vêpres de l'agio, d'un canon, qui sonne, avec ses volées de poudre, les fêtes liturgiques du Capital!': Huysmans (1889), p. 179.

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Even popular souvenir images of the Exposition bore witness to this ambivalence. Some of the more high-flown illustrations portrayed the tower emerging from a starry mist like a celestial being; on the other hand, an engraving by Georges Garen [Figure

39] depicting the Exposition grounds at night gives the Tower, ablaze with artificial light and wreathed at its base with crimson smoke from the fireworks and plumes of spray from the illuminated fountains, a decidedly diabolical – even apocalyptic – air.

Animal, Vegetable, Mineral – Or All Three at Once?

Within this confrontation between iron/modernity and church/tradition, the ways in which Burne-Jones and Moreau treat metal, decoration, and construction assume a particular potency. Robert de la Sizeranne recalled the stunning effect *King Cophetua* engendered when it was viewed within, and in contrast to, the overall setting of the Exposition; it is worth revisiting his impressions:

It seemed as though we had come forth from the Universal Exhibition of Wealth to see the symbolical expression of the Scorn of Wealth. All round this room were others, where emblems and signs of strength and luxury were collected from all the nations of the world – pyramids, silvered or gilt, representing the amount of precious metal dug year by year out of the earth; palaces and booths containing the most sumptuous products of the remotest isles – and here behold a king laying his crown at the feet of a beggar-maid for her beauty's sake! . . . It was a dream – but a noble dream – and every young man who passed that way, even though resolved never to sacrifice strength to right, or riches to beauty, was glad, nevertheless, that an artist should have depicted the Apotheosis of Poverty. It was the revenge of art on life.⁵²

Thanks to a schematic plan of the British galleries reproduced in the catalogue of the British Fine Art section, we know that *King Cophetua* occupied a commanding position in the second gallery of oil paintings, on an end wall in the long, narrow space, flanked by G. F. Watts's *Hope* and *The Judgment of Paris* – like the high altar in a church.⁵³ Although Sizeranne does not allude to it here, his assessment of the effect of *King Cophetua* as an altarpiece celebrating the supremacy of Beauty over Wealth within the British galleries takes on further significance when we consider that in the same room hung Watts's *Mammon*. Subtitled by the artist, 'Dedicated to His Worshippers', this cruel personification of wealth was unambiguously posited as an anti-altarpiece; as we will recall, Watts had earlier expressed a wish to erect a statue of

⁵² Sizeranne (1898), p. 515.

⁵³ H. Blackburn, *A Complete Illustrated Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture in the British Fine Art Section* (London and Paris, 1889), p. 43. No installation views of the British galleries have thus far surfaced; likewise, no plans of the hang of the Centennale have been traced.

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the monster in Hyde Park, in the hope that 'his worshippers would be at least honest enough to bend the knee publicly to him'.⁵⁴

However, Sizeranne's paean to this 'Apotheosis of Poverty' obscures the complexity of its relation to its surroundings. *King Cophetua*, its longstanding association with the Socialist philosophy of Burne-Jones's friend William Morris notwithstanding, is not a straightforward deprecation of wealth;⁵⁵ nor does it turn its back so completely on the technology of the present. Burne-Jones appears to have drawn the architectural setting from Carlo Crivelli's *Annunciation* [Figure 40], in the National Gallery from 1864.⁵⁶ This reverent referencing of the Quattrocento would seem to isolate the scene safely from the nineteenth-century present – that is, until we consider that Burne-Jones transformed the wood panelling of the Virgin's chamber, Midas-like, into a highly polished bronze jewel-box, simultaneously vertiginous and claustrophobic in its extreme narrowness and soaring height. Some of the designs in his *Flower Book*, on which he was at work from 1882, suggest the fascination this brazen chamber held for him, and are notable for the disparity between their chilly settings and the events unfolding within them: *Golden Shower* [Figure 41] transposes

the story of Danaë from the warm domestic interior favoured by other artists to an empty, highly polished golden chamber in which a heavily draped Danaë palpably shivers, while *Golden Gate* and *Welcome to the House* [Figure 42] envision the gates of the celestial sphere as fashioned of a similarly cold, uncomfortable golden bronze that hardly seems guaranteed to make the prospect of entering Heaven very enticing. The other metallic elements of the picture, Cophetua's armour and crown, are even more extraordinary. The armour bears little or no relation to any historical armour, resembling leather, feathers and fish scales – organic material, that is, rather than mineral. The hybrid nature of the armour was not lost on French observers, one of whom characterised it and its surroundings as 'mineral flora' – incidentally, the exact phrase used by Huysmans to describe the setting of *Galatea* nine years earlier.⁵⁷

Georgiana Burne-Jones records that her husband had commissioned the metalworker W. A. S. Benson to design the pieces, 'expressly in order to lift them out of

⁵⁴ M. S. Watts (1912), vol. 2, p. 149.

⁵⁵ See G. Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, p. 139.

⁵⁶ Indeed, Burne-Jones had an embarrassment of Crivelli at his fingertips while he worked on *King Cophetua*; the National Gallery acquired nine of its eleven works by that master between 1859-1875, while the South Kensington Museum received the bequest of the so-called Jones Madonna in 1882.

⁵⁷ 'Flore minérale'. M. Hamel, 'Exposition universelle de 1889: les écoles étrangères (premier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1889), p. 230. See also Huysmans (1883), p. 137.

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association with any historical time'.⁵⁸ When we recall that the winning design for the Tour Eiffel was the one that broke the most sharply with the past, Burne-Jones's wilful syncretism, and his willingness to make use of Benson's revival of traditional metalworking techniques allied with contemporary methods of production, rather than paint directly from historical pieces, reveals a deeper and more subtly questioning connection with technology than has previously been taken for granted.

Even the beggar maid herself is not immune to all of this creeping metal.

Although ostensibly clad in rags, the colour, the drape of the stuff and the stiffness of the hem of her shift more closely resemble silver or pewter than fabric.⁵⁹ The dress caused Burne-Jones considerable difficulties, as demonstrated by the number of drapery studies he made and his remarks in a letter in November 1883 about his desire 'to put on the Beggar Maid a sufficiently beggarly coat, that will not look unappetizing to King Cophetua, – that I hope has been achieved, so that she shall look as if she deserved to have it made of cloth of gold and set with pearls'.⁶⁰ It would seem that Burne-Jones settled on a compromise halfway between rags and cloth of gold, a compromise that both anchors the maid in the rich metallic setting like a jewel and also throws her into isolated relief. Even her limbs and face, whose extraordinary pallor was remarked upon by most reviewers, resemble ivory or marble rather than living flesh, evoking a kinship with Galatea, the 'milk-white' Nereid. Jean Lorrain, one of Burne-Jones's most ardent devotees in France, seized on the tension between flesh and mineral in his fairy tale 'La Princesse des chemins' (1892), essentially an evocation of the picture in prose. After devoting fully two-fifths of the text to an overheated catalogue of the metallic and jewelled wonders of the king's palace, he turns his attention to the beggar maid, characterising her flesh, and in particular her feet, as 'ivory stained with blood'.⁶¹ Trapped in an intermediate state between mineral (although ivory, significantly, is an organic substance with the hardness of stone) and flesh, Burne-Jones's beggar maid, and Lorrain's prose rendering of her, provide a

⁵⁸ Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, p. 145-46.

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Elizabeth Prettejohn for drawing my attention to the metallic character of the dress.

⁶⁰ Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, pp. 134-35.

⁶¹ 'Ivoire taché de sang'. J. Lorrain, 'La Princesse des Chemins', in *Princesses d'ivoire et d'ivresse*

(Paris, 1902, first published with a dedication to Burne-Jones in *L'Echo de Paris*, 22 August 1892), p. 21. I am grateful to Elizabeth Emery for pointing me to its later appearance in the *Revue illustrée* in 1897, complete with Pre-Raphaelite pastiche illustrations by Manuel Orazzi but without the original dedication and with no reproductions of, or reference to, *King Cophetua*. See also M. Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. A. Davidson (London and New York, 1970, 1931), p. 364, for a discussion, albeit dismissive, of the fairy tale.

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vivid illustration of Francette Pacteau's contention that the use of jewel metaphors in the description of the feminine body results in the evacuation of that very body, leaving an imprisoning casing of precious materials.⁶² Small wonder, then, that Lorrain leaves the beggar maid staring sadly out of the window 'as if through the bars of a gaol'.⁶³

Moreau situates *Galatée* in a different sort of built environment, a coral grotto overgrown with the simultaneously vegetable and animal forms of anemones and soft corals – creatures in whom scientific interest had been growing steadily. Ernest Chesneau's remark in his Salon review that he 'reckon[ed] Mr Darwin himself would not look at the painting without some interest' indicates an awareness of Moreau's creative engagement with the study of biology and evolution (belying Huysmans's notorious characterisation of him as 'a mystic shut away in the middle of Paris').⁶⁴ Recent research has shown that he based the marine fauna in *Galatée* upon illustrations in Philip Henry Gosse's *Actinologia Britannica* (published in London, 1858-60), which he consulted in the library of the Muséum de l'Histoire Naturelle [Figure 43].⁶⁵ A glance at the sketches he made after the illustrations, though, shows his imagination already at work, transforming the dull browns and greys and muted reds of Gosse's illustrations into a vibrantly coloured fantasy. We cannot know whether he also read Gosse's description of coralaceous anemones, whose explication of the structure of their stone skeletons borrows heavily from the language of Gothic architecture with its talk of walls supported by ribs and the arrangement of coral plates in cycles, but it seems likely that, in choosing to construct an underwater cathedral with an organic structure, he was well aware of the implications of combining nature and artifice.⁶⁶

Another layer of meaning reveals itself when we compare Moreau's rendering of the scene to his precedents in the Villa Farnesina. Raphael depicted Galatea triumphantly skimming over the waves on a dolphin-drawn chariot; although she is a water nymph, she is above, and by implication has mastery over, her own element.

Yet Moreau has placed a seemingly water-breathing Galatea *within* water, in an

⁶²F. Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (London, 1994), pp. 28-29.

⁶³'Comme à travers les barreaux d'une geôle'. Lorrain (1902), p. 24.

⁶⁴'Je me figure que M. Darwin lui-même ne la verrait pas sans quelque intérêt'. E. Chesneau, 'Salon de 1880', *Le Moniteur universel* (2 May 1880).

⁶⁵Lacambre (1998b), p. 54.

⁶⁶P. H. Gosse, *Actinologia Britannica: A History of the British Sea Anemones and Corals* (London, 1858-60), p. 307.

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enclosed space, surrounded by otherworldly anemones – beautiful and poisonous creatures that exist in a limbo halfway between the animal and the vegetable. Her oneness with them and with the water is underlined by Moreau's extraordinary treatment of her long blonde hair; the thickly built-up paint surface is almost identical with that of the anemones, and the ends of her locks appear to dissolve into the water. Polyphemus appears at first glance manifestly an intruder in the world of this beautiful, unthinking marine animal, sufficient in herself; she recalls nothing so much as Bataille's characterisation of the animal, 'in the world like water in water'.⁶⁷ Yet as

the ends of Galatea's tresses melt into their surroundings, the rest of her hair resembles nothing so much as the striations of the rocks and the flowering vine trailing across her groin seems to emerge from her, implying that she is part plant, somehow related to the surrounding marine flora – a creature simultaneously water and stone, floral and carnal. Odilon Redon, who certainly knew the painting, and whose interest in biology is thoroughly documented, took the morphing of forms to an extreme in his own version, *The Cyclops* [Figure 44]; however, the doubts about the substance of Galatea's body raised in Moreau's painting are arguably more disconcerting for being unresolved.

The morphing of form and the fluidity of the substance of Galatea's body had a precedent that Moreau certainly knew well: the original story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁶⁸ The frustrated Polyphemus serenades Galatea (who listens unobserved) with a dizzying stream of simile and metaphor, the register shifting capriciously from the trite to the bizarre bordering on grotesque over the course of fifteen lines, comparing her successively to the petals of privet (l.789), an alder (l.790), crystal glass, a young kid (l.791), shells worn smooth by the ocean (l.792), the sun in winter and shade in summer (l.793), a gazelle, a plane tree (l.794), ice, grapes (l.795), curdled milk, the wings of a swan (l.796), a garden (l.797), an untamed heifer (l.798), an ancient oak, waves (l.799), willow, bryony (l.800), a stone crag, a river in full spate (l.801), a peacock, fire (l.802), thorns, a she-bear (l.803), the sea, and a trampled snake (l.804) – it is almost as if Galatea herself undergoes a series of metamorphoses, from plant to animal to stone to water and back again.

⁶⁷Bataille (1989), p. 25.

⁶⁸The full story is found in *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, book 13, ll. 740-897, trans. D. Raeburn (London, 2004), pp. 534-41.

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Both critics and poets took up this trope of morphing form and substance; we have already seen Huysmans's characterisation of Galatea as a jewel set among jewels; Victor Champier echoed this by comparing her both to a flower ('an exquisite flower rising, all fragrant, from the Ideal') and to a jewel.⁶⁹ But perhaps more significant in this case are a group of four sonnets inspired by *Galatée* by the Symbolist poets Robert de Montesquiou (1880), Henri de Régnier (1887), the Cuban Julián del Casal (1891), and Jean Lorrain (1893).⁷⁰ All four share a few salient characteristics, including a lapidary use of language, an obvious delight in the naming and description of rich and luxurious materials (both organic and inorganic), and a tendency to work from the outside in, or from background to foreground, setting the scene and then positioning Galatea (and Polyphemus, often as an afterthought) within her surroundings as a jeweller carefully places a jewel in its setting. De Montesquiou in particular accentuated the fluidity of Galatea's body, alluding to her 'fluid whiteness' and further qualifying her as 'streaming, milky, astral', while positioning her in the midst of marine flora which he described alternately as stained glass (an integral component of a cathedral, echoed by Lorrain in his reference to the grotto's 'sonorous vaults') and 'gems close to blossoming'.⁷¹ The confusion and elision of form reaches an extreme in Régnier's sonnet, 'Galatée'; never published in his lifetime, it is worth quoting in full here.

Un rêve de crystal, d'azur et de fleurs peintes,
Éclos loin du soleil, qui n'est jamais venu,
Par le seuil entr'ouvert du retrait inconnu,
S'introduire en la nuit des ténèbres enfrentes.
Aux parois d'airain clair, décor de flores feintes,
Et, comme elles, dressant l'émail de son corps nu,

Galathée, immobile et d'un geste ingénu
 Défiant à jamais l'insulte des étreintes,
 Calme, sous le regard du cyclope affolé
 De l'éternel appât de la chair tentatrice,
 Dont le désir crispe son masque en bronze lisse,

⁶⁹ 'La fleur exquise sortie toute embaumée de l'idéal'. V. Champier, *L'Année artistique. Troisième année, 1880-1881* (Paris, 1881), p. 83.

⁷⁰ See Cooke (2003), pp. 161-65, for an in-depth discussion of the sonnets.

⁷¹ 'Sa blancheur fluide'; 'Ruisselante, lactée, astrale'; 'gemmes près d'éclore'. R. de Montesquiou, 'Nymphé', in idem, *Le Chef des odeurs suaves* (Paris, 1893), p. 135; see also note 104.

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Songe, parmi les fleurs du retrait isolé,
 Receleur du trésor de ses gloires charnelles,
 À l'intacte blancheur des neiges fraternelles.⁷²

That the setting is 'a dream of crystal, azure, and *painted* flowers' immediately suggests a refined, excessive, and self-referential artificiality; strikingly, Galatea herself, spied upon by a bronze Cyclops, is the most artificial element of the scene, with a body composed, literally, of flesh, snow, and enamel – the logical extreme of Ovid's amorphous paean. Within the Exposition Universelle, with its mind-boggling array of goods and edifices composed of one substance pretending to be another, the notion of Galatea as shape-shifting goddess, simultaneously animal and mineral, acquires a particularly disquieting resonance.

The disturbing suggestion that the adoration of Polyphemus has elevated the animal and the mineral to the level of the divine takes yet another turn when we gaze more closely at the assemblage of tiny figures on the floor of the grotto. Weightless wraiths defined only by coloured outlines, in contrast to Galatea whose body is modelled by light and shadow without the benefit of line, they seem to echo both her human form and the linear, un-modelled rendering of the corals and anemones, occupying a state somewhere between the two. That Moreau took as much trouble over these figures, whom Lorrain portrayed in his sonnet as 'divinities of the abyss, souls or flowers of flesh',⁷³ as he did over Galatea herself is evident from numerous meticulous studies; their presence clearly contributes much to the picture's overall meaning.⁷⁴ One such figure, hidden to the left of Galatea's feet among a tangle of coral, is worth lingering over [Figure 45]. This transparent water nymph is disposed in the attitude of voluptuous suffering, with hands apparently bound behind her head, in which St Sebastian is usually portrayed.⁷⁵ It was common practice in the painting

⁷² H. de Régnier, 'Galatée', Musée Gustave Moreau, correspondance Delarue, quoted in Lacambre (1998b), p. 61.

⁷³ 'Divinités du gouffre, âmes ou fleurs de chair': J. Lorrain, 'Galathée', in idem, *L'Ombre ardent. Poésies* (Paris, 1897). Lorrain wrote the poem in 1893 and sent a handwritten copy to Moreau.

⁷⁴ See G. Lacambre, 'Une nouvelle acquisition du musée d'Orsay: la *Galatée*, 1880, de Gustave Moreau', *Revue du Louvre* 4 (October 1998), p. 76 (hereafter Lacambre 1998c), for the studies. Moreau appears to have used the same model, Adrienne Dubois, for both Galatea and some of the grotto figures.

⁷⁵ Although Lacambre and Cooke have both noted the presence of 'small figures' at the borders of the picture, they make no further comment on their significance. They also goes unmentioned in all Salon reviews I have thus far found – even, surprisingly, that of Huysmans. However, given that one needs to come within inches of the picture's surface to discern the figures, and that no photographs of the installation of the *salle hors concours*, where *Galatée* hung, have surfaced so far, it is possible that the original viewing conditions simply precluded anyone noticing the figures. St Sebastian was,

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of altarpieces in the Quattrocento to place a small image of a saint or of Christ at the bottom of the centre panel below the main image as a means of establishing a closer

connection between the main image and the altar, on which the Eucharist was celebrated.⁷⁶ By inserting a diminutive figure resembling St Sebastian – a saint whose body was adored in Decadent circles as the site of the intertwining of beauty and masochistic suffering – in a tangle of animal-flowers, many of them painted in sanguine reds, below a Nereid enthroned like a Madonna in an underwater cave, Moreau strengthens the painting's claim to be read overtly as an altarpiece, one that twists and travesties Christian practice, substituting for the veneration of virtue the worship of a painful and potentially destructive beauty.

A comparable blasphemous detail lurks in the minutely worked paint surface of *King Cophetua*, obscured by the play of light on the glazing. A line drawn in the wet paint with the point of the brush handle outlines the beggar maid's head;⁷⁷ surrounding this is a faintly glowing aureole. Again, this passed unnoticed by observers on both sides of the Channel; even if it had been readily visible under the glass which French critics found so peculiar, it was nowhere near as obvious or outrageous as the gold-leaf haloes Burne-Jones's mentor Rossetti placed behind the heads of genuine saints in modern dress (or, worse yet, behind the head of a nude and assertively carnal Venus).⁷⁸ The presence of this aureole, however subtle, demands that we read the beggar maid as a Madonna, venerated by Cophetua, whom Jean Lorrain described, tellingly, as 'immobile, as if in prayer'.⁷⁹ But this is a Madonna who, unlike Mantegna's with her sweetly inclined head and graceful gestures, will never acknowledge prayers. Once again, the paralysing stasis of the worship of beauty supersedes the veneration, and, presumably, active emulation of virtue ostensibly encouraged in its Renaissance ancestor.

incidentally, a frequent subject in Moreau's oeuvre throughout the 1870s, including a watercolour (Fogg Art Museum, Mathieu 165) exhibited at the 1876 Salon.

⁷⁶ H. van Os, *Sienese Altarpieces, 1215-1460: Form, Content, Function. Volume 1: 1215-1344*, trans. M. Hoyle (Groningen, 1988), pp. 13-14; I am grateful to Glyn Davies for first informing me of the practice of appending such figures to the main panels of altarpieces. Moreau would have seen numerous examples of this practice during his visit to Siena in 1858.

⁷⁷ Penelope Fitzgerald has noted this feature and claims that Burne-Jones did it in order to emphasize the head; my own close observation appears to back up her claim. Fitzgerald (1997), p. 200.

⁷⁸ See Chapter 4.

⁷⁹ 'Immobile et comme en prière'. Lorrain (2002), p. 136.

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Through a Glass, Darkly: A Dialogue with the Renaissance

The debt of both Burne-Jones and Moreau to the religious art of the Quattrocento is a factor frequently cited as a defining element of their work by contemporary observers, and by and large agreed upon by twentieth-century scholars; indeed, Mantz insisted that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the two artists' affinity with each other was their shared reverence for this era and the resulting work 'conceived in the style of 1490'.⁸⁰ Yet although Burne-Jones's drawing upon Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* and Crivelli's *Annunciation* are noted in most studies of *King Cophetua*, and while Moreau's stylistic debt to Mantegna in general was a truism repeated unthinkingly *ad infinitum* by nineteenth-century critics, relatively little attention has been given to the possibility that they both drew on Mantegna's Madonna; likewise, their affinities with the work of Leonardo da Vinci, particularly the *Mona Lisa*, remain surprisingly unexplored. I would suggest that viewing the dialogue between *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* as mediated by the lens of the past, and in the case of Leonardo, by the magisterial reading of Walter Pater, sheds further light on the transformation of the aesthetics of the Renaissance and the essentially public character of its sacred paintings into a private, decorative, and perverse religious art.

Burne-Jones visited Paris for the first time in 1855 with William Morris, viewing the *Madonna della Vittoria* at the Louvre and returning home with an engraving after it; Moreau, as an habitu  of the Louvre from his student days, was well acquainted with the work.⁸¹ The compositional parallels between the *Madonna* and *King Cophetua* have already been noted, but arresting disparities between the two open up when we look closer. The dais on which the Madonna is enthroned, although highly ornamental and artificial, is festooned with natural materials – greenery, fruits and flowers. Transported into the world of *King Cophetua*, fruit and flowers harden into metal and gems; poignantly, the scattered posy of anemones in the beggar maid’s hand and at her feet are almost all that remains of Mantegna’s floral effusion. As well, the facial expression of the kneeling knight, Francesco Gonzaga, was unusual for

⁸⁰ ‘Con u   la mode de 1490’: P. Mantz, ‘La Peinture fran aise (4e et dernier article)’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (November 1889), p. 508. While noting approvingly the similarities between *King Cophetua* and *Galat e*, Mantz allowed his national pride to get the better of him by insisting that Moreau should be viewed as the precursor and Burne-Jones as the follower by virtue of Moreau’s being seven years older.

⁸¹ For a thorough analysis of the painting’s iconography, see R. Lightbown, *Mantegna* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 180-84.

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its time in that, in place of the respectful solemnity normally associated with donors, he gazes smilingly up at the Virgin, his broad grin as much one of complicity as of gratitude: we should remember that the occasion for the commission of the altarpiece was an important military victory, highlighting the inextricable connections between the Church and civic and political matters.⁸² Yet Cophetua, his melancholy gaze unacknowledged as he languishes in gloomily ornate surroundings, his crown lying uselessly in his lap, abdicates the responsibilities of his position for the sake of adoring his own ‘Madonna’.

Moreau appears to have borrowed from, and subverted, the *Madonna della Vittoria* to similarly bizarre and perverse effect. The shape of the canopy over the Virgin’s throne and the lushness of the foliage and fruits find an analogue in the profuse growth of marine life in Galatea’s grotto; however, where Mantegna sets the Virgin’s throne in a heavenly realm of air and light (with patches of blue sky glimpsed in the interstices between the ribs of the canopy), Moreau plunges it into a dark, airless, watery space – if not exactly underground and, by extension, in the underworld, then uncomfortably close. But Moreau also seized on, and distorted, marine elements already present in Mantegna’s painting. The canopy is hung with strings of coral and pearls (the latter long associated with purity) in the form of paternosters, each bead standing for an *Ave*, while a branch of coral dangles directly above the Madonna; according to Ronald Lightbown, coral was believed at the time to ward off demons and was worn as a protecting amulet in battle.⁸³ In *Galat e*, however, the coral appears instead to *attract* a ‘demon’, while the symbolic virtues associated with coral and pearls are blurred and warped (Galatea herself, with her nacreous flesh, could be considered one giant pearl whose purity sits uneasily with her sensuality and causes suffering rather than purification). One last detail, easy to miss, completes the perverse reading of Mantegna. At the base of the throne is a relief panel depicting the Temptation, with Adam and Eve flanking the serpent-entwined Tree of Knowledge; by positioning them thus, Mantegna collapsed the narrative of the Fall and the Redemption (symbolised by the Virgin). The group of three tiny figures picked out in red outline in the lower left corner of *Galat e* bears a noticeable resemblance to the relief – but Galatea’s disengagement from worldly concerns would appear to preclude any possibility of redemption.

⁸² Ibid., p. 182.

⁸³ Ibid.

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The swing from the public and exterior to the private and interior mines another level of meaning in Burne-Jones's appropriation and transformation of Crivelli's *Annunciation*. I have already noted the effect of his borrowing and gilding of the interior space of the Virgin's house; moving from the interior to the exterior, or more precisely, to the doorframe, brings forth other points of comparison. If we examine the carved scrolls ornamenting the doorposts in the *Annunciation* with those on the pilasters of *King Cophetua*'s frame, we see that the picture frame is almost a direct copy of the doorposts. Given how well Burne-Jones knew the *Annunciation* and that he is known to have commissioned the frame expressly for his own painting,⁸⁴ we may safely assume that this was done deliberately. Enlarging the doorframe to frame the entire canvas effectively turns the scene inside out, transforming this most public and politically charged of *Annunciations* – Crivelli was commissioned to paint it to celebrate the granting of semi-autonomous government to his adopted home of Ascoli Piceno, and was ordered to include the city's patron saint, Emidius, and set it in a recognisable street – into one of stifling interiority.⁸⁵ The brilliant, all-pervading sunlight that drenches Crivelli's Ascoli street is darkened to a tenebrous gloom out of which the figures emerge like phantoms; the landscape is reduced to a crepuscular patch glimpsed through a high window. The open doorway in the *Annunciation* symbolises Mary's epithet, *Porta Coeli* (doorway of Heaven) and implies her willingness to intercede in earthly affairs;⁸⁶ Burne-Jones's transformation of Crivelli's doorway into the frame of a space without a door, with no visible exit apart from the small high window, effectively isolates *Cophetua*'s throne room from the outside world and strands it in a dream from which there appears to be no waking. A slightly later common ancestor of *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* adds another key to the unravelling of their mysteries: the *Mona Lisa* [Figure 46]. That both Burne-Jones and Moreau were familiar with it is beyond question, and a debt to Leonardo is immediately apparent in the shadowy, fantastical landscapes in the backgrounds of both paintings.⁸⁷ French critics were quick to note the family resemblance between *Galatée* and *Mona Lisa*; Marius Vachon, to name but one, described the painting as

⁸⁴ J. Christian, ed., *Edward Burne-Jones* (exh. cat., London, Hayward Gallery, Southampton, Southampton Art Gallery and Birmingham, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1975), p. 56; see also Wildman and Christian (1998), p. 255, for further information on the frame.

⁸⁵ See R. Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 323-44, for an exhaustive discussion of the *Annunciation*'s commission and iconographical programme.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 333.

⁸⁷ Moreau also seems to acknowledge a debt to the grotto-like space in the *Virgin of the Rocks*.

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suffused 'with the mysterious and troubling poetry in the conception of [Moreau's] feminine ideal, like the *Gioconda* of Leonardo da Vinci'.⁸⁸ W. S. Taylor has also raised the possibility of its influence on Burne-Jones's depiction of the beggar maid.⁸⁹ But we might most usefully view the relationship of *King Cophetua* and *Galatée* to the *Mona Lisa* through yet another lens, Walter Pater's 'Notes on Leonardo da Vinci'. First published anonymously in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1869 and reprinted twice in *The Renaissance* in 1873 and 1877, it would certainly have been within Burne-Jones's frame of reference, and while *The Renaissance* does not seem to have been translated into French until after the First World War, it was being embraced by Symbolist literary figures: Mallarmé praised Pater as 'the writer of highly embroidered prose *par excellence* of our time'.⁹⁰

Pater's delirious, impressionistic evocation of the *Mona Lisa* remains

notorious for its ability to snuff out the possibility of ever again looking at the painting with an innocent eye; indirectly, traces of its effect appear in *King Cophetua* and *Galatée*. What is of particular interest here is his insistence on the Mona Lisa as what Paul Barolsky has termed ‘the essential synthesis of antitheses’⁹¹ – of Nature and Art, of myth and history, of body and soul, of paganism and Christianity, of life and death and of eternity and change. In Pater’s words,

She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands.⁹²

This fusion of innocence and perverse secret knowledge made Pater’s *Gioconda* a potent synthesis of chaste Madonna and amoral pagan goddess; underlying all of these stated contradictions are those of attraction and repulsion, fleshly warmth and marmoreal coldness. Kenneth Clark, a scholar whose approach to Leonardo was decidedly Paterian, echoed this paradox when he declared of the Mona Lisa that ‘this absence of normal sensuality makes us pause and shiver, like a sudden wave of cold

⁸⁸ ‘D’une poésie mystérieuse et troublante dans la conception de son idéal féminin, comme la *Joconde* de Léonard de Vinci’. M. Vachon, ‘Salon de 1880’, *La France* (30 April 1880).

⁸⁹ Taylor (1973), p. 153.

⁹⁰ ‘Le prosateur ouvrier par excellence de ce temps’: cited in P. Barolsky, *Walter Pater’s Renaissance* (University Park, 1987), p. 48.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹² W. Pater, *The Renaissance* (Oxford, 1986, 1873), p. 80.

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air in a beautiful building’.⁹³ This is a sort of classical perfection at odds with the normative humanistic classicism promoted in the Renaissance but with great resonance in the late nineteenth century. Burne-Jones’s beggar maid, too, with her marble skin and unreadable expression, embodies this conflict between attraction and repulsion, warmth and cold, as does Galatea with her seaweed hair and mineral body (whose primeval physical presence can be read, literally, as ‘older than the rocks among which she sits’) – and as Clark would one day find himself shivering in front of the *Mona Lisa*, one visitor to the Grosvenor Gallery in 1884 reported, standing before *King Cophetua*, ‘a bathing feel’, that is, the shrinking of flesh from ice-cold water.⁹⁴

Altars of Perversity: Masochism, Decoration, and the Suspension of Narrative

The distortion of worship is thrown into even higher relief in both paintings when we consider the growing elaboration of the decorative against the lessening of narrative action. A look at the evolution from study to final composition is instructive. Most of Burne-Jones’s post-1875 studies for *King Cophetua* depict the king and the beggar maid enthroned in relatively spare surroundings [Figure 47]. While one could not, with any fairness, describe the scene as dynamic, there is some indication of a narrative: Cophetua is placed in closer proximity to the beggar maid, who, blushing slightly, acknowledges his presence by demurely averting her gaze, while a pair of pages sings lustily in the background. Yet when we turn to the final version, we find the two marooned in a brazen chamber whose every surface is worked and decorated; Cophetua, now seated on a lower step, gazes across an unbridgeable distance at the maid, who not only does not acknowledge him but seems completely unaware of him as she stares blankly, as if hypnotised, out of the canvas.

Even the pages have fallen silent. In this regard, it is useful to examine Burne-Jones's own parody of the painting. In a comic drawing made for the young daughter of a friend in 1885, he recast *King Cophetua* in the style of his *bête noire*, Rubens [Figure 48]. The beggar maid, metamorphosed into a buxom, half-draped female who is Rubenesque in every sense of the word, holds court from a curtained dais with a burly Cophetua in Roman armour who gesticulates wildly, to the accompaniment of shouting and further gesticulation from the pages. The figures' inherent

⁹³ K. Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci* (London, 1989, 1939), p. 175.

⁹⁴ Fitzgerald (1997), p. 200. The visitor was Mary Gladstone.

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ridiculousness aside, Burne-Jones's distaste for the other distinguishing characteristics of Rubens's swirling baroque classicism – the sweeping, windblown movement (here subtly lampooned by the dashing facture), the heavy-handed drama, the muscular classicism and the over-emphasis of the figure at the expense of the setting (Burne-Jones's cod-Rubens is transposed to a sparsely sketched outdoor setting on the edge of what appears to be a Roman military camp) – is evident, and we may take it as an indication of the centrality of the devaluation of narrative action and the privileging of decorative stasis to the picture.

A similar transformation is evident in *Galatée*. A watercolour of the subject painted in 1878 [Figure 49] shows an almost coy Galatea, in a nearly empty grotto, lowering her eyes and draping an arm across her body against Polyphemus's avid, menacing gaze. Already, a key element of the narrative has been effaced – Galatea's handsome lover, Acis, whom Polyphemus murders out of jealousy. In this confrontation lies the possibility that Galatea has spurned the Cyclops not for a man but for communion with herself. In the finished painting, Galatea is set, in Huysmans's phrase, like a jewel among jewels, her right arm resting against the side of her coral throne, her eyes half-closed in a dreaming, self-absorbed smile. Tellingly, one of the noticeable changes Moreau made after the painting was shown at the Salon, visible in a comparison between the painting today and the Goupil photograph, was a repainting of Galatea's right hand; originally it rested, relaxed, on the rock. In the finished painting, it grips the rock, fingers tensed, as if clenched in the throes of a masturbatory reverie. Huysmans's observation that the figures in Moreau's oeuvre give 'the impression of a spiritual onanism, oft repeated, in chaste flesh' seems especially pertinent here.⁹⁵

One of the most important factors in the diminishment of narrative in both paintings is so obvious as to be easy to overlook: the titles. In history and literary painting, the title is indispensable to the viewer's identification and understanding of the subject and the incident. Yet Moreau and Burne-Jones have both entitled their pictures in ways that not only give the viewer precious little assistance in reading them, but that at the same time direct the eye to focus on some elements while effacing others by not mentioning them. If the titles fulfil the role of 'linguistic message' that Barthes termed 'anchorage', they do so in a vague and deceptive

⁹⁵ 'L'impression de l'onanisme spirituel, répété, dans une chair chaste'. Huysmans (1889), p. 19. I am grateful to Linda Goddard for drawing my attention to the relevance of this description here.

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manner.⁹⁶ A comparison of *Galatée* with one of its putative sources, Otton's *Polyphemus surprising Acis and Galatea*, is instructive. The title names all three figures and its present participle invites us to view them as active participants in a narrative whose circumstances (the dalliance of Acis and Galatea inciting the murderous jealousy of the Cyclops) will lead to a dramatic conclusion (Polyphemus crushing Acis under a boulder). Moreau, ever wary of pedantic exegesis and

frequently wilfully enigmatic in his titles and ‘explanations’ of his work, reduces this comparatively long-winded title to the bare minimum.⁹⁷ Not only is Acis no longer physically or verbally present, Polyphemus’s existence has been effectively cancelled by his absence from the title; we are guided to regard the picture not as an episode in an overarching story, but rather as a meditation on the beauty of Galatea herself. The fact that the vast majority of Salon and Exposition reviews make little or no reference to Polyphemus and focus almost exclusively on Galatea gives some indication of the extent to which the picture’s title succeeded in directing the gaze. Indeed, Chesneau admonished,

Do not search for M. Gustave Moreau’s *Galatea* in Fable. This very great artist [...] never borrows from ancient texts word for word. These texts furnish him with a situation, a theme that he then develops in the free activity of his thoughts. Galatea here is nothing but a symbol, that of Beauty; a name, that of Woman.⁹⁸

The case of *King Cophetua* is somewhat different. The ability to recognise a narrative hinges on a familiarity with Burne-Jones’s literary sources; this was unproblematic enough in Britain, but less so in France, where Tennyson’s poetry was not necessarily a ready reference and the original ballad probably even more obscure (witness the umbrage Duret took when faced with the painting on its native soil).⁹⁹ Like Moreau, Burne-Jones supplied no explanation of the subject in the French Exposition catalogue.¹⁰⁰ Although a few critics particularly well-versed in

⁹⁶ Barthes, ‘Rhetoric of the Image’ (1977), pp. 39-41.

⁹⁷ See Cooke (2003), pp. 116-19, for a discussion of the importance of titles in Moreau’s Salon paintings of the 1860s. Cooke partly attributes Moreau’s refusal to give the viewer sufficient clues to a reaction against the practice of Paul Chenavard, who appended a verbose and pedantic explication to his *Divina Tragedia* (1859) in the Salon *livret*.

⁹⁸ ‘Ne cherchez pas la *Galatée* de M. Gustave Moreau dans la Fable. Ce très grand artiste [...] n’emprunte jamais aux textes anciens leur lettre précise. Ces textes lui fournissent une situation, un thème qu’il développe ensuite dans la libre activité de sa pensée. Galatée ici n’est qu’un symbole, celui de la Beauté; un nom, celui de la Femme’. Chesneau (1880).

⁹⁹ See n.17 above.

¹⁰⁰ There is a brief description of the painting in Blackburn (1889), p. 9, but no allusion to the story or even to the literary sources.

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contemporary English poetry, including André Michel and Jean Lorrain, recognised *King Cophetua*’s literary sources (and Lorrain, in the same vein as the painting’s first observers in Britain, laced his review with enthusiastically misspelled snippets of ‘The Beggar Maid’, throwing in a line of Keats for good measure),¹⁰¹ the unfamiliarity of the subject combined with the title’s faintly exotic names, lack of a verb, and refusal to give the viewer any means of deducing a narrative meant that, at least for a non-Anglophone audience, Cophetua and the beggar maid are two figures of unknown (and possibly unknowable) relation to each other, two frozen figures stranded in an ornate setting for reasons that can only be guessed at. Unencumbered by familiarity with the picture’s literary sources, French observers were not conditioned to read as narrowly as their British counterparts and tended to respond, rather like Cophetua himself, by paying rapt attention to the scene’s aesthetic pleasures rather than by trying to reconstruct a narrative. Maurice Hamel, at the end of a rhapsodic account of the beauty and strangeness of the figures and their surroundings, notes almost as an afterthought that ‘the disjointedness and the passivity of the scene have something disturbing about them that escapes analysis’, speculating that ‘this could be called the dream of life and the artist may have rendered here the anguish of the future, the fascination of souls before the unknown abruptly revealed’ – hardly what Tennyson

can have had in mind.¹⁰² Others, like Michel, were content to conclude (in English, no less), ‘A thing of beauty is a joy forever’.¹⁰³

The simultaneous draining away, or looping, of narrative and heightening of decoration to a stifling level are qualities which figure strongly in Gilles Deleuze’s formulation of masochism; in his essay ‘Coldness and Cruelty’ he identifies the prototypical masochistic setting as one of ‘cluttered intimacy, [which] creates a chiaroscuro where the only things that emerge are suspended gestures and suspended suffering’.¹⁰⁴ The masochist, as Deleuze defines him, is one who does not in fact enjoy and seek out suffering as an end in itself, but who accepts it as a necessary

¹⁰¹ Lorrain (2002), pp. 134-35.

¹⁰² ‘Le décousu, le passif de la scène a quelque chose d’inquiétant et qui échappe à l’analyse’; ‘Cela pourrait s’appeler le rêve de la vie et l’artiste aurait rendu l’angoisse de l’avenir, la fascination des âmes devant l’inconnu brusquement ouvert’. Hamel (1889), p. 230.

¹⁰³ A. Michel, ‘Les beaux-arts à l’Exposition Universelle. Les écoles étrangères: l’Angleterre (I)’, *Journal des débats* (28 July 1889).

¹⁰⁴ G. Deleuze, ‘Coldness and Cruelty’, in *idem* and L. von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York, 1989, first published Paris, 1967), p. 34. I am indebted in my thinking on masochism and the decorative to C. Arscott, ‘Venus as dominatrix: nineteenth-century artists and their creations’, in C. Arscott and K. Scott, eds., *Manifestations of Venus: Art and sexuality* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 109-25.

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condition of an infinitely deferred pleasure. When we remember Belting’s contention that the privileging of the hieratic image, or *imago*, over the narrative, or *historia*, is also one of the defining themes running through the history of religious painting, the implications for a perverse reading of the pictures deepen.¹⁰⁵ The conflation of the veneration of beauty with masochistic suffering in *Galatée* and *King Cophetua* was almost immediately taken up by Symbolist poets and novelists in France. *Galatée*, as mentioned previously, became the subject of sonnets by several Symbolist poets, written in lapidary language that echoes the richly elaborated decorativeness and immobility of the scene; the final tercet of Montesquiou’s ‘Nymphe’,

Galathéa sommeille en un rêve étranger,

Sous l’adoration triste dont l’enveloppe

L’unique fixité songeuse du Cyclope¹⁰⁶

underlines the inextricability of suffering and adoration in Polyphemus’s never-to-beanswered

gaze.

King Cophetua is not known to have inspired any new poems, but its suspended narrative and oneiric air of mystery proved an irresistible challenge for at least one novelist – particularly remarkable given the central problem in ekphrasis, the impossibility of setting a static image in motion and of reconciling the spatial and the temporal. Three years before Lorrain published ‘La Princesse des chemins’, the painting found itself translated into prose in Edouard Rod’s novel *Les Trois coeurs*, serialised in the *Journal des débats* during the run of the Exposition (the first instalment of which appeared alongside André Michel’s appreciative review of the British Fine Art section, in particular Burne-Jones).¹⁰⁷ Rod, a sometime art critic

¹⁰⁵ Belting (1994), p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Montesquiou (1893), p. 135; Lacambre (1998b) contends that the poem was written much earlier, probably in 1885, based on the date a copy of it was sent to Moreau. For further discussion of the *Galatea* sonnets, see Cooke (2003), pp. 148-54. Interestingly, ‘Lilia’, another poem in *Le Chef des odeurs suaves* (in the same sequence as ‘Nymphe’), centres on Burne-Jones, even mentioning him by name in the first line. Although it appears not to describe a specific painting, it is tempting to speculate whether its hypnotic repetition of the word ‘lys’ may have some connection with Octave Mirbeau’s scurrilous attacks (1895) on Burne-Jones and his followers, ‘Des Lys! des lys!’ and ‘Toujours des lys!’

(see Chapter 2).

¹⁰⁷ E. Rod, *Les Trois coeurs* (Paris, 1890, first serialised in *Le Journal des débats*, July-November 1889). *King Cophetua* exerted a hold on the Francophone literary imagination well into the twentieth century. In addition to *Les Trois coeurs* and Lorrain's 'La Princesse des chemins', I have counted Iwan Gilkin's drama *Le Roi Cophetua* (Brussels, 1919), which renames the beggar maid Rosamie, makes her compete for the love of the king against three maidens of noble birth, and gives her a far greater vocal presence than in any literary precedents, and Julien Gracq's novella of the same name (published in *La Presqu'île*, Paris, 1970), which goes a step further in recasting the 'beggar maid' as a taciturn housemaid whose threatening, ambiguous silence and rare utterances help to characterise her as a cold and mysterious dominatrix who holds the male narrator in sexual thrall.

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whose contributions to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* included one of the first serious studies in French of Pre-Raphaelitism from its origins to the present day, like Huysmans before him blurred the boundary between art criticism and fiction.¹⁰⁸ *Les Trois coeurs*, on the surface the fairly conventional story of a love triangle in contemporary Paris, does for Burne-Jones on a modest scale what Huysmans did for Moreau in *À rebours*. Its protagonist, Richard Noral, transforms his study into a shrine hung with reproductions of talismanic images of women whose juxtaposition is both revealing and resonant: a fifteenth-century Rhenish Virgin from the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, Il Sodoma's *Judith*, Rossetti's *La Pia de' Tolomei*, Moreau's *La Chimère* and 'King Cophetua, by Burne-Jones, uselessly kneeling at the feet of his beggar maid: enveloped in her rags on the throne to which love has led her, her sorrowful features recount her long suffering, proclaiming her powerless to enjoy the happiness come too late, and her eyes, in which anguish persistently floats, say that she will not be able to respond to the ecstasies of the worshipper abasing himself before her'.¹⁰⁹ In a narrative characterised by relentless repetition, Noral returns again and again to his gloomy inner sanctum to contemplate the images of the beggar maid and her spiritual sisters in a state of melancholic inactivity worthy of Cophetua himself. Indeed, each time he enters his study and falls into a trance before his personal pantheon, the narrative grinds to a halt. Pacteau has noted the disruptive properties of physical descriptions of women in fiction.¹¹⁰ But the women who bring about the narrative 'freezing' in *Les Trois coeurs* are painted and decorative (that key aspect of Deleuze's formulation of masochism), not flesh and blood; conversely, it is Noral's wife and mistress, not the rather ineffectual man himself, who serve to drive the plot forward, and neither one is the recipient of his worshipping gaze. He evidently prefers (we are told he 'had wanted to surround himself with these [images] to trouble his own heart') to retreat from his escalating difficulties in the pleasurable and painfully pleasurable search for transcendence in these 'material visions of

¹⁰⁸ Rod (1887), pp. 177-95 and 399-416.

¹⁰⁹ 'Le Roi Cophetua, de Burne-Jones, inutilement agenouillé aux pieds de sa mendicante: enveloppée dans ses haillons sur le trône où l'amour l'a conduite, ses traits douloureux racontent sa longue souffrance, la proclamant impuissante à jouir du bonheur trop tard venu, et ses yeux, où flotte obstinément l'angoisse, disent qu'elle ne saura pas répondre aux extases de l'adorateur abîmé devant elle', Rod (1890), pp. 29-30. Based on Rod's description of *La Chimère*, it seems likely that he refers to the 1867 painting now in the Fogg Museum, Cambridge, MA (Mathieu 104) (see Mathieu, 1994, p. 101).

¹¹⁰ Pacteau (1994), pp. 107-8.

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intangible things, entering the soul through the eyes'.¹¹¹ Ultimately, as the crisis precipitated by his double life comes to a head, he comes to identify himself with the sole male figure in his study, 'King Cophetua languish[ing] at the feet of his beggar maid'.¹¹²

The parallel I have drawn between Noral's despondent stare and that of

Cophtetua (and, for that matter, Polyphemus) is not fortuitous. For one of the most striking aspects of both pictures is their refusal to resolve the position of the beholder and the beheld. Cophtetua's gaze is doomed never to be answered; so hypnotic and hypnotised is the beggar maid's stare, so utter her refusal to acknowledge him, that the thought arises that she may be a vision in Cophtetua's fevered imagination. Yet when we gaze into the gleaming surface of this hall of mirrors, only the beggar maid's feet are reflected. Is she, then, the only physical presence, and the king her hallucination? The disjuncture between beholder and beheld becomes even more unsettling when we turn to *Galatée*. At first glance, Polyphemus appears as an intruder in Galatea's marine domain, gazing at her as if into the depths of an aquarium, held apart by an invisible barrier. (Even then, the nature of the setting remains open to interpretation: one reviewer, on first seeing it at the Salon, took it for 'the heart of the earth'.)¹¹³ However, a closer look reveals the ends of the nymph's hair reflected as if in a pool, as if she is above, rather than in, the water; moreover, the dim, watery light bathing the Cyclops suggests that he, and not Galatea, is underwater. This, in tandem with the disconcerting disparity in scale between the two figures, raises the possibility that not only may Galatea be the fantasy of Polyphemus, he may instead – or simultaneously – be her dream. The interplay of gazes here, apart from its significance for the frustration of narrative and of desire, has further ramifications. Moreau has bucked classical and art-historical precedent by giving Polyphemus, in addition to the usual huge single eye in the middle of his forehead, two human eyes; this departure from convention serves in part to humanise the Cyclops and to render him more sympathetic (compare the horrifying yet faintly comical Polyphemus in Redon's *Cyclopes*). Yet at the same time, tripling the number of Polyphemus's eyes radically

¹¹¹ 'Richard avait voulu s'entourer comme pour se troubler le cœur'; 'visions matérielles de choses intangibles, entrant dans l'âme par les yeux'. Rod (1890), pp. 136 and 31.

¹¹² 'Le Roi Cophtetua languissait aux pieds de sa mendicante'. Ibid., p. 187.

¹¹³ 'Au sein de la terre'. Champier (1881), p. 83.

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over-endows him with the power of vision.¹¹⁴ Are we, then, to take his waking dream of Galatea as a result of this excess of vision? If so, Polyphemus's hyper-visual hallucination (and, by extension, that of Cophtetua and the beggar maid) could be considered an inversion of the positivist dictum that seeing is believing, substituting the notion that believing makes us see what we desire most to see. Taken together, in the setting of the Exposition Universelle where so much else willingly and dumbly gave itself up to the gaze, where the positivist avowal of the primacy of the material and the visible clashed with the Symbolist and antinaturalist privileging of suggestion and inner vision, where almost anything could and did become an object of veneration, *King Cophtetua* and *Galatée* conceive a world where beauty equals divinity, where to worship it is to suffer eternally, where veneration dissolves the identity and the existence of both worshipper and worshiped – altars of perversity, indeed.

¹¹⁴ See D. de Margerie, *Autour de Gustave Moreau. La Maison des Danaïdes* (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire, 1998), p. 30, for an interesting angle on Polyphemus's three eyes and the implications raised by the crossed gazes.

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Chapter 4

Lost in translation? Rossetti's reputation and influence in France, 1872-1898

Traduire, c'est trahir

old French adage

Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when in the course of its survival a work has reached the age of its fame.¹

When many artists die, their reputations follow them to the grave. In the case of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, on the other hand, dying could arguably be thought of as one of the best career manoeuvres he ever made. Concealed from public view during his lifetime, whether because of his notorious sensitivity to criticism or because his well-established network of patrons lessened the pressure to exhibit, his paintings and drawings were revealed to the public – directly in Britain, indirectly in France – as almost a complete body of work in simultaneous retrospective exhibitions at the Royal Academy and the Burlington Fine Arts Club early in 1883. Roughly halfway between France’s first exposure to the new wave of British anti-naturalist painting at the 1878 Exposition and the publication of Moréas’s Symbolist manifesto, and months before the publication of Ernest Chesneau’s *La Peinture anglaise* (re)introduced him to the French public, Rossetti could scarcely have chosen a more opportune moment to expire.

If this statement appears overly provocative – certainly, it contains a deliberate echo of Sâr Péladan’s characteristically intemperate injunction to the equally reclusive Gustave Moreau, ‘Drop dead, for the greatest good of art, for your own glory’ – then let me explain why I have chosen to open with this salvo.² The sudden access to his art afforded by his death excited an extraordinary level of interest from critics, poets and painters on both sides of the Channel; it would be fair to estimate that the ink spilt in the two decades after he died far exceeds what was written about him, both in quantity and variety, during his whole lifetime. Furthermore, the steady increase in access to his paintings, whether through reproductions, loan exhibitions, sales or acquisition by public collections, allowed a younger generation of anti-realist painters to draw inspiration from his work. Yet the fin-de-siècle explosion of interest in Rossetti, and specifically in what Rossetti had to offer Symbolism in France, remains

¹ W. Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, in *Illuminations* (1999), p. 72.

² ‘Mourez tôt, mourez tout de suite, pour le plus grand bien de l’art, pour votre propre gloire’: J. Péladan, ‘Gustave Moreau’, *L’Ermitage* (January 1895), p. 34.

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largely unexplored in subsequent scholarship on the impact of the Pre-Raphaelites in France. Burne-Jones and Watts have commanded the lion’s share of attention in such studies; Rossetti, although generally acknowledged to have been a key figure in the cross-Channel exchange, has remained a shadowy presence at the margins.³ Even the literature that accords him greater impact on the course of Symbolism in France has focused on his poetry to the exclusion of his painting, despite the inseparability of the verbal and visual aspects of his oeuvre.⁴ In fact, Rossetti’s affinities with the central Symbolist tropes of *correspondances* and the unity of the arts were integral to his appeal for continental Symbolism; moreover, unlike Burne-Jones and Watts, he occupied the unique position of having inspired works in multiple media.

Why this disparity, and why this false division? The most obvious answer is that Rossetti’s work was much less visible than that of his compatriots. While new work by Burne-Jones and Watts could be seen at least once a year in London from the late 1870s, and both exhibited more or less regularly in France, Rossetti exhibited little during his lifetime in Britain (and not at all in the last two decades of his life) and never in France – either during his lifetime (an exhibition of his recent work in

³ For example, Lethève (1959), because of his focus on exhibitions and documentation, mostly passes over Rossetti; E. Becker, ‘Sensual eroticism or empty tranquility: Rossetti’s reputation around 1900’, in J. Treuherz et al., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (exh. cat., Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 2003), while casting his net wider to take account of Rossetti’s reception in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, employs a similar documentary approach and is much indebted to Lethève. S. Phelps Smith, ‘From Allegory to Symbol: Rossetti’s Renaissance Poets and His Influence on Continental Symbolism’, in Casteras and Faxon (1995), provides a more in-depth analysis

of the appeal Rossetti's brand of antinaturalism held for Continental artists, but does not discuss any specific works inspired or influenced by him.

⁴ A particularly egregious example is the only recent biography of Rossetti in French, J. de Langlade, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Paris, 1985), which, while it devotes a full chapter to Rossetti's discovery by Debussy, Albert Samain, Pierre Louÿs and other poets, merely notes in passing that Rossetti's artistic influence manifested itself in the work of Moreau, Redon, and other Symbolists (bizarrely, Van Gogh is included in this list) without further discussion. Indeed, Rossetti's painting barely receives mention in the rest of the text, which is luridly sensationalistic in the mould of Violet Hunt's *The Wife of Rossetti* (1932) and proffers such unedifying details as the assertion that Rossetti, in his final decade, enjoyed a *ménage à trois* with Fanny Cornforth and Alexa Wilding.

⁵ Many of Rossetti's biographers have operated on the assumption that he withdrew wholly from exhibiting his work as a reaction against the scathing criticism *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (S.44) received in 1850; see for example J. Comyns Carr, *Some Eminent Victorians* (London, 1908), p. 65. As Colin Cruise has recently demonstrated, Rossetti did in fact continue to exhibit in small, independent group shows (notably the Hogarth Club) up to 1856: C. Cruise, "'Sincerity and earnestness": D. G. Rossetti's early exhibitions 1849-53', *Burlington Magazine* 146 (January 2004), pp. 4-12. Rossetti knowingly colluded in his self-mythologising as a mysterious, temperamental recluse, for example telling Chesneau that 'since the age of twenty-two, I can say that I have never exhibited anywhere, for personal motives whose details here would be egotistical' ('Depuis l'âge de vingt-deux ans, je puis dire que je n'ai jamais exposé nulle part, pour des motifs qui me sont personnelles [sic] et dont le détail ici serait égoïste [sic]'): Rossetti, letter to Ernest Chesneau, 7 November 1868, W. E. Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Cambridge, 2003), vol. 4, p. 119.

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Paris in 1862 mooted by Whistler evidently came to nothing)⁶ or posthumously. Furthermore, to this day, no French collection, either public or private, possesses any of his paintings.⁷ Although, in addition to the two 1883 retrospectives, Rossetti's work appeared at the Manchester Exhibition in 1888 and 74 of his paintings were displayed at the New Gallery in 1894, outside of these exhibitions a visitor to Britain hoping to view his paintings faced disappointment. By 1890, only two of his paintings – *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* [Figure 50, S.44] and *Beata Beatrix* [Figure 51, S.168] – had entered the National Gallery. If one was prepared to venture further afield, the altarpiece of Llandaff Cathedral in Cardiff, the Oxford Union murals, in an advanced state of ruin, and *Dante's Dream* in Liverpool (the only one of Rossetti's paintings to enter a museum during his lifetime) raised the tally to five. Otherwise, one had to rely on the largesse of collectors, a few of whom were apparently willing to show their paintings to amateurs, but, as Paul Bourget, one of the first French writers to develop an interest in Rossetti, lamented after a trip to London in the autumn of 1883, such crumbs of generosity only whetted an insatiable appetite; he was only able to see twenty of the 395 paintings listed in William Sharp's recent catalogue.⁸ Amateurs like Bourget who crossed the Channel and actively sought out Rossetti's work were, however, a tiny minority. For a Paris-bound audience, then, viewing Rossetti took place under conditions that set him apart from his peers – namely, his work could be seen *only* in the form of reproductions.

In the previous chapters, I touched upon the problems inherent in the use of reproductions to disseminate original works of art. However, these issues acquire a particular urgency in discussing Rossetti's reception in France. In the case of Burne-Jones and Watts, reproductions, however unsatisfactory, were periodically supplemented with exhibitions of 'the real thing', transforming prints and photographs into aides-memoires rather than imperfect independent objects; reproductions of their work functioned as they were intended, that is, as substitutes for originals. In the case of Beardsley, the medium of illustration meant that his art was intended for

⁶Rossetti wrote to George Price Boyce on 20 October 1862 asking permission to borrow back *Bocca Bacciata* as it would be 'going to Paris under Whistler's auspices to an exhibition': Fredeman (2003), vol. 2, p. 494-95.

⁷According to V. Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1971), and J. McGann, ed., *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive* (2000 and forthcoming).

⁸P. Bourget, 'Lettre de Londres', *Le Journal des Débats politiques et littéraires*, 24 September 1884, republished in *Études et portraits* (Paris, 1889), vol. 2. See also Bourget, 'Sensations d'Oxford' (1883), republished in *Études et portraits*, vol. 2, pp. 212-18, on the Oxford Union murals.

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reproduction from the start. The French Rossetti, however, was an artist whose original work, because of its near-complete unavailability, effectively ceased to exist. Walter Benjamin's contention that the 'aura' of a work of art decreases in direct proportion to the proliferation of mechanical reproduction would seem to find its inverse in Rossetti's case.⁹ In the absence of the original work, photographs and engravings, which seem largely to have been published in limited editions and collected by a literary and artistic elite, took on the ritualistic fetish value that would ordinarily have been accorded the original.¹⁰ Indeed, photographs after Rossetti's paintings were deemed important enough to include in the 1892 Salon de la Rose + Croix; two years later, an exhibition of photographs after Rossetti and Burne-Jones was held in Brussels.¹¹ And still, notwithstanding the remarkable quality of many of these reproductions, they could only give an incomplete, or worse, a deceptive idea of the original. Camille Mauclair recalled that the reproductions of *Beata Beatrix* and other Pre-Raphaelite paintings that he and his colleagues pored over at Mallarmé's *mardis* 'ravished our Symbolist-Wagnerian imaginations', but when he saw the paintings for the first time, 'there was nothing more disappointing'.¹² If the reproductions Mauclair knew were guilty of hiding the inelegance of Rossetti's drawing and facture, neither could they convey, by virtue of their much-reduced scale, the overpowering physical presence of Rossetti's late works. Even in one of the rare coloured mezzotints, the hothouse lushness of the colour that critics agreed was one of the strongest and most distinctive aspects of Rossetti's painting was lost¹³ – a loss, I would argue, comparable to the loss of the elusive essence of his poetry when it was translated into French.

⁹ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1999), pp. 216-17.

¹⁰ For example, in *Les Trois coeurs*, Richard Noral decorates his study with reproductions of talismanic Symbolist and Renaissance paintings of women, including Rossetti's *La Pia de' Tolomei* (S.207); see Chapter 3.

¹¹ For further discussion of Rossetti's presence at the Salon de la Rose + Croix, see below. I have not been able to discover whether a catalogue of the Brussels exhibition exists, but given that Dietrich, one of the major publishers of Pre-Raphaelite reproductions, was located there, it seems reasonable to assume that the photographs exhibited were those published by Dietrich.

¹² 'Tout cela ravissait notre imagination de symbolistes et de wagnériens, et, en photographie, c'était vraiment très attachant. Quand nous avons vu les peintures elles-mêmes, [...] il n'y a rien de plus décevant': C. Mauclair, *Mallarmé chez lui* (Paris, 1935), pp. 72-73. It is worth bearing in mind that at the time of writing, the reputation of Symbolism and Pre-Raphaelitism was at its lowest ebb.

¹³ My decision to focus on Rossetti reproductions owes much to Jerome McGann's approach in his recent monograph on the artist; McGann reasons that as reproductions represented the broader public's only knowledge of the artist, they provide a better way to contextualise him than would the paintings themselves: J. McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game That Must Be Lost* (New Haven and London, 2000), p. ix.

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Any study of Rossetti's role in the development of antinaturalism in France is, then, a study of translations – from English poetry into a French approximation thereof, from painting or drawing into photograph or print, and even, in the case of *The Blessed Damozel*, from two different media (poetry and painting) into a third (music). In tracing Rossetti's impact on the poets who attempted to translate his words and on the artists – Maurice Denis, Odilon Redon and Claude Debussy – who

translated his visual world from black-and-white photographs and colourful descriptions into new images, we should bear in mind Benjamin's warnings about the pitfalls and potentials of translation:

In translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were. It cannot live there permanently, to be sure, and it certainly does not reach it in its entirety. Yet, in a singularly impressive manner, at least it points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages. The transfer can never be total, but what reaches this region goes beyond the transmittal of subject matter. This nucleus is best defined as the element that does not lend itself to translation. [...] Unlike the words of the original, it is not translatable, because the relationship between content and language is quite different in the original and the translation. While the content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds.¹⁴

The most 'successful' translation, then, is not one which adheres slavishly to the letter (or the outline) of the original, but one which manages to capture something of its spirit within the gap it creates between itself and the original. Elements of Rossetti's work did, inevitably, get lost in the translation; however, in some of the more sensitive translations, be they verbal, visual or musical, rich and complex resonances reverberate in these newly opened spaces.

'Un Italien d'Angleterre': French Perceptions of Rossetti

When the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* assigned Théodore Duret to cover the Rossetti retrospectives in 1883, their choice of critic was highly significant. An advocate of the Impressionists, a close friend of Whistler and an enthusiastic promoter of Japanese art, Duret had been the *Gazette's correspondant d'Angleterre* since Duranty's death in 1880 and was the epitome of the cosmopolitan avant-garde critic. While Duret, like many of his British counterparts, expressed doubts about the validity of Rossetti's project to resuscitate Renaissance art, the similarities cease there. Unlike

¹⁴ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' (1999), pp. 75-76.

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the mainstream British critics, who seemed contractually obliged to rail against the physical and moral sickness they perceived in Rossetti's late work,¹⁵ Duret's sophistication allowed him to recognise the complexity of the artist's range of literary and visual references¹⁶ and to acknowledge readily the power of the late works' overwhelming physicality, characterising the feminine prototype represented therein as simultaneously compelling, repellent and terrifying: 'she exerts a sort of fascination, but mixed with disquiet; one would be afraid to approach too closely, one feels that if she took you in her arms, she would make your bones crack'.¹⁷

The choice of Duret to report on Rossetti in such a distinguished publication indicates that Rossetti had already, by this date, acquired a reputation in France as a major vanguard artist and a figure whose importance transcended national boundaries. Indeed, in spite of never having exhibited in France, Rossetti had not been entirely unknown there before his death. For instance, Duret's prior knowledge of Rossetti's art is apparent in his review of the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition in 1881 in which he discussed the artist at length despite his absence from the exhibition, admitting that while Rossetti's attempts to turn back the clock of art history were 'absolutely opposed to [his] tastes and indeed [his] ideas about art', his art nonetheless exerted a strange fascination upon him.¹⁸ However, tracing the international dissemination of his literary and artistic reputation during his lifetime is a haphazard exercise, relying

much on speculation to knit together sparse or no longer extant pieces of evidence.¹⁹ Examining the evolution of responses to Rossetti, and the growing engagement with

¹⁵ A pertinent example is the unsigned review in the *Illustrated London News*, which was typical in its conflation of biography and art and its equation of physical illness with moral downfall: 'Perhaps no man has ever lived in the past – in the world of his own imagination – so completely as Rossetti. But has the painter, or even the poet, the right to live wholly for himself in his own fancy, and not for his age and his fellows? Will not such infidelity bring penalties upon himself and his art too? As regards himself, the piteous story of Rossetti's later life – the febrile strain, with its unhealthy, morbid tendencies, resulting in insomnia, hardly relieved by inordinate doses of chloral – sufficiently answers the question. As regards a man's art, the answer is scarcely less plain.' 'Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Illustrated London News* (6 January 1883), p. 30.

¹⁶ Although he does not allude to it in his article, Duret, as a keen Japonist, probably admired Rossetti's appropriation of Japanese motifs (particularly in the Llandaff altarpiece), some of which predate Whistler's experiments. I am grateful to Laura MacCulloch for drawing my attention to Rossetti's Japonisme.

¹⁷ 'Elle exerce une sorte de fascination, mais mêlée d'inquiétude; on aurait peur d'en approcher de trop près, on sent que si elle vous prenait dans ses bras, elle vous ferait craquer les os': T. Duret, 'Les Expositions de Londres: Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 18, (1 July 1883), p. 54.

¹⁸ 'Absolument opposés à mes goûts et à mes idées en fait d'art': T. Duret, 'Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor Gallery', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1881), pp. 555-56.

¹⁹ This is especially the case in trying to chart the growth of awareness of Rossetti's painting; as Saunier (2002), p. 74, has observed, few reproductions from before 1880 are known, and attempting to trace sources for extant early reproductions has proven difficult.

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him, first as a poet and then as a painter, reveals the formation of an artistic identity strikingly different from Rossetti's British persona. This 'French' Rossetti, the exotic 'Italien d'Angleterre',²⁰ I would argue, conditioned the attempts of his first (poetic) translators to render his verse into French and, more broadly, reshaped his identity, drawing him out of his self-imposed isolation and transforming him into a full-blown Symbolist.

Brief references to Rossetti occur in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in the 1860s;²¹ a French amateur eager to learn more generally had to rely on British art periodicals for further information. Given his aversion to exhibiting, and the fact that steady patronage meant he could afford to keep a low profile, Rossetti displayed a surprisingly keen interest in maintaining public interest in his painting, making certain that laudatory notices of his new work appeared in key periodicals – of course, it helped that his brother, William Michael, and his former Pre-Raphaelite Brother F. G. Stephens, were respected critics, both of whom wrote for the *Athenaeum* and other widely-read publications.²² The first traced article devoted solely to Rossetti to appear in a French periodical, though, was a review of his *Poems* in *La Revue britannique* in 1870. The critic, Amédée Pichot, was not wholeheartedly enthusiastic, but his article highlights aspects of Rossetti's work frequently dwelt upon by French commentators over the following decades: his status as an exotic outsider, his isolation from contemporary trends and his debts to medieval Italian poetry, his blending of mysticism and sensuality, his idealism and its roots in the material.²³ While noting

²⁰ H. Dupré, *Un Italien d'Angleterre. Le poète-peintre Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Paris, 1921); Dupré's title is informed by Ruskin's famous remark that Rossetti was 'a great Italian tormented in the Inferno of London'.

²¹ In 1859, 1865 and 1869, most notably in Burty (1869), pp. 52-54, who refers to him as 'Rosetti' and designates him as the founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but does not refer to any of his works; see S. Phelps Smith in Casteras and Faxon (1995), p. 61.

²² See, for example, 'Mr. Rossetti's New Pictures', *Athenaeum* no. 2581 (14 April 1877), pp. 486-87; 'Art Notes', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 1 (1878), p. v; and 'Art Notes', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 4 (1881), pp. xlvi-xlvi. All of these feature detailed descriptions, often in fulsome, florid language, of Rossetti's recent work; the first 'Art Notes' piece cited, a description of the newly completed *Blessed Damozel*

(S.244) is a good case in point, beginning ‘There are few more intense and perfect poems in the English tongue than “The Blessed Damozel,” by Dante Gabriel Rossetti; and there must be thousands of persons who feel something more than mere curiosity to see the picture, founded on the poem and bearing its name, painted by the poet himself for Mr. William Graham’. Rossetti’s zeal in crafting a positive self-image is apparent in a letter to Stephens chiding the latter for penning a critical article on his poems and asking him in future to refrain from writing about him entirely unless his intention was to praise: letter to F. G. Stephens, 15 November 1871, in Fredeman (2003), pp. 185-86.

²³ A. Pichot, ‘Correspondance de Londres’, *La Revue britannique*, vol. 3 (June 1870), pp. 560-61. He concludes: ‘En peinture comme en poésie, M. Rossetti est idéaliste. Tantôt le symbole reçoit de lui-même une forme matérielle qui a la transparence d’un voile, et quand ses personnages ont réellement existé, il les transfigure et les divinise par des attributs mystiques’ (p. 561).

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that the Blessed Damozel is ‘a rather pagan saint’, Pichot’s review displays none of the moral outrage that marked much of the British response to Rossetti’s poetry. The first traced in-depth French analysis and translation of Rossetti’s poetry appeared in 1872, coincidentally the same year that his nemesis Robert Buchanan expanded and reprinted his infamous polemic, ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry’, in pamphlet form.²⁴ Significantly, the article, by Emile Blémont, appeared in *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique*, one of the first *petites revues* to be born from the ashes of the Franco-Prussian War (itself a vital nexus for artistic exchange between Britain and France) and characterised by Ernest Raynaud as the precursor to the myriad Symbolist periodicals of the 1880s and 1890s.²⁵ Blémont’s thoughtful examination of the Pre-Raphaelite school of poets, which focuses mainly on Rossetti, draws comparisons between them and the idealism of Gautier and Puvis and characterises Rossetti’s *House of Life* as a blend of ‘Italian delicacy and *morbidezza* united with the deep reverie of the North’. It includes two translations of Rossetti’s poems: the whole of ‘Lost Days’ (‘Les Jours perdus’) from *The House of Life* and the first stanza of ‘The Blessed Damozel’.²⁶ Despite Blémont’s good intentions and his valiant attempt at a metrical (though unrhymed) rendering of Rossetti’s verse, the French version of ‘The Blessed Damozel’ is flat, stilted; read aloud, it feels uncomfortable in the mouth, and meaning is distorted by his efforts to shoehorn the words into the correct number of syllables (‘Her eyes were deeper than the depth / Of waters stilled at even’ becomes ‘Ses yeux savaient mieux le calme et l’ombre / Que les eaux dormantes du soir’).²⁷

Even as Rossetti’s complex, Dantesque prosody frustrated French translators, his Italian roots and his foreignness in the country of his birth seem, ironically, to have increased his appeal in France and smoothed the path for his acceptance. First and foremost, the allure of the exotic hovered about him; the son of a *carbonaro* born in

²⁴ Buchanan originally published ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry’ under the pseudonym ‘Thomas Maitland’ (*Contemporary Review*, October 1871, pp. 334-50). Motivated as much by professional envy (Buchanan was a decidedly second-rate poet) as by prudery, the article and its repercussions are widely considered to have precipitated Rossetti’s nervous breakdown and increasing withdrawal from the world from 1872.

²⁵ Raynaud (1918), vol. 1, p. 9. Indeed, Raynaud credits Blémont with ‘preparing the path for Symbolism’ ([il] prépare les voies au symbolisme’) with his articles on the Pre-Raphaelites. It is also worth noting that Blémont was a close friend of Fantin-Latour, who had visited Rossetti on one of his stays in London in 1864; Rossetti reciprocated the visit later that year.

²⁶ ‘Les sonnets sur la Vie, l’Amour et la Mort, unissent la délicatesse, la *morbidezza* italienne à la forte rêverie du Nord’: E. Blémont, ‘Littérature étrangère: l’école préraphaélite’, *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique*, no. 14 (27 July 1872), p. 107.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

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exile was a deeply romantic figure, and his French biographers and critics consistently

identified him as such, rather than as an Englishman;²⁸ reproductions of his selfportraits, highlighting his dark, liquid eyes, broad forehead and sensual lips, frequently appeared in his biographies to emphasise the point. In an era of simmering (though never virulent) Anglophobia, Rossetti's Italianness was a point in his favour in France; not only did it make his status as an outsider fascinating rather than threatening, it simultaneously gave him, as a member of a Latin people, a degree of familiarity and belonging. Not least, his work's embrace of mysticism, the ideal, and the world of the imagination could be partly explained and justified by contemporary stereotypes about his nationality.²⁹

This point was taken to stupefying extremes by Péladan in the preface to the first (and only) translation of the whole of *The House of Life* in 1887. Declaring Rossetti the last (or latest) exponent of the Latin tradition, Péladan all but claimed him as a reincarnation of the Neo-Platonic ideal as represented by Dante and Guido Cavalcanti.³⁰ But he went further still in his ultra-romantic characterisation of Rossetti (whom he compared to his other idol, Moreau), rhapsodising that 'Rossetti's charm is a woman's charm, one must experience it without explaining it'.³¹ Such a bald declaration of the painter-poet's androgyny (or effeminacy) would have been anathema in Britain; indeed, Rossetti's defenders had had to go to great lengths to counter the assaults of the conservative press on the virility of Rossetti's person and oeuvre, which, although at their harshest in the wake of 'The Fleshly School'

²⁸ See Dupré (1921); M. Duclaux, *Grands écrivains d'outre-Manche* (Paris, 1901), p. 273 ('Cet Italien qui a laissé sur l'art et la littérature d'outre-Manche une empreinte si forte et si personnelle, et dont l'influence est visible jusque dans les récents développements de la poésie française'; C. Dupouey, *Notes sur l'art et la vie de D.-G. Rossetti* (Paris, 1906), p. 4; G. Mourey, *D.-G. Rossetti et les Préraphaélites anglais* (Paris, 1909), p. 24; G. Sarrazin, *Poètes modernes de l'Angleterre – Walter Savage Landor, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Élisabeth [sic] Barrett Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne* (Paris, 1885) (hereafter Sarrazin 1885a), pp. 234-355 ('Devenu Anglais par circonstance . . . l'artiste hérita la raffinement de sa race, et garda, chez ses nouveaux compatriotes, le pur esprit italien du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance'); O. G. Destrée, *Les Préraphaélites. Notes sur l'art décoratif et la peinture en Angleterre* (Brussels, 1894), pp. 25-26. This is far from an exhaustive list. Of course, none of these writers could have known about Rossetti's almost comical, over-compensatory John Bullishness, frequently expressed in his letters.

²⁹ The definition for 'imaginatif' in P. Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e Siècle*, vol. 9 (Paris, 1873), p. 578, cites Jules Michelet: '*L'Europe aristocratique se plait à confondre le peuple de France avec les peuples IMAGINATIFS et gesticulateurs, comme les Italiens, les Irlandais, Gallois, etc.*'

³⁰ J. Péladan, preface to C. Couve, trans., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. La Maison de la vie* (Paris, 1887), pp. x and xlviii. However, Péladan expressed reservations about Rossetti's place in this grand hierarchy, noting that the chief inspiration of his poetry was Dante's most 'earthly' work, *La Vita Nuova*.

³¹ 'Le charme de Rossetti est un charme de femme, il faut le subir et non l'expliquer': *ibid.*, p. lii.

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controversy, had not abated following his death eleven years later.³² Péladan's Rossetti, while wildly exaggerated, is characteristic of the persona created for him in France by Symbolist poets and critics – just recognisable from knowledge of the English version, but distorted as if by a curved mirror, the raw materials of his life and poetry shaped to fit the mould of a sensual-mystical French Symbolist poet-painter.³³ And what of Couve's translation of *The House of Life* itself? The method she employed is unique in nineteenth-century translations of Rossetti's poetry, in that she translated each sonnet twice: once 'literally' (in prose) and, on each facing page, 'literarily' (in verse).³⁴ The prose translations are nearly all significantly shorter than the poems, reducing them to two or three sentences conveying the bare bones of dramatic incident – the epitome of Benjamin's notion of the bad translation, that which transmits information only. The verse translations, while not as shockingly

blunt and spare, make no attempt to render Rossetti's metre or rhyme scheme into French. Although marginally 'poetic', they display only a partial understanding of Rossetti's vision or his unusual imagery. The translation of the first sonnet of 'Willow-wood' is a good case in point – the final couplet, 'And as I stooped, her own lips rising there / Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth', which sent Buchanan (who, typically, took the quotation entirely out of context) into apoplexies of disgust, is rendered as the rather more innocuous, conventional and awkward 'Et tandis que je me baissais, les lèvres de ma Bien-Aimée émergèrent / Et inondaient mes lèvres d'un torrent de baisers'. The grand expectations of metaphysical, neo-Platonic poetry built up by Péladan's introduction are disappointed by the inept translation.

³² Comyns Carr (1908), p. 65, admits that 'The common impression of the time, which I indeed partly shared, was that Rossetti's individuality, however finely it might be endowed with poetic imagination, was not of the most virile order', adding that once he met Rossetti he realized that the artist's reluctance to exhibit was 'not due to any lack of masculine strength'. As Kate Flint has observed, conservative critics in Victorian Britain employed adult male heterosexuality as the norm against which 'unhealthy' (for which read 'effeminate') art was judged and condemned: K. Flint, 'Moral judgment and the language of English art criticism 1870-1910', *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 6, no. 2 (1983), p. 64.

³³ An interesting comparison is G. Mourey, *Passé le détroit. La vie et l'art à Londres* (Paris, 1895), pp. 160-61. Echoes of Huysmans's heated writings on Gustave Moreau are discernible in Mourey's perfumed, highly romantic characterisation of Rossetti and his work; indeed, Huysmans was Mourey's mentor and they seem to have discussed Rossetti and the other Pre-Raphaelites together.

³⁴ Apart from Blémont's translation of 'Lost Days' in 1872, the major translation of selections from *The House of Life* was I. Cleveland, trans., 'La Maison de la vie, Sonnets', *La Revue contemporaine*, vol. 5, no. 1, June-July 1886, pp. 65-69 and no. 2, August-September 1886, pp. 216-19, which translated 'Winged Hours', 'Heart's Compass', 'The Soul's Sphere', "'Retro me, Sathana!'", and 'The Vase of Life'. As I have found no references to Ianthe Cleveland elsewhere, I assume the name is a pseudonym, but have not been able to discover the identity of its user.

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While Couve's attempts represent the nadir of French translations of Rossetti's poetry, it underscores several crucial problems present in varying degrees in all of the published translations from the 1880s. Rossetti's strikingly unusual turns of phrase were almost always rendered in French in a manner that made them either anodyne or nonsensical, and the flavour of his deliberate archaisms was lost as they were translated into current French. The hallmark of his verse, the union of the spiritual and the sensual that so disturbed his more conventional British readers, was muted and cooled; particularly in the case of Gabriel Sarrazin's translation of 'The Blessed Damozel', the heated yearning and palpable fleshliness of the Damozel were rendered passive and wistful.³⁵ In effect, translating Rossetti into French uncoupled the spiritual from the sensual; what emerged were poems by a different poet in which the spiritual and the mystical took centre stage.

This is not to imply that Rossetti never found sympathetic and able translators in France. Not surprisingly, the most interesting (and freest) responses to his poetry came from other poets whose own work trod a similar path, but most of them remained unpublished until long after the demise of Symbolism. Albert Samain produced several translations of the *House of Life* sonnets. A first version dates from 1873, following a visit to London during which he evidently met Rossetti and visited his studio, and includes twenty-two of the sonnets as well as translations of 'The Blessed Damozel', 'Eden Bower', 'Troy Town' and 'Love's Nocturne'; Samain, more than any other French translator, made the most painstaking efforts to preserve the rhythms and euphony of Rossetti's verse.³⁶ He returned to the task early in 1887, but as he confessed to his friend Raymond Bonheur, he felt the essence of Rossetti's poetry elude his grasp the harder he tried to capture it, and in the end never published

his translations.³⁷ Pierre Louÿs crafted a sensitive free-verse translation of 'Willowwood'

in 1896 which Debussy considered setting to music (a project that never came to fruition), but which did not see the light of day until 1931.³⁸ Finally, Francis Vié-
³⁵ G. Sarrazin, trans., 'La Damoselle élue', *La Revue contemporaine*, vol. 1, no. 3, 25 March 1885, pp. 373-78 (hereafter Sarrazin 1885b)

³⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, La Maison de vie, traduite de l'anglais par Albert Samain*, NAF 12856.

³⁷ A. Samain, *Des Lettres, 1887-1900* (Paris, 1933), pp. 1-6 ; see especially his letter to Bonheur of 30 April 1887, in which he laments, 'Le texte ne se laisse pas violer commodément, d'autant plus qu'à la concentration hyper-elliptique de la forme s'ajoute la concentration quintessentielle de l'idée'.

³⁸ P. Louÿs, 'La Saulaie', *L'Esprit français* (10 April 1931). On the aborted project for 'La Saulaie', see F. Lesure, ed., *Claude Debussy. Lettres 1884-1916* (Paris, 1980), pp. 83 and 98-101, H. Bourgeaud, ed., *Correspondance de Claude Debussy et Pierre Louÿs (1893-1904)* (Paris, 1945), pp. 75-76 and 146-139

Griffin, the Franco-American Symbolist poet who had written admiringly of Rossetti in an 1891 notice in *Entretiens politiques et littéraires*,³⁹ published a translation, in *beau livre* form, of 'The Blessed Damozel' in 1924. One could argue that the bilingual Vié-Griffin had an unfair advantage over his peers; his translation, which took more liberties with Rossetti's words than any other and even introduced a new metre and rhyme scheme, restored to it the musicality that preceding versions had leached out.⁴⁰

One feature common to the better part of French literary responses to Rossetti, despite – or perhaps because of – the appeal of his double works of art to Symbolist aesthetics, was the subsuming of his artistic production into his literary production, or, in the case of one of his most influential critics, Gabriel Sarrazin (who did have firsthand knowledge of Rossetti's paintings)⁴¹, the imposition of a false division between the two halves of his oeuvre.⁴² Surprisingly, even that arch-supporter of the synthesis of the arts, Teodor de Wyzewa, had little time for Rossetti as a painter, considering his artistic production contrived, deficient in technique and inferior to his poetry.⁴³ Of course, this can be partly attributed to the difficulty of seeing Rossetti's paintings and the inadequacies of reproductions, but it may also be symptomatic of the rivalries between writers and artists that characterised much Symbolist debate, with writers claiming the primacy of literature over the visual arts.⁴⁴ Or, as Dario Gamboni trenchantly encapsulates these attitudes, 'fin-de-siècle *littérateurs* generally made no
48 and J. Trevitt, 'Debussy inconnu: an inquiry. 2: The later vocal and instrumental music', *Musical Times* 114, no. 1568 (October 1973), pp. 1001-5.

³⁹ F. Vié-Griffin, 'Deux mots', *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* (1891), pp. 215-17.

⁴⁰ F. Vié-Griffin, *La Damoselle élue* (Paris, 1924).

⁴¹ Sarrazin met William Michael Rossetti during a visit to London in 1878 and apparently saw some of his brother's paintings; he was also friendly with Ford Madox Brown. For further discussion of Sarrazin's links with London, see Brogniez (2003), pp. 90-97.

⁴² 'Distinct, divisé, tour à tour maître des deux pôles opposés d'art, mystique, puis sensuel, traversé d'une ombre de sensualisme dans sa mysticité, et d'une vive lueur de mysticité dans son sensualisme, tel fut Rossetti': G. Sarrazin, 'L'École esthétique en Angleterre', *La Revue indépendante*, vol. 2 (November 1884), p. 166.

⁴³ Wyzewa based his damning judgment of Rossetti on *Ecce Ancilla Domini* and *Beata Beatrix*, claiming that the latter 'est le plus saisissant modèle que l'on puisse offrir aux Jeunes peintres pour leur faire sentir la nécessité d'apprendre leur métier': T. de Wyzewa, *La Peinture étrangère au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1892), p. 158. He continued to disparage Rossetti as a painter in *Peintres de jadis et d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1903), pp. 284-85. (Both essays, according to the exhaustive bibliography in P. Delsemme, *Teodor de Wyzewa et le cosmopolitisme littéraire en France à l'époque du symbolisme*, Brussels 1967, were not published elsewhere previously).

⁴⁴ See Goddard (2004).

secret of their conviction that the world, paintings included, had been made so as to result in a book'.⁴⁵

In this mass of verbal translations, only one poet – Paul Verlaine – stands out as having engaged with Rossetti's pictorial work. Verlaine was commissioned by William Rothenstein to write an ekphrastic poem on Rossetti's 1867 portrait of his patron Frederick Leyland's wife, *Monna Rosa* [Figure 52, S.198] for the first issue of the short-lived, and actively internationalist British Symbolist journal *The Pageant* in 1896; it was one of the last poems he ever wrote and, as his response to Rothenstein makes clear, financial considerations loomed uppermost in the ailing poet's mind.⁴⁶ While not one of his best poems, 'Monna Rosa' is worthy of closer attention than it has previously been accorded. Rossetti himself, apart from a pastiche quotation from Angelo Poliziano inscribed on the frame, had not, as was his usual practice, written a poem for the painting;⁴⁷ Verlaine's effort may thus be seen as a collaborative postscript or a posthumous pendant. Notably, his poem makes no attempt to impose any narrative or, indeed, any concrete meaning on this explicitly subject-less picture. Rather, the hypnotically repetitive cadences and fluid assonances combine to evoke aurally the dreamlike, sensual atmosphere of the painting. Just as Mrs Leyland, draped in the same white and gold damask robes in which Rossetti dressed his 'stunner' *Monna Vanna* (S.191), merges with her exotic Aesthetic surroundings as merely another swathe of sumptuous colour, so Verlaine takes obvious pleasure in the simple naming and suggestion of colour –

Elle est seule au boudoir
En bandeaux d'or liquide,
En robe d'or fluide
Sur fond blanc dans le soir
Teinté d'or vert et noir.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ 'Les littérateurs fin-de-siècle ne faisaient généralement pas mystère de leur conviction que le monde, tableaux compris, était fait pour aboutir à un livre': D. Gamboni, "'Vers le songe et l'abstrait": Gustave Moreau et le littéraire', *48/14: La Revue du musée d'Orsay*, no. 9 (Autumn 1999), p. 56.

⁴⁶ Verlaine returned his poem to Rothenstein with the following note, dated 15 September 1895: 'Voici vers [sic]: je les crois appropriés *ad-hoc*, "and the right lines of the right thing". Si vous pouviez me les faire payer tout de suite, quelle reconnaissance!' P. Verlaine, *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. Y.-G. Le

Dantec and J. Borel (Paris, 1962), p. 1356. The poem was published in *The Pageant* in the original French.

⁴⁷ While Rossetti informed Leyland that the quotation ('Con manto d'oro, collaria ed anelli, / La piace aver con quelli / Non altro che una rosa ai sua capelli') was from Poliziano, according to William Michael it was actually his own work 'in the style of'; he may have been flaunting his erudition at Leyland's expense. Fredeman (2003), vol. 3, letter to Frederick Leyland, 18 June 1867, pp. 546-47.

⁴⁸ P. Verlaine, 'Monna Rosa', *The Pageant* (1896), p. 14.

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– a task given particular urgency by the fact that his readers only had access to the black-and-white reproduction which his poem, both literally and figuratively, framed.⁴⁹

The sensitivity of Verlaine's poetic response to Rossetti's pictorial work is, however, rare among his contemporaries. For a more satisfactory example of a Benjaminian 'good' translation – one that 'is transparent; does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully'⁵⁰ – we must turn instead to Rossetti's fellow visual artists, and to the work that resulted when a poet, a composer and a painter took on the task of translating his most talismanic double work, *The Blessed Damozel* [Figure 53, S.244].

A Total Work of Art: From *The Blessed Damozel* to *La Damoiselle élue*

In 1885, the 23-year-old Claude Debussy, about to depart for Rome for a two-year stint as a *pensionnaire* of the Académie Française, read ‘La Damoiselle élue’, Gabriel Sarrazin’s translation of ‘The Blessed Damozel’, in the *Revue contemporaine*. Although inspiration did not strike immediately, his reading sowed the seeds of a composition that germinated over his sojourn in Rome, emerging in 1887 as a cantata, based on Sarrazin’s translation, for female soloists and choir.⁵¹ Five years later, shortly before the work received its premier in Paris and the score was published by Edmond Bailly of the Librairie de l’art indépendant (a publisher and shop with links to the occult and Péladan’s Salon de la Rose + Croix), Bailly asked the young Nabi painter and theoretician, Maurice Denis, to provide the frontispiece [Figure 54, C.30] – a willowy white-gowned woman standing on a golden balcony, the stylised arabesques of her blonde tresses floating like flames against a starry sky.⁵² The resulting work, informed by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* theories formulated by Teodor de Wyzewa in *La Revue wagnérienne*, exemplified the synthesis of the arts which had

⁴⁹ Presumably Rothenstein provided Verlaine with a verbal description of the painting’s colour scheme.

⁵⁰ Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’ (1999), p. 79.

⁵¹ François Lesure speculates that Debussy’s younger brother Alfred may have been a catalyst in the composition of *La Damoiselle élue*; Alfred published a translation of Rossetti’s ‘The Staff and the Scrip’ (‘Le Bourdon et le besace’) in *La Revue indépendante* (November 1887) and the brothers probably discussed contemporary poetry together: F. Lesure, *Claude Debussy avant Pelléas ou les années symbolistes* (Paris, 1992), pp. 80-81.

⁵² Throughout my discussion of *La Damoiselle élue*, I shall be referring to the 1893 piano reduction published by Bailly, not the orchestral score (unless otherwise noted).

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become central to Symbolist aesthetics.⁵³ Yet, curiously, with a handful of important exceptions such as Richard Langham Smith’s exploration of Debussy’s creative debt to the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti himself often appears as a footnote in discussions of *La Damoiselle élue*.⁵⁴ Moreover, some of the literature on Denis’s and Debussy’s reinterpretation of Rossetti’s *Blessed Damozel* discusses it as an ‘improvement’ on the original, to Rossetti’s detriment.⁵⁵ This is, perhaps, not surprising given that Denis, both as a member of the Nabis, with their association with the radical aesthetic of Paul Gauguin, and as the author of the groundbreaking ‘Définition du néo-traditionnisme’ whose opening formula, ‘Remember that a painting – before being a charger, a nude woman or some anecdote – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order’ has been subjected to much misinterpretation as a manifesto of formalist abstraction, has always fitted more comfortably into high modernist narratives than has the ‘retrograde’, literary art of Rossetti.⁵⁶ I would like to propose a different, less normative reading that restores Rossetti to his rightful place in this Symbolist constellation and suggests that Denis’s visual reinterpretation of the figure of the Blessed Damozel reveals a broader knowledge of, and deeper engagement with, Rossetti’s oeuvre than has previously been acknowledged.

In temperament and in aesthetic preferences, Denis exhibited marked differences from his fellow Nabis and strong affinities with Rossetti almost from the beginning. As MaryAnne Stevens points out, Denis was unique among his peers in his fascination, verging on obsession, with women as ideal or sacred beings, a characteristic which allied him more closely to the subject matter and aesthetic of

⁵³ For further discussion of the role played by Wyzewa’s articles, see J. Kearns, *Symbolist Landscapes: The Place of Painting in the Poetry and Criticism of Mallarmé and his Circle* (London, 1989), pp. 72-74. On Wyzewa’s low opinion of Rossetti the painter, see n.43 above.

⁵⁴ R. L. Smith, ‘Debussy and the Pre-Raphaelites’, *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 2, Autumn 1981, pp. 95-109. It should be noted, however, that Smith errs in claiming that Debussy’s interest in Rossetti and his decision to set *La Damoiselle élue* was ‘clearly *avant l’heure*’ and that there were few articles or

translations until the 1890s (p. 96).

⁵⁵ The most extreme example is R. Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London, 1979), p. 22, who states that Debussy ‘transcends Rossetti and restores to [him] his intention’; Guy Cogeval praises Denis’s design as ‘fort lointain de l’élégance morbide de Rossetti qui éternise un amour impossible par delà la barrière de la mort’: G. Cogeval, ‘Le ciel ne peut pas attendre. Maurice Denis et la culture symboliste’, in G. Cogeval et al., *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943* (exh. cat., Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1994), p. 24.

⁵⁶ ‘Se rappeler qu’un tableau – avant d’être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote – est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées’: M. Denis [‘Pierre Louis’], ‘Définition du néo-traditionnisme’, *Art et critique* nos. 65 and 66 (23 and 30 August 1890), pp. 540-42 and 556-58, reprinted in M. Denis, *Le Ciel et l’arcadie*, ed. J.-P. Bouillon (Paris, 1993), p. 5.

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Rossetti and Burne-Jones.⁵⁷ His youthful tastes corresponded remarkably closely with Rossetti’s. A reading of Denis’s journal entries on his first visits to the Louvre and Rossetti’s letters home during his first visit to Paris, despite the difference in tone between the former’s rapturous reverence and the latter’s flippancy, shows that both were drawn to Fra Angelico’s *Coronation of the Virgin* and Hippolyte Flandrin’s frescoes at St-Germain-des-Prés, signalling the origins of a commitment to renew painting by keeping one eye fixed (selectively) on the past.⁵⁸ Furthermore – and crucially for his acquaintance with Rossetti’s work – Denis sought and maintained much closer ties with literary Symbolists than did the other Nabis, attending Mallarmé’s famed *mardis* from 1890. Not only did his affiliation with Mallarmé’s circle expose him to intense discussions on the notion that painting should approach, in Pater’s words, ‘the condition of music’ – Whistler and Arthur Symons were regular attendees – but also to reproductions of Rossetti’s painting, which Mallarmé apparently made available at his gatherings.⁵⁹

Although unfortunately we are forced to rely in large part on anecdotal information concerning which reproductions Denis may have seen, and many of the reproductions that survive today were published too late to have informed his work in the early 1890s, we can attempt a speculative reconstruction of the convergence of his path with Rossetti. He may have seen photographs of Rossetti’s paintings as early as 1889; the first version of *Mystère catholique* [Figure 55] bears an uncanny resemblance to *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* in terms of subject matter (moving the Annunciation into an overtly contemporary domestic setting), the deliberately

⁵⁷ Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 211-12.

⁵⁸ See M. Denis, *Journal*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1957), entries for 12 August 1885, p. 40, 20 August 1885, pp. 41-42, 5 January 1886, p. 63 (on Fra Angelico) and 18 August 1886, p. 66 (on Flandrin), and Fredeman (2002), vol. 1, letter to William Michael Rossetti, 4 October 1849, pp. 108-9 (‘Now for the best. Hunt & I solemnly decided that the most perfect works, taken *in toto*, that we have seen in our lives, are two pictures by Hippolyte Flandrin [...] in the church of S. Germain des Prés. Wonderful! wonderful!! wonderful!!!’). Rossetti’s enthusiasm for Flandrin has been dismissed by most scholars as an embarrassing error of youth, but there may be some significance in it previously overlooked: Driskel (1992), pp. 72-73, identifies Flandrin and other pupils of Ingres (including Eugène Amaury-Duval, whose frescoes in the church at St-Germain-en-Laye were among the first works of art to which Denis was exposed as a child) as representing a French form of Pre-Raphaelitism, in the sense that they were inspired by the work of Fra Angelico and subscribed to the belief that Raphael had ‘declined after his first efforts’ (in moving to pagan subjects, among other things), a central tenet of the aesthetics of ultramontanism. For further discussion of Denis’s dialectical relationship with the painting of Flandrin, see Driskel (1992), pp. 237-39; see also Marlais (1992), pp. 186-207, on the paradox of Denis’s conservative modernity.

⁵⁹ G. Vaughan, ‘Maurice Denis and the sense of music’, *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 7, no. 1 (1984), pp. 38-40 and 42.

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awkward, flattened rendering of the figures and, most striking, the predominantly white palette, enlivened only by a few intense touches of red, blue and gold.⁶⁰ More central to the development of the imagery of *La Damoiselle élue*, however, were two engravings either published or exhibited in Paris in the early 1890s which exemplified Rossetti's perception of music's power to suggest the divine, a notion closely bound up with his interest in medievalism and his conception of the Gothic – strikingly different from the Ruskinian Gothic – as centring on the identification of flesh and spirit and on the importance of love.⁶¹ In 1891, an engraving by Eugène Gaujean after Rossetti's *Christmas Carol* [Figure 56] was exhibited at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Praised by Edouard Rod, who nevertheless expressed disappointment at the fact that Gaujean had not thus far made any engravings after Rossetti's most renowned works, '[those] admirable canvases that M. Leighland [sic] guards jealously',⁶² this image of a richly-dressed young woman lost in rapture as she sings a carol celebrating Christ's birth⁶³ must have struck a chord with Denis, for whom music, the divine, and love had always been intimately related, whether in the psalms sung in church or, more recently, in the form of his fiancée Marthe Meurier, a talented musician. Outside of the Salon, Denis may have had access to another reproduction of one of Rossetti's musical subjects, which has thus far escaped scholarly attention: an engraving after *King René's Honeymoon* recently discovered in an undated magazine clipping in the archives of the Musée

⁶⁰ Denis is known to have painted at least six versions of the subject; this one, the second, bears the closest resemblance to *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*. The third and fourth versions, painted in 1890 (one of which was exhibited at the 1891 Salon des Indépendants), while retaining the same composition and white colour scheme, are painted in a pointillist style. For further discussion of the multiple versions of *Mystère catholique*, see Cogeval et al. (1994), pp. 125-29. K. P. Aichele, 'Maurice Denis and George Desvallières: From Symbolism to Sacred Art', Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College (1976), p. 25, also notes the similarities between *Mystère catholique* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, but expresses doubts over whether the inspiration was direct. However, an etching by Eugène Gaujean after *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, in the National Gallery from 1886, was published by Thomas Agnew in 1880 and could have been available in France: R. K. Engen, *Pre-Raphaelite Prints: The Graphic Art of Millais, Holman Hunt, Rossetti and their Followers* (London, 1995), p. 66. Moreover, Frederick Hollyer produced a coloured mezzotint of the painting in the 1880s (reproduced in McGann (2000), plate II).

⁶¹ On Rossetti's conception of the Gothic, particularly in relation to *The Blessed Damozel* see D. M. R. Bentley, "'The Blessed Damozel': A Young Man's Fantasy", *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 20, nos. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 1982), pp. 36-37.

⁶² '[Une] de ces admirables toiles que M. Leighland [sic] garde jalousement': E. Rod, 'Les Salons de 1891 au Champ-de-Mars et aux Champs-Élysées (2^e et dernier article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July 1891), p. 33. For further discussion of Gaujean's reproductive prints of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, see Saunier (2002), p. 77, and Engen (1995), pp. 65-67.

⁶³ Rossetti inscribed on the painting's frame the first line of the carol, 'Jesus Christus hodie natus est de Virgine': Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 193.

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d'Orsay [Figure 57].⁶⁴ Although the source has proven impossible to trace, from the credit line 'Reproduit avec l'autorisation de J. H. Trist esquire' printed below the engraving, we may safely assume that it dates from before 1892.⁶⁵ Joanna Meacock suggests that this celebration of harmony in music and in love may be read as Rossetti's secular recasting of his earlier, and already highly sensual, *St Cecilia* in the Moxon edition of Tennyson's *Poems* [Figure 58]: as King René works the bellows of the Queen's portative organ, he becomes the force behind her music, creating a direct parallel with St Cecilia's reliance on the power of God, her spouse. Furthermore, the painting puns on the meaning of René's name ('reborn') to imply that physical love might somehow attain to the nature of the divine and become redemptive.⁶⁶ This shared interest in the intersection of music, love, and the sacred highlights another connection between Rossetti and Denis: a profound and, in Rossetti's case,

complicated relationship with Catholic mysticism. Rossetti, although raised in the Anglican faith, displayed a strong predilection for Catholic ceremony and imagery, his interest whetted by the burgeoning Oxford Movement.⁶⁷ Although his early efforts at religious painting suffered a critical battering informed by the rabid anti-Catholicism of the early 1850s⁶⁸ and he would become disillusioned with religion in later life, a mystical spirituality continued to pervade his work to the end. As F. W. H. Myers, one of Rossetti's most sensitive critics, argued, this mysticism was inextricable from the sensuous appeal of his work and differentiated it from the hedonistic materialism espoused by Gautier and Baudelaire:

The pictures that perplex us with their obvious incompleteness, their new and haunting beauty, are not the mere caprices of a richly-dowered but wandering spirit. Rather they may be called (and none the less so for their shortcomings) the sacred pictures of a new religion; forms and faces which bear the same relation to that mystical worship of Beauty on which we have dwelt so long, as the forms and faces of a Francia or a Leonardo bear to the medieval mysteries of the worship of Mary or of Christ.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Documentation du Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti box 1.

⁶⁵ J. Hamilton Trist's sale was held at Christie's on 9 April 1892: Surtees (1971), p. 101. Trist had commissioned the painting, a replica of Rossetti's panel from the King René's Honeymoon Cabinet (1862, London, Victoria and Albert Museum), in 1864.

⁶⁶ J. Meacock, 'Saintly Ecstasies: The Appropriation and Secularisation of Saintly Imagery in the Paintings and Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow (2001), p. 175. On the availability of the Moxon Tennyson in France and its mention by Gustave Kahn in the *Revue blanche*, see Chapter 2.

⁶⁷ On Rossetti's religious background and education, see Meacock (2001), pp. 19-38.

⁶⁸ See Bullen (1998), pp. 20-36, on the long-lasting implications of anti-Catholicism for the Pre-Raphaelites' critical fortunes in Britain.

⁶⁹ F. W. H. Myers, 'Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty', *Cornhill Magazine*, vol. 47 (February 1883), p. 219.

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But, as much as Myers stressed the moral dimension of Rossetti's mysticism, he could not efface completely the sensuous delight it took in beauty. We might fairly apply to him the oxymoronic label of 'materialist mystic', one whose insistence on, and devotion to, the sacredness of the physical put him at odds with both conventional Victorian Christianity and the body-denying austerity of the monastic ideal espoused by Walter Pater in *Diaphaneité*.⁷⁰ This would explain Rossetti's attraction to the writings of the Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, of whose work he is known to have owned several volumes, and the centrality of the Swedenborgian concept of the 'conjugal angel' – the divine being formed by the physical union of two ideal human partners – to the conception and symbolic programme of *The Blessed Damozel*.⁷¹

Even a cursory reading of Denis's early musings on religion reveals striking affinities with Rossetti's 'religion of beauty'. Denis, although a devout Catholic from an early age, was no ascetic. He unashamedly acknowledged the importance to his faith of the sensory delights of church ceremony – psalms, lights, incense⁷² – and at the age of fifteen, in the first flush of his passion for Fra Angelico, dreamed of founding a chapel-cum-art gallery in which he and his fellow artist-monks would hold masses and art exhibitions simultaneously.⁷³ His entry into the Académie Julian and subsequent initiation into the less exalted side of studio life precipitated a brief crisis of faith, or more accurately the loss of an ideal:

I used to say "the Nude is chaste, the Nude is beautiful", without knowing what it meant. Today I know it and I love it, but alas! why must it in fact be

unchaste, and aesthetic pleasures necessitate immodesty?⁷⁴

However, meeting Marthe caused him to discard his callow notions of the opposition between the body and soul and to decide that indeed ‘we must not give up on the reconciliation of what we call the flesh and what we call the spirit, that this

⁷⁰ W. Pater, *Diaphaneité* (1864), reprinted in *Miscellaneous Studies* (London, 1895), pp. 247-54.

⁷¹ On Rossetti’s readings of Swedenborg, see Meacock (2001), pp. 202-5 and Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 192-93.

⁷² Denis (1957), p. 90, entry for 25 December 1891 (‘Noël. Messe de minuit’).

⁷³ ‘Et alors – oh, que ce serait beau – je lui élèverais en plein Paris profane une somptueuse chapelle, que mes confrères et moi n’ingénieraient à orner de tableaux, de fresques, de tables, de prédelles, de lunettes... Oh! que ce serait beau. Et chaque année, notre société artistico-religieuse y viendrait entendre la messe avec sa toile sur le bras. La messe dite on accrocherait les envois – exclusivement religieux – dans un local *ad hoc*. L’exposition se terminerait par une seconde messe dans notre église!...’ *Ibid.*, p. 40 (12 August 1885).

⁷⁴ ‘Je disais “le Nu est chaste, le Nu est beau”, et je ne le connaissais pas. Aujourd’hui je le connais et je l’aime; mais, hélas! pourquoi faut-il qu’il ne soit point chaste en effet, et que les joies esthétiques nécessitent des impudeurs?’ *Ibid.*, p. 68 (18 March 1888).

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reconciliation is the object of our greatest endeavours’.⁷⁵ At the same time, what Sarrazin considered the hallmark of Pre-Raphaelitism – the fragile ‘ange-femme’⁷⁶ – and the explicitly Marian nature of the Damozel’s physical description⁷⁷ doubtless appealed to his insistent idealisation of Woman. This resolution of opposites spilled over into his art and theoretical writings and, in tandem with his well-documented interest in all things medieval, made him an apt and sympathetic pictorial translator of *The Blessed Damozel*.

The Blessed Damozel, apart from being possibly Rossetti’s most renowned double work, occupies the unique position of forming the bookends of his career. Thus, it also carries the burden of encapsulating the trajectory from light to darkness which, in the heavily biographical view of most of Rossetti’s posthumous critics, defined his life and work. Furthermore, it is the only one of Rossetti’s double works in which word preceded image: more than twenty years separate the initial composition of the poem (1847) and the commission from William Graham for the painting (1871, but apparently not begun until 1873).⁷⁸ In that space of time, Rossetti’s style had evolved from the archaisms (both verbal and visual), angular forms and fresh, jewel-like palette of his truly Pre-Raphaelite phase to the overripe colour and mannered arabesques of his late, and what was widely considered his decadent, style. Indeed, Sidney Colvin, one of his more insightful critics, considered it the embodiment of Rossetti’s moral-cum-artistic decline and the squandering of his early promise, lamenting, ‘What a decay of the colour-sense is shown in the unwholesome pink stars and haloes, the dusky hotness and livid shadows of the “Blessed Damozel”! what a change, in the whole cast and temper of the imagination, from the mood in which the poem itself had been written thirty years before!’⁷⁹ For

Duret, the Damozel had nothing of the delicacy and spirituality which characterised her poetic antecedent; he classed her among the other late female figures like *Astarte*

⁷⁵ ‘Qu’il ne faut renoncer à rapprocher ce qu’on nomme la chair de ce qu’on nomme l’esprit, que cette conciliation est l’objet de notre effort essentiel’: *Ibid.*, p. 90 (25 December 1891).

⁷⁶ Sarrazin (1885a), p. 248.

⁷⁷ Bentley (1982), p. 38.

⁷⁸ Graham was not the first to request a painting after the poem *The Blessed Damozel*; Rossetti’s patron Thomas Plint apparently expressed an interest in such a painting in 1856, but Rossetti turned down the suggestion, confiding to Ford Madox Brown that ‘I think I shall stick to St. Cecilia’, even though Plint would have been willing to pay half again as much for *The Blessed Damozel*: Fredeman (2002), vol. 2, letter to Ford Madox Brown, 18 December 1856, p. 151.

⁷⁹ S. Colvin, ‘Rossetti as a Painter’, *Magazine of Art*, vol. 6 (1883), p. 183. See also J. Comyns Carr,

Syriaca and *Pandora* (a half-length engraving of which illustrated his review) as ‘a sort of sibyl, siren, or melusine’.⁸⁰

Indeed, the poem in its ‘final’, most explicitly sensual incarnation still sits uneasily with the even more overt, claustrophobic eroticism of the painting, with the compressed perspective of its background of embracing lovers threatening to burst into the foreground, overwhelming the Damozel.⁸¹ Walter Pater, discussing this last version of the poem, considered this marriage of opposites central not only to *The Blessed Damozel*, but to Rossetti’s art as a whole: ‘One of the peculiarities of [the poem] *The Blessed Damozel* was a definiteness of sensible imagery, which seemed almost grotesque to some, and was strange, above all, in a theme so profoundly visionary.’⁸² The unnerving quality of Rossetti’s attempt at fusing heaven and earth, that is, extreme material specificity and visionary ideas, finds concrete expression in his rendering of the Damozel’s eyes and lips in the painting. Associating eyes with ‘soul’s beauty’ and the mouth with ‘body’s beauty’, as in so many of his late works, Rossetti enlarged and exaggerated the Damozel’s hooded blue-green eyes and pouting Cupid’s-bow lips to an almost grotesque degree, as if the celestial and the terrestrial are locked in an eternal struggle for dominance. Sarrazin seems to have been impelled by the unsettling carnality of this ‘angelic siren’ (the attention given to colour in his description of the painting indicates firsthand knowledge)⁸³ to change his translation of the title from *La Damoiselle bénie* in his first article on Rossetti to *La Damoiselle élue* in his translation of the poem. While both words do mean ‘blessed’, the choice subtly shifts the meaning from the holier, more conventionally religious overtones of ‘bénie’ (which can also be translated as ‘consecrated’) to the less literal ‘élue’ (‘elect’ or ‘chosen’, which accentuates the Damozel’s humanity and physicality).

This, then, was the challenge facing first Debussy, then Denis – how to capture the tension between the erotic and the spiritual and find a way to resolve it, or at least allow them to exist harmoniously, without letting the two destroy each other.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ ‘Sorte de sibylle, de sirène, de mélusine’: Duret (1883), p. 54.

⁸¹ On the evolution of the poem from its first draft in 1847 through its published versions in *The Germ* (1850) and the 1870 and 1881 *Poems*, see Bentley (1982).

⁸² W. Pater, *Appreciations* (London, 1889), p. 230.

⁸³ ‘l’angélique sirène’: Sarrazin (1884), p. 166.

⁸⁴ It is difficult to determine how much, if any, creative control Debussy exercised over Denis. His only letter to Denis on the subject was written after the score was printed, and merely notes, ‘Je viens de voir « la Damoiselle Elue ». Vous dire que c’est une très belle chose est encore mal dire ce que j’en pense. Soyez-en bien remercier’ (Musée départemental Maurice Denis-Le Prieuré, Ms. 12390). This would seem to imply that Debussy had only just seen the final design for the first time.

Debussy’s solution was to make several cuts to Sarrazin’s translation, excising all of the parenthetical interjections from the Damozel’s lover. This may have been in part for practical reasons – he may have felt that including a male soloist would clutter the cantata. However, the removal of the lover’s voice, which D. M. R. Bentley likens to a typographical equivalent of the painting’s predella,⁸⁵ dramatically alters our experience of the geography of the poem and the painting. Rather than a bipartite altarpiece in which a disquietingly lush *horror vacui* of a Heaven dominates over a compressed yet more austere Earth, we are left with a Marian icon; in place of a reinvented medieval-Catholic conception of the universe in which Heaven and Earth are simultaneously knowable and spirit and flesh are one,⁸⁶ we find a Heaven populated by angelic female voices from which the existence of the earth and, crucially, all signs of men have been removed except from within the mind of the

Damozel, bounded by empty space.

Debussy's effacement of the terrestrial realm does not, however, cool or stifle the eroticism of the celestial sphere described in *La Damoiselle élue*; indeed, by isolating the Damozel in her heaven he turns the sensuality in upon itself, transforming the longing of two souls for each other across an unbridgeable distance into the Damozel's voluptuous reverie. His musical language is visually evocative, in keeping with the synaesthetic concerns of Symbolism and bespeaking a unified response to the image and the text. As Smith points out, he uses three- and seven-note motives in the bars in which the choir describes the 'seven stars in her hair' and 'the three lilies in her hand'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the 'strangely ethereal registration of the chords' which open the cantata and recur throughout, with the high octave doublings often unsupported by a bass line, appears to mimic in sound the 'stained glass' effect of (early) Pre-Raphaelite painting, which often employed luminous unmixed colours on a wet white background to make them appear as if lit from behind,⁸⁸ while the swaying yet oddly static opening section leads the listener into a realm where time ceases to exist. Julie McQuinn observes that the entrance of the Damozel herself is built up as if she were the Virgin herself.⁸⁹ Indeed, the strangely static major triads in which the choir frames her utterances could be considered the aural equivalent of the

⁸⁵ Bentley (1982), p. 39.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸⁷ Smith (1981), p. 102.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ J. McQuinn, 'Exploring the erotic in Debussy's music', in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. S. Trezise (Cambridge, 2003), p. 125.

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hieratism of a Byzantine icon. Yet in keeping with Debussy's emphasis on the ambiguity between the sacred and the profane, this stasis also creates a feeling of 'lush suspension'⁹⁰ in which is located the frustrated desire of the Damozel, a desire whose resolution is beyond the bounds of the text and which Debussy refuses to resolve musically, preferring to let it float. Significantly, most of her entrances are enclosed by silence, and her first is unaccompanied. Debussy often imbued silences with an intense erotic charge, and the stillness in which the Damozel dreams of being reunited with her lover is no exception.⁹¹

This combination of poetic, musical and visual concerns infuses Denis's frontispiece. One of its most striking aspects is the way the design floats on the white surface of the sheet as if suspended in space – an effect most noticeable in the set of prints made outside the edition in 1892, as in Figure 54; Denis uses the white space to evoke visually the silences of the cantata and the ellipses in the poem. As Gerard Vaughan observes, he almost certainly had access to a reproduction of Rossetti's painting, for the tilt of the Damozel's head, the disposition of her hands and the waves of hair billowing around her head recall the original almost exactly.⁹² Yet Denis, not having seen the much larger original, had no firsthand knowledge of the intimidating corporeality of the Damozel evoked by Duret. Moreover, the loss of colour and scale in the reproduction dampened the sultry atmosphere conjured by Rossetti's palette and hid the restlessness of his brushwork; just as in Sarrazin's translation of the poem, the spiritual and the physical were uncoupled by the limitations of black-and-white photogravure. However, Denis's decision to change the colour of the Damozel's hair from the auburn of the painting to blonde harks back to the poem ('the hair that lay along her back / was yellow like ripe corn'), indicating a close reading of the text and a desire to negotiate the gaps opened up by Rossetti between poem and painting. The attempt at a return to the more mystical, less physical text (which emerges as even

more mystical in Sarrazin's translation) accords with Denis's religious concerns and the Byzantine aesthetic espoused in the 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme'. If Debussy's setting of the Damozel's entrance musically evokes the otherworldly hieratism of a painted icon, then Denis's lithograph borrows openly from the icon

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

⁹¹ Other examples include *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) and, most famously, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902), in which the protagonists declare their love in total silence.

⁹² Vaughan (1984), p. 43.

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tradition. Exhibiting the pure profile of Marthe, his own "'élue" par excellence',⁹³ the Damozel is preternaturally tall, dominating the image even more thoroughly than does Rossetti's, but her attenuated body, enveloped by her long-sleeved gown, is drained of almost all substance and transformed into a pale field delineated only by the dark heavens and their golden barrier. The only body parts to be given any real presence – again, following the conventions of icon painting – are her hands (not holding 'three lilies' but, oddly, a book), her voluminous hair and her face, with eyes not lowered to shade a smouldering gaze but closed completely on some inner dream and lips not parted, as in the painting, as if about to speak, but closed, indeed scarcely defined.⁹⁴ Save for her hair and the tilt of her head, one could be forgiven for thinking that Denis had, after a brief glance, turned his back entirely on Rossetti.

Although the influence of medieval devotional painting and Japanese prints on Denis's rendering of *La Damoiselle élue* has become an article of faith,⁹⁵ and there is certainly much evidence to support this thesis, I would argue that in his 'translation' of *La Damoiselle élue* Denis also sought inspiration in reproductions of Rossetti's work in a more overtly mystical vein. Laurence Brogniez notes that Denis's syntheist vision displays more affinities with Rossetti's gold-backed (and therefore more explicitly iconic) initial version of the subject, *Sancta Liliis*,⁹⁶ which also focuses on the Damozel to the exclusion of her lover. However, it seems probable that Denis was also aware of Rossetti's most extreme essay in anti-illusionism, the two versions of *Dantis Amor* [Figures 59 and 60, S.117 and S.117A]. Seldom, if ever, cited in literature on the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites in France, the pen-and-ink preliminary version is included in a list of photographs after Rossetti's works available to order from William Michael from 1882.⁹⁷ Given William Michael's

⁹³ J.-P. Bouillon, *Maurice Denis* (Geneva, 1993), p. 43. The implications for Denis's conflation of his artistic and emotional lives will be explored further in the following section.

⁹⁴ It is worth noting, however, that this last detail also varies in Rossetti's two *Blessed Damozels*; in the second version now in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight (S.244 R1) the Damozel's lips are closed.

⁹⁵ See especially U. Perucchi-Petri, 'Les Nabis et le japonisme', in C. Frèches-Thory and U. Perucchi-Petri, eds., *Les Nabis, 1888-1900* (exh. cat., Zurich, Kunsthaus and Paris, Grand Palais, 1993), pp. 33-59, and Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 24.

⁹⁶ Brogniez (2003), p. 233. She adds, 'La peinture de Denis apparaît comme une préraphaélisme libéré de toute contrainte formelle, ayant renoncé à la précision mimétique pour mieux laisser s'exprimer le symbole.' Frederick Hollyer photographed *Sancta Liliis* in 1874, so, assuming that the reproduction would have been available in France in the early 1890s, her suggestion is certainly plausible.

⁹⁷ For the price list of reproductions sold by William Michael Rossetti, see British Library, Add. 49525 (Dykes Campbell Papers), vol. 5, no. 78. The list is dated in pencil '1882-1890', presumably by William Michael himself; most of the reproductions he sold were of drawings rather than paintings, *Dantis Amor* (no. 36) listed as selling for seven shillings.

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acquaintance with Samain and Sarrazin, it seems plausible that the photograph may have made its way across the Channel. Even at first glance, the parallels between *Dantis Amor*, which McGann contends is Rossetti's most wholly visionary work in its

utter disregard for the idea of representation,⁹⁸ and *La Damoiselle élue*, are arresting: the deliberate refusal of post-Renaissance perspective and the collapsing of the picture plane, the archaising background (if one can fairly speak of background in images which fly in the face of Albertian perspective) of conventionalised gold stars scattered on a cobalt field, recalling Trecento Sieneese painting, and the weightless, static angularity of the figures. Delving more deeply into Rossetti's mystical symbolism reveals further parallels and points of inspiration for Denis. The head of Beatrice, encircled by a crescent moon, takes the traditional place of the Virgin, glowing in the reflected light of Christ, the Son/the Sun (evoked by the visual pun of Christ's head haloed by the sun), alluding to her 'heavenly marriage',⁹⁹ while the separation of the two, presided over by the allegorical figure of Love, as drawn from the *Vita Nuova*, presents the two phases of Dante's love for Beatrice, earthly in the *Vita Nuova* and heavenly in the *Divine Comedy*, in cosmic unity.¹⁰⁰ This union of opposites, or at least the longing for it, is, as we have seen, central to *The Blessed Damozel* and, in different ways, to the ideals of both Rossetti and Denis. Rossetti conceptualises love as the force that generates and drives the universe, underscored by the centrality and scale of the figure of Love (who here simultaneously draws together and holds apart the symbolic lovers) and by his inscription, in the drawing, of the final line of the *Divine Comedy* along the diagonal divide between the spheres, 'the Love that moves the sun and other stars'. This seems to have emerged in Denis's pictorial translation of *The Blessed Damozel*.

Yet if the frontispiece for *La Damoiselle élue* seems to draw more upon Rossetti at his most spiritual and immaterial, Denis preserves and reworks one of the original Damozel's most sensual attributes – her luxuriant hair. His Damozel's hair seems to have more weight and substance than her body as it swirls around her as if caught in a celestial wind. Despite its stylised appearance, it exudes a warm, restless physicality somewhat at odds with the ascetic flatness and angular lines of the rest of the design (and, indeed, with the text, which describes the Damozel's hair as much

⁹⁸ McGann (2000), p. 115.

⁹⁹ Meacock (2001), p. 166.

¹⁰⁰ Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 160.

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more demurely '[lying] along her back'); it enfolds her in an ethereal envelope much as Debussy's excision of the lover's voice from the text turns the eroticism of the Damozel's monologue inward. If its golden colour distances it from the seductive black hair celebrated by Baudelaire's 'La Chevelure' and its length from Mélisande's notoriously fetishised hair, 'plus longs que moi',¹⁰¹ it recalls Pater's contention that the Damozel's hair was one of the details most disruptive to the visionary cast of the poem. In the context of Debussy's setting of the poem, however, the Damozel's hair serves not only to suggest the blending of the mystical and the sensual, but to tie together the pictorial, the poetic and the musical. Her hair is essentially a series of decorative arabesques, a motif central to the aesthetic of Denis and his fellow Nabis, whose importance was not simply decorative but synaesthetic. Indeed, in the 'Définition', Denis identified the arabesque as the earliest and purest form of artistic expression, not least because it made no attempt at mimesis;¹⁰² he further qualified this as a recurring theme in all art forms, with the ability to express the emotional and spiritual in sensual form: 'Even a simple pursuit of lines [...] has an emotional value. Even the Parthenon frieze, even, and especially, a great Beethoven sonata!' ¹⁰³ The arabesques of the Damozel's hair give visual form to the undulations of Debussy's melodies, just as the cantata paints a picture in sound of the Damozel dreaming about her lover. This fusion of image, music and poem, of the sacred and the sensual, while

not slavishly faithful to the letter (the mere ‘information’) of Rossetti’s original, was faithful to its spirit, reversing the splitting of his oeuvre into discreet halves by his previous translators.

The Blessed Damozel continued to haunt Denis for at least another year, but her next incarnation, while no less poetic, was in a wholly secular vein. Fittingly, she resurfaced in another total work of art which would eventually involve Debussy: the programme design for the 1893 premier of Maeterlinck’s play *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Lugné-Poe’s Théâtre de l’Oeuvre [Figure 61, C.68]. Smith contends that *Mélisande* is

¹⁰¹ M. Maeterlinck, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892), in *Théâtre complet* (Paris and Geneva, 1979), vol. 2, p. 25.

¹⁰² ‘A l’origine, l’arabesque pure, aussi peu trompe-l’oeil que possible’: Denis (1993), p. 13.
¹⁰³ ‘Même une simple recherche de lignes, [...] a une valeur sentimentale. Même la frise du Parthénon, même, et surtout, une grande sonate de Beethoven !’: Ibid., p. 17. See also M. Denis (writing as ‘Pierre Louis’), ‘A Blanc et noir’, *Art et critique* 2, no. 76 (8 November 1890), p. 717, in which the synthesis of music and painting in the arabesque is made even more explicit: ‘deux thèmes de symphonies colossales, à peine éclos de l’imagination du Voyant et déjà somptueux au minimum d’arabesques qui les exprime; déjà symboliques, sur la toile à peine effleurée, en rythmiques ondulations’.

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‘in many ways a younger sister to the Blessed Damozel’;¹⁰⁴ while he refers specifically to Debussy’s opera, which was first performed nine years later, his characterisation applies with equal aptness to the character in the play, for Maeterlinck was an avowed admirer of Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry and openly paraded its influence on his work. This common parentage is given striking form – not previously noted – in Denis’s lithograph for the programme, which displays much stronger compositional ties with *The Blessed Damozel* than did *La Damoiselle élue*. In the foreground, the figure of *Mélisande*, her face framed by her long blonde hair, lowers her eyes in a melancholy reverie. Behind her the climax of the drama plays out: she and *Pelléas* enfold each other in a last, despairing embrace – the pair bearing a remarkable resemblance to the lovers at left in the middle ground of *The Blessed Damozel* – while a ghostly, distorted *Golaud* looms above *Pelléas* to deal the fatal blow. The shift from the ethereal and the sacred to the claustrophobic sensuality played out in Rossetti’s poem and painting repeats itself in the frontispieces for *La Damoiselle élue* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Denis’s musical reimagining of *The Blessed Damozel* had come full circle.

Beata Beatrix, Sancta Martha: Icons of the Beloved

Denis continued his dialectical relationship with Rossetti, informed by the tension between the sacred and the secular inherent in *The Blessed Damozel*, throughout the 1890s. The most salient and intriguing element of this dialogue was his constant reworking of a recurrent trope in Rossetti’s oeuvre, that of the icon of the beloved or muse. Aptly nicknamed ‘le Nabi aux belles icônes’, Denis’s early work is rife with small-format female ‘portraits’ (I use the inverted commas advisedly, for many of them are not portraits in the conventional sense of a faithful likeness) which explicitly borrow from the language and practices of domestic devotional painting. This practice had informed Rossetti’s own ‘portraits’ to such a degree that it became a commonplace for critics to describe him as the high priest of a religion of beauty.¹⁰⁵ Equally commonplace in Denis scholarship is the assumption that his ‘icons’ were primarily expressions of a personal faith that revolved around and exalted the rhythms

¹⁰⁴ Smith (1981), p. 104.

¹⁰⁵ P. T. Forsyth, for example, accorded him a prominent place in *Religion in Recent Art: Expository Lectures on Rossetti, Burne Jones, Watts, Holman Hunt and Wagner* (London, 1901 (1889)); see also Myers (1883). On the broader social significance of the establishment of a ‘religion of beauty’ in late Victorian Britain, see Anderson and Wright (1994), pp. 9-16.

of domestic life, nowhere more so than in his explicitly iconic casting of Marthe as her namesake saint, *Sancta Martha* [Figure 62].¹⁰⁶ It may seem a stretch to claim that such quiet, tender pictures, some of which border on the sentimental, display any bonds with Rossetti's obsessive repertoire of 'beautiful women with floral adjuncts'¹⁰⁷ in which the flesh so often appears to exist in an uneasy truce with the spirit. We must, however, bear in mind the uncoupling of the sensual and the spiritual occasioned by the reproductions which constituted Denis's acquaintance with Rossetti. In fact, Rossetti's fusion of the divine and the sensual is transformed in Denis's icons, which, I argue, while more restrained and operating in a more explicitly spiritual register, are also more erotic and troubled than has been previously assumed. If no one has accused Denis of the near-pathological repetition decried by critics of Rossetti's gallery of beauties, his cast of characters is in fact even more circumscribed than Rossetti's, whose sister Christina's declaration that 'One face looks out from all his canvases'¹⁰⁸ is generally considered a description of his oeuvre. While Rossetti, in the main, limited himself to a handful of models (Elizabeth Siddall, Fanny Cornforth, Alexa Wilding and Jane Morris) and his increasingly mannered concentration on certain salient features (hooded eyes, bow-shaped lips, lantern jaws, columnar necks and nervous hands) did indeed blur the distinctions between them, draining them of individuality and transforming them into what Griselda Pollock has termed 'woman-as-sign',¹⁰⁹ Denis, from 1891, rarely looked to any model other than Marthe, the touchstone of both his art and his life. Like Rossetti, and also like countless icon painters for centuries before him, Denis reduced Marthe to a set of stylised but still recognisable features, which, while far from the disquieting ideal formulated by the older artist, reveals the same drive towards abstraction and the displacement of the individual by the symbolic type. There is something of Pygmalion in the projects of both artists; Rossetti's attempts to educate Elizabeth Siddall and reshape her identity are too well known to require reiteration here,¹¹⁰ while Marthe

¹⁰⁶ On *Sancta Martha*, see Thomson (2004), pp. 126-27, who notes the political implications of Denis's creation of a religious-domestic idyll in the milieu of the *ralliément*, and Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 190.

¹⁰⁷ The term is William Michael's: W. M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters, with a Memoir* (London, 1895), vol. 1, p. 203.

¹⁰⁸ C. Rossetti, *Poems*, ed. W. M. Rossetti (London, 1895), p. 114.

¹⁰⁹ G. Pollock, 'Woman as sign: psychoanalytic readings', in *Vision and Difference* (London and New York, 1988), pp. 120-54.

¹¹⁰ For a revisionist re-reading of the narrative of Rossetti's relationship with Elizabeth Siddall, see Pollock (1988), pp. 91-114. My use of the original spelling of her surname, rather than the more common 'Siddal' (a deliberate misspelling by Rossetti) is informed by Pollock's essay.

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privately lamented in 1892, the year before her marriage to Denis, 'I have been distressed by the idea that he wants me to be very holy, more so than I ever can be'.¹¹¹ As Rossetti repeatedly cast Elizabeth in the role of his religio-poetic ideal Beatrice, Denis enacted a similar transformation of Marthe from flesh and blood to painted saint.

One of Denis's most obvious compositional borrowings from Rossetti was the *Triple portrait de Marthe fiancée* [Figure 63], which, as several commentators have noted, bears the imprint of Rossetti's watercolour *Rosa Triplex* [Figure 64, S.238].¹¹² Two versions of *Rosa Triplex* exist, both of which were known in France by the time Denis painted his triple portrait: the finished watercolour, modelled by May Morris, which was photographed by Frederick Hollyer in the 1880s, and an unfinished chalk drawing for which Alexa Wilding sat and after which prints were made and published in France [Figure 65]. The latter work was the subject of a short illustrated article by

Cosmo Monkhouse in the *Magazine of Art* around the time of the retrospectives, in which the author predicted, presciently as it turned out, that the drawing was ‘likely to be the parent of a thousand copies and adaptations’.¹¹³ While by virtue of size and medium it was one of Rossetti’s more minor works, it was also one of his best known in France and, given the recurrence of triple figures in Denis’s early work,¹¹⁴ a significant precedent. Furthermore, because of its near-monochrome palette, the drawing suffered less in translation than did many of Rossetti’s paintings. While the parallels with the Holy Trinity no doubt appealed to Denis’s religious sensibilities, Rossetti’s repetition of the same face in three different aspects relies on the time-honoured

motif of the Three Graces as the personification of the aspects of beauty united in the person of Venus.¹¹⁵ This meditation on beauty also entered into Denis’s conception – with some significant modifications. Judging from the composition of the portrait, Denis was acquainted with both versions of *Rosa Triplex*, drawing the

¹¹¹ ‘Je m’affligeais de la pensée qu’il me désirait très sainte, plus que je ne puis l’être’; quoted in Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 220, no source given.

¹¹² See Frèches-Thory and Perruchi-Petri (1993), pp. 162-63, and Bouillon (1993), p. 33-34.

¹¹³ C. Monkhouse, “‘Rosa Triplex.’ Drawn by Dante Gabriel Rossetti”, *Magazine of Art*, vol. 6 (1883), p. 272.

¹¹⁴ Important examples include *Soir Trinitaire* (1891, private collection), *Jeunes filles qu’on dirait des anges* (1892, private collection), and, most famously, *Portrait d’Yvonne Lerolle en trois aspects* (1897, Josefowitz collection). The Trinity was central to mystical theology, something of significance to both Denis and Rossetti.

¹¹⁵ Monkhouse, however, contended that ‘these maidens are not one and the same’, describing them as ‘three different but sympathetic faces’ (p. 272). Bouillon (1993), p. 34, also notes the possible inspiration of Puvis’s *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, which Denis admired when it was displayed in the 1887 exhibition at Durand-Ruel’s gallery.

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framing device of the vine-covered arbour from the rose trellis of the watercolour and the more simplified rendering of the figure from the drawing. Yet the expression of glazed, sensuous ennui imprinted on the faces of the ‘triple rose’ in both versions disappears in the portrait, replaced by the gentle, melancholy introspection of countless Renaissance Madonnas. At the same time, Denis renders the unity of the figures simultaneously less corporeal and more intimate. Where the intricately entwined hands of the three women in Rossetti’s pictures form the heart of the design, the three Marthes are depicted without hands, completely covered by robes which give no hint of the contours or the volume of the bodies underneath, in the manner of a medieval or Byzantine icon; instead, the flattened robes, with their stylised, nonnaturalistic

folds, enfold the three figures, making of them a single white rose of flesh and linen – an effect heightened by the fact that the faces are turned inward to form a circle, rather than gazing in different directions as they do in *Rosa Triplex*. From Rossetti’s subject-less trinity of beauties, Denis elaborated one which both tamed beauty and elevated it to the realm of the divine. Indeed, Jean-Paul Bouillon has suggested that the portrait represents Denis’s personal Trinity: Love, Art and Religion.¹¹⁶

As pertinent as *Rosa Triplex* is for the recurrence of tripling in Denis’s oeuvre (notably the far more unsettling *Soir trinitaire* and *Jeunes filles qu’on dirait des anges*), the crucial Rossettian influence appears to have been *Beata Beatrix*. On a purely practical level, *Beata Beatrix* was one of the most accessible of Rossetti’s pictures, with the original being one of the few in public collections, and the frequency with which it crops up in French writings on Rossetti, both in description

and reproduction, suggests that it was one of the most readily available in reproduction. If Mauclair's claim that 'perhaps five hundred persons [in Paris] . . . had at home the *Beata Beatrix* of Rossetti, the *Saint Cecilia* of Burne Jones [sic], . . . and hung their bedrooms with friezes by Walter Crane'¹¹⁷ needs to be treated with caution, it does suggest the fame Rossetti enjoyed among a literary and artistic elite and the extent to which that painting was considered exemplary of his art. However, the reproduction of the painting, as in this example by Frederick Hollyer [Figure 66],¹¹⁶ Bouillon (1993), p. 34.

¹¹⁷ 'Cinq cents personnes peut-être . . . avaient toutes chez elles la *Beata Beatrix* de Rossetti, la *Sainte Cécile* de Burne Jones, . . . tapissaient leurs chambres de frises de Walter Crane': C. Mauclair, *L'Art en Silence* (Paris, 1901), p. 173.

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is one of the most problematic.¹¹⁸ The painting's pulsating eroticism, its conflation of death and sexual ecstasy, depends in large part upon the hot yet subtly modulated reds and velvety greens which dominate its palette, not least because of the symbolic values Rossetti assigned them (red corresponding to death and green representing life and hope). The monochrome photograph not only evacuates the sensuousness of the colour from the image, it emphasises the misty, powdery quality of the facture – something of course already present in the painting but subdued by the lush hues – and the way in which the dying light limns Beatrice's hands, thus etherealising the image and disconnecting the troubling bond between Eros and Thanatos established by Rossetti. The spiritualised Beatrice known to Denis through the photograph was thus no longer one of the terrifying goddesses evoked by Duret, nor an image imbued with the 'conspicuous preference for the sad and the cruel' which for Mario Praz constituted the defining characteristic of Rossetti's art,¹¹⁹ but a beautiful saint and, by virtue of its reduced scale, a domestic icon.¹²⁰

The simultaneous domestication and spiritualising of *Beata Beatrix* begun by the reproductive process and completed by Denis is readily apparent in one of his earliest portraits of Marthe, *Le Menuet de la princesse Maleine (Marthe au piano)* [Figure 67]. Guy Cogeval has also noted in passing its formal parallels with Rossetti's *The Day Dream* [Figure 68, S.259],¹²¹ and we may usefully draw out the comparisons with both. Not only is Marthe posed in the same three-quarter profile, with a similar introspective expression, as if lost in dreams inspired by the music before her (much as Rossetti's dreamer has fallen into a reverie inspired by the book of poetry she holds) but both paintings also hinge on the interplay between word and image (and, in the case of *Le Menuet*, music). In *The Day Dream* this is made explicit by the poem inscribed on the frame describing, but not quite elucidating, the nature of the woman's dream. In *Le Menuet* the literary reference, to Maeterlinck's recent play *La princesse Maleine* (1890), is reduced to the title of the score (with a frontispiece by

¹¹⁸ Reproductions of *Beata Beatrix* were also produced by all of the major publishers on the Continent: Dietrich in Brussels, Hanfstaengl in Munich, Adolphe Braun in Paris, and the Berlin Photographic Company, among others. See McGann, web site, for the broadest selection.

¹¹⁹ Praz (1970), p. 228.

¹²⁰ This is supported by the performative devotion accorded by some of Rossetti's patrons to his pictures, the best known example being George Rae's wife, whom, as he reported to Rossetti, 'It is my belief that she spends half the day before the picture [*The Beloved*] as certain devout Catholic ladies had used to do before their favourite shrines in the days of old' (quoted in Treuherz et al. (2003), p. 78).

¹²¹ Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 165.

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Denis) for the play's incidental music on the music desk.¹²² Cogeval has remarked that the contemplative mood of the painting is at odds with the play's atmosphere of foreboding and violent denouement,¹²³ but perhaps the disjuncture is not so extreme.

The fifteen-year-old princess Maleine, murdered on the eve of her wedding, her virginity thus preserved by death, is portrayed as too fragile and pure to exist in a corrupt world, and in a pivotal scene Maeterlinck has her appear illuminated and framed in a doorway in her wedding gown like an icon in an alcove.¹²⁴ The parallels with Dante's Beatrice, another child bride cut down in all her purity by an early death, are revealing, particularly when we consider the childlike quality of Marthe's beauty, insisted upon frequently by Denis both in his paintings and his journal.¹²⁵

While *Le Menuet*'s setting is clearly a contemporary bourgeois interior, and the subject of a woman playing or listening to music a common one at the turn of the century (although with particular resonance for the Nabis and other anti-naturalist artists),¹²⁶ Denis's emphasis on the decorative and his adoption of certain of the conventions employed by Rossetti both in *Beata Beatrix* and *The Day Dream* (which also recall the conventions of icon painting) sanctify the domestic setting and elevate Marthe above its ordinariness. The most striking element of the painting's facture is the pseudo-Divisionist rendering of the wallpaper, a technique exploited on a more delicate scale in Marthe's hair and apron – almost as if the granular mistiness that distinguished the reproduction of *Beata Beatrix* were writ large. The relative lack of

¹²² Pierre Cailler includes the frontispiece for Pierre Hermant's score in the catalogue raisonné of Denis's graphic work (P. Cailler, *Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre gravé et lithographié de Maurice Denis* (Geneva, 1968), C.4). However, given that no copy of the score has thus far surfaced, Vaughan (1984), p. 42, conjectures that the score depicted in *Le Menuet de la princesse Maleine* may have been a single handmade original, now lost.

¹²³ Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 165.

¹²⁴ The stage direction is 'The door opens slightly and we perceive, in the opening, Princess Maleine in the long white garments of a fiancée' ('La porte s'entr'ouvre et on aperçoit, dans l'entrebâillement, la princesse Maleine en longs vêtements blancs de fiancée'). M. Maeterlinck, *La princesse Maleine* (1890), in *Théâtre complet* (1979), vol. 1, p. 78. Also worth noting is the fact that Redon produced an etching of *La princesse Maleine* in 1892 (Mellerio 22), illustrated with the title *La Petite Madone* in A. Mellerio, *Odilon Redon, peintre, dessinateur, graveur* (Paris, 1923), p. 91.

¹²⁵ For example, 'Pour la rondeur puérile de ses bras, pour la parfum moite de sa chair, pour son sourire, pour l'étrange bonté de ses yeux': Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 86 (entry for 15 October 1891) and 'Et c'est après l'ecclésiastique caresse de ses mains dans les miennes, ses mains très douces, ses mains bonnes et blanches, ses mains enfantines': *ibid.*, p. 87 (entry for 16 October 1891). Furthermore, Denis and Marthe read *La princesse Maleine* together during their courtship, and both seem to have turned to it in moments of emotional turmoil, Denis noting that shortly before he announced their engagement to his parents, Marthe 'reread *La princesse Maleine* until two in the morning. She is pale, nervous, affectionate. Sorrows for me, and still more doubts. Always doubts. Never mind, that's life' ('Elle relit la *Princesse Maleine* jusqu'à deux heures de la nuit. Elle est pâle, énervée, caressante. – Des douleurs pour moi, et encore des doutes. Toujours des doutes. N'importe. C'est la vie'): *ibid.*, p. 87.

¹²⁶ See Vaughan (1984), pp. 41-42, and Bouillon (1993), p. 27, on *Le Menuet*'s precedents and contemporary counterparts.

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differentiation between Marthe's hair and the background, also in evidence in the way the curl of hair on the nape of her neck appears to be part of the pattern of decorative arabesques on the wallpaper, recalls both the dissolving of the (draped) body in *Beata Beatrix* and the interplay between the anti-illusionistic folds of the green robe and the convolutions of the leaves in *The Day Dream*. As Cogeval remarks, it 'enshrines her in a network of signs',¹²⁷ an enshrinement Denis verbalised in a veritable paean to Marthe written concurrently: 'SHE IS MORE BEAUTIFUL than all images, than all representations, than all subjective efforts! She exists, outside of me, I have not created her.'¹²⁸ This enshrinement in a network of decorative signs extends to the depiction of Marthe's body. Although Denis took evident trouble to represent 'the childish roundness of her arms' and 'her waist round as a tower',¹²⁹ her body lacks volume and any real sense of materiality, her contours and the lines of her dress and

apron reduced to yet another set of arabesques. Only her face and her hands display any modelling and are given any real substance. Not surprisingly, the head and the hands have also long been the focal points of icons, the hands in particular as the site of healing and miracle-working power.¹³⁰ We have already seen how Rossetti centred the design of *Beata Beatrix* on Beatrice's ecstatic face, surrounded by a natural aureole, and open hands, highlighting their significance by outlining them with light, making them, rather than the ill-defined body hidden beneath heavy drapery, the carriers of the image's spiritual meaning and erotic charge. Likewise, the curiously insubstantial body of the dreamer in *The Day Dream* is literally thrown into the shade by the startlingly mannered gesture of her hands. Marthe's hands, the part of her depicted as most sensual and alive, are poised over the keyboard, but her sideways pose precludes her actually playing the minuet (whose score is, in any case, closed). Instead, the delicately stylised disposition of her hands evokes the gestures commonly used in icons of the Virgin, their downward turn suggestive of benevolence and blessing. And as the transport of Beatrice's soul is attended by the figures of Love and Dante, so is Marthe's entry into the divine realm of music (a metaphor for the rapprochement of love and divinity which, as we have already seen, Rossetti

¹²⁷ Cogeval et al. (1994), p. 165.

¹²⁸ 'ELLE EST PLUS BELLE que toutes les images, que toutes les représentations, que tous les efforts subjectifs! Elle est, en dehors de moi, ce n'est pas moi qui la crée': Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 86 ('Dimanche de Notre-Dame du Rosaire').

¹²⁹ 'Sa taille ronde comme une tour – comme les Psyché de Raphaël': *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 90 ('Soirée du mardi 29 [December 1891]).

¹³⁰ See Belting (1994), pp. 36-41, for an explanation of the origins of the motif of the healing hand.

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favoured) accompanied by two allegorical guardian figures. The two female figures adorning the cover of the score have been interpreted as representing sacred love (the nude with raised arms) and human love (the clothed woman bending to gather flowers on the bank of the stream), the two inseparable facets, for both Denis and Rossetti, of love.¹³¹

Fittingly, it was in his suite of lithographs, *Amour*, commissioned by Ambroise Vollard in 1892 but not published until 1899, that Denis paid his greatest tribute to Rossetti.¹³² Regarded by his friend and advocate André Péroché as one of the masterpieces of Symbolism and the high-water mark of his graphic oeuvre,¹³³ the suite represents both the zenith of his Symbolist work and a farewell to those very ideals, as the Nabis disbanded to follow their separate paths and Denis devoted himself to the invention of a new classical order. Significantly, this was Denis's sole attempt at creating a double work of art; while he had often served as an illustrator for other writers (including Gide, Verlaine, Mallarmé and, of course, Rossetti), he had never created images inspired by his own writings. The twelve plates of *Amour*, all of which centre on either the figure of Marthe or a more generalised young girl who features in the more mystical scenes, deployed in natural or domestic settings, are captioned with fragments drawn from 'Les Amours de Marthe', his highly poetic and mystical account of his and Marthe's courtship.¹³⁴ Unlike Rossetti's poems, which were often inscribed in full upon the relevant pictures' frames, Denis's audience would not have had access to the original contexts of the captions; without knowledge of their personal meaning for the artist, the viewer would be compelled to discern or even create anew his or her own correspondences between word and image.

Moreover, the fact that the captions were printed on the stone and in coloured inks effectively makes them part of the lithographs, further breaking down the boundary between word and image. Indeed, even armed as we are today with Denis's *Journal*,

the rapport between caption and picture is not always evident. Thus the private,

¹³¹ Bouillon (1993), pp. 27-28. This reading is open to interpretation and the reverse seems equally legitimate. The nude figure recurs several times in Denis's work, most significantly as the frontispiece of *Amour*.

¹³² François Fossier dates the creation of the suite to 1897-1899: F. Fossier, *La Nébuleuse nabe* (Paris, 1993), p. 100. However, at least three known preparatory drawings (private collection) have been tentatively dated to 1892-93, therefore, around the time of the events that inspired them.

¹³³ A. Pératé, 'Maurice Denis', *L'Art et les artistes* no. 41 (November 1923), p. 62. It is worth noting that Pératé contributed several articles as *correspondant d'Angleterre* to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in the 1890s, including a review of the 1897 Guildhall exhibition in which Rossetti's paintings featured.

¹³⁴ Denis (1957), vol. 1, pp. 85-101. Denis first met Marthe on 23 October 1890 (pp. 81-82); however, 'Les Amours de Marthe' only begins on 30 June 1891.

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personal narrative (or, to use Belting's term, *historia*) was transformed in the lithographs into discrete, generalised images whose fragmentary legends resisted reconstitution even as they suggested a new narrative.¹³⁵

Amour is ostensibly a celebration of courtship and marital love – the

consummation of the latter underlined by the presence of a wedding ring on Marthe's finger in the final plate, 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' [Figure 69, C.119] – but,

with two exceptions ('Sur le canapé d'argent pâle' (C.117) and 'Nos âmes en des gestes lents' (C.116), Denis himself is absent from the lithographs, which posit a realm from which men are excluded and populated by angelic women, rather like that of *La Damoiselle élue* and very much in keeping with the hermetic feminine world of Rossetti's 'icons of beauty'. Even in 'Ce fut un religieux mystère' (C.111), which takes as its point of departure Denis's rapture over their first kiss, an androgynous figure takes his place in bestowing the sacred kiss. Most discussions of *Amour* have viewed the album in purely biographical or formal terms, either seeking keys to their meaning in Denis's journal or mapping the evolution of his style against his theoretical writings and concurrent artistic production.¹³⁶ Far from diminishing the interchange between Denis's life and art, I would suggest instead that richer meaning may be mined from *Amour* when we consider the influence of Rossetti and the convergence of the two artists' common concerns with the bonds between the sensual and the sacred.

François Fossier divides ten of the twelve plates of *Amour* into 'solar' and 'lunar' subjects, based mainly on the varying degrees of warmth of the palette and light but also on subject and the disposition of the figure.¹³⁷ Two lithographs, 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' and 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' [Figure 70, C.114], one from each of these categories, exhibit particularly striking debts to

¹³⁵ This is particularly relevant in the case of 'Le chevalier n'est pas mort à la croisade' (C.112), whose title forms part of a parable which Denis recounts to Marthe (p. 87, entry for 23 October 1891), the telling of which is depicted in 'Sur le canapé d'argent pâle' (C.117) but which is represented literally.

¹³⁶ For the latter approach, see Pératé (1923), p. 62. Fossier (1993), pp. 97-104, whose examination of *Amour* is the most in-depth available, while he takes some biographical detail into account and acknowledges a few external influences (notably Japanese prints), does not stray much beyond these limits.

¹³⁷ Fossier (1993), p. 102. According to this schema, 'Allégorie' (C.108), 'Les attitudes sont faciles et chastes' (C.109), 'Le Bouquet matinal, les larmes' (C.110), 'La vie devient précieuse, discrète' (C.118) and 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' (C.119) belong to the 'solar' group and 'Ce fut un religieux mystère' (C.111), 'Le Chevalier n'est pas mort à la croisade' (C.112), 'Les Crépuscules ont une douceur d'ancienne peinture' (C.113), 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' (C.114) and 'Et c'est la caresse de ses mains' (C.115) to the lunar. 'Sur le canapé d'argent pâle' and 'Nos âmes en des gestes lents' are excluded.

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Rossetti, but, if we also apply Fossier's schema to their Rossettian precedents, *Beata Beatrix* (which, with its crepuscular atmosphere and overtones of sorrow, belongs to the lunar) and *Venus Verticordia* [Figure 71, S.173] (whose blazing hues and confrontational frontality place it firmly within the solar), we see Denis subverting both in his reworking of the images. Like *Beata Beatrix*, 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' portrays a beautiful woman, simultaneously carnal and chaste, in transports which blur the distinction between the celestial and the terrestrial. The resemblance of Beatrice's expression – the straining throat, the parted lips and the closed eyes – to both sexual climax and a saint in ecstasy has often been remarked upon,¹³⁸ the eroticism paradoxically intensified by the fact that her body is modestly covered. Denis heightens the image's sensuality by turning Marthe full-face and depicting her semi-nude. Her dress falls around her legs – an echo of the figure of sacred love, the nude stepping out of her drapery, on the frontispiece – as if undone by the sheer force of her too-quickly beating heart and her nudity is accentuated by the fact that she remains shod. Her blissful expression is reiterated by the sunburst, a symbolic expression of both mystical rapture and orgasm, visible through the window at right, as if nature itself echoed and redoubled her ecstasy.¹³⁹ Yet at the same time, Denis's powdery facture, reminiscent of pastel and of the heightened haziness of the reproduction of *Beata Beatrix*, his use of soft colours and the perfunctory modelling of the body etherealise a figure whose voluptuous nudity is potentially far more erotic than that of her clothed antecedent. As well, exchanging Rossetti's indistinctly brushed garden setting for the homely interior of 'Mais c'est le coeur. . .' tames and domesticates the ardour of the flesh. In place of the lover removed from mundane existence by the transfiguring and sanctifying power of death, Denis presents us with a life-affirming physical passion tempered and hallowed by its domestication, an innocent and saintly carnality sanctioned within the bounds of marriage and the home.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ See for example Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 156, and Meacock (2001), pp. 168-69.

¹³⁹ This passionate vision appears somewhat at odds with the chaste and restrained original context of its caption, one of the first sections of 'Les Amours de Marthe': 'One feels more beautiful when one is in love. Attitudes are easy and chaste. Life becomes precious, discreet: the sunsets have the softness of old paintings. But it's the heart that beats too fast, in truth. One is good and merciful' ('On se sent plus beau quand on aime. Les attitudes sont faciles et chastes. La vie devient précieuse, discrète: les couchers de soleil ont une douceur d'anciennes peintures. Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite, en vérité. On est bon, et miséricordieux'): Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 85, entry for 30 September 1891.

¹⁴⁰ Indeed, following the formalising of their engagement, Denis's musings about Marthe take on a markedly more sensual character, and they seem to have indulged in physical intimacy before their
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Whereas 'Mais c'est le coeur. . .' both intensifies and reins in the sensuality of the sacralised secular subject of *Beata Beatrix*, 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' reworks one of Rossetti's most contentious amalgamations of the Christian and the pagan, *Venus Verticordia*. One of Rossetti's rare nudes, *Venus Verticordia* borrows attributes from the iconography of the classical goddess, Eve and the Virgin Mary to, at the time, scandalous effect.¹⁴¹ While he also produced two watercolour replicas in which Venus is posed before a parapet against a simpler background (S.173 R1 and S.173 R2), reproductions of both of which were available in France by the early 1890s, it would appear from the inclusion of a rosebush in 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves' that Denis was referencing the oil.¹⁴² While Rossetti did have a legitimate classical precedent for giving his Venus a golden nimbus,¹⁴³ *Venus Verticordia* is essentially a highly contentious reworking of the Renaissance convention of portraying the Virgin with one breast exposed; his jocular reference to the painting as 'Mary with her Bubs' demonstrates that he thought of it in precisely these terms.¹⁴⁴

Indeed, while the painting is generally discussed in the context of Rossetti's 'Venetian' experiments, and its opulent colour and facture place it firmly within that strand of his career, its prototype, to which Denis may also have turned, may in fact be Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child* (the so-called 'Melun Madonna') [Figure 72], which marriage, as a discreet, elliptical journal entry from early 1892 hints: 'In the studio, the awakening of our flesh: I was ashamed . . .' ('A l'atelier, l'éveil de notre chair: j'avais honte'): *ibid.*, p. 92 (entry for 3 February 1892). Note that this 'awakening of the flesh' takes place in the site of artistic creation. The domestic character of 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' is underlined by the recent rediscovery of Denis's photography; Saskia Ooms notes that a blurry, luminous photograph of Marthe wearing a chemise and sitting in front of a window with her daughter Noële on her lap, taken in 1898, displays striking similarities with the composition and atmosphere of the lithograph (F. Heilbrun and S. Ooms, *La Photographie au Musée d'Orsay: Maurice Denis*, Paris 2006, p. 21). Although the composition of 'Mais c'est le coeur qui bat trop vite' dates from the early 1890s, it seems reasonable to assume some sort of interchange between the lithograph and the photograph. For further discussion of the role photography played in Denis's oeuvre, see N. Bondil, 'Maurice Denis photographe: "l'oeil mange la tête"', in J.-P. Bouillon, ed., *Maurice Denis* (exh. cat., Paris, Musée d'Orsay, Montréal, Musée des Beaux-arts and Rovereto, Museo di Arte Moderno e Contemporaneo, 2006), pp. 73-77.

¹⁴¹ Meacock (2001), p. 182, also notes the reference to St Teresa of Avila (a saint celebrated for her quasi-erotic mystical visions) in the presence and position of the arrow.

¹⁴² *Venus Verticordia* was mentioned by Sarrazin as the most sensual of Rossetti's female figures, 'flaunting her tempting breasts' ('ses seins tentateurs'): Sarrazin (1884), p. 166.

¹⁴³ On 23 August 1864, in the midst of working on *Venus Verticordia*, Rossetti wrote to Ford Madox Brown, 'What do you think of putting a nimbus behind my Venus's head? I believe the Greeks used to do it': Fredeman (2003), vol. 3, p. 85. As Elizabeth Prettejohn points out, far from being an attempt to find some flimsy justification for an outrageous innovation, this is evidence of the extent of Rossetti's learning, for Pausanias did record a famous statue of Venus holding an apple and with a sphere around her head (Treuhertz et al. (2003), p. 189).

¹⁴⁴ Letter to Walter Theodore Watts-Dunton, 16 October 1877, O. Doughty and J. R. Wahl, eds., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Oxford, 1967), vol. 4, p. 1516.

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Rossetti probably saw on his visit to Antwerp in 1849.¹⁴⁵ The Virgin, widely believed to have been modelled on Charles VII's official mistress Agnès Sorel, presents what to a nineteenth-century eye must have seemed a bizarre melange of the timelessly conventional and the fashionably particular (especially the Virgin's shaven forehead and tiny waist). The use of Agnès Sorel, a woman whose status was defined in terms of her physical appeal and sexual availability, as model for the Virgin, which Johan Huizinga notoriously saddled with the charge of epitomising the breakdown of the boundary between the sacred and the erotic at the end of the Middle Ages,¹⁴⁶ would doubtless have been of interest to Rossetti's increasing tendency to secularise sacred subjects; it would have had a rather different resonance for Denis in his casting of his own beloved, Marthe, in that role. *Venus Verticordia* displays a similarly uneasy blend of the particular and the conventionalising, Rossetti having complicated the coarse sensuality of the nude bust by grafting onto it the classical but exaggerated features of Alexa Wilding.

From this potent and challenging clash of pagan and Christian, sacred and sensual, Denis distilled a no less erotic but altogether gentler icon of his wife. Again, the shortcomings of the reproductions available to him played a crucial role in these changes, with their effacement of the tactile, almost pulpy quality of Rossetti's facture and of the hot brilliance of the reds, pinks and gold. Marthe is posed in a similar manner – her hair loose and her shoulders and one breast bared, standing before a rose hedge in full bloom – but the confrontational frontality of Rossetti's Venus is attenuated by the choice of a more demure three-quarter profile. Ruskin, who so violently objected to Rossetti's overtly sexualised treatment of the flowers in *Venus Verticordia*, would have found fault with Denis's non-naturalistic roses on the

grounds of style rather than eroticism. The flat, deliberately archaic nimbus is replaced by a warm golden mist that bathes the scene and etherealises the sensuous (more so than in ‘Mais c’est le cœur. . .’) handling of the flesh, a subsuming of the earthy into the spiritual even more striking when we consider that the origin of the lithograph’s title was Denis’s rhapsody, ‘She was too beautiful in her virgin’s veil and

¹⁴⁵ Although Rossetti makes no mention of Fouquet’s painting in his letters home during his visit to Antwerp, the painting entered the collection of the Antwerp museum in 1843 and it may be reasonably assumed that it was on view when he visited.

¹⁴⁶ J. Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. R. J. Payton and U. Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996, first published 1919), pp. 181-82. The tradition that Agnès Sorel had served as the model, first recorded by Denis Godefroy, dates back at least as far as the seventeenth century, so it is possible Rossetti was aware of it.

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completely an other, completely unreal, more beautiful than dreams’.¹⁴⁷ This Marthe, standing in an unspoilt forest glade, is, like Rossetti’s Venus but in a markedly different manner, a new Eve in no danger of falling, a ripely beautiful Virgin, a Venus who harkens back to the original meaning of the epithet Verticordia – that is, contrary to Rossetti’s creative misinterpretation, a guardian of marital fidelity, a turner of the hearts of married women towards their husbands.

Despite the abundant visual evidence of Rossetti’s influence on his early work, mention of his name is conspicuously absent from Denis’s writings, both private and public, from these years. When he finally encountered Rossetti’s work in the flesh, during a visit to London in 1906, he succinctly expressed his disappointment and distaste: ‘I saw again the Rossettis and the Burne-Joneses – absence of pictorial imagination and analysis and no feeling for nature’.¹⁴⁸ However, it is important to bear in mind that Denis’s aesthetic and project had changed radically since the turn of the century and his search for a reinvigorated classicism was in many ways inimical to the *néo-traditionnisme* for which he had once so eloquently pleaded; his repudiation of his former models ought perhaps to be viewed in this light. Nevertheless, his work speaks for itself, revealing the constant return to and reworking of the concern he shared with Rossetti, the coexistence of the flesh and the spirit.

With Closed Eyes: Redon, Rossetti and the Inward Turn

Rossetti’s fascination with mysticism, his dual career as a poet and painter, and his appropriation and transformation of Christian imagery held a considerable appeal for another artist whose mysticism was of a very different order – Odilon Redon. The assertion may seem bizarre at first glance; the fantastical creatures which populate the French artist’s nightmarish *noirs* would appear far removed from Rossetti’s lush gallery of beauties. Indeed, the apparently unbridgeable gulf between the two artists’ oeuvres, exacerbated by Redon’s all-too-successful expunging of references to other artists from his autobiography¹⁴⁹ and the care he took in crafting his image as an isolated genius immune to the influence of his contemporaries, has meant that, beyond

¹⁴⁷ ‘Elle était trop belle en voile de vierge et tout à fait une autre, une d’irréel, plus belle que les rêves’: Denis (1957), vol. 1, p. 90 (entry for 29 December 1891).

¹⁴⁸ ‘Je revois les Rossetti et les Burne Jones [sic], absence d’imagination pittoresque, analyse, et pas d’émotion de nature’: Denis (1957), vol. 2, p. 40 (4 July 1906).

¹⁴⁹ Very few artists consistently receive positive mention in Redon’s journal; the notable exceptions are Rembrandt, Delacroix and his mentor Rodolphe Bresdin: O. Redon, *A soi-même. Journal 1867-1915* (Paris, 2000).

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a few passing references to Redon’s affinities with Rossetti (notably in Richard Hobbs’s monograph), this avenue has remained largely unexplored.¹⁵⁰ Thanks to Douglas Druick’s and Peter Zegers’s careful deconstruction of the artist’s painstaking

self-mythologising with the aid of Redon's biographer André Mellerio's personal papers,¹⁵¹ we can finally begin to explore with a more critical eye Redon's connections with and responses to his contemporaries – not least, Rossetti. Like Denis and Debussy, Redon's first contact with Rossetti's work was probably with his poetry.¹⁵² Perhaps not coincidentally, his album *Hommage à Goya* (Mellerio 54-59), his first public attempt to create a double work of art, was published in 1885, the year after Sarrazin's articles on the English Aesthetic School in the *Revue indépendante* and the same year that his translation of 'The Blessed Damozel' and *Poètes modernes d'Angleterre* were published. Richard Hobbs has argued persuasively that the captions of the prints in this album were written as a prose poem whose coherent continuity influences our reading of the images.¹⁵³ This practice represents a break with that of his earlier albums, such as *Dans le rêve* (1879), whose titles simply served to indicate the subject matter of the individual plates. While this was not the first time Redon, whom Mellerio characterised as a 'painter-writer',¹⁵⁴ had composed a prose-poem title for one of his albums – he had done so for *Les Origines* in 1883, but suppressed the captions for its first printing – the revelation of Rossetti's project may have provided the necessary impetus for his making known his own literary aspirations.¹⁵⁵ However, given Redon's extraordinarily complicated relationship with contemporary literature and his not unreasonable anxieties about the possibility of his art being misinterpreted and co-opted by writers for their own

¹⁵⁰ This portion of the chapter is much indebted to Hobbs's research on Redon's acquaintance with Pre-Raphaelite painting and his attempts to break into the London art world. R. Hobbs, *Odilon Redon* (London, 1977), pp. 91-94.

¹⁵¹ D. Druick et al., *Odilon Redon, 1840-1916*, exh. cat. (Chicago, Art Institute, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum and London, Royal Academy, 1994).

¹⁵² Hobbs (1977), p. 91, also notes that he may have been acquainted with earlier Pre-Raphaelite painting as early as 1867, thanks to the British art displays at that year's Exposition Universelle.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-48. Redon continued this practice in his next album, *La Nuit* (1886), but thereafter renounced it, partly because, with the exception of *Songes* (1891), all of his subsequent albums were inspired by the work of other writers.

¹⁵⁴ A. Mellerio, 'Trois peintres écrivains. Delacroix, Fromentin, Odilon Redon', *La Nouvelle revue* (15 April 1923), pp. 304-314.

¹⁵⁵ Redon was also friendly with Samain, another possible factor in his acquaintance with Rossetti's poetry.

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ends,¹⁵⁶ Rossetti's pictorial oeuvre seems to have held greater appeal for him, and proved a greater influence on his own work.

Redon's interest in Rossetti seems to have burgeoned in the 1890s, the decade in which Symbolist critics began to embrace him as one of their leading lights and in which he began, after decades of *noirs*, to experiment with colour. Having attended the first performance of *La Damselle élue* in 1893, he was moved to offer Debussy one of his works by way of homage, a gesture reciprocated by Debussy's gift of a copy of Denis's illustrated score.¹⁵⁷ As a regular at the *mardis* from 1885, he probably saw the same reproductions discussed by Mauclair, and he was in contact with Arthur Symons from 1890. He may also have discussed Rossetti with Mellerio; Mellerio's working notes for his survey of anti-naturalist art, *Le Mouvement idéaliste en peinture*, show that early on he had considered including a chapter on the Pre-Raphaelites, with special reference the Rossetti, 'le plus ancien',¹⁵⁸ although the book in its published form was rather more reticent about the place of the Pre-Raphaelites in the idealist movement.¹⁵⁹ However, the primary source of his knowledge of Rossetti's oeuvre, apart from the expected media of reproductions, articles, and translations, was a personage and an exhibition society with whom he always had a tense relationship:

Péladan and the Salons de la Rose + Croix.

Péladan, who courted Redon aggressively and unsuccessfully for inclusion in the first Salon de la Rose + Croix in 1892, evinced a great admiration for the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti in particular.¹⁶⁰ Jean da Silva has noted that, the outrageousness of the Sâr's programme aside, the Salon was the first international exhibition of Symbolist art¹⁶¹ (albeit a very narrowly and crudely defined brand of Symbolism), and

¹⁵⁶ For a thorough examination of Redon's relationship with literature and writers, see D. Gamboni, *La Plume et le pinceau. Odilon Redon et la littérature* (Paris, 1989).

¹⁵⁷ A. Redon and R. Bacou, eds., *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Mallarmé, Verhaeren... à Odilon Redon* (Paris, 1960), p. 228.

¹⁵⁸ André Mellerio Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago, Series X, Box FF.12:5, I.65. This box also contains pages transcribed from Gustave Geffroy's *La Vie artistique* (second and third series) and Destrée's *Les Préraphaelites*.

¹⁵⁹ Mellerio only mentions the Pre-Raphaelites as a 'possible' influence on the *mouvement idéaliste*: 'Peut-être le Préraphaelisme Anglais a-t-il été aussi de quelque enseignement, sinon comme influence picturale directe, du moins comme tendances à la hauteur intellectuelle et morale, formation du caractère de l'artiste'. A. Mellerio, *Le Mouvement idéaliste en peinture* (Paris, 1896), p. 67.

¹⁶⁰ See n.30 above.

¹⁶¹ J. da Silva, *Le Salon de la Rose + Croix (1892-1897)* (Paris, 1991), p. 5. Huysmans expressed the hope – never realised – to Mourey that the publication of *Passé le détroit* might encourage the Pre-Raphaelites to stage a group exhibition in Paris, implying that this would be far superior to the diluted 'Pre-Raphaelitism' on view at the Salons: 'ce serait un vrai service que vous nous rendriez à tous – sauf aux foetus du Rose-Croix – ça serait vraiment l'heure!' Letter from Huysmans to Mourey, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Fonds Lambert, Ms. 50.

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Péladan's regard for its British exponents was apparent in his list of potential exhibitors in 1891. When his intent to include Burne-Jones and Watts 'and the five other Pre-Raphaelites' in the first Salon came to nothing, he exhibited photographs of paintings by Burne-Jones and Rossetti instead. While the choice of photographs is unfortunately lost to posterity – they receive no mention in the catalogue – it seems reasonable to surmise that one of the photographs exhibited was *Beata Beatrix*. Indeed, the Salon abounded with Dantean imagery and themes, not least the angelic figure of Beatrice, especially in Edmond Aman-Jean's poster for the 1893 Salon [Figure 73].¹⁶² Aman-Jean's Beatrice is a distant relation of Rossetti's, with her willowy, weightless body borne off by an angel as she passes a lyre to an unseen Dante whose presence is signified solely by the laurel wreath in the lower right corner. Sapped of the least suspicion of corporeality, she evokes the centrality of the neo-Catholic revival to Péladan's aims and the inseparability of religion from the aesthetic ideal he promulgated.

Redon himself may have been privately sceptical of both the neo-Catholic and occult strands of this enterprise, both on religious and artistic grounds (he had, after all, been an exhibitor in the Salon des Indépendants, which Péladan despised)¹⁶³, but he found it expedient to remain on good terms with the neo-Catholic writers who promoted and patronised him.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, although he would not allow Mellerio to mention their accolades in his biography, he numbered several esoteric mystics associated with the Salon de la Rose + Croix, including Antoine de la Rochefoucauld and Elémir Bourges, among his acquaintance, and most significantly, from 1890 Bailly had sold his albums through the Librairie de l'art indépendant – the publisher, we should recall, of *La Damaoiselle élue*.¹⁶⁵ If Redon did not buy into their wilder beliefs and practices, he was clearly intrigued, his interest sparked by his fascination with idealist philosophy in the 1870s and 1880s. His interest in hermetic mysticism found its clearest expression in a recurrent subject in his 1890s work, that of the

¹⁶² On Aman-Jean's contribution to the second Salon, see R. Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in*

France: *Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose + Croix* (New York and London, 1976), p. 150.

¹⁶³ Redon had exhibited paintings, drawings and lithographs at the Salon des Indépendants from 1884 to 1887.

¹⁶⁴ On Redon's relationships with figures in the Catholic revival, see M. Stevens, 'Redon and the transformation of the Symbolist aesthetic', in Druick et al. (1994), pp. 205-10.

¹⁶⁵ Redon's ties to esoteric mysticism are discussed in greater depth in F. Leeman, 'Redon's spiritualism and the rise of mysticism', in Druick et al. (1994), pp. 215-36.

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mystic head. These mysterious figures, shown in austere, firmly drawn profile or full face with eyes lowered or closed, show Redon's clearest debt to Rossetti's art. One of the earliest and most emblematic of these mystic heads was *Yeux clos* [Figure 74]. A subject Redon repeated several times to satisfy collectors, this imposing androgynous head with closed eyes, either rising out of or sinking into the sea, was in an earlier version (1889) haloed like a saint or Christ and entitled *Au ciel*, which clearly suggests a religious interpretation. (It was also painted in the year of publication of Péladan's *L'Androgyne*, which hailed androgyny as the apotheosis of humanity.) Like *Beata Beatrix*, it originated as a portrait of the artist's wife, the traits generalised to reduce the face's particularity.¹⁶⁶ The powdery, diffuse quality of the paint, applied to the loosely-woven canvas like pastel, recalls the dreamlike atmosphere and ethereal haze surrounding Rossetti's Beatrice. Here, however, the head's closed expression diverges from Rossetti's image of divine ecstasy in revealing ways. Where Beatrice's closed eyes are directed upward in rapture, her body and soul overpowered by an external force, the 'gaze' in *Yeux clos* is both downward and inward, utterly self-contained as if its owner has achieved an absolute knowledge of ideal truth and is about to voluntarily leave the world behind for a state of hermetic perfection.

Yeux clos, with its nod toward naturalistic drawing and colour, characterised by Redon's Belgian admirer Edmond Picard as 'art that mixes reality and mysticism', was soon superseded by mystic icons that took anti-naturalism, the dematerialisation of the body and the inward turn to extremes.¹⁶⁷ *La Cellule d'or* [Figure 75] and *Sita* [Figure 76] were both exhibited in Redon's retrospective at Durand-Ruel's gallery in 1894, the exhibition that consolidated his reputation as a poet's painter. The former, a fusion of the esoteric imagery of *Yeux clos* with a Byzantine aesthetic (flattened, hieratic forms and unnatural colours – lapis lazuli and gold – with heavy symbolic import) and Christian iconography, pushes the icon-like qualities of *Beata Beatrix* and similar works to their limits, the head appearing to float, disembodied and completely spiritualised, within a grainy golden aureole. *Sita*, while usually considered an early example of Redon's growing fascination with Eastern mysticism, also appears a generalised and etherealised response to Rossetti's secular (or non-Christian) saints.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 227. Edmond Picard was the first to point out the face's resemblance to Camille Redon, a claim dismissed by Redon, who later admitted that while the likeness had not been intentional, he used few life models so the faces in his work were bound to reflect those of his intimate acquaintance.

¹⁶⁷ E. Picard, 'Yeux clos', *L'Art moderne* (28 December 1890), p. 142.

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Redon also borrowed one of Rossetti's favoured tropes, the use of symbolic accessories to both suggest a narrative and frustrate its interpretation. *Sita*, the wife of Rama in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, was abducted by her husband's rival Ravana and, as he carried her off through the skies, she threw down her jewels to indicate the direction of her flight to Rama. In the pastel, *Sita*, reduced to a haloed bust in profile against a starry sky, floats above a shower of falling forms which could be variously interpreted as jewels, blossoms or lights. To a viewer unfamiliar with its literary source, this syncretic image might have seemed an exotic icon of a saint or a highly

original reading of the Assumption of the Virgin. The rich, velvety iridescence of the colour further recalls that of *Beata Beatrix*, as if Redon had imaginatively recreated the palette invisible to him in the available monochrome reproductions.

However, Redon was finally to encounter the genuine article when he visited London in October 1895 as a guest of his key British patron, Dr Albert Edward Tebb. Although the artist makes no mention of the painting in his correspondence during his visit – indeed, with the exception of a few ecstatic lines on the Elgin Marbles, he merely referred to ‘beautiful museums which I have only thus far seen in rapid glances’¹⁶⁸ – it seems reasonable to assume that he saw it in the National Gallery. The impression it made upon him emerged the following spring, when Ambroise Vollard solicited his participation in his second album of original prints. *Béatrice* [Figure 77, Mellerio 168], his first colour lithograph, although neither his first use of Dantean imagery nor his first ‘portrait’ of Beatrice,¹⁶⁹ is his first overtly Rossettian interpretation of the subject. Although he based the design on his own pastel by the same name made in 1885 [Figure 78], around the time when he first seems to have become acquainted with Rossetti’s work, the differences between the two are telling. In the pastel, Redon draws a hard line in charcoal around the figure, firmly delineating her individual features – especially her pensive, down-turned eyes – and the circlet of flowers garlanding her head. In 1896, probably with *Beata Beatrix* fresh in his mind’s eye, Redon preserved the basic elements of the composition but radically dematerialised

the head, retaining the profile (now demarcated only by fields of pale, diaphanous colour) and, removing all but the slightest hint of modelling and effacing

¹⁶⁸ ‘Beaux musées dont je n’ai vu encore que de rapides aperçus’: letter to Maurice Fabre, 8 October 1895, M.-A. Leblond, ed., *Lettres d’Odilon Redon, 1878-1916* (Paris and Brussels, 1923), pp. 25-26.

¹⁶⁹ Redon produced several charcoal drawings of Dante and Virgil in the 1860s (perhaps thanks to Delacroix’s example); an 1892 charcoal drawing of Beatrice, portrayed standing and full-face (Art Institute, Chicago) differs significantly in composition and mood from the lithograph.

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Beatrice’s eyes and mouth.¹⁷⁰ Deprived of eyes and outward vision, this Beatrice is the most extreme example of Redon’s inward turning of Rossetti’s imagery.

Although he had by this time seen Rossetti’s work in colour, Redon was to pay one more tribute to the other artist’s influence in one of the last *noirs* he produced before turning definitively to colour. *Tête d’enfant aux fleurs* [Figure 79, Mellerio 169], while on its surface a meditation on the fragility of childhood innocence, bears an unsettling resemblance, not previously noted, to Rossetti’s subjectless female portraits: with her weary, heavy-lidded gaze and an ill-defined cluster of flowers at her shoulder and tangled in her hair, Redon’s child could be a ‘stunner’ in miniature. In fact, an entry in *À soi-même* in 1900, which appears to relate to the lithograph, describes a quasi-mystical childhood encounter with a beautiful little girl while en route to his first communion in terms reminiscent of Dante’s first meeting with Beatrice:

The first time in the garden of the house where I was born (in Bordeaux, in the allées d’Amour). She was blonde, with large eyes and her hair in long curls that fell upon her muslin dress, which brushed against me. I felt a shiver, I was twelve, I was on my way to make my first communion. And chance willed it that she was near me on the retreats, at church, under the mystery of the vaults of Saint-Seurin. What emotions blended therein: all the art as much as the surroundings. Blessed hours, will you ever return in the mystery of the Unknown?¹⁷¹

This oft-overlooked print, perhaps more than anything else in Redon's oeuvre, ties together the various strands that bind and differentiate the two artists: the blending of aesthetic pleasure and divine, or mystical transport. But Redon, even more so than his younger colleague Denis, was firmly on the side of the spiritual, and in a form that Rossetti, despite his far-ranging interest in mysticism, could never have imagined. Some elements of Rossetti's poetry and paintings were bound, by their very nature, to be lost in translation. Yet the reinterpretations of his work by his French counterparts allowed, at their best, for new light to be cast upon it.

¹⁷⁰In the first impression, however, Redon remained closer to the original pastel.

¹⁷¹'La première fois, dans le jardin de la maison où je suis né (à Bordeaux, allées d'Amour). Elle était blonde, avec de grands yeux et les cheveux en longues boucles tombant sur sa robe de mousseline, qui me frôla. Je connus un frisson, j'avais douze ans, j'allais faire ma première communion. Et le hasard voulût qu'elle fût près de moi lors des retraites, à l'église, sous le mystère des voûtes de Saint-Seurin. Que d'émotions s'y mêlèrent : tout l'art aussi de ce décor. Heures bénies, reviendrez-vous jamais dans le mystère de l'Inconnu ?' Redon (2000), p. 100.

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Chapter 5

From *Salomé* to *Salome*: Gustave Moreau's reception and influence in Britain, 1877-1898

Two months after Gustave Moreau's death in April 1898, the *Magazine of Art* carried the following terse obituary:

M. Gustave Moreau has recently died at the age of 72. He was born in Paris; became the pupil of Picot at the École des Beaux Arts, and began exhibiting at the Salon in 1852. His "Cantiques des Cantiques" [sic] (1853) is at the Dijon Museum; "Oedipus and the Sphinx" (1864) obtained a medal, and "Man and Death" (1865) a medal of a higher class. "Orpheus torn in pieces by the Maenads" (1866) was acquired for the Luxembourg. His "Jupiter and Europa" (1869) was awarded a first-class medal, and "The Sphinx's Riddle Solved" a second-class medal at the Universal Exhibition of 1878. Besides these he painted many decorative pieces. He succeeded to the seat of Boulanger in the Académie des Beaux Arts in 1888, and was appointed *chef d'atelier* at the École in 1892.¹

Moreau's career, as outlined in this mainstream art periodical, is reduced to a skeleton of official honours and successes. No mention of his triumphant return to the Salon in 1876 with his two most notorious works, *Salomé* and *L'Apparition*, images which established and sealed his standing as one of the patron saints of Decadent and Symbolist literature; no reference to his appearances at the 1880 Salon or the 1889 Exposition Universelle; and, bizarrely, no allusion to the exhibition of his art in Britain, either his participation in the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition or the monographic show of his illustrations for the *Fables* of La Fontaine at the London galleries of Boussod and Valadon in 1886. To take this obituary at face value is to gain the impression that Moreau was a conventional history painter whose career was conducted within the respectable confines of the Académie and played out at a safe remove from Britain, on which it had no discernible impact.

This reticence may stem from reasonable causes: Moreau's general abstention from public exhibitions during the last two decades of his life kept him largely off the radar of all but his most vehement advocates, and confined awareness of his activities to specialist publications, and a magazine which had, two years previously, published a virulently Francophobic rant against Aubrey Beardsley and 'other Decadents'² would almost certainly not have wished to stress his association with the Decadence.

¹ 'The Chronicle of Art – June', *Magazine of Art* (June 1898), p. 456.

² M. Armour, 'Aubrey Beardsley and the Decadents', *Magazine of Art* (November 1896), pp. 9-12.

However, it prefigures a lacuna in scholarship on Symbolism that has persisted to this day. While comparative readings of the work of Moreau and Burne-Jones multiply at a steady pace, and indeed form a keystone of studies of internationalism in antinaturalist

art, they have tended to focus on the perception of Burne-Jones in France as an ‘English Moreau’ (or Moreau in Britain as ‘the French Burne-Jones’) and have commented either only in more general terms on Moreau’s reception and influence on other artists outside his own country, or have ignored the issue entirely.³ No doubt this single-mindedness of approach is an outgrowth of the numerous comparisons drawn between Burne-Jones and Moreau by critics during their lifetimes, an association crystallised by Léonce Bénédict in the pamphlet he published shortly after the deaths of both artists, *Deux idéalistes: Gustave Moreau et E. Burne-Jones*. Even when both artists’ critical fortunes were at their lowest ebb, in 1940, Robin Ironside kept this correlation alive in his influential reappraisal of their work.⁴ While I do not want to downplay the significance of the interchanges between Moreau and Burne-Jones, discussed in the preceding chapters, a significant part of the story remains thus far unexplored. As his *Magazine of Art* obituary suggests, Moreau was, if not a household name, then at least a regular presence in the British art press from the beginning of his Salon career, giving the lie to Pierre-Louis Mathieu’s erroneous claim that ‘outside France, Moreau’s work remained little known, without any exhibitions, books or articles dedicated to him’.⁵ In fact, although the level of attention paid to his work fluctuated considerably over his lifetime, Moreau’s reception in Britain underwent several significant changes which not only broadly reflected shifting British perceptions of French art and culture, from angry xenophobia to tentative interest, but also led to his elevation by an artistic elite in the 1890s to a position approximating the one given him by Huysmans and his followers in France. My aim in this chapter is twofold. Firstly, I wish to trace Moreau’s critical reception in Britain over the last three decades of the nineteenth century, with particular attention paid to the exhibition of his watercolour illustrations to *Les Fables de La Fontaine* at Goupil’s London galleries in November 1886 and to the role of photographs and reproductive prints in disseminating his oeuvre. Secondly, I wish to

³ For example, Dubernard-Laurent (1996); Casteras and Faxon (1995) and, more recently, R. Rapetti, *Symbolism* (Paris, 2005).

⁴ R. Ironside, ‘Burne-Jones and Gustave Moreau’, *Horizon* 1, no. 6 (June 1940), pp. 406-24, reprinted as ‘Gustave Moreau and Burne-Jones’, *Apollo* 101 (March 1975), pp. 173-82.

⁵ Mathieu (1994), p. 243. Mathieu mentions Gleeson White’s 1897 article on Moreau in *The Pageant* in a footnote but makes no reference to any other points of contact with Britain.

explore the influence of his work on Aubrey Beardsley – an influence remarked upon in passing ever since the beginning of the revival of Moreau’s reputation in the 1960s, but never explored in any depth⁶ – and Beardsley’s subversive reworking of Moreau’s vision of Salome through the lens of Japonisme. In so doing, I hope to uncover the range of Moreau’s influence in Britain, above and beyond Burne-Jones.

‘Weird compositions’ or ‘the classical ideal’? Moreau in the British press, 1877-1900⁷

When Moreau exhibited six oils and five watercolours in the French Fine Art section at the 1878 Exposition Universelle, most French broadsheets and art periodicals acknowledged his appearance, treating him, in the main, as a noteworthy anomaly. The consensus held that, while his art was of considerably greater interest than much of the stale, retrograde academic canvases that dominated the exhibition,

his outré renditions of mythological and Biblical subjects either defied interpretation or were too idiosyncratic to herald a sea change in history painting.⁸ The view from Britain requires rather more effort to discover. As I have noted above, Moreau's appearance in the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition, the first time one of his pictures was on public view in Britain, seems to have done little to raise his profile. Indeed, almost the only reference to his work that year came in an *Athenaeum* review, not of the Grosvenor exhibition but of the 1877 Salon; the author, commenting unfavourably on *Herodias Dancing*, a painting by Adrien Moreau, complained, 'the rest of the picture is simply contemptible, and devoid of the flashy attractions of M. Gustave Moreau's picture which decorates the Grosvenor Exhibition, and bears the head of Christ (?) in the centre of chromatic coruscations'.⁹ Moreau's distinctive use of colour is singled out as his defining characteristic; there is nothing unusual in this by itself, for French critics often dwelt upon it. But for the *Athenaeum*'s critic there is something strange, unsettling, foreign and above all morally suspect (perhaps because foreign) about it – 'flashy attractions' calls to mind the tawdry decoration of a music

⁶ See, for example, R. von Holten, *L'Art fantastique de Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 1960), p. 58 and Mathieu (1994), p. 244.

⁷ I exclude reactions to Moreau's submissions to the 1880 Salon and the 1889 Exposition Universelle, which I discussed in Chapter 3.

⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹ 'The Salon, Paris (second notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 2586 (19 May 1877), p. 647. The head in Gustave Moreau's picture was, of course, that of John the Baptist rather than Christ. Furthermore, Adrien Moreau did not exhibit a painting by this title at the 1877 Salon; the critic seems to have misidentified *Les Tziganes* (no. 1541) as such.

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hall and the entertainment on offer there. Apart from this instance of damnation with faint praise, most critics held their tongues; not mentioning a work of art at all, as Kate Flint has noted, marginalizes it more effectively than a negative notice,¹⁰ confirmation of the truth of Oscar Wilde's remark that the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about. Sir Coutts Lindsay's intention to advertise the international nature of his new gallery by hanging the first room with advanced continental art seemed to have come to naught.

A preliminary perusal of British reviews of the French Fine Art section at the Exposition Universelle the following year gives the impression that Moreau's work remained effectively invisible. Although the first article in the first number of the newly launched *Magazine of Art* was devoted to the Exposition, the anonymous author of the review of French art devoted the lion's share of the piece to the academic triumvirate of Cabanel, Bouguereau and Gérôme (who did, after all, occupy a disproportionate amount of space in the exhibition), and Moreau went unmentioned.¹¹ This trend continued in other major general-readership periodicals such as the *Times*, the *Athenaeum* and the *Saturday Review*. However, the *Art Journal*, as well as the one-off *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* published in Britain throughout the duration of the Exposition both made reference to Moreau, with varying degrees of scepticism and perplexity. The *Art Journal*'s reviewer was considerably more complimentary about the problem-fraught French section as a whole than many of his peers, claiming that even under such unfavourable circumstances France demonstrated 'eloquently and convincingly that she is the greatest living Art School in the world',¹² but became noticeably less eloquent himself when describing Moreau:

G. Moreau, who delights in Biblical and mythological subjects, has much of the brilliant colouring of the English Etty, with rather a heavy black element running through it. His 'Moses exposed on the Nile' (660) and 'Hercules and the Hydra' (656) afford indications of this tendency.¹³

The incongruous comparison of Moreau's scintillating jewel-like palette with Etty's smoky, overripe one is less than happy and suggests the critic's urgent groping for a means of making sense of such extraordinary images by anchoring them in a more familiar context.

¹⁰ Flint (1983), p. 60.

¹¹ 'French Fine Art at the Late Paris International Exhibition', *Magazine of Art* 2 (1879), pp. 15-18.

¹² 'International Art at the Universal Exposition, Paris', *Art Journal* 17 (1878), p. 197.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

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The reviewers in the *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* wrote in a more dismissive vein, perhaps not surprisingly considering the proudly nationalist tone taken by the publication as a whole. The first mention of Moreau appeared on 18 June, when the author simply stated that 'M. Gustave Moreau has his "Sphinx," which created much controversy some years since, and several later works'.¹⁴ This critic appears to have possessed some prior knowledge of Moreau's oeuvre, but clouded by the passage of time: the "Sphinx" shown at the Exposition was not the *OEdipe et le Sphinx* (Mathieu 75) with which Moreau made his name at the 1864 Salon and in which the figures of Oedipus and the Sphinx dominate the canvas, but a new work, *Le Sphinx deviné* [Figure 80, Mathieu 203], painted in his mature style, in which the small figures are enveloped in a misty atmosphere and dwarfed by the menacing Leonardesque landscape.¹⁵ Moreau's watercolours were mentioned in passing in the next number,¹⁶ but the lengthiest commentary came from 'a Lady in Paris' who contributed a running report, in a more animated tone than her male counterparts,¹⁷ on the Exposition to the journal:

The first pictures the visitor notices on entering the long gallery to the right are some of Moreau's weird compositions. There are quaint renderings of Biblical subjects: – a 'Moses among the Bulrushes,' with flames darting from his forehead; a 'Jacob and the Angel,' standing out against a limpid evening sky; and 'The Daughter of Herodius [sic],' dressed in airy gauze and flaming jewels; besides 'Hercules doing battle against the Hydra' and 'The Secret of the Sphinx divulged'.¹⁸

In writing off Moreau's style as 'weird' and 'quaint', this critic not only provides inadvertent confirmation of the artist's dictum that 'a work of art is especially beautiful when it can never please imbeciles',¹⁹ she (or he) also devalues the seriousness of his intent and of the status of his work as high art. Although Moreau's subjects are biblical, for a conservative British critic his 'weird' technique infringes upon their potential didactic value. Moreover, the unflattering national stereotypes

¹⁴ 'French Art at the Exhibition', *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* no. 7 (18 June 1878), p. 77.

¹⁵ *Le Sphinx deviné* was, incidentally, the painting Zola dwelt upon most in his review of the 1878 Exposition, despite (or, considering his lack of sympathy for Moreau's style and subject matter, because of) its being the weakest of Moreau's exhibited works.

¹⁶ 'Fine Arts at the Paris Exhibition', *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition* no. 8 (29 June 1878), p. 89.

¹⁷ It is possible that 'a Lady in Paris' was actually the creation of a male journalist looking to mock feminine reactions to the Exposition's attractions.

¹⁸ 'French Art – II. [From a Lady in Paris]', *Illustrated Paris Universal Exhibition*, no. 27 (9 November 1878), p. 317.

¹⁹ 'Une oeuvre d'art est surtout belle quand elle ne peut jamais plaire aux imbéciles': Cooke (2002), vol. 2, p. 219.

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invoked in the criticism of Moreau's colour – flashy, gaudy, vulgar, and so forth – were a common tactic in conservative British art criticism at the time: moral impurity was considered to go hand in hand with colouristic excess (while, inversely, a muted palette was seen as denoting restraint and modesty), and if such pictures were

produced by a foreign brush, so much the more dangerous.²⁰ Even a more broadminded and formalist critic like D. S. MacColl, writing of Moreau's pictures, which included *Salomé*, in the retrospective exhibition at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, was not immune to this tendency, describing them as 'gaudy tinsels [hung] on models from Chassérian [sic]'.²¹

While this mode of 'blind and dumb criticism' typified the mainstream British press's response to Moreau in 1878,²² matters began to change in the Exposition's aftermath. This may partly be explained by the gradually increasing availability of reproductions of Moreau's paintings. A photogravure produced by Goupil after *Salomé* featured in the souvenir volume *Les chefs-d'oeuvre d'art à l'Exposition Universelle de 1878*, while an etching by Gaujean after *L'Apparition* was published in *L'Art* (which, as we will recall, had a London office and important ties with the Grosvenor Gallery) in 1878.²³ Goupil seems to have played the chief role in publishing reproductions of Moreau's work, especially important as they had an office and gallery in London; the photograph of *Galatée* published after the 1880 Salon is a case in point.²⁴ However, Goupil's most significant part in Moreau's reception in Britain was not to occur until 1886, when it hosted the London showing of Moreau's watercolour illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine*.

The sixty-four watercolours constitute the most under-studied segment of Moreau's oeuvre, not least because all but one have been in private hands since the

²⁰ See Flint (1983), pp. 61-62.

²¹ D. S. MacColl, 'Art at the Paris Exhibition – I', *Saturday Review* 90 (15 September 1900), p. 327. Flint (1983), p. 62, considers MacColl's reaction symptomatic of the lingering effects of the xenophobic aspect of British art criticism, but I would suggest that his unflattering description may also stem from the fact that by 1900 Moreau's star, and that of Symbolism as a whole, had faded. In other words, by this time Moreau's style and choice of subject may really have seemed bizarre and outmoded to a forward-thinking Modernist critic.

²² The term is Barthes's, which he defines as, instead of the critic honestly acknowledging his own incomprehension, '[elevating] one's blindness and dumbness to a universal rule of perception, and to reject from the world [that which is not understood]: "I don't understand, therefore you are idiots."' R. Barthes, 'Blind and Dumb Criticism', in *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers (London, 1972), pp. 34-35.

²³ G. Lacambre, 'La diffusion de l'oeuvre de Gustave Moreau par la reproduction au XIXe siècle', *Bulletin de la Société J.-K. Huysmans* no. 94 (2001), p. 30. Lacambre's article is the only in-depth study thus far of the role of reproduction in diffusing Moreau's reputation, but it is not exhaustive and, as with much of her work on Moreau, is concerned almost entirely with documentation.

²⁴ See Chapter 3.

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1930s and the owners have steadfastly refused to allow scholars access or to lend them to exhibitions.²⁵ Currently, only two serious studies of them have been attempted – a thesis on Moreau's iconography, and an article by Dominique Lobstein on the commission for the watercolours by Moreau's patron Antony Roux – and both, doubtless hindered by lack of access to the pictures, are primarily documentary.²⁶ However, uncovering the story of their creation, their exhibition on both sides of the Channel, and their eventual reproduction is key to understanding the extent of Moreau's reception and influence in Britain.

In 1879, the Marseillais banker Roux began to commission a series of watercolours illustrating La Fontaine's *Fables* from Moreau and several other leading artists, including Gustave Doré, Ferdinand Heilbuth, Elie Delaunay and Giuseppe de Nittis, in an endeavour that recalls earlier schemes in Britain such as Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Dalziel Brothers' Bible Gallery. The watercolours were displayed in a group exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit in May of 1881.

Unfortunately, no catalogue was produced, and we have no way of ascertaining which twenty-five of Moreau's watercolours were exhibited; however, the show received

numerous press notices, many of which were clipped and preserved by Moreau and his mother.²⁷ The French periodicals were all but unanimous in their low opinion of the watercolours of the other artists, but most praised Moreau's as the most original on view, even if this originality was inextricable from his tendency to err on the side of the grotesque. This unsigned review in *L'Art moderne* is typical:

We are not admirers of this bizarre and fantastical painting, whose personages with greenish flesh and smelling of mud move about in a strange world dripping with gems and shimmering with brocades: a real jeweller's hallucination. But despite what is false and conventional in this art, despite the inevitable heaviness produced by repeated retouching, we must recognise that the artist has got out of a rut and produced an ensemble which is personal, powerful, new in its ideas and clever in its execution: perhaps the most complete there is in the Salon of the rue Laffitte.²⁸

²⁵ The sole watercolour in public ownership, *Le paon se plaignant à Junon* (Mathieu 224), belongs to the Musée Gustave Moreau.

²⁶ M. Beynel, 'Iconographies du XIXe siècle: les *Fables* de La Fontaine vues par Gustave Moreau et Gustave Doré' (DEA thesis, Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, 1989) and D. Lobstein, 'Antony Roux, Gustave Moreau et les *Fables* de La Fontaine', *Paragone Arte* 28 (November 1999), pp. 75-88.

²⁷ This dossier (Musée Gustave Moreau, Recueil d'articles, INV.14581) includes articles by Charles Blanc (*Le Temps*), Marie Raffalovich (*La Vue*), Ary Renan and Judith Gautier (source unknown). Gautier, predictably given her place in Symbolist literary circles, wrote the most positive critique. Marie Raffalovich's relationship with Moreau will be discussed in more detail below.

²⁸ 'Nous ne sommes pas admirateur de cette peinture bizarre et fantasque, dont les personnages aux chairs verdâtres et sentant la vase s'agitent dans un monde inconnu où ruissent les pierreries, où chatoient les brocarts: une vraie hallucination de joaillier. Mais malgré ce que cet art a de faux et de 180

Included in the dossier is a single article in English, excerpted from *The Parisian*, a broadsheet that catered to the city's Anglophone community. The reviewer, whose name has not been preserved, in contrast to his French counterparts showers unreserved praise on Moreau:

No modern painter has a more brilliant palette than Mr. Gustave Moreau, and, if we did not know it already, the twenty-five water-colours which he exhibits in the Rue Laffitte would prove that he has an imagination with which no other living artist's can be compared. Each of his compositions has the brilliancy of a casket of jewels, and in imaginative power each seems to surpass the other. [...] The few pictures by Mr. Gustave Moreau which we have seen from time to time at the Salon had made us acquainted with a rare colourist and poet; the water-colours of which we are now speaking have revealed to us a varied and inexhaustible imagination beyond all our dreams.²⁹

Most of the recurring complaints about Moreau's oeuvre – the febrile colour, the tendency toward a *horror vacui* of bejewelled detail, the preference for the fantastic – are turned on their head. One could argue that the watercolours, by virtue of their fairytale subjects and medium, had less power to offend than the large-scale, encrusted canvases of myths and Biblical subjects played out in an atmosphere of exoticism and dread (although this critic appears to be full of praise for Moreau's Salon paintings as well). Furthermore, watercolour was considered the British medium par excellence, so there exists the possibility of condescension on the part of a British reviewer towards a French painter making a foray into unfamiliar territory – but this is belied, at least in the review in question, by the tone of genuine enthusiasm. In any event, whether because of a more anodyne choice of subjects or because of a shift in taste, at least a few British viewers were becoming more receptive to Moreau's art.

Roux was of the same mind as most of the critics, ultimately deciding in 1882

to give the entire commission for sixty-five watercolour illustrations to Moreau. All of Moreau's watercolours were exhibited together at the Goupil gallery (owned by the dealers Boussod et Valadon) in Paris from March to May 1886, and then at Goupil's convenu, malgré la lourdeur inévitable que produisent des retouches répétées, il faut reconnaître que l'artiste sort de l'ornière et produit un ensemble d'oeuvres personnelles, puissantes, neuves comme idées et habiles comme exécution : c'est peut-être ce qu'il y a de plus complet au Salon de la rue Laffitte': 'Nouvelles Parisiennes. Les fables de La Fontaine illustrées par aquarellistes', *L'Art moderne* no. 14 (5 June 1881), p. 111.

²⁹ Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, dossier of press clippings related to *Les Fables de La Fontaine* (1881), INV. 14582.

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London branch in November of the same year. These were the artist's only one-man shows during his lifetime in either city.

Before I address the exhibition of Moreau's La Fontaine watercolours in 1886 in London and Paris, however, two important developments which prepared the ground for his (re)introduction to Britain need to be discussed. Much Moreau scholarship labours under the assumption that his work again remained out of the public eye between 1881 and 1886. This is true if we restrict ourselves to *original* work, but it overlooks the increasing importance of reproduction to keeping Moreau's reputation alive when he could not or did not choose to exhibit. As Geneviève Lacambre has demonstrated, Moreau, notwithstanding the image of the 'hermit in the midst of Paris' who cared nothing for the opinion of the masses promulgated by Huysmans, had taken a keen interest in the reproduction of his paintings ever since his first Salon appearance in 1852.³⁰ He was deeply concerned with the limitations of available techniques and their potential impact upon the presentation of his paintings. From the first, his technique of choice was photography because of its superior fidelity to the original over the more commonly used engraving, and his favoured photographer was his neighbour in the rue de la Rochefoucauld, the British photographer Robert Bingham. It is unclear whether Bingham's photographs of Salon paintings such as *OEdipe et le sphinx*, *Jason* and *Orphée* were ever sold in Britain, but they were exhibited as works of art in their own right³¹ and were available commercially in Paris; indeed, his photographs and those of his successors, Ferrier et Lecadre (who purchased his archive of negatives following his death in 1870), became a sought-after item in the 1880s and 1890s for amateurs unable to obtain Moreau's paintings for themselves. However, in 1883 Moreau began a fruitful professional relationship with a printmaker who was at the forefront of the original print revival and who was to have probably the most decisive impact upon the spread of his international reputation, Félix Bracquemond.

The dealer Georges Petit apparently commissioned an etching after *David* [Figure 81, Mathieu 201], one of the paintings Moreau exhibited at the 1878

³⁰ Lacambre (2001), p. 33.

³¹ Bingham exhibited a photograph of *Oedipe et le sphinx* at the 1865 Salon française de photographie: *ibid.*, p. 35.

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Exposition, from Bracquemond late in 1882 or early in 1883.³² Although only three letters from Bracquemond to Moreau concerning the project survive, they reveal that Bracquemond worked closely with the artist on the realisation of the etching, requesting meetings to discuss the project and to obtain Moreau's opinion (and, if necessary, corrections) on his work in progress.³³ The etching [Figure 82], which was published in Paris by Petit and in London by Obach, was exhibited at the 1884 Salon, thus not only renewing awareness of Moreau's work in an official venue at a time when the newly published *À rebours* was exciting interest in his work in Decadent

circles, but also – very unusually – earning the only *médaille d'honneur* awarded a work in any medium at that Salon. Although Bracquemond was careful to attribute his success to the quality of the original,³⁴ the award heralds a dramatic change in both the status of printmaking in general and reproductive prints in particular. As with Rossetti, reproductions – especially those made by printmakers recognised as artists in their own right – became acceptable and sought-after substitutes for the original work. No doubt thanks to Bracquemond's success at the Salon, Boussod and Valadon chose him to produce a series of etchings after Moreau's illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine* in 1886, despite not being associated themselves with the movement to revive the original etching.³⁵

Before Moreau's work made its second appearance in London, however, another important development occurred. Claude Phillips, who had written the first serious study of Puvis to appear in a British art periodical earlier in 1885,³⁶ published a comparable article on Moreau in the *Magazine of Art* later the same year. Phillips, who concurrently served as the *correspondant pour l'Angleterre* for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, was the most openly Francophile critic in Britain in the 1880s and became instrumental in raising the profile of both Puvis and Moreau in his own country.

³² Bracquemond wrote to Moreau on 20 February 1883 to inform him that he had just finished preparations for the engraving after *David*: Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Bracquemond correspondence, letter dated 20 February 1883.

³³ Letter cited in n.32 above and a letter from Bracquemond to Moreau dated 5 February 1884 ('Voulez-vous me dire quand je pourrais avoir l'honneur de vous voir ? Je voudrais vous soumettre une épreuve de ma gravure d'après votre tableau et vous demander vos conseils avant de mettre la dernière main à mon travail').

³⁴ 'Permettez-moi de vous dire, qu'une grande part vous revient dans le succès que j'obtiens. J'ai en imitant votre oeuvre bénéficié des combinaisons de formes et de couleurs que vous avez imaginées': Bracquemond correspondence, letter dated 28 May 1884.

³⁵ On the commission for Bracquemond's *Fables de La Fontaine* etchings, see Sabine du Vignau, 'Michel Manet et Goupil & Cie: 1882-1915', *État des lieux (I)*, exh. cat. (Bordeaux, Musée Goupil, 1994), p. 120.

³⁶ See Chapter 2.

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Notably absent from Phillips's thoughtful analysis, which covers Moreau's publicly exhibited paintings from 1864 to 1880, is any hint of the moralising and xenophobia that pervaded earlier British criticism. Indeed, while acknowledging the increasing spate of comparisons between Moreau and Burne-Jones in the French press, he not only declares the parallel simplistic, but implies that Moreau is the better and more original artist and that Burne-Jones would do well to learn from him:

[Moreau] . . . makes everything – drawing, style, and technique – subservient to his efforts to render his conceptions concrete and visible. In this quality, though in this alone, he perhaps resembles Blake more closely than any other creative artist, though his art remains essentially that of the painter, and does not, like that of the Englishman, become a symbol only. [...] Moreau not so much merely imitates the outward characteristics and mannerisms of his prototypes the Quattrocentists, as he seeks to transfuse them into himself, and possess himself of the spirit with which they conceived and painted.³⁷

The article is illustrated with two reproductions, one after *Orphée* and the other after *David* (not Bracquemond's etching, which Phillips mentions as having renewed interest in Moreau, but an inferior engraving which renders the picture's jewelled surface flat and leaden). In fact, Phillips subjects *David* to a lengthier scrutiny than any of the other paintings he discusses, seeming to delight in describing the 'barbaric profusion and splendour' of the king, the angel and their exotic surroundings in terms

somewhat reminiscent of, though more restrained than, those used in the infamous passages in *À rebours*.³⁸ Interestingly, Phillips only refers in passing to the by this time notorious *Salomé* and *L'Apparition*, for which he evinces little regard and expresses regret that it is, thus far, the only work by Moreau to have been exhibited in Britain, where his art is 'little known and less understood'; the latter is, in his estimation, 'in all respects one of Moreau's most fantastic and least successful works, one, indeed, on which it would not be fair to found any appreciation of his powers'.³⁹ Phillips's wish that Moreau be represented in Britain with stronger and more varied work was to be fulfilled the following year when the solo exhibition of his *Fables de La Fontaine* watercolours staged by Boussod and Valadon in Paris opened in the company's London galleries in November. When the show was staged in Paris in May, it was accompanied by the publication of six etchings by Bracquemond [Figures 83-88] and attracted numerous plaudits, not least from Moreau's friend, the

³⁷ C. Phillips, 'Gustave Moreau', *Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), p. 233.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

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Symbolist writer Henry Cazalis. Cazalis's review, illustrated with etchings after *Le Génie du fable*, *La Fortune et le jeune enfant*, and *Le Loup et l'agneau*, appeared, probably not coincidentally, in Boussod and Valadon's bimonthly *Les Lettres et les arts*.⁴⁰ Cazalis, in summing up Moreau's achievement, drew on the growing vogue for the synthesis of the arts, declaring him an 'astonishing symphonist' in his handling of line and colour and that 'he communicates sensation, emotion, and intense reverie as the equal of a poet or a musician'.⁴¹

When the exhibition crossed the Channel, it excited considerably greater interest than Moreau's previous outing at the Grosvenor, attracting coverage in the *Athenaeum*, the *Magazine of Art* and the *World*. These three articles offer a telling cross-section of the evolution (or the lack thereof) of Moreau's reception in Britain. The *Athenaeum*'s review, while it accorded Moreau more column inches than he had ever received in that periodical, retained more than a trace of the disapproval and condescension of the recent past. While praising *Phoebus and Boreas* and *The Dragon of many Heads and the Dragon of many Tails* as 'not unworthy of Breughel, and combining charms of colour with peculiar wildness of invention', and *The Man who ran after Fortune* as '[epitomising] all the romance, beauty, and vigour of his invention and technique', the anonymous critic deployed the familiar vocabulary of moral censure for *Le Singe et le chat* [Figure 83], which 'approaches Decamps in its sumptuousness and its weird luxury; but the luxury is overdone, and the sentiment of the design, however romantic and spirited it may be, is sensuous, while the colour, though splendid and harmonious, is more showy than fine', a condemnation that reaches its acme in his conclusion that 'the artist possesses superb and powerful natural endowments, which, more from wilfulness and self-indulgence than any other cause, have been allowed to run to seed.'⁴²

Claude Phillips, however, writing in the *Magazine of Art*, paid homage to Moreau's qualities as a 'painter-poet' (an echo of the positive inter-artistic comparisons set up by Cazalis which were to prove a double-edged sword for Moreau's reputation in France), and opined that his genius was better suited to watercolour than to oils and praised his handling of Persian and Indian motifs (those

⁴⁰ The identity of the etcher has not been preserved, but they do not appear to be the work of Bracquemond.

⁴¹ 'Étonnant symphoniste'; 'La sensation, l'émotion, la rêverie intense, il les communique à l'égal d'un poète ou d'un musicien': H. Cazalis, 'Gustave Moreau et les Fables de La Fontaine', *Les Lettres et les*

arts 2 (1 April 1886), p. 65.

⁴² 'Minor Exhibitions', *Athenaeum* no. 3080 (6 November 1886), p. 606.

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which had been denounced in the *Athenaeum* as 'weird luxury').⁴³ Yet, despite Moreau's reputation as a painter-poet, Phillips underlined the fundamental independence of the watercolours from their literary source material: 'his variations, it may be urged, are so dazzling and so little like the themes upon which they are built, that, to appreciate their singular charm, only the mere outline of the latter must be borne in mind, and their aim and spirit banished, as much as possible, from our thoughts.'⁴⁴ Particularly interesting in this regard is the brief notice of the exhibition written by George Bernard Shaw for the *World*. Shaw not only commended Moreau for not falling into the trap of slavish 'mere illustration' of the Fables, but, in tune with Cazalis and other advanced French critics, added that 'he has the insight of a poet, and the true painter's faculty of mixing his colours with imagination. He uses the palette as a good composer uses the orchestra'.⁴⁵ In drawing this comparison, Shaw may, of course, have had in mind Walter Pater's contention that 'all arts aspire to the condition of music', but it is also worth bearing in mind that he was almost certainly aware of concurrent discussions of cross-fertilisation between the arts, and particularly music and painting, in the influential *Revue wagnérienne*, which had begun publication in 1885.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, despite the advocacy and admiration of cosmopolitan critics such as Phillips and Shaw, enthusiasm for Moreau in Britain remained a minority taste, as evidenced by the poor sales of Bracquemond's *Fables* etchings.⁴⁷

Moreau's appearance at the 1889 Exposition Universelle – the final exhibition of his work during his lifetime – and concurrent studies of his oeuvre by Paul Leprieur and Ary Renan⁴⁸ seem to have been the primary point of exposure for key figures of the Decadent Nineties such as Arthur Symons.⁴⁹ Indeed, Symons, as the key promoter of French Symbolist literature and antinaturalist art in Britain in numerous articles

⁴³ The 'Persian' qualities of Moreau's post-1870 oeuvre were frequently remarked upon by contemporary critics. For a thorough exploration of the extent of Moreau's debt of inspiration to Persian and Indian art, see A. Okada, G. Lacambre and M. Maucuer, *L'Inde de Gustave Moreau* (exh. cat., Paris, Musée Cernuschi and Lorient, Musée de la Compagnie des Indes, 1997).

⁴⁴ C. Phillips, 'The Fables of La Fontaine by Gustave Moreau', *Magazine of Art* 10 (1887), p. 102.

⁴⁵ G. B. Shaw, 'What the World says', *The World* 644 (3 November 1886), p. 14.

⁴⁶ Interchanges between music and the arts will be explored further in Chapter 6.

⁴⁷ The London exhibition catalogue advertised sets of the six etchings for £25 (proofs on parchment) or £15 15/- (proofs on Japanese). They seem not to have sold well in either London or Paris, for Bracquemond wrote to Roux in December 1888, 'La persistance de Monsieur Bousso d à se débarrasser de nos gravures est étonnante'. Musée Gustave Moreau, Roux correspondence, letter from Félix Bracquemond to Antony Roux, 5 December 1888 (letter forwarded to Moreau by Roux).

⁴⁸ P. Leprieur, 'Gustave Moreau', *L'Artiste* 119 (March-June 1889), pp. 161-80, 338-59, 443-55.

⁴⁹ Symons devoted a chapter to Moreau in *Studies in Seven Arts* (London, 1906) which suggests close study of his paintings over a number of years, but he gives no clues as to when or how he first became acquainted with the artist's work.

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throughout the 1890s and books including *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) and *Studies in Seven Arts* (1906) and, crucially, as a collaborator of Aubrey Beardsley, may be seen as a bridge for artistic reputations between the two countries.⁵⁰ However, despite the obvious attractions of Moreau's work for British anti-naturalist and Decadent writers and artists, written evidence during the period remains frustratingly sparse. Confirmation of the high regard in which he was held by these circles exists primarily in an article by the critic Gleeson White that appeared in 1897 in the second (and final) volume of the *Pageant*, Britain's most design-conscious and cosmopolitan analogue to the Francophone Symbolist *petites revues*.⁵¹ Even

putting to one side White's contribution, this volume, which features reproductions of Moreau's work (*Oedipe*, *Hercule et l'hydre de Lerne*, and *L'Apparition*) alongside Puvis, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts, and its art editor Charles Shannon, validates Moreau's place in an anti-naturalist artistic pantheon which was by this point venerated on both sides of the Channel. Still, White insisted that Moreau must be appreciated on his own terms, deploring the fatuity of his now-ubiquitous characterisation as 'the French Burne-Jones'. Rather, he argued that, although the art of both 'may [be] traced to the same fountain-head', Moreau should be seen as representing the classic ideal and Burne-Jones the romantic.⁵² (Indeed, Jean Lorrain had introduced a similar dichotomy in his 1887 volume *Les Griseries* when he dedicated his poems 'Printemps Classique' and 'Printemps Mystique' to Moreau and Burne-Jones, respectively.) Although White focused his discussion on Moreau's major Salon paintings, particularly *Oedipe*, *Orphée*,⁵³ *Salomé* and *L'Apparition*, he also refers to numerous lesser-known, privately owned works, which suggests that he may have paid visits to the relevant collections in Paris. In fact, Charles Hayem and Edmond Taigny, two of Moreau's most important patrons, were both noted for their

⁵⁰ On Symons's promotion of Redon in Britain, see Chapter 6.

⁵¹ The 1897 volume of the *Pageant* also featured works in translation by Maeterlinck ('The Seven Princesses') and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam ('Queen Ysabeau') as well as a commentary on Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly by Edmund Gosse; the 1896 volume published in the original French Verlaine's poem 'Monna Rosa', discussed in Chapter 4, and Maeterlinck's 'Et s'il revenait'.

⁵² G. White, 'The Pictures of Gustave Moreau', *The Pageant* 2 (1897), pp. 3-4.

⁵³ White quotes (without naming) another English critic on *Orphée*: 'It is against skies flushed by the aftermath of sun that recall for their touches of orange and bands of brooding purple these words, *Quelles violettes frondaisons vont descendre* – words so expressive of that hush in nature become strange in expectation of some countersign pregnant for the future – it is against a sky like this than an all-persuasive figure moves away; the head of Orpheus lies between her hands, and we scarcely know if her fastidious dress, decked with so many outlandish things, has been clasped to her waist and chaste throat in real innocence of the burden she holds so mystically; but this hint of sentiment is too slight, too fugitive, in the picture to become morbid'. I have not been able to discover the identity of this critic, but it does not appear to be Symons.

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generosity in allowing amateurs access to their collections, so it is certainly possible that White could have examined their contents.⁵⁴ Most significant, though, was White's insistence on the suggestiveness and ultimate resistance to exegesis of Moreau's oeuvre – terms which had, by this time, become standard in Symbolist criticism of Moreau in France. Finally, on the eve of his death, Moreau's reputation in Britain – at least, within a rather recherché, elite milieu – seemed to have achieved a degree of parity with that of his following in France.

Upon the publication of the second volume of the *Pageant*, Aubrey Beardsley, then convalescing in Boscombe, wrote to his patron André Raffalovich to thank him for sending a copy. He was especially taken with 'two of the Moreaus (*Oedipus* and the *Hercules*) [which] are perfectly ravishing', adding, 'I often think of *your* Moreau, one of his most beautiful works'.⁵⁵ Raffalovich's 'Moreau' was the 1872 watercolour *Sapho* [Figure 89, Mathieu 155], evidently a gift from his mother Marie and at this date the only work by Moreau in a British collection.⁵⁶ Beardsley's rapturous response indicates a longstanding acquaintance with Moreau's work, one which has been little explored and, I would argue, began even before his involvement in the creation of the most infamous illustrated book of the 1890s, Oscar Wilde's controversial play, *Salome*.

'Intensely decorative cruelty': Décadence, Japonisme and Beardsley's *Salome*
Wilde's displeasure with Beardsley's illustrations for *Salome* is notorious.

The reasons most often cited for his condemnation of the younger man's work are

Beardsley's mischievous inclusion of unflattering caricatures of Wilde as the Woman in the Moon, Herod, and the sinister dramaturge/carnival barker in *Enter Herodias* [Figure 90, R.285], and his outrageous deviation from the text of the play in his addition of extraneous scenes (*The Peacock Skirt*, *The Black Cape* and *The Toilet of*

⁵⁴ Hayem donated his collection of works by Moreau to the state in 1899, on which occasion they were exhibited in the Musée du Luxembourg; see J. Lorrain, *Poussières de Paris* (Paris, 1902), pp. 22-23, for an account of the exhibition.

⁵⁵ Letter to André Raffalovich, 29 November 1896, H. Maas, J. L. Duncan and W. G. Good, eds., *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley* (London, 1970), p. 218.

⁵⁶ Marie Raffalovich purchased *Sapho* from Moreau in June 1872; the date at which it passed into André's possession is unrecorded, but presumably he owned it by 1895, when he first took Beardsley under his wing. See my article, 'Gustave Moreau and the Raffalovich family: new documents for *Sappho*', *Burlington Magazine* 148 (May 2006), pp. 327-31, for further discussion of Mme Raffalovich's patronage of Moreau.

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Salome), now considered a central element of Beardsley's ironic critique of the text.⁵⁷ Yet it seems that Wilde's most fundamental objection to Beardsley's decorations was that their restless whiplash lines and Japanesque tendencies flouted the spirit of his Byzantine text and, even worse, its pictorial sources:

'My Herod is like the Herod of Gustave Moreau – wrapped in his jewels and sorrows. My Salomé is a mystic, the sister of Salammbô, a Sainte Thérèse who worships the moon; dear Aubrey's designs are like the naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes on the margins of his copybooks.'⁵⁸

In Wilde's eyes, it would seem that the most heinous crime 'dear Aubrey' committed was his impish infidelity to Moreau, whose vision of *Salome* had coloured and shaped Wilde's own ever since he read the newly published *À rebours* on his Paris honeymoon in 1884. However, Wilde's complaint, probably as much the product of the clash of two enormous egos as of genuine artistic disagreement, unwittingly reveals his short-sightedness. For Beardsley was probably not only better acquainted with the work of Moreau (who himself had more than a passing interest in Japonisme) than Wilde, he used this knowledge, as I shall demonstrate, allied with the inspiration of Japanese prints, to create a bold and subversive rereading of Moreau's vision of *Salome*.⁵⁹

Tracing Beardsley's contacts with Moreau's work prior to the creation of the illustrations for *Salome* is not a straightforward task, made still more difficult by large gaps in his correspondence in the early 1890s.⁶⁰ As we have already seen, he discussed and looked at Moreau's work with André Raffalovich, who, thanks to his mother's patronage, had enjoyed privileged access to Moreau's atelier from an early age, but such conversations are unlikely to have taken place much before 1895.⁶¹ The

⁵⁷ My approach to Beardsley as artist-critic of Wilde's text is informed by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's examination of the *Salome* illustrations as parody: L. J. Kooistra, *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 130-46.

⁵⁸ Quoted in J. P. Raymond and C. Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* (London, 1932), pp. 51-52. It should be noted that Charles Ricketts was a rival of Beardsley for Wilde's favour, having illustrated all of his works up to 1894, most famously *The Sphinx*, also published by John Lane.

⁵⁹ Beardsley's Japonisme in general has been discussed in K. Berger, *Japonisme in Western Painting from Whistler to Matisse*, trans. D. Britt (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 250-57, and, at greater length, in L. G. Zatlín, *Beardsley, Japonisme and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁶⁰ No letters are known survive between early January 1890 and July 1891, and 1892 is patchy.

⁶¹ Some time after André had moved to London in 1882, Marie Raffalovich wrote to Moreau, 'Veuillez nous permettre, à mon fils André (qui est venu passer quelques jours avec nous) et à moi de vous rendre visite dans votre atelier? Il serait désireux d'emporter avec lui à Londres le lumineux souvenir de cette vision'. Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Raffalovich correspondence, undated letter. On

another occasion, Mme Raffalovich invited him to dinner at her house on 6th January, noting that André was visiting for a few days and ‘il serait fort heureux également de vous voir’ (ibid., no year given).

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Bracquemond etchings after *David* and the *Fables* may well have still been available in London by the time Beardsley became a clerk in a City insurance office in 1889 and began to frequent nearby second-hand bookshops and print dealers, but we have no proof of his having seen them at this point; if he was indeed aware of the *Fables* illustrations, Moreau’s Persian-influenced fantasies, worlds apart from the quaint moralistic tales of La Fontaine, could have provided him with a model for his transgressive approach to illustrating *Salome*. He met Wilde by chance when he visited Burne-Jones at his studio and showed him some drawings in July 1891, but it seems rather unlikely that Wilde, despite his initial friendliness to Beardsley, would have discussed Moreau or *Salome* with a young upstart.⁶² More significant, no doubt, was Beardsley’s first visit to Paris in June 1892, during which he met Puvis, then the president of the Salon du Champ de Mars, ‘who introduced [him] to one of his brother painters as “un jeune artiste anglais qui fait des choses étonnantes!”’⁶³ In another letter he added that ‘the new work was regarded with no little surprise and enthusiasm by the French artists’.⁶⁴ Although we have no way of determining the identity of the ‘artists’ or of Puvis’s ‘brother painter’, it is tempting to speculate that the artist in question was Moreau, who was friendly with Puvis and by this time a member of the Académie. Even if this were not the case, though, Beardsley could certainly have seen *Orphée* at the Musée du Luxembourg or even have sought out Moreau’s work in the collections of Hayem, Taigny or others; the resemblance of the Thracian maiden in her exotic garb, tenderly cradling the severed head of Orpheus, to *Salome* contemplating the head of John the Baptist had long been remarked upon, and would not have been lost on Beardsley.⁶⁵ As well, we must not forget Beardsley’s fluency in

⁶² See Beardsley’s letter to A. W. King, 13 July 1891, in Maas et al. (1970), pp. 21-23, for a description of his visit to Burne-Jones and the older artist’s appraisal of his work.

⁶³ Letter to E. J. Marshall, autumn 1892, in Maas et al. (1970), p. 34. Beardsley repeats this news almost verbatim in a letter to his school friend G. F. Scotson-Clark, ca. 15 February 1893. Ibid., pp. 43-44.

⁶⁴ Letter to A. W. King, 9 December 1892, ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁵ When the painting was exhibited at the 1866 Salon, Théophile Gautier remarked on the similarity of Orpheus’s severed head to ‘that of John the Baptist on a silver charger in Herodias’s hands (‘celle de Saint Jean-Baptiste sur son plat d’argent aux mains d’Hérodiade’): T. Gautier, ‘Salon de 1866’ (*Le Moniteur universel* 135, 15 May 1866), p. 576. Chesneau noted in 1868 that ‘she is reminiscent of the Salome of the scriptures, who also contemplated, with a quite different gaze, the severed head of Saint John the Baptist’ (‘Elle rappelle la Salomé des livres saints qui contemplait, elle aussi, mais de quel autre regarde, la tête coupée de saint Jean-Baptiste’): E. Chesneau, *Les Nations rivales dans l’art* (Paris, 1868), p. 203. Lacambre (1998a), p. 98, speculates that Chesneau’s comparison of the two themes may have been prompted by conversations with Moreau, although the artist’s interest in *Salome* may not have developed until the early 1870s. I am grateful to Luke Houghton for reminding me of the parallels between the two subjects.

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French and his voracious and catholic taste for French literature; although the only references to Huysmans in his letters appear long after *Salome*, it seems plausible that Wilde may have encouraged him to read not only *À rebours* but sources that influenced Moreau’s picturing of *Salome* such as Flaubert’s *Salammô* – sources which the playwright claimed as having moulded *his* *Salome* in turn.⁶⁶

Wilde’s text – which, we should bear in mind, was originally written in French – could be considered an attempt to render in words the lapidary qualities of Moreau’s painted *Salomé*. The ritualistic repetition of certain phrases has the contradictory

effect of underscoring the clashing, all-powerful obsessions that rule all the characters, and of draining them of humanity, of any hint of flesh-and-blood realism. Under these cascades of jewelled language, which blasphemously rework the extravagant prose of the *Song of Songs*, Salome, Herod, Herodias, Iokanaan, even relatively minor characters like Narraboth and the Page harden into ciphers, their movement and development limited by envelopes of verbal ornamentation. This was precisely the effect Moreau himself desired when he created Salome's costume; rejecting 'old classical Greek frippery' as inappropriate for 'the figure of a sibyl and religious enchantress with a mysterious character', he 'conceived of a costume like a shrine'.⁶⁷ Nowhere is this enshrinement (or imprisonment) of a character in layers of language more apparent or effective than in Salome's litany of desire for Iokanaan, the climax of which is worth quoting at length:

It is thy mouth that I desire, Iokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy, are not so red. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press. It is redder than the feet of the doves who inhabit the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found

⁶⁶ As early as 1890 Beardsley boasted to King that 'I can read French now almost as easily as English' (letter to A. W. King, 4 January 1890, in *ibid.*, p. 18). André Raffalovich seems to have tried to interest Beardsley in Huysmans's novels, even attempting to engineer a meeting which appears never to have taken place (letter to André Raffalovich, 13 April 1897, in *ibid.*, p. 302), but with little success, Beardsley finally confessing that 'I never like Huysmans' (letter to André Raffalovich, 21 February 1898, *ibid.*, p. 434). However, Beardsley's dislike may have been reserved for Huysmans's later, neo-Catholic writings such as *La Cathédrale*, which seem to have been part of Raffalovich's arsenal in his attempts to convert Beardsley to Catholicism.

⁶⁷ 'Je suis obligé de tout inventer, ne voulant sous aucun prétexte me servir de la vieille friperie grecque classique. [...] Ainsi, dans ma Salomé, je voulais rendre une figure de sibylle et d'enchanteresse religieuse avec un caractère de mystère. J'ai alors conçu le costume qui est comme une châsse': Cooke (2002), p. 99.

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in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings!... It is like the vermilion that the Moabites find in the mines of Moab, the vermilion that the kings take from them. It is like the bow of the King of the Persians, that is painted with vermilion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth... Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.⁶⁸

This 'enshrinement' of the body of Iokanaan in metaphorical jewels, this tension between eroticism and decorative artificiality exemplified here is also, according to Arthur Symons, one of the defining characteristics not only of Moreau's Salome, but of his portrayal of women in general: '[Salome] is not a woman, but a gesture, a symbol of delirium; a fixed dream transforms itself into cruel and troubling hallucinations of colour; strange vaults arch over her, dim and glimmering, pierced by shafts of light, starting in blood-red splendours, through which she moves robed in flowers or jewels, in hieratic lasciviousness'.⁶⁹ Yet Wilde subverts the male artist's prerogative to imprison the body of a desired woman in a jewelled shrine by endowing Salome herself with the power the Moreau claimed over her.

Beardsley's response to Moreau's image and Wilde's text is a complex and uneasy mixture of allegiance and parody, further complicated by the fact that elements of Wilde's text are themselves parodic (notably Salome's rhapsody of desire, which

parodies the Song of Songs). The textual parody has already been explored extensively, with sometimes contradictory conclusions, by Linda Gertner Zatin and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, and I shall only touch upon it briefly here.⁷⁰ Beardsley comes closest to out-and-out caricature of Moreau's tendency to encrust every surface, human and architectural, with gems in the title page and border for the list of pictures [Figures 91, R.274 and 92, R.276], in which imbricated, stylised, highly sexualised roses are substituted for stones, swarming over every surface; the parody is most grotesque in the looping of garlands of roses across the chest of the chortling herm – possibly a twist on the statue of Diana of Ephesus looming in the shadows behind Herod's throne in Moreau's *Salomé?* – to whom Beardsley has given extra eyes in place of nipples and navel.⁷¹ Indeed, the self-consciously excessive decorativeness of the *Salome* illustrations, coupled with a greater familiarity with Moreau's stylistic

⁶⁸ O. Wilde, *Salome* (London, 1894), p. 53.

⁶⁹ Symons (1906), p. 76. Symons was ultimately critical of Moreau's vision, considering it sterile and repetitive, but conceding that 'at least he lived his own life, among his chosen spectres' (p. 86).

⁷⁰ Kooistra (1995), pp. 130-46; L. G. Zatin, *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 90-96.

⁷¹ Zatin (1997), p. 65, also notes the possible influence of another Moreau (the 18th-century engraver Moreau le Jeune) on the roses in *Salome*.

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quirks, may help to explain why Beardsley's reputation blossomed so quickly in France, with remarkably little of the lag that characterised the cross-Channel spread of the reputations of some of his contemporaries.⁷² Conversely, Beardsley's emphasis on the theatrical and the grotesque appears to amplify, to the point of parody and subversion, conservative British (mis)perceptions of Moreau's art. French and Belgian critics as early as 1893 singled out the decorative nature of Beardsley's work for praise, rather than condemning it as frivolous grotesquery devoid of moral or philosophical import.⁷³ Gabriel Mourey, one of the most influential advocates of antirealist

British art in the 1890s, went still farther to characterise the essence of Beardsley's work as 'intensely decorative cruelty', making the interesting assertion that this was a product of Beardsley's North-European origins.⁷⁴

Mourey's emphasis on the foreignness of Beardsley's elegantly grotesque art represents the flipside of the attacks of the conservative British press on Beardsley's perceived 'Frenchness'. Matei Calinescu has pinpointed the notion of otherness or foreign origin as central in perceptions of the origins of Decadence; nowhere is this better illustrated than in evolving French and British perceptions thereof.⁷⁵ As early as 1856, Delacroix was musing on the inherent tendency toward decadence in England and the Nordic countries and praising Shakespeare as the acme of refinement in times of decadence, presaging Mourey's comments on Beardsley.⁷⁶ Yet Beardsley, in his native country, was frequently the victim of xenophobic hostility; although such attacks increased, not surprisingly, following Wilde's disgrace and his involuntary entanglement therein, he and his work (inseparable in moralising Victorian criticism) were judged dangerously foreign, for which read French or Francophile. Harry Quilter vilified Beardsley as a harbinger of evil foreign influence in his attack on the

⁷² See J. Lethève, 'Aubrey Beardsley et la France', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (December 1966), pp. 343-50, for an outline of Beardsley's reception in France during his lifetime, and more recently, J. H. Desmarais, *The Beardsley Industry: the Critical Reception in England and France, from 1893 to 1914* (Aldershot, 1998).

⁷³ See for example 'L'Image', *Le Livre et l'image* 2 (August 1893), pp. 47-64, and G. Combaz, 'Aubrey Beardsley', *L'Art moderne* (1 April 1894), pp. 101-103.

⁷⁴ 'Une cruauté intensément décorative dans sa manière de s'exprimer, le dénote septentrional': Mourey (1895), p. 269.

⁷⁵ M. Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC, 1987), pp. 167-69.

⁷⁶ Delacroix wrote: 'On the need of refinement in times of decadence. The greatest spirits cannot avoid it. . . . The English, the Germanics have always pushed us in that direction. Shakespeare is very refined. Painting with a great depth of feeling which ancient artists neglected or did not know, he discovered a small world of emotions which all men in all times have experienced in a state of confusion' (*Journal*, ed. A. Joubin, Paris 1932, p. 439, cited in Calinescu (1987), p. 167).

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latest wave of anti-realist art, 'The Gospel of Intensity';⁷⁷ most famously, Margaret Armour, after savaging the 'ugliness' and 'corruption' of Beardsley's drawings and forecasting in them Britain's impending moral downfall, proposed the following novel solution: 'Why not hoist the Decadents altogether off our shoulders and saddle them on to France? She has a nice broad back for such things, and Mr. Beardsley won't be the last straw by many.'⁷⁸ Beardsley's warmer reception in France – perhaps bolstered by the parallels between his work and that of Moreau, an artist both sanctioned by the Académie and the darling of Decadent and Symbolist circles – unwittingly gives credence to her recommendation.

Japanese art was viewed with as much, if not more, suspicion as French by conservative British critics,⁷⁹ and Beardsley's open and diverse borrowing of its motifs and technique has often been considered part of his project to *épater les bourgeois*.⁸⁰ Yet the Japoniste flourishes on which Beardsley prided himself – and to which Wilde strenuously objected – represent not so much a riposte to Moreau's ornamental eclecticism as a means of entering into a dialogue with the painter's work and ultimately destabilising it. For Moreau, while not an enthusiastic collector of Japanese objects like some of his contemporaries, had also absorbed some of the lessons of Japanese art, and although it only seems to have overtly informed his work during a relatively brief period in the late 1860s and early 1870s, some of what he had learned filtered into his later work in subtler form. His eyes were opened to Japanese woodblock prints by the displays at the 1867 Exposition Universelle, and shortly thereafter he purchased an album of Edo-period prints, *Ô Yamato Azuma Nishiki-e*, from the noted Parisian Japanese art dealer Desoye.⁸¹ He only made two direct watercolour copies after prints, in 1869; significantly, given his fascination with androgynous figures, the images he chose to copy were a portrait of a male Kabuki

⁷⁷ H. Quilter, 'The Gospel of Intensity', *Contemporary Review* 67 (1895), pp. 777-78. Quilter was a notorious bugbear of avant-garde British artists over the last quarter of the nineteenth century and himself a victim of Whistler's barbs.

⁷⁸ Armour (1896), p. 11.

⁷⁹ On Victorian anxiety over the perceived 'indecent' of Japanese art, see T. Watanabe, *High Victorian Japonisme* (Bern, 1991), pp. 146, 161-62. One of the harshest detractors of Japanese art in Britain was the American James Jackson Jarves, who, in an article in the *Art Journal*, not only deplored 'the obscene Art of Japan' but went so far as to claim that such obscenity was a logical result of 'wrong culture' and the primitivism of the Japanese people who had 'no true sense of the beautiful': J. J. Jarves, 'Japanese Art', *Art Journal* 7 (June 1869), p. 182. The parallels with contemporary culturally based

criticism of French art scarcely need be pointed out.

⁸⁰ It was certainly seen as such during Beardsley's lifetime; the 'Japanee-Rossetti girl' on his poster for *A Comedy of Sighs* was derided in verse ('Ars Postera') by Owen Seaman in *Punch* (April 21 1894).

⁸¹ Paris, Grand Palais and Tokyo, National Museum of Western Art, *Le Japonisme*, exh. cat. (1988), p. 149.

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actor [Figure 93] and two *onnagata*, or female impersonators [Figure 94].⁸² Yet the album seems to have led to the lightening and brightening of his palette, which up to this point had more or less bowed to academic dictates and had avoided pure, unmixed colour. His debt to Japanese prints is clearest when we place *Sapho*⁸³ alongside a

print from the album by Kunisada, *Genji taking the air in summer on the Sumida* [Figure 95]. As Lacambre has noted, Moreau adapted the red-and-blue floral kimono of the woman in the foreground and the graceful, mannered pose and gesture of the woman in the boat in the middle distance for *Sapho*,⁸⁴ conflating classical subject, Renaissance setting and Japanese motifs. While examinations of Moreau's Japonisme normally cease with *Sapho*, I would argue that undercurrents continue to be felt in some of his later work, most significantly in *L'Apparition*. Salome's highly artificial posture – the torso twisted towards the viewer, the head bowed in profile, the arm extended sideways – is a modification of the pose of the woman in the middle ground in Kunisada's print, a pose which appears in various forms in Edo prints and, while often the province of women, was not reserved solely for them, as is the case for the servant boy in this illustration by Sukenobu [Figure 96].⁸⁵ Beardsley, the devotee of *ukiyo-e*, could well have been cognisant of the same sources as Moreau and have perceived their influence on his work.

The prevalence of androgynous figures in both Moreau's representations of Salome and in the Japanese art on which he and Beardsley drew provides a useful lens through which to view Beardsley's responses to Moreau's figuration of the narrative and character of Salome. The role of costume in revealing or disguising a figure's sex is crucial in all three cases. As Zatlin notes, the fact that both men and women wore kimono and the subtle differences between male and female hairstyles meant that for the uninitiated Western viewer (and even some initiated ones), it was all but impossible to distinguish between male and female figures.⁸⁶ Although the androgynous qualities of Moreau's male figures has received some attention, the

⁸² Both sheets are inscribed at the bottom, 'Exposition japonaise – Palais de l'Industrie'; the originals are unknown, but may be the work of Utagawa Kunisada: *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁸³ Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Raffalovich correspondence, letter dated 9 September 1873; see also Sloan (2006), pp. 328 and 331. *Sapho*, incidentally, was the first of Moreau's works to be subjected to the attentions of a *litterateur* when its first owner, Marie Raffalovich, wrote a florid, morbidly romantic fairy tale after it

⁸⁴ Lacambre (1998a), p. 113.

⁸⁵ On Sukenobu's influence on Beardsley, see Zatlin (1997), p. 123.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-67. This does not, of course, apply to shunga (erotic prints) in which both men and women are depicted with outsize genitalia (a feature adopted by Beardsley in his illustrations for *Lysistrata*).

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capacity of costume and ornament to denote, disguise or even blur gender also informs *Salomé* and *L'Apparition* to a degree heretofore little examined. This is perhaps a consequence of the blinding power of Huysmans's virtuoso description of the paintings in *À rebours*, which Peter Cooke has justly described as their 'literary prison'.⁸⁷ We may assume, however, that Beardsley, who would have known both the paintings (if only in reproduction) and *À rebours*, would have been alive to the inconsistencies in Huysmans's vision, and his *Salomé* illustrations suggest that he eagerly seized on these contradictions. Place both pictures alongside the celebrated passage, and the degree of license taken by Huysmans is remarkable:

(on *Salomé*:) With a withdrawn, solemn, almost august expression on her face, she begins the lascivious dance which is to rouse the aged Herod's dormant senses: her breasts undulate, the nipples hardening at the touch of her whirling necklaces; the strings of diamonds glitter against her moist flesh; her bracelets, her belts, her rings spit fiery sparks . . .

(on *L'Apparition*:) With a gesture of horror, Salome tries to thrust away the terrifying vision which holds her nailed to the spot, balanced on the tips of her toes; her eyes dilate, her right hand claws convulsively at her throat. She is

almost naked . . . A gorgerin grips her waist like a corselet, and like an outsize clasp a marvellous jewel sparkles and flashes in the cleft between her breasts; lower down, a girdle encircles her hips . . . finally, where the body shows bare between gorgerin and girdle, the belly bulges out, dimpled by a navel which resembles a graven seal of onyx, with its milky hues and its rosy fingernail tints.⁸⁸

Huysmans not only deliberately eroticises Salome's body and gestures, he introduces details and actions from his own imagination inimical to Moreau's principles of *belle inertie* (beautiful inertia) and anti-theatricality.⁸⁹ Moreau's Salome, first of all, does not actually dance; her static pose and blank expression, as well as being anti-theatrical, suggests the continuing influence of Japanese prints. She is instead depicted in a hieratic and physically impossible pose, almost floating on the tips of her toes, her drapery hovering behind her as if frozen rather than as a result of

⁸⁷ Cooke (2003), p. 131. Symons was also wary of Huysmans, suspecting him of latching onto Moreau's work because he was 'the painter of all others best suited to evoke his own eloquence' (Symons, 1906, pp. 72-73).

⁸⁸ Huysmans (1884), pp. 143, 147.

⁸⁹ My use of this term is informed by Michael Fried's essay 'Art and Objecthood' (*Artforum* 5, Summer 1967, pp. 12-23); although Fried's arguments centre on Minimalist sculpture, his location of 'theatricality' in the ability of a work of art to both distance and confront the viewer is equally applicable in the case of Moreau. For a discussion of the origins of the anti-theatrical in Moreau's work, see Cooke (2003), pp. 104-110.

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whirling movement;⁹⁰ although her dance is the painting's ostensible subject, its choreography is left to the imagination and only suggested symbolically. We should recall that Wilde also tells us nothing of the Dance of the Seven Veils – the central action of the play – beyond the fact of its performance.⁹¹ Secondly, this majestically hieratic figure enshrined in her jewels and opaque, metallic veils is far from being the voluptuous feminine ideal described by Huysmans. Not only are her breasts chastely concealed by her costume (so much so that her torso appears flat), her arms and shoulders are as muscular as those of the executioner, although significantly paler – Moreau apparently nodding to the archaic convention of giving women fairer skin than men – and almost as solidly columnar as the pillars supporting Herod's palace. Her face is a smooth, impassive mask, with a faint suggestion of melancholy, not unlike that of the Thracian maiden in *Orphée*. Its counterpart in Beardsley's *Salome* is not to be found in any of the depictions of Salome herself, but in the face of the epebic, homosexual Page in *A Platonic Lament* [Figure 97, R.284], mourning over the body of Narraboth who had killed himself out of unrequited love for Salome. That the dead Narraboth is supported by a jester who appears to be masturbating with his free hand while casting a lewd glance at the viewer neatly implicates the reader as voyeur and subverts expectations of the nature of the object of desire.⁹²

If Salome-by-way-of-Huysmans exists at all in Beardsley's world, she appears not in the guise of Salome herself, but as the ferociously brazen but ultimately pathetic Herodias. By rotating the figure from profile to full face, the decorous selfcontainment of Moreau's Salome gives way to aggressive confrontation. Beardsley inflates the rigid hieratism of *Salomé* to an outrageous degree in Herodias's columnar, phallic body, jewel-studded hair and haughty expression; the 'jewelled gorgerin' described by Huysmans as emphasising Salome's breasts is given to her instead to support the outsize globular breasts whose appearance corresponds more closely to

⁹⁰ In most of Moreau's studies from life for the dancing Salome, the model is shown supporting her weight on one or both flat feet; due to the impossibility of posing a model on point for any length of time, he fashioned a wood and wax model in that pose and seems to have used it not only in the 1876

Salomé but in the later variants in which she appears on point (Lacambre, 1998a, p. 160).

⁹¹ See Kooistra (1995), pp. 144-45, on the symbolic significance for Wilde of the invisible dance; it is worth noting that in March 1893 (the month before Beardsley's homage to the play, *J'ai baisé ta bouche Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche*, was published in the inaugural issue of *The Studio*), he inscribed a presentation copy of the original French edition, 'For Aubrey: for the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance' (cited in *ibid.*, p. 131).

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 135, notes the prevalence of the technique in the *Salome* illustrations, which includes the caricature of Wilde in *Enter Herodias*, the putti in *The Eyes of Herod*, and the lute player in *The Stomach Dance*.

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Huysmans's overheated portrait than to Moreau's depiction. (Even in *L'Apparition*, when Salome is shown semi-nude, her breasts and belly are devoid of the sensuous modelling on which Huysmans dwelt at length and which on close examination seems to be the product of wishful thinking.) Yet, as Kooistra points out, Herodias's power is revealed, on close examination, to be illusory: armless and apparently legless, she depends on the foetal grotesque, who tugs at the outlines of her sleeve as if upon the strings of a marionette, for support;⁹³ the effeminate page's noticeable lack of arousal in the first, suppressed, version of the scene undermines her sexuality, the only power she and her daughter wield in a patriarchal society. The image functions as an ironic critique of Moreau's self-conscious, wooden hieratism, Huysmans's overwrought prose, and Wilde's portentous drama at once.

Of course, Beardsley's clearest reworking of *Salomé* and *L'Apparition* comes in his renderings of the same scenes, *The Stomach Dance* [Figure 98, R.280] and *The Climax* [Figure 99, R.286]. As much as Wilde may have objected to Beardsley's deliberate dashing of the reader's expectations of a mystical, symbolic ritual dance by substituting the more earthbound 'Stomach Dance', the illustration in fact serves as proof that Beardsley understood Wilde's text and its departure from the tradition represented by Moreau. One of Wilde's most shocking innovations was to transform Salome from the pawn of Herodias who dances to fulfil her mother's desire, as recounted in the biblical tale and adhered to by artists for centuries, into an independent woman who acts on her own terms, motivated by her own sexual desires.⁹⁴ Beardsley reflects this paradigm shift in *The Stomach Dance* by substituting for Moreau's full-profile pose, which, in tandem with her lowered eyelids, deprives Salome of agency and reduces her to being the object of the dual gaze of Herod and the viewer of the painting, a confrontational frontal pose which places Salome in control and a steely, passionless glare that confounds Herod's, and by extension the viewer's, impulse to objectify her. Yet Beardsley has chosen to retain and amplify several features of Moreau's image, most notably the motionlessness of Salome's body and her unnatural pose, not merely balanced on the tips of her toes but apparently floating, possibly inspired by the prevalence of floating figures in Japanese

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 139. Zatin (1990), p. 87, conversely sees Herodias as a figure of power and nonconformity, but one whose use of her body to control Herod brings her no pleasure.

⁹⁴ Indeed, Wilde also portrays Herodias with greater sympathy, or at least with greater ambiguity, showing her not only refusing to collude with Herod's lust for Salome but actively discouraging her from dancing for him (pp. 80-90).

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prints; the only suggestion of movement is in the outward thrust of her stomach and the single outswung veil. For whom, or what, is this Salome dancing? For dominance over her hated stepfather, for the right to his power? For the achievement of her vengeful desire for Iokanaan's head? For her own pleasure? Although the veil projecting from between her thighs and apparently spouting a stream of roses has been likened to an erect penis ejaculating,⁹⁵ her frozen attitude, her cold, almost

unappealing semi-nudity and her stony expression belie any enjoyment of pleasure. She remains as enigmatic, albeit in different terms, as Moreau's Salome. *The Climax*, however, represents an explicit challenge to the rigid antitheatricality of *L'Apparition*. Although one might balk at my describing the latter work as anti-theatrical, given the dramatic event depicted, I would argue that Salome's expression of horror, while more emotive than that which Moreau usually gave his female protagonists, remains mask-like and conventional, the blood coating the floor as much a part of the scene's decorative scheme as the wall mosaics. Beardsley again opts for an exaggeratedly weightless Salome, this time suspended in midair, and retains Moreau's unorthodox depiction of the head of John the Baptist afloat rather than resting on a silver charger; the treatment of the streaming blood is, if anything, even more boldly decorative. Yet his Salome, rather than recoiling from the head in horror, grasps it in both hands as a cruel smile distorts her features. Significantly, in contrast to the unveiled, semi-naked Salome of *L'Apparition*, sexualised by her immoral actions, this Salome is draped neck to ankle, all indications of gender effaced, the consequence of her being stripped of her sexuality – or at least, the means of satisfying it – at the moment she achieves her revenge. Indeed, Beardsley goes a step further than Moreau in the final image, the supremely ironic *cul-de-lampe* [Figure 100, R.283]. Depicted as literally the direct result of Herod's terse order, 'Kill that woman!', the image is positioned directly beneath the stage direction 'The soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields Salome, daughter of Herodias, princess of Judea' and is, significantly, the only time Salome is shown completely naked. This is also the only time her body conforms to contemporary notions of beauty (or at least to Symbolist notions thereof, with her slender limbs, small breasts and abundant hair in snail-shell curls); as Zatlin suggests, it makes a mocking commentary on Victorian sexual politics, in that Salome's beauty and femininity, sacrificed when she insisted on

⁹⁵ I. Fletcher, *Aubrey Beardsley* (Boston, 1987), p. 87.

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assuming power, are only legitimised by the total passivity of death.⁹⁶ Perhaps not even Moreau would have dared go as far.

Symons, paying tribute to Beardsley, declared that 'in the *Salome* drawings, in most of *The Yellow Book* drawings, we see Beardsley under this mainly Japanese influence; with, now and later, in his less serious work, the but half-admitted influence of what was most actual, perhaps most temporary, in the French art of the day'.⁹⁷ While he never specified what French art had shaped Beardsley's oeuvre, it seems fair to assume, given his own knowledge of the Symbolist and Decadent literary and artistic milieu, that he detected in Beardsley's catholic borrowing and rebellious, mould-breaking intermingling of disparate sources a debt to Moreau's art greater than he might ever have been willing to acknowledge.

⁹⁶ Zatlin (1990), p. 95.

⁹⁷ A. Symons, *From Toulouse-Lautrec to Rodin, with Some Personal Impressions* (London, 1929), p. 189.

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Chapter 6

The Condition of music: Fantin-Latour, Redon, Beardsley and Wagnerian prints

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it.¹

In 1890, Henri Fantin-Latour exhibited one of his most important paintings inspired by Wagner's operas, *Scène première de l'Or du Rhin* [Figure 101], at the

Royal Academy.² To judge from the mass of press notices assiduously assembled by Fantin's wife, Victoria, it met with the approval, albeit the misunderstanding, of the majority of London critics, as epitomised by this notice from the *Athenaeum* which praised his painterly skill but dismissed the picture as a mere representation of a theatrical scene:

Full of beautiful colour and tone, vigorous, and graceful, but not quite innocent of the theatre (for this the subject may be responsible), is M. Fantin-Latour's *Première Scène du 'Rheingold' de R. Wagner* (1109). The nymphs are disporting themselves in the richly toned light and shadow of the rocky bank above the Rhine, as they hover over the concealed treasure and glitter in the golden beams of sunlight slanting from above; the evil genius watches them from below.³

This was not the first time Fantin had displayed work inspired by Wagnerian themes in London; he had been quietly submitting prints to the annual Black and White Exhibitions at the Dudley Gallery since 1877, the year after he first began to devote himself seriously both to the technique of transfer lithography and to subjects drawn from Wagner's oeuvre. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, notice in the British press was consistent but limited, and, as Michel Hoog has remarked, is better used as a barometer of Fantin's position on the critical radar rather than as an indicator of a growing acceptance or appreciation of his programme.⁴

¹ Pater (1986), p. 86; original emphasis.

² Fantin occasionally titled his Wagnerian pictures with the original German; otherwise he translated the titles into French. I have preserved these idiosyncrasies.

³ 'The Royal Academy (Third and Concluding Notice)', *Athenaeum* no. 3265 (24 May 1890), p. 678. It is worth bearing in mind that more progressive commentators, such as Arthur Symons, concurred with this reviewer in their dissatisfaction with the inability of Fantin's imaginative subjects to totally transcend any suspicion of theatricality; Symons lamented that 'the lithographs snatch a filled cup too hastily and part of the music is spilled' and '[they are] rarely, I think, on a level, as pictorial invention, with the music which [they] set [themselves] to interpret': A. Symons, *Studies on Modern Painters* (New York, 1925), pp. 31-32.

⁴ The single greatest compendium of contemporary criticism of Fantin is to be found in the three volumes of press cuttings assembled by his wife Victoria, now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale 201

If Fantin's Wagnerian subjects were deemed interesting oddities by mainstream British observers among the portraits and floral still lifes that served as his bread and butter,⁵ their significance, along with those of Odilon Redon, was not lost on British art's only noteworthy Wagnerite, Aubrey Beardsley. Beardsley's fascination with Wagner dates from the outset of his brief career; his letters attest to the dedication with which he attended performances at Covent Garden and, tellingly, one of his earliest surviving drawings, heavily influenced by his then-mentor Burne-Jones, depicts a despairing Tannhäuser struggling toward Rome and the hope of absolution [Figure 102, R.19]. However, subsequent renderings of Wagnerian subjects, especially scenes drawn from *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhäuser* and *Das Rheingold* show Beardsley moving away from the meticulously detailed medievalism of Burne-Jones towards a new aesthetic that reveals the influence of the French Wagnerites Fantin and Redon.

Beardsley's Wagnerian pictures have occupied a crucial place in recent monographic studies.⁶ Yet remarkably, the most comprehensive study of his Wagnerism to date, Emma Sutton's *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (2002) makes virtually no reference to either Fantin or Redon, or to the debates on Wagner, music and the visual arts that galvanised the French avant-garde in the 1880s and 1890s.⁷ The blame for this lacuna does not lie entirely with Beardsley

scholars. Redon's presence and reception in Britain remains little studied, and as for Fantin, although his crucial sojourns in London in the 1860s have been a topic of scholarly discourse ever since the publication of Adolphe Jullien's biography in 1909, his links with Britain in later life – that is, after Wagnerian and other musical subjects de France (henceforth BNF ACP). For Hoog's comments on its usefulness, see Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 22.

⁵ As with other French antinaturalists, Claude Phillips was more open to Fantin's art than most of his peers, although, in common with many French critics, he complained that Fantin's later musical subjects lacked inspiration and conviction; see for example C. Phillips, 'The Salons. Salon of the Champs Elysées', *Magazine of Art* 17 (1894), p. 327. It is also interesting to note that at least two British critics considered Fantin's imaginative works similar but inferior to those of Watts; see BNF ACP vol. 2, cuttings from *Fashions of Today* (1886) and *The Times* (1886), p. 234.

⁶ See for example M. Heyd, *Aubrey Beardsley: Symbol, Mask and Self-Irony* (New York, 1986), pp. 169-90, Zatlin (1990), pp. 75-79 and 195-201, and C. Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley: Dandy of the Grotesque* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 33, 139-41, 166-68.

⁷ Sutton mentions Fantin twice in passing, Redon and the *Revue wagnérienne* only once (E. Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s*, Oxford 2002, pp. 4, 12, 182). While I do not wish to demean Sutton's discoveries and arguments, which have been invaluable to my research for this chapter, I contend that her exclusion of French Wagnerism from her discussion impedes a fuller contextual understanding of Beardsley's Wagnerian pictures and prose.

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began to occupy more and more of his production – have received far less attention.⁸ Furthermore, the protean nature of his oeuvre and the impossibility of pigeonholing it – naturalist? Symbolist? Realist? proto-Impressionist? conservative? avant-garde? – has meant that modernist readings of his work have focused on the portraits and still lifes, which conform more closely to notions of 'progress', to the exclusion of the apparent aberrations of the imaginative works. Likewise, recent scholarship on Beardsley's Wagnerism, although it serves as a corrective to the Francocentric outlook that has coloured the standard accounts of Wagner's role in the development of Symbolism,⁹ unintentionally echo the prejudices and parochialism of British critics in the 1890s by concentrating on the relationship of Beardsley's work to British debates on Wagner and on Germany, the performance of Wagner's operas in London, and Victorian sexual politics, with little reference to the impact of French Wagnerism on this most ardently Francophile of British artists.

Although I do not wish to discount the importance of these issues in shaping Beardsley's response to Wagner's operas, I would argue that his Wagnerism needs to be viewed through the lens of concurrent developments in France to be fully understood. With his voracious appetite for French art and literature, his extensive contacts in Parisian artistic and literary circles and his close working relationships with key ambassadors of the French avant-garde such as Arthur Symons, Beardsley almost certainly absorbed his Wagnerism coloured by French concerns, assumptions and debates. Moreover, his adoption of a French Rococo style for both some of his Wagnerian images and for his unfinished retelling of *Tannhäuser*, *Under the Hill* resulted, as I aim to demonstrate, as much from the influence of Fantin's favoured mode for his own imaginative subjects and the embrace of the eighteenth century by the French avant-garde as it did from Beardsley's own explorations in this field. This chapter does not attempt to present either an exhaustive survey of Wagnerism in France and Britain, or of Wagnerian imagery in either artist's oeuvre. Instead, my intention is to examine some points of interaction between Beardsley and France in

⁸ A. Jullien, *Fantin-Latour: sa vie et ses amitiés* (Paris, 1909), pp. 11-40 and 91-103, is particularly important in respect to Fantin's links with Britain in the 1860s in its inclusion of correspondence from this period. Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 212-14, discuss several of Fantin's Wagnerian pictures (including *Scène première de l'Or du Rhin*) in relation to Beardsley's work, but not in much depth.

⁹ See for example C. Morice, *Demain, questions d'esthétique* (Paris, 1888), pp. 26-27, and idem, *La*

littérature de toute à l'heure (Paris, 1889), pp. 195-200; Mauclair (1901), pp. 171-73; and Lehmann (1968), pp. 195-96. Raynaud (1918), vol. 1, pp. 117-18 and vol. 3, pp. 166-68, discusses both the centrality of British Aestheticism and Wagner to the development of Symbolism in France, but makes no mention of Wagner's influence across the Channel.

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general, and Beardsley, Fantin and Redon, in order to throw more light on the complex mixture of political, social and aesthetic discourses that informed all three artists' interest in the intersection of music and the visual arts and their Wagnerian pictorial languages. I have limited my discussion primarily to images inspired by *Tannhäuser* and *Das Rheingold*. By exploring several elements of this interchange – the shifting political ramifications of Wagner's operas on both sides of the Channel from the 1870s onward; theoretical debate on the synthesis of the arts; performance practices; the impact of innovations in printmaking technique and the dissemination of artistic reputations through prints – and culminating with a case study of Fantin's and Beardsley's reworking of eighteenth-century motifs in their interpretation of *Tannhäuser*, I hope to demonstrate the significance of French Wagnerism to Beardsley's own.

A Composer for all seasons: Wagner in French and English

As I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, artists and their work sometimes undergo 'translation' in foreign countries. Yet if the French perception of Rossetti was fairly benign, Wagner outside his own country prompted an altogether more visceral response, and a corresponding need to mould him in the image of whatever cause he was perceived to serve.¹⁰ Yet any survey of Wagnerism in France and, to a lesser extent, in Britain, uncovers a bewildering variety of cultural and political factions who embraced (or rejected) Wagner for wildly varying reasons.¹¹ How – and why – did the same composer inspire Fantin's nebulous lithographs and Georges Rochegrosse's spectacularly vulgar 1894 Salon showpiece *Le Chevalier des fleurs* [Figure 103], provide the soundtrack for both the first Salon de la Rose + Croix and the decidedly more earthbound setting of the bourgeois salon, provoke Baudelaire's paeon to the voluptuous and orgiastic paganism of *Tannhäuser* and P. T. Forsyth's earnest tribute

¹⁰ My outline of the politics of Wagnerism in France is much indebted to G. D. Turbow, 'Art and politics: Wagnerism in France', in D. C. Large and W. Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca and London, 1984), pp. 134-66.

¹¹ Two such surveys on Wagnerism in the arts in France are M. Kahane and N. Wild, eds., *Wagner et la France* (exh. cat., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1983) and Paris, Musée du Petit Palais and Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, *Marianne et Germania, 1789-1889. Un siècle de passions francoallemandes*

(exh. cat., 1997). The only comparable survey of Wagnerism in England is A. D. Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (London, 1979), which is chiefly concerned with Wagner's sociopolitical significance rather than his impact on the visual arts (perhaps not surprisingly, given that Wagnerian art in Britain had a sole serious practitioner, Beardsley).

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to Wagner as a herald of the return of Christianity to art?¹² And how did a nation which accorded Wagner such a shabby reception during his lifetime come to be the crucible of Wagnerian art and theory?

It is my contention that the flowering of Wagnerian art and criticism in France over the last quarter of the nineteenth century constituted a means of neutralising Wagner's revolutionary and, in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, dangerously German qualities. This depoliticising of Wagner led to the gradual disappearance of Wagner the composer, subsumed into a collection of conceptual tenets that could be, and were, co-opted by an avant-garde that became increasingly conservative as the century drew to a close. It is worthwhile reviewing Wagner's reception and shifting political significance in France from the 1840s, charting against it some of the

landmarks of his adoption by artists and writers.

Against the turbulent backdrop of the revolutions of 1848 and 1851, Wagner paradoxically enjoyed the support not only of Napoléon III and his circle, but also of revolutionaries and republicans – much discussed at republican salons such as Juliette Adam's, he was even dubbed 'the Courbet of music' by Champfleury.¹³ However, at this point his operas had yet to receive a full-scale production in Paris, and his supporters were in essence backing a composer whose works they knew either on paper, in the form of chamber performances for which they had never been intended, or not at all. The composer himself, during his 1859-1861 sojourn in Paris, had conducted a concert, attended by Fantin and apparently well received, of extracts from *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Lohengrin*;¹⁴ buoyed by this success, his hopes of Parisian acclaim were dashed by the disastrous staging of *Tannhäuser* in 1861, which was greeted with jeers and brawling and was forced to close after only three performances. Wagner's ill fate in France might have been sealed if not for the passionate advocacy of Baudelaire, whose article 'Richard

¹² Baudelaire's comparison of the overtures of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* is notable for his use of an analogy to painting, perhaps the first in French criticism: 'dans la partie voluptueuse et orgiaque de l'ouverture de *Tannhäuser*, l'artiste avait mis autant de force, développé autant d'énergie que dans la peinture de la mysticité qui caractérise l'ouverture de *Lohengrin*' (Baudelaire, 1992, p. 466).

¹³ Turbow (1984), pp. 140-46.

¹⁴ V. Bajou, *Fantin-Latour et ses musiciens*, *La Revue de la musicologie* 76, no. 1 (1990), p. 46. The concerts took place 25 January, 1 and 8 February 1860 at the Théâtre des Italiens. Michèle Barbe claims that Fantin in fact first heard Wagner's music (the Wedding March from *Lohengrin*) at one of Padeloup's *concerts populaires*, either 3 January or 13 February 1861: M. Barbe, 'Fantin-Latour et la musique' (Ph.D. thesis, Université de Paris IV, 1992), vol. 1, p. 63. In any case, we may safely assume that Fantin had heard Wagner's music performed before the disastrous premier of *Tannhäuser* on 13 March 1861.

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Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris' appeared in the 1 April issue of the *Revue européenne* and, with its explication of Wagner's theory of the total work of art informed by his own vision of the synthesis (not the union) of the arts in his 1857 poem 'Correspondances', mediated most subsequent Symbolist responses.¹⁵ Fantin apparently had bought a ticket to the cancelled fourth performance.¹⁶ The following year, never having attended a full production of the opera and having only heard a few further extracts from the above-mentioned operas at Jules Etienne Padeloup's recently inaugurated *concerts populaires*, he chose as the subject of his first attempt at lithography the second scene of the first act of *Tannhäuser*, reworking the scene in a large-scale oil shown at the 1864 Salon [Figure 104].¹⁷ Largely ignored by critics – partly because overshadowed by the controversial *Hommage à Delacroix* but also, one suspects, because of the anti-Wagnerian sentiment still aroused by memories of the 1861 debacle¹⁸ – the painting was purchased by Alexander 'Aleco' Ionides, brother of the forward-thinking collector Constantine Alexander Ionides and, perhaps more importantly in the present instance, brother-in-law of the German musician Edward Dannreuther, a key promoter of Wagner in Britain and, in the 1870s, a recipient of Fantin's Wagnerian lithographs. Thus, from the outset of his career as a Wagnerian artist, Fantin was implicated as much in the evolution of Wagnerism in Britain as in France.

Such associations were to deepen in the 1870s and 1880s, although not without considerable struggle. Following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Wagner's music was banished from Parisian concert halls, not least thanks to the fiercely Francophobe composer's rubbing of salt in French wounds with the 1870 publication of his malicious screed 'A Capitulation'; even in 1876, a performance of

excerpts at one of Padeloup's concerts was roundly booed.¹⁹ Yet if Wagner's *music* met with a frosty reception in the wake of the defeat, his *theories* – or to be more accurate, interpretations thereof – were fast gaining ground. Translation into French

¹⁵ Morice (1889), pp. 196-98, lamented Wagner's emphasis on a union, rather than a synthesis, of the arts, no doubt informed by a Baudelairean paradigm, but he seems to have been motivated by a concern to keep poetry, rather than music, at the top of the hierarchy of the arts ('C'est le malheur de l'Art qui a voulu que Wagner fût plus musicien que poète').

¹⁶ Bajou (1990), p. 46.

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the painting's genesis and initial reception, see Druick and Hoog (1982), pp. 159-60.

¹⁸ On perceptions of *Tannhäuser* in 1864 and Fantin's response to Wagner's brand of 'realism', see J. House, 'Fantin-Latour in 1864: Wagner and Realism', in P. Andraschke and E. Spaud, eds., *Welttheater. Die Künste im 19. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 1992), pp. 248-53.

¹⁹ Turbow (1984), pp. 155-56.

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of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* in the 1870s provided not only an alternative vision to the materialism and positivism of Comte and Taine, but a basis for understanding Wagner's theory of the total work of art.²⁰ Schopenhauer posited a hierarchy of the arts, through which man passed in his temporary escape from the tyranny of the Will, with music at the top; whereas the other arts expressed ideas (the objectification of the Will), only music directly expressed Will itself. Pater propounded an essentially Schopenhauerian hierarchy, with each art form 'aspiring' to the state of the increasingly abstract one above it, in 1877, when he added 'The School of Giorgione' to the second edition of *The Renaissance*.²¹ Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, although reliant upon this tradition, challenged it by insisting on the fusion of the different arts at the point at which their individual limits coincided. Yet a full-fledged attempt to formulate a theory of Wagnerian painting would have to wait until the gradual depoliticising of Wagner in the 1880s which paved the way for the founding of the *Revue wagnérienne* in 1885.²²

When Teodor de Wyzewa used his review of the 1885 Salon as a platform on which to propound a definition of Wagnerism in the visual arts, his decision to crown Fantin as the standard-bearer of the new painting was hardly surprising. Rejecting the mass of official Salon painting as hollow and un-Wagnerian, Wyzewa declares, M. Fantin-Latour has consoled us in this misery: first of all, he is a conscious Wagnerist, he knows, admires and celebrates the Master, but above all he has the extreme glory that alone, today, he has resolutely understood the double work possible to the painter: in his great paintings, each of which represents a new victory, he has reproduced, more exactly than all others and more entirely, the objective, real and total life of forms: and he has, in beautiful drawings, written a poem of plastic emotion, communicating strangely gentle and mild emotions to the soul, through a fanciful combination of lines and tints.²³

²⁰ On the significance of Schopenhauer to the development of Wagnerian theory in France, see Kearns (1989), pp. 67-68.

²¹ Pater's essay would probably have been read by key exponents of Wagnerism in France; Mallarmé is recorded as an admirer. See also Chapter 3 on Pater's reception in France.

²² Turbow (1984), pp. 155-56, dates this shift to around 1880; however, Fantin, as I shall discuss further on, returned to Wagnerian subjects several years earlier. That Wagner's music had not entirely lost its controversial charge is demonstrated by the cancellation of a Paris production of *Lohengrin* (only the third production of a Wagner opera in Paris before 1900) in 1887 after a single performance due to fears that it would fuel Boulangist unrest. For a discussion of the *Revue wagnérienne*'s position within the ever-changing constellation of Symbolist *petites revues*, see F. Lucbert, *Entre le voir et le dire. La critique d'art des écrivains dans la presse symboliste en France de 1882 à 1906* (Rennes, 2005).

²³ 'M. Fantin-Latour nous a consolé de cette misère: celui-là, d'abord, est un Wagnériste conscient, connaît, admire, célèbre le Maître, mais il a, surtout, cette extrême gloire, que seul, aujourd'hui, il a

résolument compris la double tâche possible au peintre : il a, dans de grands tableaux, dont chacun montre une victoire nouvelle, reproduit, plus exactement que tous et plus entièrement, la vie objective, réelle, totale des formes : et il a, en d'adorables dessins, écrit le poème de l'émotion plastique, communiquant aux âmes des émotions étrangement douces et tièdes, par une combinaison fantaisiste

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Although his definition of Wagnerian painting is embedded in a Salon review, it is interesting to note that all of Wyzewa's Wagnerian artists are French and, for the most part, avant-garde and anti-naturalist: 'a new pastel by M. Degas . . . a painting by M. G. Moreau, the symphonist of refined emotion, or some horrifying drawing by M. Redon, or the exhibition of Old Masters at the Louvre . . . are Wagnerian acts'.²⁴ As James Kearns remarks, 'the tradition which anticipates modernity is a familiar manoeuvre in modernist criticism', and Wyzewa's analysis is a case in point.²⁵ But Wyzewa did more than merely attempt to ground the new painting in a time-honoured tradition. His claiming of Wagner for French painters and, by extension, France, can be seen as an attempt to not only neutralise the nationalistic controversy stirred by Wagner's music and theory (in itself a political move), but also to sideline Wagner the man and the composer, leaving a set of concepts to be appropriated and, indeed, improved upon by French artists and writers; as A. G. Lehmann put it, 'Wagner's reputation thrived on the absence rather than on the presence of his works in France'.²⁶ This subsuming of Wagner and his music proved the start of a trend, as the *Revue wagnérienne*, over the course of its print run, devoted increasing column inches to poets and critics whose work scarcely pertained to Wagner and laid itself open to charges that it had become a mouthpiece for Symbolism rather than Wagnerism. Wagner's political significance, when raised at all, was only discussed in the most abstract terms.

If Wyzewa's understanding of Fantin's art and his motives for promoting it were shaped by his own agenda, the *Revue wagnérienne* was crucial in consolidating Fantin's reputation as an anti-naturalist painter-printmaker and in bringing this still little-understood portion of his oeuvre to the attention of an avant-garde audience. While Fantin had been exhibiting his lithographs at the Salon and the Dudley Gallery since 1876, and, as the album of press cuttings makes clear, they had begun to attract critical attention, the size of the Salon and the bias of most mainstream reviews des lignes et des teintes'. T. de Wyzewa, 'Peinture wagnérienne: le salon de 1885', *Revue wagnérienne* 1 (8 July 1885), p. 155.

²⁴ 'Un pastel nouveau de M. Degas . . . un tableau de M. G. Moreau, le symphoniste des émotions affinées, ou quelque dessin épouvantant de M. Redon, ou cette exposition des vieux Maîtres ouverte au Louvre . . . sont des faits Wagnériens': Ibid.

²⁵ Kearns (1989), p. 73. In 1886 Wyzewa went still further, identifying as Wagnerians 'avant la lettre' Leonardo, Rubens, Rembrandt, Watteau, Delacroix, Puvis, Degas and (surprisingly) Albert Besnard, further extending Wagnerism's French credentials: T. de Wyzewa, 'Notes sur la peinture wagnérienne et le Salon de 1886', *Revue wagnérienne* 2 (8 May 1886), pp. 100-113.

²⁶ Lehmann (1968), p. 195.

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towards oil paintings meant that it was difficult to appreciate them as part of an ongoing body of work.²⁷ However, the magazine not only used Fantin's Wagnerian lithographs as *hors-texte* illustrations, the 8 December number also advertised nineteen of Fantin's lithographs, which, although not intended to be purchased as a group, conveyed a more complete conception of Fantin the Wagnerian, and Fantin the innovative graphic artist,²⁸ a strategy augmented by Adolphe Jullien's decision to use his lithographs to illustrate his biography of Wagner published the following year in Paris and London.

The *Revue wagnérienne*'s British connections have received little attention,

but they are worth highlighting to demonstrate the laying of the groundwork for a cross-Channel exchange in this arena. Two of the periodical's founding members were the music critic Houston Stewart Chamberlain (who happened to be Wagner's son-in-law) and the playwright Louis N. Parker, the latter of whom contributed a regular column charting Wagner's fortunes in Britain. In his first column, Parker lamented the current unfashionability of Wagner's operas in his country, which he considered musically backward: 'as for musical drama, it is twenty years behind the times here'. However, he hailed, in distinctly revolutionary terms, the salutary effect he anticipated Wagner would have on British musical life once his music had been disseminated to all those souls sensitive enough to appreciate it:

As for musical drama, here it is twenty years behind the times. We find ourselves in a state of transition; we endeavour to push forward into the light, but we are held back by a crowd of feuilletonists, organists and choir-masters who know only too well that their reign will cease as soon as we are emancipated. What is most encouraging is that the taste for Wagnerian music begins to be disseminated among the real people. [...] The English people have for Wagner a high respect mixed with a shy curiosity, and a great desire to become acquainted with his work.²⁹

²⁷ Many of the press clippings from the 1870s and early 1880s characterise Fantin's prints as 'fanciful' or 'charming', the implication being that they are minor works (BNP ACP, vol. 1, passim).

²⁸ The lithographs advertised for sale at the offices of the *Revue wagnérienne* were as follows: *Le Vaisseau fantôme, scène finale* (H.60); *Tannhäuser: Scène du Venusberg* (H.1), *Elisabeth* (H.), *L'Etoile du soir* (H.65) and a variation thereof (H.); *Lohengrin: Prélude* (H.39); *Le Rheingold: Les Filles du Rhin* (H.69), *Scène finale* (H.18); *La Walküre: Scène première* (H.23), *Scène finale* (H.24); *Siegfried: Erda* (H.20, H.54, and H.57); *Götterdämmerung: Siegfried et les filles du Rhin* (H.31 and H.72); *Parsifal: Evocation de Kundry* (H.73), *Klingsor et Kundry* (H.43), *Parsifal et les Filles-Fleurs* (H.59); and an allegorical composition, *Musique et poésie*.

²⁹ 'Quant au drame musicale, il est ici de vingt ans en arrière. Nous nous trouvons dans un état de transition; nous nous efforçons de pénétrer plus avant dans la lumière, mais nous sommes retenus par une foule de feuilletonistes, d'organistes et de maîtres de chapelle qui ne savent, que trop bien, que leur règne cessera dès que nous nous serons émancipés. Ce qu'il y a de plus encourageant, c'est que le goût pour la musique wagnérienne commence à se disséminer parmi le vrai peuple. [...] Le peuple anglais a, 209

Following the demise of the *Revue wagnérienne* in 1888, Parker and Chamberlain helped to found a British Wagnerian review, the *Meister* (1888-1895), which like its French precedent devoted as much space to Wagner's philosophy as to his music.³⁰ Chamberlain published a definitive and lavishly illustrated biography of Wagner in German in 1896; the English translation (1897) found its way into Beardsley's collection of Wagneriana, which included a vocal score of *Tristan*, four volumes of the English translation of Wagner's prose works, a copy of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzifal* (the text on which Wagner based his opera) and, significantly, a French collection of illustrated libretti.³¹ Although Beardsley does not mention Jullien's biography or the *Revue wagnérienne* in his letters, there is no reason to suppose that, as an avid Wagnerite and frequenter of book and print shops in both London and Paris, he would not have encountered either the biography, back issues of the magazine, or Fantin's lithographs.

To understand Fantin's own appropriation of Wagner for a French milieu, and the significance of Fantin's Wagnerian imagery on Beardsley, we need to cast our gaze back to 1876. This year proved a turning point for Fantin for three different, but closely intertwined reasons: he first saw a staged production of the *Ring* cycle at the first Bayreuth festival, he married his longstanding fiancée Victoria Dubourg, and he began to experiment with, and soon adopted, a new lithographic technique. All three

events would converge to create the Wagnerian artist lauded by Wyzewa a decade later, a contradictory amalgam of cultural conservatism and formal innovation whose originality would in turn inspire Beardsley's work.

Fantin was keenly aware of being one of the few Frenchmen in the audience at Bayreuth, but his awe in the face of his first full-blown experience of Wagner's operas quickly trumped any political misgivings.³² Having only heard excerpts performed at Padeloup's and Lamoreux's concerts, he found the performance of *Das Rheingold* a revelation:

pour Wagner, un haut respect mêlé d'une curiosité timide, et un grand désir de connaître ses oeuvres': L. Parker, 'Correspondance – Angleterre', *Revue wagnérienne* (14 March 1885), pp. 53-54.

³⁰For an outline of the journal's history, see Sessa (1979), pp. 38-44. Volume 6 (1893) mentions the Wagnerian etchings of Ricardo de Egusquiza, a Spanish artist associated with the Salon de la Rose + Croix, which were apparently selling well in London; perhaps Fantin's lithographs had set a precedent for him?

³¹Maas et al. (1970), pp. 164, 351, 372, 380. According to Sutton (2002), p. 6, n. 18, the French volume in question was *Quatre poèmes d'Opéras: 'Le Vaisseau Fantôme', 'Tannhaeuser', 'Lohengrin', 'Tristan et Iseult', Précédés d'une lettre sur la musique de Richard Wagner* (Paris: A. Durand et fils et Calmann Lévy, 1893).

³²Jullien (1909), p. 115.

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There is nothing in my memory more fairy-like, more beautiful, more complete. The movement of the Rhinemaidens swimming about and singing is perfect. The Alberich who climbs up and steals the gold; the lighting, the glimmer of the gold in the water, everything is ravishing. There, as in all the rest, it is the sensation, not the music, not the scenery, not the subject, but something that grips the spectator, or perhaps I should say the listener – although that's not the word either, it is all that, mixed together.³³

Not the least startling element of the experience was something that would seem to an opera-goer today so commonplace as not to merit a mention: Wagner insisted that the house lights be lowered before the performance began, sweeping away mundane reality and enveloping the audience in the music and drama. Much, however, as Fantin would have liked to believe that, in the darkened theatre, 'The house no longer exists; the men and women next to us don't count; . . . even the Kaiser himself is forgotten',³⁴ he discovered to his bitter surprise that in Paris Wagner's music lacked the power to transcend the still-raw wounds of 1870 when, shortly after his return from Bayreuth, he attended the *concert populaire* at which excerpts from several operas were roundly booed. Although he understood that this hostility was the result of political tensions rather than philistinism, Fantin's response was to retreat: as he explained to his friend, the German painter Otto Scholderer, he felt 'a desire to go and live alone, away from all artists, as I don't feel I am like them'.³⁵ His marriage to Victoria Dubourg, a talented pianist who also happened to be fluent in German, allowed him to do precisely this. From this point onward, his experience of Wagner's music shifted from the concert hall and theatre to the privacy of his home.³⁶ This shift from the public and expansive to the domestic and intimate paralleled Fantin's search for a new method of marrying music and the visual.

The first work to emerge from the trip to Bayreuth was a lithograph of the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* [Figure 105, H.8]. The choice of lithography was in itself unusual: etching had been established as the technique of choice for the artist-

³³'Je n'ai rien dans mes souvenirs de plus féérique, de plus beau, de plus réalisé. Le mouvement des Filles du Rhin qui nagent en chantant est parfait. L'Alberich qui grimpe, qui ravit l'or; l'éclairage, la lueur que jette l'or dans l'eau, tout est ravissant. Là, comme dans tout le reste, c'est de la sensation. Pas la musique, pas le décor, pas le sujet; mais un empoignement du spectateur. Ce n'est pas le mot qu'il faut que spectateur, ni auditeur non plus, c'est tout cela mêlé': Ibid., p. 112.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Fantin to Scholderer, 3 November 1876, quoted in Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 275.

³⁶ Fantin became increasingly reclusive following his marriage, eventually curtailing his concert-going entirely. Jacques-Emile Blanche recounted an episode (presumably in the 1890s) when the artist decided at the last minute to miss a performance of *Les Troyens* for which he had booked tickets, because 'la nuit, le froid, la chaleur, la foule, tout le troublait, dans la perspective de cette sortie inusitée': J.-E. Blanche, *Propos de peintre de David à Degas* (Paris, 1919), p. 37.

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printmaker for the past two decades. Lithography, which had experienced a heyday in France in the 1830s in the hands of caricaturists such as Daumier and Gavarni, was regarded as outmoded by the artistic establishment and treated with suspicion, if not scorn, by many artists because of its popular and commercial roots.³⁷ Furthermore, Fantin was almost certainly aware that the process had been invented by a German, Aloys Senefelder; whether or not he was conscious of it, he was not only taking on German subject matter but a German medium, with the same impulse toward transformation and appropriation. For his next Wagnerian print, a revisiting of his 1862 lithograph *Tannhäuser: Venusberg* [Figure 106, H.9], Fantin turned to an unorthodox variant – transfer lithography. Although the technique of drawing on a specially prepared paper which, when transferred to the lithographic stone, precluded the age-old problem of the reversal of the image in the finished print, had been employed since the 1860s, its use had been limited to the reproduction of drawings and it was not considered worthy of exploiting for its own innate qualities.³⁸

However, Fantin immediately recognised elements of the process which uniquely suited it to musical subjects. If laid on a textured surface, the thin transfer paper picked up the underlying pattern, and he discovered after experimenting with placing heavy laid paper under the transfer paper before drawing on it that he could combine multiple textures – the fine parallel lines of the laid paper and a coarse and a fine granular texture that could subtly convey the modelling of flesh. Moreover, once the design was transferred to the stone, it remained open to change, and Fantin took advantage of this mutability by further developing the images on the stone with crayon, stump and scraper. Thus, although the lithographs were printed by a master printer, Fantin not only retained control of the image up until its printing, but his chosen process privileged the Romantic ideals of spontaneity of inspiration and artistic autonomy. This affinity with the Romantic trope of genius and inspiration was recognised and reinforced by commentators such as Léonce Bénédict, who attributed Fantin's preference for the lithographer's crayon to the fact of 'the brush [being] too

³⁷ The 'artificial flavour of 1830' of Fantin's lithographs was in fact a frequent target of unsympathetic British critics; see for example 'Current Art', *Magazine of Art* 10 (1887), p. 110 and 'Current Art', *Magazine of Art* 11 (1888), p. 111. On the status of lithography relative to etching in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Bann (2001), pp. 66, 87, 92-93.

³⁸ According to Germain Hédiard (1906), p. 18, Fantin had first been introduced to transfer lithography by Belfond, Lemercier's master printer. However, he probably first became acquainted with the possibilities of the thin transfer paper supplied by Lemercier for twelve transfer lithographs of Corot's drawings in 1872, and would have been aware of Alfred Robaut's use of the technique for a series of reproductions of Delacroix's drawings, 1864-1870; see Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 283.

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slow today for his hand, impatient to fix instantly to canvas or paper these tender and vibrant improvisations, the continuous dreams of his mind'.³⁹

Still more significantly, the richly varied textures and tonal gradations achieved by this new method gave Fantin the means to pursue a synaesthetic union of music and image.⁴⁰ Gustave Geffroy was one of the first to recognise the importance of his innovations, when Fantin exhibited another scene from *Tannhäuser*, *L'Etoile du soir* [Figure 107, H.48], along with three other musical lithographs, at the 1884 Salon:

The artist has attempted the union of the two arts; he has sought by means of the vibrations obtained with black and white to represent scenes he has glimpsed in the harmonies of the musicians he likes; he can be said to have often succeeded; some of these sketches create a musical impression for those who enter into this mysterious world, where feminine figures emerge and evaporate, where heroes suddenly appear. The artist's method is simple: large areas covered in hatching, with tonal graduations and highlights; very smooth transitions between transparent blacks and pure whites. The dream figures appear in the shadows and in the light; they tremble, move, fade away like the musician's languid phrases; they stand out against brilliant backgrounds and suggest . . . an impression of ringing short notes; some of them are as serene and pure as the penetrating melodies of Wagner; others have the sorrowful charm of certain phrases of Berlioz. They represent an astonishing transposition of art, and it required all the skill of Monsieur Fantin-Latour to accomplish it.⁴¹

Geffroy's mixing of musical and painterly metaphors indicates the success of Fantin's efforts, but it is worth looking more closely at these three lithographs to discover the extent of the 'correspondances' between image and music. The 'vibrations obtained by black and white' not only correspond to Wagner's description of the Rhine in the opening scene with its three levels of sunlit water, dark water and gloomy depths, they

³⁹ 'Le pinceau est trop lent aujourd'hui à sa main impatiente, ces tendres et vibrantes improvisations, qui fixent à chaque instant sur la toile ou sur le papier les rêves continus de son cerveau': L. Bénédite, 'Artistes contemporains: Fantin-Latour', *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* (10 January 1899), published in *Fantin-Latour* (Paris, 1903), p. 21.

⁴⁰ That Fantin considered transfer lithography the province of Wagnerian and other music subjects is borne out in Hédiard's catalogue of his lithographs; out of 193 lithographs, all but a handful (one still life and a few figure groups) are musical subjects.

⁴¹ 'L'artiste a tenté l'union des deux arts; il a voulu représenter par les vibrations obtenues à l'aide du noir et du blanc, les scènes entrevues par lui dans les harmonies de musiciens qu'il aime; on peut dire qu'il y a souvent réussi; certaines de ces esquisses donnent une impression musicale à qui pénètre dans l'air mystérieux où naissent et s'évaporent les formes féminines, où surgissent les héros. Le travail de l'artiste est simple; de grandes surfaces couvertes de hachures, avec des dégradations et des éclaircies; des transitions très douces entre des noirs transparents et des blancs purs. Les figures du rêve apparaissent dans ces ombres et dans ces lumières; elles tremblent, se meuvent, s'effacent comme les phrases alanguies du musicien; elles se profilent sur des fonds éclatants et font... songer aux appels des notes brèves; quelques-unes ont la sérénité et la pureté des mélodies aiguës wagnériennes; d'autres disent le charme souffrant de certaines phrases de Berlioz. C'est là une étonnante transposition d'art, et il a fallu toute la maîtrise de M. Fantin-Latour pour la réaliser.' G. Geffroy, 'Salon de 1884: Treizième article – dessins, aquarelles, pastels', *La Justice* (23 June 1884).

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give visual form to the quivering vibrato of the string sections. One of Wagner's major innovations had been the use of the leitmotif to denote certain characters or milieus; Fantin's awareness of this technique and his desire to create an optical equivalent is apparent in the broken, diffuse, feathery lines echoing the watery leitmotif that pervades the scene. Interestingly, a single drawing in Beardsley's surviving oeuvre – a portrait study in red chalk of the actress Réjane [Figure 108, R.265] – suggests that he may have made a half-hearted stab at imitating Fantin's feathery, oscillating touch. However, this seems to have been a one-off experiment, and the broken, blurred strokes were inimical to Beardsley's elegantly linear style. But Beardsley's technique, if not identical to Fantin's in the letter, reveals similarities in the spirit. Like Fantin, his preferred medium – the line block – was one previously little exploited by artists, and he was the first British artist to use it with a thorough understanding of its capabilities and its differences from wood engraving.

Although the line block did not allow for the illusion of shading produced by the conventional method of hatching, it had the advantage of transferring the artist/designer's

lines from drawing to print with virtually no alteration to the original appearance; the problem of artistic intention mediated by the hand of the engraver, endemic to wood engraving, was thus sidestepped. Thus, despite the fact that Beardsley, from very early on in his career, tailored his drawings to the limitations of the line block, he paradoxically found liberation in its constraints. Although he had used the technique for a vast array of subjects, it is worth noting that his discovery of the full potential of the line block (particularly the possibility of introducing 'tones' of grey with the aid of patterns of lines and dots) reached its full flower in 1896, when Wagnerian subjects took centre stage in his work. And if the printing process itself seems clinically precise, Beardsley's drawing practice, as described by Robert Ross, appears to have tapped into the same Romantic sensibility as Fantin:

He sketched everything in pencil, at first covering the paper with apparent scrawls, constantly rubbed out and blocked in again, until the whole surface became raddled with pencil, indiarubber, and knife; over this incoherent surface he worked in Chinese ink with a gold pen, often ignoring the pencil lines, afterwards carefully removed. So every drawing was invented, built up, and completed on the same sheet of paper.⁴²

Of course, Beardsley overlaid this Romantic procedure with the self-consciously decadent practice (albeit originally the product of necessity, when his only free time

⁴²R. Ross, *Aubrey Beardsley* (New York, 1909), pp. 38-39.

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for drawing was at night) of working in a dark room by the light of a single candle, drawing together both the high-flown idealism embodied by his subject matter and the pessimistic decadence which Wagner was perceived by conservative commentators to embody.⁴³

Beardsley's greatest stylistic debt to Fantin appears to have been in the latter's use of line to reproduce both the aural experience of Wagner's music and its appearance on the page. Both artists' experience of Wagner's music, we should recall, was shaped as much by reading scores or transcriptions as by concert- and opera-going. In the spiralling upward procession of the gods in one of his earlier Wagnerian lithographs, *Finale du Rheingold* [Figure 109, H.18], Fantin skilfully merged the tendency toward transposing sound into form with the more literal rendering of the patterns of the notes on the staves in that scene's key leitmotif.⁴⁴ Significantly, Beardsley's most formally experimental Wagnerian images were his unfinished suite of illustrations for a projected 'Comedy of the Rhinegold'. The frontispiece [Figure 110, R.450] displays the most overt borrowing from Fantin. As Victor Chan notes, Beardsley's *Rheingold* drawings are distinguished by the softening of the harsh angularity of his Japoneseque early style in favour of a 'new classicism' characterised by flowing curves.⁴⁵ Much as Fantin had done in his renderings – print, pastel and painting – of the opening scene, Beardsley eschews straight lines in all parts of the design apart from the borders and lettering, evoking with undulating lines and carefully graded blacks and whites both the watery leitmotif and the libretto's description of the scene. The marriage of musical and visual line is made still more explicit in the *Third* and *Fourth Tableaux of 'Das Rheingold'* [Figures 111, R.430 and 112, R.438]. The velvety, closely packed pattern of lines that composes the background of the underground world of Nibelheim in the *Third Tableau* appear to be the most overt homage to Fantin's characteristic vibrating textures. While the

swirling, heavily stylised lines of Loge's hair and garments and Alberich's dragon

⁴³ Beardsley's nocturnal working habits also seem to have been knowingly modelled on the practices of Des Esseintes; combined with his adoption of Huysmans's protagonist's colour scheme of orange and black for the decoration of the house he shared with his sister Mabel in *Pimlico*, he vividly illustrates Praz's contention that Decadence was the logical outcome of Romanticism.

⁴⁴ Indeed, Fantin saw fit to transcribe the Valhalla theme (which is also Wotan's leitmotif) on the stone, below the image; see Barbe (1992), vol. 2, p. 138. Fantin seems to have taken an interest in the correspondence not only of line to sound, but of colour; the palette of *Tannhäuser: Venusberg* (1864) corresponds to the tonal colours of the orchestration of the related scene (ibid., vol. 2, p. 157).

⁴⁵ V. Chan, 'Aubrey Beardsley's Frontispiece to "The Comedy of the Rhinegold"', *Arts Magazine* 57 (January 1983), p. 89. Chan attributes this 'new classicism' to the influence of Charles Ricketts and Jan Toorop; strangely, Fantin barely merits a mention in passing in the entire article.

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body are often cited as precursors of Art Nouveau's hallmark whiplash curves,⁴⁶ a comparison of the pictures with the corresponding musical passages reveals a deliberate attempt to match the stroke of lines in ink to lines of music. Loge's extraordinary flame-shaped chest hair in the fourth tableau contains an even more explicit reference to its corresponding leitmotif. This motif has generally been interpreted biographically, as both a visualisation of the torment of Beardsley's ravaged lungs and as evidence of his identification with the mischievous, amoral fire god.⁴⁷ Yet, as Sutton points out, the flames form a graphic counterpart to the flickering chromatic semi-quavers which characterise Loge's leitmotif in this scene.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Loge's flames may be read as bringing together a self-referential alignment of artist and subject, an attempt to translate musical language into graphic expression, and an allusion to Pater's notorious injunction to the aesthete 'to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame' – a connection reinforced by Beardsley's ironic comment to a friend, 'I never wear an overcoat, I am always burning'.⁴⁹ However, Pater's spirit, whether knowingly or not, suffuses Beardsley's *Rheingold* images as much as it does Fantin's. When Pater speaks of painting 'aspiring to the condition of music', one possible reading is that painting aspires to slough off its material form. Both Fantin and Beardsley, in their Wagnerian images, seek to translate, or at least transpose, form – especially the human form – into sound by dematerialising it. Their superficial differences of approach would appear to give the lie to this assumption, and both Sutton and MaryAnne Stevens fall into this trap when they assert, respectively, that 'in contrast to the impressionistic mythic Wagnerian images . . . of Fantin-Latour's work, hailed . . . as a realisation of "Wagnerian painting", the *Rheingold* drawings are an idiosyncratic fin-de-siècle exploration of a "Wagnerian" (i.e. leitmotivic) style of composition'⁵⁰ and that 'unlike the somewhat etiolated linear style of Beardsley's Wagnerian renderings which seem to dwell . . . specifically upon the narrow, sinister aspects . . . Fantin's more fully modelled forms capture the vast dimension of the human drama which Wagner lays out in his tetralogy'.⁵¹ Yet this draws a false distinction between the artists' work and obscures a common goal accomplished by divergent means. It is certainly difficult to

⁴⁶ See for example Reade (1967), p. 358.

⁴⁷ For examples of this reading, see Reade (1967), p. 357, and Snodgrass (1995), p. 33.

⁴⁸ Sutton (2002), p. 181.

⁴⁹ Cited in Snodgrass (1995), p. 33.

⁵⁰ Sutton (2002), p. 182.

⁵¹ Wilton and Upstone (1997), p. 213.

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deny that Fantin's gods, mortals and nymphs are rendered with softly rounded bodies and limbs, delicately modelled by the play of light and shadow; their apparent corporeality initially appears the polar opposite of Beardsley's wraithlike figures who

seem composed less of flesh and blood than of empty space precariously moulded into human form by a few exquisitely economical strokes of the pen. But the corporeality of Fantin's figures seems just as tenuous as that of Beardsley's; the pulsating interplay of light and shadow, of pattern against solid, renders his figures' existence perhaps even more contingent and insubstantial than that of Beardsley's, amorphous forms that detach themselves temporarily from the protean flow of the music before melting once again into the background.

While characteristic within the broader context of antinaturalism, this shared concern with dematerialisation and abstraction in Wagnerian images also indicates an underlying ambivalence towards contemporary, and more specifically German, operatic performance practice. Concurrent, more literal, representations of Wagnerian opera scenes indicate that the jocular stereotype of the stout, buxom Teutonic goddess in armour and horned helmet had its origins in the productions of the day.⁵² Not only would the overt nationalism of such aspects of the staging have presented a conflict of loyalties for a French artist (even an ardent lover of German culture such as Fantin) tackling Wagner so soon after *l'année terrible* of 1870, but the earthbound aspect of the performers and sets gave rise to the sort of slavishly literal, narrative-bound renderings (of which Rochegrosse's *Parsifal* is an extreme) at odds with the transcendent music. Indeed, Fantin's account of the performance at Bayreuth tellingly devotes the most space to the least tangible aspect of the staging – the lighting.⁵³ His figures are, for the most part, clad in flowing classical drapery rather than Germanic costume, as if in an attempt to (re)inscribe Wagner's music into a Latin tradition.

Of all of Wagner's operas, *Tannhäuser*, and especially the episode of the Venusberg, was the subject which most captured Fantin's imagination and compelled him to seek a solution to the seemingly intractable dilemma of being a French artist taking on Wagnerian subject matter. His rather unorthodox solution was to recast Wagner in a distinctively French and apparently inimical style – the Rococo. While

⁵² See for example the illustrations of the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* (1876) reproduced in Druick and Hoog (1982), p. 281.

⁵³ Jullien (1909), pp. 111-19. Such was Fantin's fascination with the play of coloured light in the Bayreuth production of *Das Rheingold* that he printed several impressions of *Scène première du Rheingold* on different coloured papers so as to capture the sensations of the performance (Druick and Hoog, 1982, p. 283).

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Fantin's vision of the Venusberg, in the 1862 lithograph and the 1864 oil, invokes the Romantic discourse on the choice between the temptations of Life and the rigours of Art by means of the melancholic figure of Tannhäuser resting a hand on his lyre and glancing away from the reclining Venus,⁵⁴ his deviation from Wagner's description of the setting muddies the moral struggle. Rather than place his figures in the dark grotto specified in the libretto, Fantin shifts the scene into a verdant, sunlit meadow.

Although the 1876 lithograph retains the same composition as the earlier versions of the subject, Tannhäuser's resistance to Venus's charms is subtly diminished by the change in the position of his head and the direction of his gaze; the nymphs dancing around him seem to have emerged from one of countless Rococo prints of bathers in a landscape, their generously fleshed but strangely weightless bodies devoid of the moral menace of the fin-de-siècle femme fatale. In place of a Christian knight and poet, torn between shouldering his moral and artistic responsibilities and abandoning himself to the pleasures of the senses, we are presented with a scene of pure, frivolous merrymaking suffused with a breath of melancholy, an image whose composition and mood owe explicit debts to Watteau's *fêtes galantes* and especially *The Embarkation for Cythera* [Figure 113].⁵⁵ Tannhäuser was far from the only Wagnerian subject

Fantin treated in a Rococo manner. The mischievous Rhinemaidens in the various permutations of the first scene of *Das Rheingold*, particularly the 1888 oil version, echo another favourite Rococo trope, that of the young woman on a swing watched admiringly (and often lasciviously) by her reclining lover; Fantin has substituted water for a swing and the threatening, semi-concealed Alberich for the more usual swain, but the similarities with a painting such as Fragonard's *The Swing* [Figure 114] are arresting – not least in Fragonard's blurred, almost visionary treatment of the foliage and Fantin's parallel dematerialised rendering of the water and riverbed.

Even in London in 1892, where the politics underpinning Wagner's operas were, at least on the surface, a less sensitive issue, Beardsley had little time for the conventional and typically German theatrical trappings. Although, unlike Fantin, he evinced as great an interest in the spectacle of the audience and the behind-the-scenes mechanics of performance as in the operas themselves, almost from the start he took

⁵⁴ Druick and Hoog (1982), pp. 153-54.
⁵⁵ Fantin did in fact spend time in the Louvre copying *The Embarkation for Cythera* (as well as Titian's *Concert champêtre*) in preparation for the painting *Tannhäuser: Venusberg* (Druick and Hoog, 1982, p. 160). His *Tannhäuser* subjects also exhibit more general similarities with the popular Rococo theme of female bathers in a landscape; relevant examples would be too numerous to list here, but one with which both Fantin and Beardsley would have been conversant is Fragonard's *Bathers* of 1765 (Louvre).
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telling liberties with the representation of actual performers. His 'portrait' of the Hungarian soprano Katharina Klafsky in the role of Isolde [Figure 115, R.28] does bear a superficial resemblance to publicity photographs of the singer,⁵⁶ but he transforms her voluptuous presence into a lean, hieratic apparition with a profile that hovers between sensitive and severe, all but enveloped in kimono-like robes; as Zatlin has demonstrated, the result displays greater affinities with a Japanese kakemono than with anything likely to be seen onstage at Covent Garden.⁵⁷

This tension between a faithful, literal record of a performance and a desire to transcend conventional theatricality comes to the fore in Fantin's and Beardsley's approaches to *Tristan und Isolde*. Fantin's very choice of *Tristan* as a subject implies his adoption of a common strategy of French Wagnerians for defusing political controversy, that of privileging the operas drawn from Franco-Celtic rather than Teutonic legend.⁵⁸ *Signal dans la nuit* [Figure 116, H.67] takes as its point of departure a scene from the second act of *Tristan*, one of the less obviously dramatic episodes in the opera; no hint of the stirring emotion of scenes such as the drinking of the love potion or the celebrated *Liebestod*. Rather than bathe the figure of Isolde in a dramatic spotlight, Fantin engulfs her in shadow, her contours barely delineated by the faint glow of moonlight; the viewer must work to pick her out of the gloom. The deliberate anti-theatricality is reinforced by the fact that Isolde is shown from the back, thus concealing any display of emotion; indeed, without knowing the print's title, Isolde could be any young woman standing alone in a moonlit night and it would be all but impossible to identify it as a scene from any opera, let alone *Tristan*.

Beardsley takes the opposite tack: rather than effacing theatricality, he heightens it to almost to the point of parody. *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* [Figure 117, R.105], although conceived as an illustration for Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, is unswervingly Wagnerian in its inspiration.⁵⁹ The episode illustrated is arguably the most suspenseful in the opera; Tristan has agreed to drink a draught of poison offered by Isolde in atonement for slaying her lover as Isolde, torn

⁵⁶ Heyd (1986), pp. 171-72. Klafsky sang Isolde in the 9 July performance of *Tristan* in 1892 at Drury Lane, which Beardsley attended; a photograph of her in that role was published in the *Illustrated London News*, 23 July 1892 (p. 102).

⁵⁷ Zatlin (1997), p. 34.

⁵⁸ *Parsifal*, whose origins can be traced to *Le Chanson de Roland*, was also considered 'safer' and more congenial in France, particularly among composers; Debussy, for example, incorporated elements of the song of the Flower Maidens into *La Damaïsselle élue* (see Holloway, 1979, pp. 36-37).

⁵⁹ For further discussion of the Tristan and Isolde designs for *Le Morte d'Arthur*, see Sutton (2002), pp. 40-44.

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between desire and hatred, looks on, both of them unaware that her maid Brangäne has replaced the poison with a philtre that will cause them to fall into each others' arms. As Sutton observes, Beardsley has substituted for Malory's description of the setting as the cabin of the ship Wagner's specification that the action occurs in a 'tentlike

apartment on the fore-deck of a ship, richly hung with tapestries',⁶⁰ and the background at first glance appears to adhere to this description, with the sun setting over the deck visible through a gap between two ornately embroidered tapestries. However, the utter disregard for modelling and the creation of an illusionistic threedimensional

space calls attention to the flatness and artificiality of the scene; the floorboards on which Tristan and Isolde tread are as much the joists of a stage as they are the planks of a ship's deck, the hangings as much flats and drop-curtains as they are tapestries. Yet in this parodistically theatrical setting, Tristan and Isolde, with their identical sensual yet ascetically hard profiles, are curiously frozen; if their gazes crackle with psychological tension, more of the scene's nervous energy resides in the writhing tendrils and flowers crawling around the border. By exposing the scene designer's conjuring tricks, Beardsley both subtly ridicules Wagnerian theatrical practice and privileges the static and the visual over the music-drama's forward impetus of narrative and music.⁶¹

If Fantin's Wagnerian prints, and his negotiation of the pitfalls of literal representation of performance, provided Beardsley with an apposite model, the uncanny stasis of the figures and their austere, enigmatic, androgynous profiles in *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* seem utterly foreign to Fantin's diaphanous classicism. They suggest that Beardsley found in France another source of inspiration whose fascination with androgyny and sense of the grotesque paralleled his own – Odilon Redon.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42; R. Wagner, *Tristan and Isolde* (London, 1993), p. 52.

⁶¹ Beardsley adopted this tactic more overtly in his *Rheingold* drawings by entitling them *tableaux*, a word guaranteed to evoke the popular entertainment of *tableaux vivants*. However, as Sutton observes, even the *tableau vivant* suffered from a split personality by the 1890s, alternately derided by forwardthinking

critics for its simplistic melodrama and appreciated for its proto-Symbolist qualities by avantgarde playwrights and directors; furthermore, the tactic of performing Wagner's operas as a series of static images was favoured by Cosima Wagner from 1883 until 1906 (Sutton, 2002, pp. 190-91).

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Austerity and the Grotesque: Redon in London

Redon's impact on anti-naturalism in Britain, and specifically on Beardsley, remains surprisingly understudied. With the exception of one conspicuous instance of Beardsley more or less directly lifting the motif of the monstrous spider from Redon's repertoire of grotesques for his early drawing *La Femme incomprise* (R.257), the affinities between the two artists' work has been little remarked upon, and possible points of contact scarcely mentioned.⁶² However, Beardsley's brief career coincided with Redon's most protracted effort to raise his profile in Britain, and if Redon was a rather reluctant Wagnerian in comparison to Fantin, both his small output of Wagnerian subjects and several of the core themes of his oeuvre seem to have

informed Beardsley's own.

In 1890, Charles Morice wrote to Redon to introduce him to 'an English poet of no mean talent . . . who desires the honour of your acquaintance, with the goal of writing a study of your work for an English review'.⁶³ The poet in question was the apostle of French Symbolism in England and Beardsley's future collaborator and biographer, Arthur Symons, and his article appeared in the *Art Review* in July of that year.⁶⁴ Symons, no doubt informed by the contemporary penchant for drawing comparisons between British and French artists, introduced Redon to his readers as 'a French Blake', perhaps in an effort to ground Redon's seemingly outlandish vision in a recognisable tradition;⁶⁵ the better part of the text, possibly informed by Huysmans's meditation on *Hommage à Goya* in *Croquis parisiens* (1886), is devoted to an explication of Redon's second suite of lithographs inspired by Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint-Antoine* and illustrated with two of the plates, *La Chimère* and *Saint Antoine: ... à travers ses longs cheveux qui lui couvraient la figure, j'ai cru reconnaître Ammonaria*... [Figure 118, Mellerio 95]. Although not a Wagnerian subject, the scene would probably have struck a chord with Beardsley, who was likely to have been

⁶² Snodgrass (1995), p. 309, is one of the few exceptions, noting that Beardsley is likely to have seen Redon's prints both on his visits to Paris and when Redon exhibited in London in 1893.

⁶³ 'Un poète anglais d'un beau talent . . . désire l'honneur de vous connaître, dans le but de faire sur votre oeuvre une étude pour une revue anglaise': A. Redon and R. Bacou, eds., *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren . . . à Odilon Redon* (Paris, 1960), letter from Charles Morice, 1890, p. 198.

⁶⁴ Symons's piece should be considered the first *successful* attempt to publicise Redon's art in a British periodical. Huysmans worked briefly and disastrously with Harry Quilter on the *Universal Review* in March 1888; his plans to write and publish an illustrated survey of Redon's work came to naught. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶⁵ Symons did, however, stress the differences between Redon and Blake, particularly the fact that Redon's universe was 'a lower heaven than [Blake's] where the morning stars sing together': A. Symons, 'A French Blake: Odilon Redon', *Art Review* (July 1890), p. 207.

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familiar with the literary source; as well, the sinuous lines of *Ammonaria*'s hair and the torturer's flail appear to presage those of the *Rheingold* illustrations. Symons continued to promote Redon's work in later writings, and if he despaired of the artist's continued obscurity on both sides of the Channel, which he attributed to his refusal to 'conciliate the average intelligence',⁶⁶ it seems reasonable to assume that he would have discussed Redon with colleagues likely to appreciate him, not least Beardsley. Redon's profile continued to rise, albeit with less fanfare in Britain than in France and Belgium, over the next five years. In 1891 the Belgian critic Jules Destrée published a catalogue raisonné of his *noirs*, bringing together a previously scattered production and introducing a new audience to the complete body of Redon's work. The catalogue may have contributed to Redon's discovery by three British collectors, Albert Edward Tebb, Campbell Dodgson and Mortimer Mompes; Mompes, a printmaker and student of Whistler, met Gauguin in Brittany in 1894, asking him to request of Redon 'the complete collection', regardless of cost, which suggests that he had seen the catalogue,⁶⁷ while Tebb was so taken with Redon's prints that he visited the artist in both Paris and Peyrelebad to buy new work.⁶⁸ The enthusiasm of these amateurs gave Redon hope of critical and commercial success in Britain; as he wrote to his Dutch patron Andries Bonger in 1894, he was counting on an exhibition in London the following year and 'I have been advised to set my sights on that side [of the Channel], I sense a success in England'.⁶⁹ His high hopes were to be disappointed, for when he exhibited four lithographs at Dunthorne's Rembrandt Head Gallery in November 1895, the few critics who chose to write about the show responded with

alarm and perplexity.⁷⁰ The gallery, however, was around the corner from the offices of the Bodley Head, and although Beardsley makes no mention of the exhibition in his letters, it is certainly possible that he could have seen Redon's prints there.

⁶⁶ A. Symons, *From Toulouse-Lautrec to Rodin, with Some Personal Impressions* (London, 1929), p. 170.

⁶⁷ Redon and Bacou (1960), p. 196, letter from Gauguin to Redon, April/October 1894. Although Gauguin cautioned Redon that Mompes's motives may have been commercial as well as connoisseurial ('Pour votre gouverne je crois vous dire que cet artiste les achètera dans un but de spéculation ayant lui-même

pour ses eaux-fortes un éditeur à Londres'), Redon sold Mompes an edition of *Songes* plus thirteen other lithographs for 150 francs in October 1894.

⁶⁸ 'Depuis votre lettre, un amateur de Londres vint *ici* me trouver, et il m'acheta même. Voilà un fait tout nouveau dans ma vie': S. Lévy, *Lettres inédites d'Odilon Redon* (Paris, 1987), p. 31, letter to Andries Bonger, 15 September 1895.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18, letter to Andries Bonger, 9 June 1894. Redon wrote to Bonger again on 5 June 1895, 'On me fait des risettes de l'Angleterre et même de l'Amérique' (p. 28).

⁷⁰ For further discussion of Redon's reception in Britain and his efforts to promote himself there, see Hobbs (1977), pp. 91-97.

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Beardsley thus had multiple opportunities to encounter Redon's oeuvre, and there is evidence to suggest that it did. But what of Redon the Wagnerian? Redon had never embraced Wagner as wholeheartedly as Fantin and, although his correspondence indicates that he regularly attended performances of the composer's music (such as the Concert Lamoureux), his response to the production of *Die Walküre* he saw during his stay with Tebb in London was decidedly lukewarm: 'the actors are too theatrical, without really being actors; no sense of scene, but a sense of drama which seems to me innate, even in the extras'.⁷¹ He evinced an even lower regard for Fantin's Wagnerian art, deriding the 'vague Germanic sentimentalism' of his 'limp blond sketches' and questioning the validity of attempting to transpose music into painting: 'no colour can translate the musical world, which is uniquely and completely internal and has no hold on the natural world'.⁷² Redon's disdain for Fantin should probably be read at least partly as a pose, as integral to his reluctance to align himself with any of his contemporaries; this discomfort was amplified by the fact that Redon found himself, from 1878, very much in the older artist's debt, as it was Fantin who introduced him to the process of transfer lithography, which remained his preferred technique for his *noirs*.⁷³ Redon was also drawn into the orbit of the *Revue wagnérienne*, which advertised his (unrelated) lithographic albums, and for which he produced his first Wagnerian subject, *Brünnhilde* [Figure 119, Mellerio 68]. Two further explicitly Wagnerian images, *Brünnhilde (crépuscule des dieux)* [Figure 120, Mellerio 130] and *Parsifal* [Figure 120], followed after the periodical's demise. Although Redon employed the same medium as Fantin for his Wagnerian subjects, he used it for very different ends. Where Fantin's lithographs evoke the agitated movement of musical phrases, Redon's suggest a hushed interior stillness and, in common with much of his 1890s work, a hermetic mysticism, sometimes – particularly in the case of *Parsifal* – imbued with Christian overtones. *Parsifal*, incidentally, enjoyed a vogue among British Wagnerians in the 1890s, touching as it

⁷¹ 'Des acteurs qui le sont trop, sans l'être; aucun sens de la scène, mais un sens du drame, qui me semble inné, même chez les figurants': Leblond (1923), p. 26, letter to Maurice Fabre, 8 October 1895.

⁷² 'Vague sentimentalisme germain'; 'blondes et molles esquisses'; 'nulle couleur ne peut traduire le monde musical qui est uniquement et seulement interne et sans nul appui dans la nature réelle': Redon (2000), pp. 156-57.

⁷³ Redon and Fantin had met in the salon of Berthe de Rayssac in 1877, where Fantin introduced him to the transfer process either that year or in 1878 (letters to Mellerio in 1898 and Bonger in 1909 suggest different dates). See Mellerio papers, Series XIII, Fox FF.15.7 ('Fantin-Latour me donna l'excellent

conseil de les reproduire à l'aide du crayon gras, il me passa même, de bonne grâce, une feuille de papier report, pour le calque').

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did on the considerable overlap between the Wagnerian movement and the Christian revival.⁷⁴ Beardsley never took up Wagner's last opera as a subject – no doubt the story of a holy fool's redemption of sinners held little appeal for him⁷⁵ – but the serene, androgynous visage of Redon's portrayal of its hero, and of his two versions of *Brünnhilde*, may have struck a chord. Both *Brünnhildes* owe as much to Redon's

all-encompassing fascination with the 'ethereal profile' as they do to the character from the *Ring* cycle, and it has been frequently noted that the 1894 version betrays a strong Pre-Raphaelite influence;⁷⁶ in contrast to the hazy, generalised faces of Fantin's Rhinemaidens and Valkyries, the sensitive yet rigid profiles of Redon's *Brünnhildes* convey a forceful, conflicted personality not unlike Beardsley's Isolde. The androgyny of Beardsley's Tristan and Isolde also seems an echo of Redon's *Brünnhilde* and Parsifal; both artists' depiction of these characters taps into the fascination with 'female-dominated androgyny' that not only informed much antinaturalist art, but has also been identified by musicologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez as integral to Wagner's symbolic use of tonality.⁷⁷ However, Beardsley seems unable to resist the temptation to parody Redon's example. *Flosshilde* [Figure 122, R.446] flaunts the same austere, androgynous profile (albeit fixed in a cynical smirk) as *Brünnhilde*, but in endowing the clever, flirtatious, manipulative ringleader of the Rhinemaidens with the same cast of feature as the noble, self-sacrificing *Brünnhilde*, Beardsley punctures the mystical pretensions of the French artist.

Conversely, Beardsley saw fit to borrow with greater reverence from Redon's more grotesque imagery. Brian Reade has compared *Alberich* [Figure 124, R.451] to Caliban, a comparison which aptly suggests the dwarf's combination of human and animal characteristics and his ability to inspire both revulsion for his bestiality and malevolence and pity for his victimisation by more powerful characters.⁷⁸ What he

did not add (and may not have known) is that Beardsley may have had a specific

⁷⁴ On *Parsifal*'s appeal to religiously-minded British Wagnerians, see Sessa (1979), pp. 118-39.

⁷⁵ The sole reference to *Parsifal* in Beardsley's oeuvre is the apparently asexual orchestra conductor Titirel de Schentefleur in *Under the Hill*, almost certainly intended as a parody of the opera's (and its champions') promotion of platonic love and the renunciation of the self.

⁷⁶ See for example Hobbs (1977), p. 54. M. H. Spielmann used it to illustrate an article on the lithography revival on the Continent, suggesting that it was 'a possible origin of some of Mr Aubrey Beardsley's lineal eccentricities' but criticising Redon for '[losing] his art in extravagant fancies' and 'always straining after an idea which he does not so often succeed in communicating': M. H. Spielmann, 'Original Lithography. The Revival on the Continent', *Magazine of Art* 20 (January 1897), p. 150.

⁷⁷ J.-J. Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne: A Study in Interpretation*, trans. S. Spencer (Princeton, 1993), pp. 294-98.

⁷⁸ Reade (1967), p. 358.

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Caliban in mind – Redon's [Figure 124]. *Alberich* and Caliban are almost mirror images of each other, with their seated poses and raised arms and their not-quite-human

heads grafted onto hirsute animal bodies, but the similarities are accompanied by intriguing oppositions. Redon's Caliban, with his preternaturally huge eyes and pensive smile, seems at one with his surroundings; this is probably a prelapsarian Caliban, at peace in his natural surroundings before the arrival of Prospero. *Alberich*, bound, grimacing and cursing, could just as easily be Caliban subdued and enslaved. Numerous commentators have pointed out the possibility of Beardsley's

autobiographical identification with the grotesque, gargoyle-like yet peculiarly compelling Alberich, whose name, by a curious coincidence, is the German form of Aubrey.⁷⁹ In Redon's sympathy for the devil, he doubtless found a kindred spirit, whether that devil was Shakespearean or Wagnerian.

Redon's contribution to Beardsley's formulation of a Wagnerian aesthetic was clearly more significant than has generally been assumed, although their shared interest – and sympathy with – the grotesque and the mysterious would on the surface appear to make Redon a more obvious source of inspiration than Fantin. However, Beardsley's most ambitious Wagnerian project, *Under the Hill*, his unfinished retelling of *Tannhäuser*, not only reveals an even greater debt to Fantin and to French Wagnerism in general, it represents one of the strangest and most subversive attempts to appropriate Wagner for France, through the lens of a style whose perceived frivolity was seemingly inimical to the entire Wagnerian project – French Rococo.

'Wagner's brilliant comedy': *Tannhäuser* and the Rococo turn

Under the Hill has suffered a split personality since its conception: it has been characterised as a 'romantic novel' (Beardsley), a 'Rabelaisian fragment' (Yeats), a 'spoof of pornography' (Zatlin) and, most recently, 'a parody of *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism, and of antiquarianism' (Sutton). To this list I would add: an exercise in Francophilia that simultaneously mocks the political foibles of French Wagnerism and colludes with its efforts to enact a cultural revenge. While Sutton argues persuasively that *Under the Hill* skews and subverts British conceptions of the respectability and

⁷⁹ See for example B. Brophy, *Black and White: A Portrait of Aubrey Beardsley* (London, 1968), p. 64; Chan (1983), pp. 92-93; and Sutton (2002), p. 184, all of whom have noted the similarities between Alberich's profile and Beardsley's. It is also worth noting that another variation of Aubrey ('elf-king') is Oberon; Beardsley was probably aware of his kinship with the fairy king of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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erudition of Wagner and German culture as a whole by recasting it in the ostensibly antithetical mould of the French Rococo, it is my contention that *Under the Hill* is, on another level, a homage-cum-parody of the project of French Wagnerism and its own, little-discussed, alignment with the aesthetic and political concerns of the eighteenth century.

Few studies of Beardsley fail to comment on the eighteenth-century flavour of his mature style;⁸⁰ the underlying assumption of most of these discussions is that this stylistic shift resulted from the disastrous aftermath of the Wilde trial and that Beardsley's attempts to distance himself from Wilde and the *Yellow Book* and his new association with Symons and the *Savoy* led to the disavowal of his earlier, Japoneseque style and its replacement with a new classicism. However, Beardsley had shown an interest in the Rococo and especially, and significantly, in Watteau, from at least 1893.⁸¹ That his experimentation with a style informed by the art of eighteenth-century France coincided with the period of his most intense Wagnerian activity – the writing and illustration of *Under the Hill* and the semi-related *Rheingold* drawings – invites further examination. For although *Under the Hill* is riddled with references to the literature and *objets d'art* of incongruous styles, national schools and periods (itself a parody of the eclecticism that characterised both Aestheticism and mainstream Victorian culture, as well as Wagner's aesthetic), it is the French Rococo that predominates. Beardsley sprinkles his text with self-consciously archaic French turns of phrase to both heighten the decadent mood and attenuate the outrageous nature of the novella's polymorphous sexual activity,⁸² lampoons the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* by having Tannhäuser bathe with his homosexual attendants in a bathroom straight out of 'the well-known engraving by Lorette that forms the

frontispiece to Millevoye's "Architecture du XVIIIe Siècle", and hangs the Chevalier's bedroom with erotic Rococo prints which demonstrate his wide-ranging knowledge of the genre (the print described in most detail resembling Fragonard's notorious painting of a girl playing not-quite-innocently with a puppy, *La*

⁸⁰For example, Symons (1929), pp. 188-89 and Chan (1983), p. 89. I use the term 'mature' advisedly in reference to an artist whose career and life were over before his twenty-sixth birthday; it is generally acknowledged that the extraordinary pace of Beardsley's stylistic evolution allows for the identification of a 'mature' phase.

⁸¹'I have just found a shop where very jolly *contemporary* engravings from Watteau can be got quite cheaply': Maas et al. (1970), p. 54, letter to William Rothenstein, September 1893.

⁸²It is worth noting that this is an idiosyncrasy that carries over from Beardsley's personal correspondence; many of his letters to Leonard Smithers yield the odd snatch of 'franglais'.

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Gimlette).⁸³ In the longest and most explicit allusion to Wagner, Tannhäuser retires to bed with the score of *Das Rheingold*, reading it in a manner strongly informed by his surroundings:

Tannhäuser had taken some books to bed with him. One was the witty, extravagant *Tuesday and Josephine*, another was the score of *The Rheingold*. Making a pulpit of his knees he propped up the opera before him and turned over the pages with a loving hand, and found it delicious to attack Wagner's brilliant comedy with the cool head of the morning. Once more he was ravished with the beauty and wit of the opening scene; the mystery of its prelude that seems to come up from the very mud of the Rhine, and to be as ancient, the abominable primitive wantonness of the music that follows the talk and the movements of the Rhine-maidens, the black, hateful sounds of Alberich's love-making, and the flowing melody of the river of legends. But it was the third tableau that he applauded most that morning, the scene where Loge, like some flamboyant primaeval Scapin, practises his cunning on Alberich. The feverish insistent ringing of the hammers at the forge, the dry staccato restlessness of Mime, the ceaseless coming and going of the troupe of Nibelungs, drawn hither and thither like a flock of terror-stricken and infernal sheep, Alberich's savage activity and metamorphoses, and Loge's rapid, flaming, tonguelike movements, make the tableau the least reposeful, most troubled and confusing thing in the whole range of opera. How the Chevalier rejoiced in the extravagant monstrous poetry, the heated melodrama, and splendid agitation of it all!⁸⁴

The slyly self-referential quality of the episode aside – most of the scenes described are those treated by Beardsley in the illustrations – one of the most striking aspects of Tannhäuser's reading is its strong emphasis on the visual. Although it is stated that the Chevalier is reading a musical score, the description of his perusal of it, particularly the reference to a 'tableau', gives the impression that he is instead poring over an album of prints – if not by Beardsley, perhaps by Fantin. The 'primaeval' splendour and sweep of Wagner's drama is consistently undercut by reference to its 'wit', extravagance, and exquisitely bijou qualities; this recalls not only Nietzsche's perverse characterisation of Wagner as 'our greatest *miniaturist* in music',⁸⁵ but also shifts Wagner's work from the realm of the public and collective experience to that of the private, the interior and the dilettantish, qualities which the Rococo was widely considered to embody.⁸⁶ I would argue, however, that Beardsley was guided in his

⁸³ A. Beardsley, *Under the Hill and Other Essays in Prose and Verse* (London, 1904), pp. 54-55.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

⁸⁵ F. Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *'The Birth of Tragedy' and 'The Case of Wagner'*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York, 1967), p. 171, original emphasis.

⁸⁶ A further instance of Beardsley's Rococo-inflected interpretation of Wagner may be found in comparing his dandyish *Abbé* (R.423) with its possible prototype, Watteau's *Gilles* (Louvre). The exquisite, delicate costumes of Gilles and countless other male figures in Watteau's oeuvre would have
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recasting of Wagner's drama into a Rococo aesthetic as much by Fantin's precedent, discussed above, as by his interest in the French avant-garde's contemporaneous cult of the Rococo and his well-documented enthusiasm for Watteau.⁸⁷

Embedding Wagnerian subjects in the aesthetic of a lost aristocratic regime is also, however, a loaded political choice, especially when one is working within the framework of a republic or a constitutional monarchy, and Beardsley seems to have been very much alive to the contradictions of cloaking an artistic revolution in politically (and artistically) retrograde forms. The curious interdependence of aesthetic avant-gardism and political conservatism that so profoundly informed antinaturalism

as a whole holds a special significance for both the Rococo revival, Wagnerism, and their eventual intertwining, especially by the 1890s. By the time Beardsley came to write *Under the Hill*, Wyzewa had transformed himself into one of the breed of arch-conservatives typical of 1890s France – railing against the Third Republic, endorsing elitism and the neo-Catholic revival, and yearning for a return to the values of the Ancien Régime.⁸⁸ Even Fantin, although no political animal – characteristically, during the Franco-Prussian War he neither fled to London nor fought for France, but hid in his father's house in the middle of Paris – revealed his artistically conservative bent when the Salon split in 1890; rather than exhibit with the more progressive Salon du Champ de Mars, he remained staunchly loyal to the conservative Salon des Champs Elysées, showing his musical and imaginative subjects (which critics came to see as increasingly trite) in decidedly conventional company. Beardsley's creation of a hermetic, amoral, over-aestheticised and, ultimately, trivial setting for his retelling of the tale of Tannhäuser may be just as ironic a comment on the conservative impulse of the Rococo revival and French Wagnerism as an attempt to *épater les bourgeois anglais* by reformulating the high moral seriousness and metaphysical pretensions of Wagner – and of British Wagnerism – in terms bound to be seen as decadent and degrading by a Francophobic British public.

I would suggest a further contemporary French rereading of the Rococo as vital influence on Beardsley's reinterpretation of *Tannhäuser*. The Rococo did not flound in the face of Victorian notions of masculinity in dress, no small attraction to Beardsley, whose fascination with androgyny and desire to shock his audience went hand in hand.

⁸⁷ On the Rococo revival in France, and especially the role of the Goncourt brothers, see Silverman (1989).

⁸⁸ On Wyzewa's conservatism, see Marlais (1992), pp. 55 and 103.

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capture only the imaginations of painters, designers and art critics; poets caught the bug as well, and none more so than Verlaine. Beginning in the late 1860s, he wrote the suite *Fêtes galantes*, inspired by, but not directly imitative of, Watteau's paintings. Verlaine's conception of Watteau was very much of his time, not only in its highlighting of the paintings' delicate artificiality and melancholy but in its emphasis on the interchange of image and sound, its conflation of colour and musical harmony. 'Mandoline' is the most explicit instance of this approach and is worth quoting at length:

Les donneurs de sérénades
Et les belles écouteuses

Echangent des propos fades
 Sous les ramures chanteuses.
 [...] Leurs courtes vestes de soie,
 Leurs longues robes à queues,
 Leur élégance, leur joie
 Et leurs molles ombres bleues
 Tourbillonnent dans l'extase
 D'une lune rose et grise
 Et la mandoline jase
 Parmi les frissons du brise.⁸⁹

Music pervades every element of the poem – the singers, the mandolin, the trees, even the evening breeze. But most significantly, music engenders dematerialisation: the poem's personages dissolve into 'soft blue shadows' whirling in the moonlight to the tune of the mandolin, insubstantial clouds of colour and sound. This is, moreover, emphatically not the bombast of the opera house, but the silvery, ephemeral melodies in a minor key suited to the drawing room or the garden. It was precisely this effect sought – and not always achieved – by Wagnerian painting, and which Beardsley, who was not only conversant with Verlaine's poetry, but with the man himself,⁹⁰ seems to have aimed for in the 'romantic dream' and 'brilliant comedy' that was *Under the Hill*.

⁸⁹ Verlaine (1962), pp. 115-16.

⁹⁰ Beardsley met Verlaine in London in November 1893 and, with his characteristic blend of archness and admiration, described him as 'a dear old thing': Maas et al. (1970), p. 58. The text of the lecture Verlaine gave, along with his account of his travels in England, was published in the *Savoy* in January 1896.

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Beardsley may have found in Wagner's reputation and pretensions a ripe target for brilliant satire, but his relationship with Wagner's *music* was considerably more nuanced. Concealed and complicated by layers of irony and mischievous subversion lay a sincere admiration and respect that seemed to increase with the growing inevitability of his approaching death. Writing to Leonard Smithers from his first extended exile in vain search of recovery, he confessed with unwonted seriousness that 'Wagner alone consoles me somewhat',⁹¹ and in an interview published in the *Idler* in March 1897, the author juxtaposed the blunt observation that 'according to medical opinion, he has not long to live' with the statement that 'Beardsley had two grand passions in life. One was for Wagner's music, and the other . . . for fine raiment'.⁹² Even when he found himself in dire financial straits in the last six months of his life and was forced to ask Smithers to sell most of his library, he requested that his copies of Wagner's prose be kept back.⁹³ Fittingly, in light of his Rococo-tinted vision of the composer, Watteau, in the form of Adolf Rosenberg's illustrated biography given him by André Raffalovich, became his other great source of comfort.⁹⁴ Beardsley may well, as I have argued, have arrived at this re-visioning of Wagner through the work of Fantin-Latour, of Redon, of Verlaine. But he did as much as any of these Frenchmen in reclaiming Wagner – for France.

⁹¹ Maas et al. (1970), p. 171, letter to Leonard Smithers, 26 September 1896.

⁹² A. H. Lawrence, 'Mr Aubrey Beardsley and his Work', *Idler* 11 (March 1897), pp. 189-90.

⁹³ Maas et al. (1970), p. 380, letter to Leonard Smithers, 22 October 1897.

⁹⁴ Beardsley wrote to Raffalovich, 'I can't tell you how much pleasure the little Watteau has given me [...] I really feel better since I opened the parcel'. *Ibid.*, p. 232, letter of 24 December 1896.

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Conclusion

In the two decades covered by this study, antinaturalism mounted a serious challenge to the perceived separateness of British and French art. This paradigm shift took place most visibly in the 1878 and 1889 Expositions Universelles and, to a lesser extent, in exhibitions at private galleries such as the Grosvenor, Georges Petit, and Goupil. The opportunity of seeing original works by artists such as Burne-Jones and Moreau juxtaposed stimulated a critical reappraisal – albeit more in France than in Britain – of the links and rivalries between the two countries and, despite the fact that as late as 1895 a leading critic like Sizeranne insisted that British art was inherently independent from its continental counterparts, the acknowledgment of complex cross-Channel dialogues and interchanges between antinaturalist artists. Moreover, the ways in which Burne-Jones, Watts, Moreau and Puvis positioned themselves – consciously or not – within these exhibitions established common goals of resistance to the socio-political norms of the Third Republic and of Victorian Britain. Of course, many fruitful exchanges also took place outside the major exhibitions; many of these highlight the centrality of relationships between the arts, particularly between painting and literature, painting and music, or all three. Some were the result of writers’ interest in particular artists – Symons in Moreau and Redon, Rod in Burne-Jones, and Sarrazin in Rossetti, to name only a few – and were inevitably coloured by contemporary perceptions of a hierarchy of the arts in which literature took precedence over painting. Others were more reciprocal, as in the case of Denis’s collaboration with Debussy in their reinterpretation of *The Blessed Damozel*, while some occurred in a spirit of parody and subversion, as in the case of Beardsley’s responses to Moreau, Fantin and Redon.

Throughout this thesis, I have insisted on the role played in these dialogues by reproductions and translations. Sometimes, as with Burne-Jones, Watts or Moreau, reproductions functioned as they were meant to – as substitutes for original works of art – whereas with Rossetti, given the inaccessibility of his work, they became an end in themselves. Reproductions are, by their very nature, imperfect renderings of the original, and this distortion is an essential characteristic of the cross-Channel dialogue, not least because it paved the way for creative reinterpretations on both sides. These are dialogues based as much upon misunderstanding as upon common ground, but they resulted, however briefly, in rapprochement and the pursuit of shared objectives.

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Coda

1900: Towards a new internationalism

The past is never dead; it’s not even past.¹

As the Exposition Universelle of 1900, the last and largest of the nineteenth century, opened, still incomplete, on 14 April, the walls of the newly-built Grand Palais provided the backdrop for the final encounter of a different sort. This was the last time new works by Moreau, Puvis, Burne-Jones, Watts and Fantin would be exhibited together,² and commentary from critics on both sides of the Channel was flavoured by a contradictory blend of the valedictory and the contemptuous, shaped by the events of two years previously. 1898 had been antinaturalism’s *année terrible*. Within less than twelve months of each other, Burne-Jones expired in Rottingdean; Puvis, mourning the Princesse Cantacuzène, and Moreau, putting the last arrangements in place for his house-museum, died in Paris, along with Mallarmé; Beardsley, fittingly for an artist who wore his allegiance to France on his impeccable sleeves, breathed his last in Menton. Fantin and Watts would both live on until 1904, Watts to produce the startling *Sower of Systems* [Figure 125] while Fantin, who had

long since given up Wagnerian subjects, soldiered away at increasingly backward-looking soft-focus scenes of nymphs and bathers. Of the other survivors, Redon remained loyal to his antinaturalist objectives, although as the new century dawned he definitively turned away from the dark dream world of his *noirs* toward vibrant visions of intense colour; Denis, meanwhile, announced his new allegiance to the renewal of a classicism whose impersonal gravitas rejected the highly individual, mystical antinaturalism tinged with the medieval that had dominated the first decade of his career. The major publishers of reproductions – Dietrich, Braun, Hanfstaengl, Swann – continued to print and sell monochromes after Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Moreau, but demand was dwindling. This wave of deaths, coupled with the new avenues sought by the survivors, only served to reinforce the general sentiment that an

¹ W. Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (1951).

² Burne-Jones exhibited *The Dream of Lancelot*, *Cupid's Hunting Fields* and seven watercolours, including *The Prioress's Tale*. Watts was represented by a *View of Naples*, and Beardsley by a single drawing, *Venus and Tannhäuser*. In the Centennale, Fantin was represented by his first imaginative subject, *Féerie*, as well as *Coin de table*, *La Famille Dubourg*, *La Brodeuse*, a self-portrait and a sketch (*La Tapisserie*); Moreau by *Salomé*, *Vénus*, *Enlèvement de Déjanire*, *Saint Sébastien* and *Jason*; and Puvis by *La Toilette*, *La Famille du pêcheur*, a reduced version of *Pro patria ludus* and *La Vigilance*. None of them showed work in the Décennale (although Emile Sulpis showed two reproductive etchings of Moreau's paintings), despite all being eligible to exhibit there.

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era had drawn to a close and, if anything, antinaturalism's obituary had been in the writing for at least the last five years, as capricious former defenders like Jean Lorrain turned against it and commentators across the spectrum began to grouse that the new work of its elder statesmen was hackneyed, reactionary and obsolete. Burne-Jones's wearily resigned summing-up of his destiny could, at least on the surface, aptly be applied to the fate of antinaturalism as a whole by 1900: 'I must be prepared for public weariness about me. I've had a good innings . . . the rage for me is over'.³

If it seems perverse to conclude this study of antinaturalist painting by looking at an event two years after its ostensible date of death, my choice of the last of the great Expositions – the ultimate manifestation of the positivism that powered the nineteenth century and against which antinaturalism had always rebelled – is deliberate. It is my contention that the state of the art world in 1900, and particularly as exemplified by the displays and debates of the Exposition Universelle, provides a vital insight into the legacy of antinaturalism and of the cross-Channel dialogues which were essential to its development. We must look beyond the common assumption of modernist histories of art that 1900 represents a period of rupture which saw the definitive triumph of the giants of the new order over the old and the outworn; the reality was much less clear-cut. Robert Rosenblum's exhortation to reconsider the artistic production of turn of the century as embodying flux rather than rupture, when the old, the new and the in-between rubbed shoulders, acquires particular urgency in the case of antinaturalism.⁴ A consideration of multiple aspects of the Exposition, including but not limited to the fine art displays, reveals that if many of antinaturalism's original French and British adherents had died, they left heirs in unexpected places. Perhaps the most noticeable example was Moreau's star pupil and the inaugural curator of the Musée Gustave Moreau, Georges Rouault, whose *L'enfant Jésus parmi les docteurs* [Figure 126], exhibited in the Décennale, fused Moreau's penchant for fantastical architecture with his own tendency toward anatomical exaggeration and expressive ugliness. Another case in point was the Belgian Fine Art section, almost universally lauded for its freshness and vitality; among the obvious avant-garde names like Emile Claus, Théo van Rysselberghe, Eugène Laermans and

Henri Evenepoel (the last another student of Moreau) were the antinaturalists Fernand

³ G. Burne-Jones (1904), vol. 2, p. 323.

⁴ R. Rosenblum, 'Art in 1900: Twilight or Dawn?', in R. Rosenblum, M. Stevens and A. Dumas, *1900: Art at the Crossroads* (exh. cat., London, Royal Academy and New York, Guggenheim Museum, 2000), pp. 27-53.

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Khnopff, an artist who made no secret of his Anglophilia and admiration for Burne-Jones in particular, and Jean Delville, whose paintings were markedly *not* victims of the accusations of backwardness heaped by British and French critics alike on their fellow countrymen.⁵ Not coincidentally, Belgium had been a major crucible of artistic exchange since the 1880s, most obviously in the international exhibitions of Les XX and La Libre Esthétique to which many French and British antinaturalists (including Watts, Beardsley, Denis, Fantin and Redon) contributed but just as significantly in its position as a centre in the reproductive print trade. Jean Clair's argument that Belgium should be considered the true international crossroads of Symbolism⁶ can be further honed by adding that it was specifically the crossroads of the cross-Channel exchange.

Nor was the demarcation between the antinaturalism of the nineteenth century and the ineluctable march of new 'isms' the unbridgeable gap that High Modernist histories would have us believe. Both inside and outside the Exposition, albeit more perceptibly in Paris and on the Continent than in Britain, the young artists of the avant-garde selectively absorbed the lessons of their antinaturalist predecessors. Puvis's influence on Matisse and Picasso is now more or less a given, but his effect on British modernists such as Augustus John and Stanley Spencer has only recently begun to be discussed,⁷ doubtless due to the long shadow cast by the deep-seated disdain for antinaturalism of the Bloomsbury critics. The young Picasso's attraction to Burne-Jones is occasionally mentioned in passing but rarely discussed in depth; as Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone rightly point out, echoes of this fascination, possibly spurred by seeing Burne-Jones's work in the flesh at the Exposition, can be traced in the pale profiles and all-pervading blue atmosphere of some of his Blue Period portraits.⁸ Further confirmation of the continuing influence of French and British antinaturalism can be found in the work of Hodler, Klimt, and Munch, to name

⁵ Indeed, Khnopff, who served as a correspondent for the *Magazine of Art* in the late 1890s, had published a eulogy to Burne-Jones therein: F. Khnopff, 'A Tribute from Belgium', *Magazine of Art* (August 1898), pp. 520-26.

⁶ See Introduction.

⁷ The most wide-ranging survey to date of Puvis's influence on modern art is Lemoine (2002), although Lemoine's insistence that Puvis was not a Symbolist/antinaturalist (pp. 17-47) needs to be treated with suspicion, especially in light of Lemoine's general antipathy toward nineteenth-century art. Robert Upstone's essay in the same volume, 'Echoes in Albion's Sacred Wood: Puvis and British Art' (pp. 277-90) is one of the few in-depth discussions to date of Puvis's influence, both contemporary and posthumous, on British art. To Upstone's study I would add that, ironically, considering Bloomsbury's hostility toward antinaturalism, some of Duncan Grant's *Bathers* betray a strong hint of Puvis's classical idylls.

⁸ Wilton and Upstone (1997), pp. 32-33, 272.

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only a few. In an era when the avant-garde was increasingly questioning the representational, 'antinaturalism' becomes a particularly slippery term, but if the naturalism against which antinaturalism had originally rebelled had also waned, aspects of the antinaturalist impulse – the fascination with dream and myth, the rejection of narrative and exterior reality – retained their relevance for the new generation.

However, to uncover the most powerful evidence of antinaturalism's staying

power in the new century, we need to leave behind the fine art displays in the Grand Palais and move toward the displays of the decorative arts. One need only look at the pavilion given over to Art Nouveau Bing [Figure 127], the bizarre, amorphous, writhing walls of Loïe Fuller's pavilion [Figure 128] and the displays of glass, ceramics and metalwork to see that many of the shared guiding principles of antinaturalism – the impulse toward a fusion of the arts, the collapse of the boundary between the 'fine' and 'decorative' arts, the rejection of the quotidian in favour of the spiritual and the mystical, and the undertones of masochism in the decorative – had simply passed into the realm of three-dimensionality. Indeed, some Art Nouveau objects made explicit allusions to antinaturalist paintings. Charles van der Stappen's *Sphinx mystérieux* [Figure 129], with its ivory flesh encased in a swirling silver garment and its air of impenetrable enigma, is a clear descendent of Burne-Jones's beggar maid, down to the undercurrents of masochistic idolatry. The impact of both Britain and France on the direction taken by this overtly international style has been frequently acknowledged, but perhaps because of the deeply entrenched, though (at least in the present situation) false distinction drawn by art historians between fine and decorative art, the role of antinaturalist painting and graphic arts in the development of Art Nouveau has not been fully explored.⁹ However, if we consider Art Nouveau as a continuing manifestation of the antinaturalist impulse, the notion, increasingly commonplace in recent studies, that antinaturalism was driven underground in 1900 by the impulse to formalist abstraction, only to re-emerge around 1920 in the guise of Surrealism, is ripe for reassessment. Alan Bowness's characterisation of Symbolism/antinaturalism as the bridge between Romanticism and Surrealism

⁹ An important exception to this rule is P. Greenhalgh, ed., *Art Nouveau: 1890-1914* (exh. cat., London, Victoria and Albert Museum and Washington, D. C., National Gallery of Art, 2000), which not only emphasises the overt internationalism of Art Nouveau but includes essays on the influence of painting generally, and British painting (with special attention to Rossetti and Whistler) in particular.

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remains valid,¹⁰ but, taking Art Nouveau into account, this bridge extends all but unbroken up to the eve of the First World War.

Given the centrality of the Expositions and their politics to the development of cross-Channel artistic dialogues, it seems only fitting to bring this study to an end with a brief examination of contemporary commentary on the health of the arts as represented – or not – at the Grand Palais. A perusal of much of the press coverage, at all points on the spectrum, is likely to give us a strong feeling that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*: the grumbling that the displays resembled an 'odious bazaar',¹¹ the ceaseless wrangling over the allotment of exhibition space to the various nations, the carping by critics of all nationalities (including French!) that France had, once again, allocated the best part of the exhibition space for itself, the furious debates about the primacy of French art, could just as easily belong to 1878 or 1889 as to 1900. Yet a new note of internationalist rapprochement crept into the reviews of some of the more forward-thinking observers. Although in 1878 the British journalist George Augustus Sala had acerbically cautioned the Exposition-goer against 'yield[ing] to the pleasing hallucination that International Exhibitions have anything to do with politics',¹² one could legitimately argue that the Expositions had played a significant role in the creation of artistic internationalism. The breakdown of boundaries between national schools was not always greeted as a positive development, and the perceived French monopoly on every aspect of the visual arts – from education to the market – was often blamed for the homogenisation of contemporary art; as Arsène Alexandre noted, 'internationally, we observe that the peculiarities of style are little by little dwindling and melting away in the most diverse

countries. Even the tyro can nowadays at a glance distinguish between an old Italian and a Flemish or a German painting; but it is by no means certain that the most practised eye will hereafter be able to make a distinction between a German, a French and a Flemish work of our own time'.¹³ But perhaps the best summation of the

¹⁰ See Introduction.

¹¹ The description is Camille Pissarro's, cited in M. Stevens, 'The Exposition Universelle: "This vast competition of effort, realisation and victories"', in Rosenblum, Stevens and Dumas (2000), p. 59. Gustave Geffroy's criticism of the Exposition took the form of a debate between two imaginary philosophers, of whom the negative one also chose to characterise not only the Exposition, but Paris as a whole, as 'nothing more than a bazaar': G. Geffroy, 'Revue des idées: L'Exposition de 1900 et les Expositions: Plaidoyers pour et contre', *Revue encyclopédique* 10, p. 610.

¹² G. A. Sala, *Paris Herself Again in 1878-9* (London, 1879), vol. 1, p. 192.

¹³ A. Alexandre, 'Continental Pictures at the Paris Exhibition', *The Paris Exhibition 1900, Art Journal* (London, 1901), p. 323.

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international situation in 1900, with all its optimism and doubts, is provided by the Belgian poet and critic Emile Verhaeren:

[Ever since the time of David], France has monopolised the vast production of art. There is only the École, unique and always the same, whether in London, Berlin, Brussels [...] Modern painting, on the contrary, lives on blues and violets; it breaks down sombre or dazzling light according to time of day and the movement of clouds and sun, it favours a delicate and vibrating facture. It has been adopted by all who wish to emancipate themselves from routine, it has won over Europe and even Asia and America. One paints, in accordance with this style, in Tokyo as well as in New York. But in time, precisely because it has been adopted by painters lacking in genius, it has become as banal as it is universal. Notwithstanding those great individuals who have amplified it, it has yet to inspire other masters. [...] Uniformity reigns supreme. And truly, covering the kilometres of carpet which determine the route through the Grand Palais . . . always the same from room to room, country to country, one finds the emblematic representation of the monotonous art of our time.¹⁴

Verhaeren's and Alexandre's fears that the dissolution of national difference augured the rise of bland uniformity were to prove unfounded, but their pinpointing of the increasing irrelevance of national schools to modern art is worth dwelling on. In the years immediately following the exhibition, slotting the younger generation of artists – for whom fertile dialogues with their counterparts in other countries were vital – into national schools became increasingly inappropriate, the inevitable outcome of the endless tug-of-war between nationalism and internationalism that coloured every aspect of life in the later nineteenth century. The rich and contentious dialogues between antinaturalist artists in Britain and France discussed herein can be viewed both as a microcosm of this paradigm shift and as one of its causes. In their wake, Europe's artistic landscape would never again be the same.

¹⁴ 'Dès ce moment, la France monopolise la grosse production de l'art. Il n'y a que l'école, unique et toujours la même, qu'elle soit à Londres, Berlin, Bruxelles [...] La peinture moderne, tout au contraire, vit de couleurs bleues et violettes; elle décompose la lumière sombre ou éclatante suivant les heures et la marche des nuages et du soleil, elle affectionne la facture menue et vibratile. Elle est adoptée par tous ceux qui veulent s'émanciper des routines, elle a gagné l'Europe et même l'Asie et l'Amérique. On peint, suivant son mode, à Tokyo aussi bien qu'à New York. Mais à son tour, précisément parce qu'elle est adoptée par des peintres sans génie, elle devient aussi banale qu'universelle. A part les individualités hautes qui l'ont magnifiée, elle n'a point encore suscitée ailleurs d'autres maîtres. [...] L'uniformité règne partout. Et vraiment, à parcourir le tapis kilométrique qui fait le tour du Grand Palais . . . toujours la même de salle en salle, de pays en pays, on y trouve la représentation emblématique de l'art monotone de notre temps.' E. Verhaeren, 'Chronique de l'Exposition', *Mercure*

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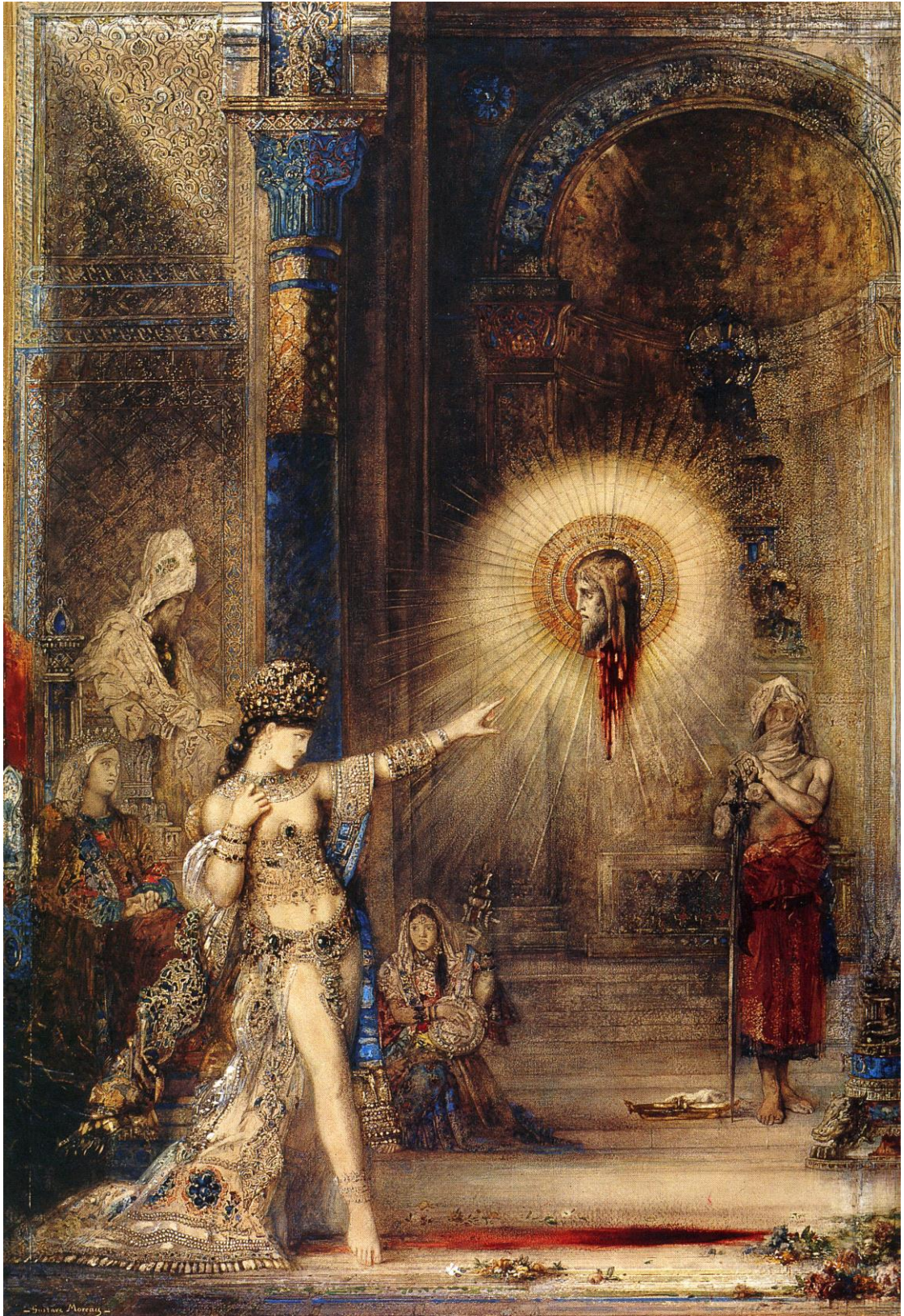


Figure 1. Gustave Moreau, *L'Apparition* (Mathieu 186), 1874-6, watercolour on paper, 106 x 72.2 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, département des Arts graphiques.

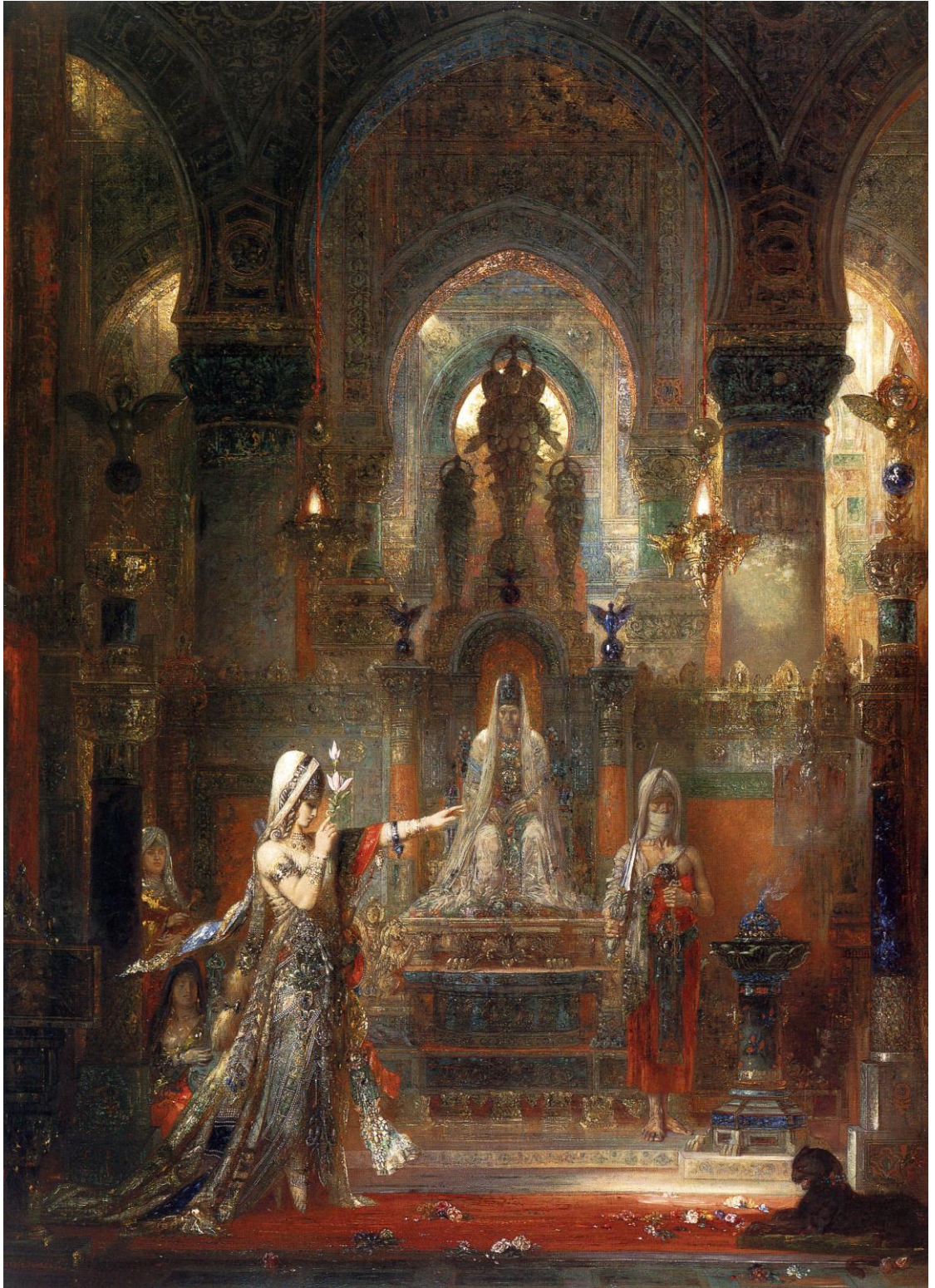


Figure 2. Gustave Moreau, *Salomé* (Mathieu 184), 1874-6, oil on canvas, 144 x 103.5 cm. Los Angeles, The Armand Hammer Collection.



THE GROSVENOR GALLERY OF FINE ART, NEW BOND-STREET.

Figure 3. ‘West Gallery, The Grosvenor Gallery of Fine Art, New Bond Street’, wood engraving, published in the *Illustrated London News*, 1877.



Figure 4. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Beguiling of Merlin*, 1873-4/77, oil on canvas, 186 x 111 cm. Port Sunlight, Lady Lever Art Gallery.



Figure 5. Edward Burne-Jones, *Love among the Ruins*, 1870-3, watercolour and bodycolour, 99 x 155 cm. Photograph after the damaged original (Witt Library).

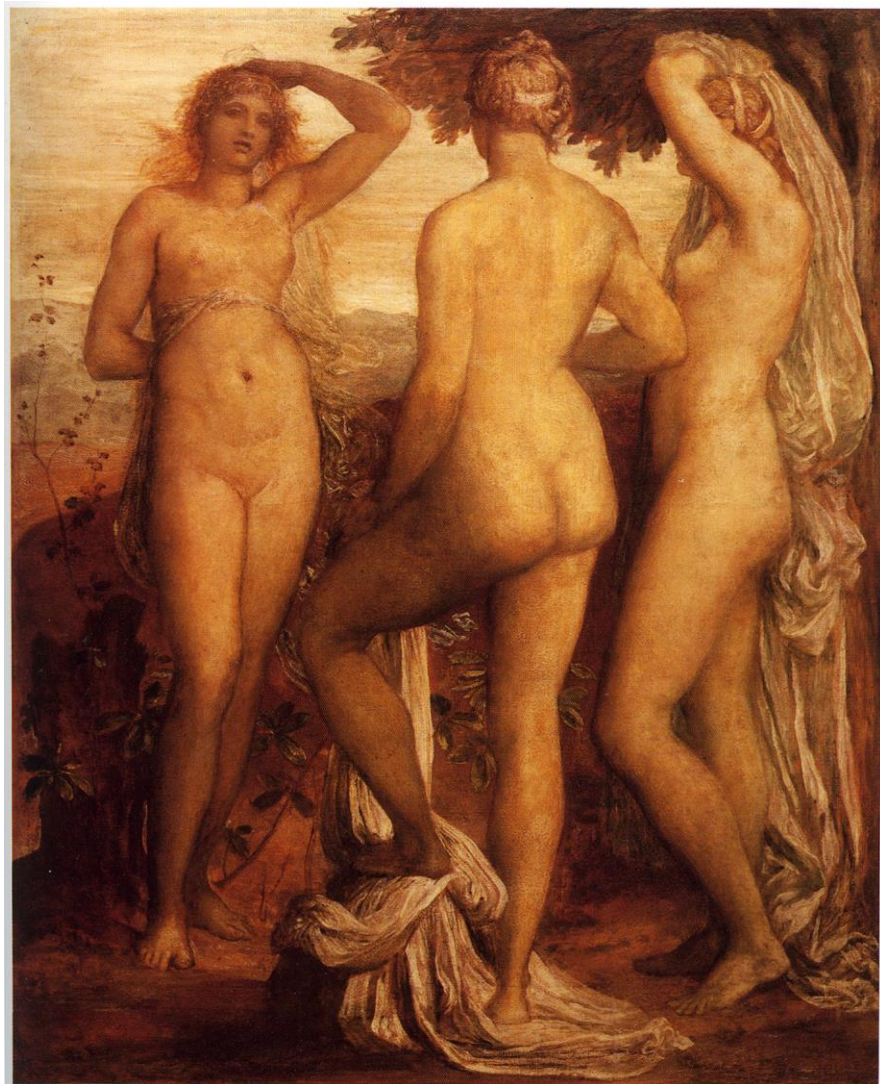


Figure 6. George Frederic Watts, *The Three Goddesses [Pallas, Juno, and Venus]*, c. 1865-72, oil on canvas, 80 x 65.4 cm. Buscot Park, Oxfordshire, The Faringdon Collection Trust.

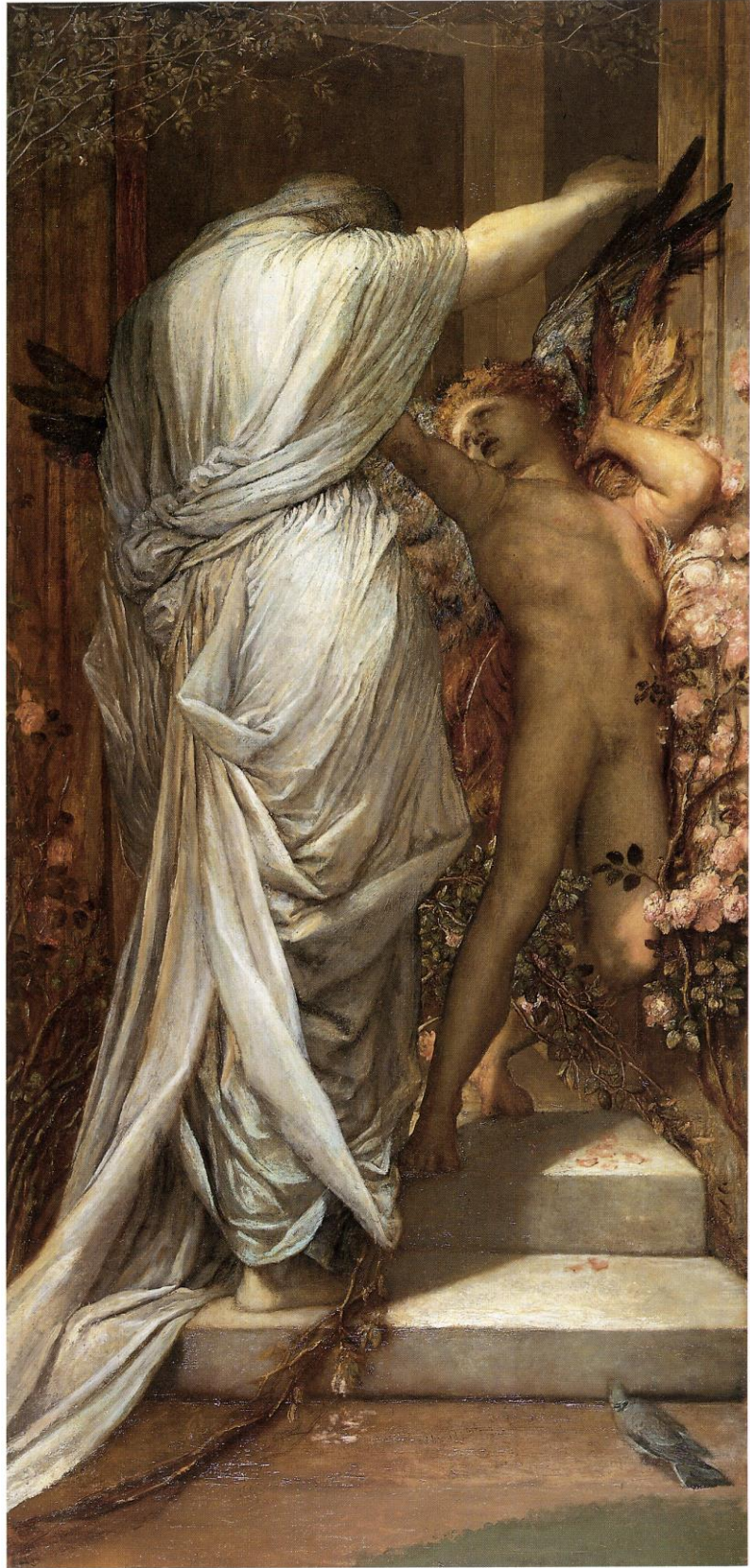


Figure 7. George Frederic Watts, *Love and Death*, c. 1874-7, subsequently reworked until 1887, oil on canvas, 248.9 x 116.8 cm. The Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester.

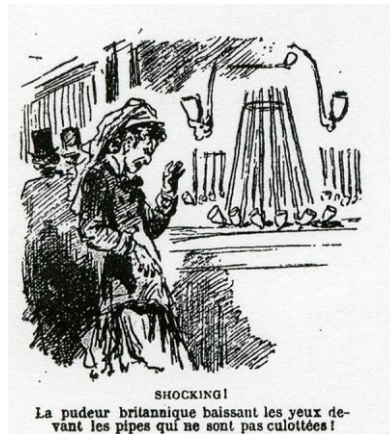


Figure 8. Cham, 'SHOCKING!', *L'Exposition pour rire*, 1878.

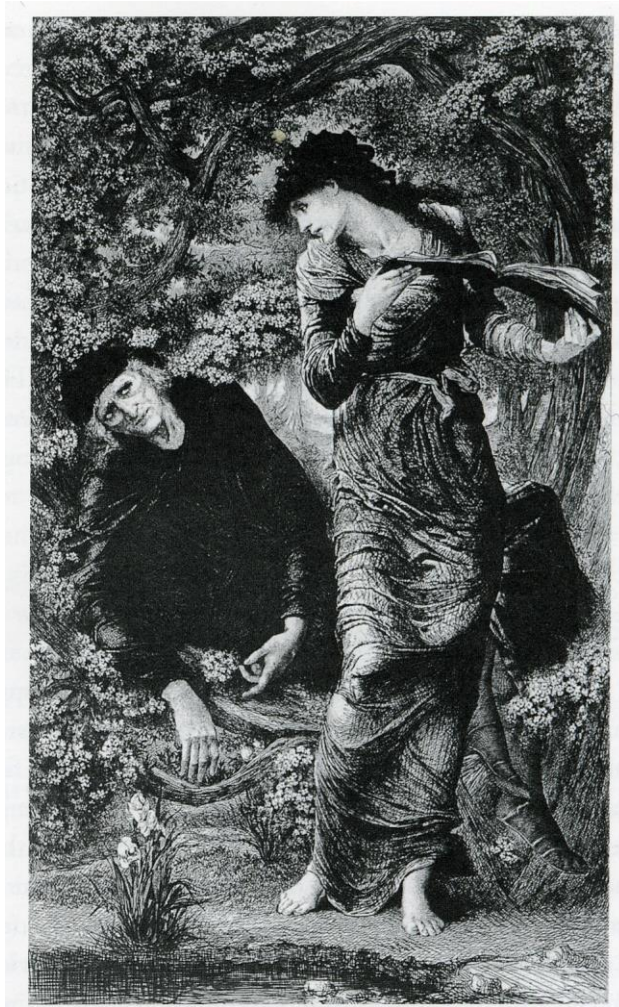


Figure 9. Adolfe Lalauze, etching after Edward Burne-Jones, *The Beguiling of Merlin*, published in *L'Art* 9, 1877.



Figure 10. Emile Boilvin, etching after Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *Le Faucheur* [Death and the Maidens], published by the Galerie Durand-Ruel, Paris, London, and Brussels, 1873. Paris, Documentation du Musée d'Orsay.

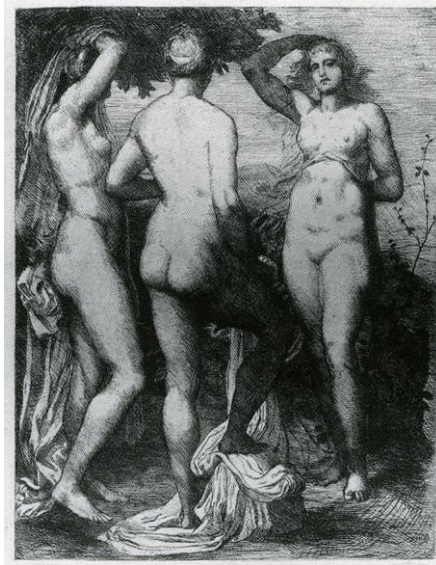


Figure 11. J. Benwell Clark, etching after George Frederic Watts, *Pallas, Juno and Venus*, published in *L'Art* 22, 1880, facing p. 176.

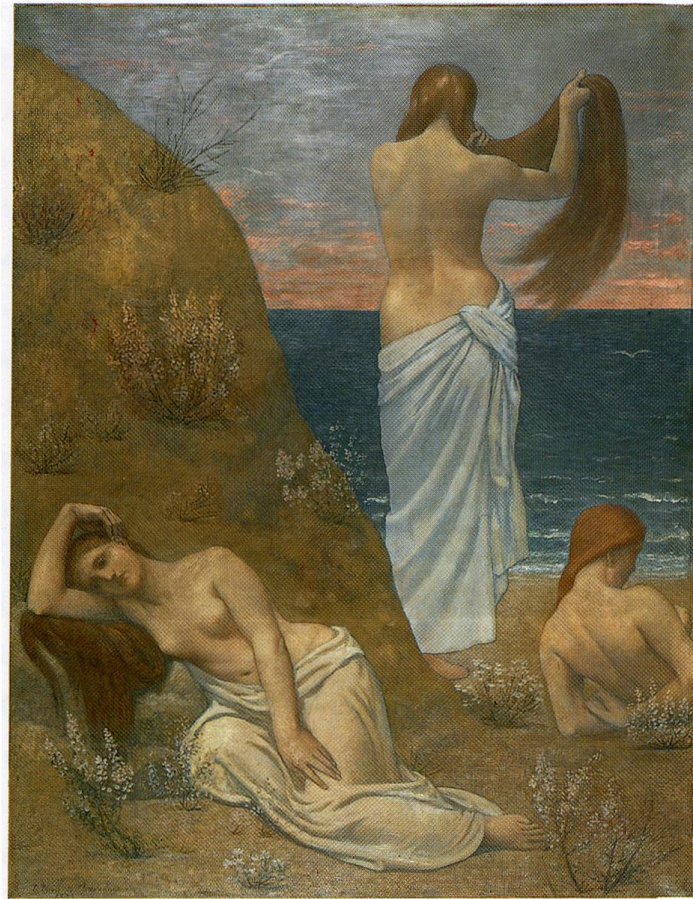


Figure 12. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer*, 1879, oil on canvas, 205 x 154 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



Figure 13. Stop, 'Jeunes filles au bord de la mer', *Le Journal amusant*, 31 May 1879.

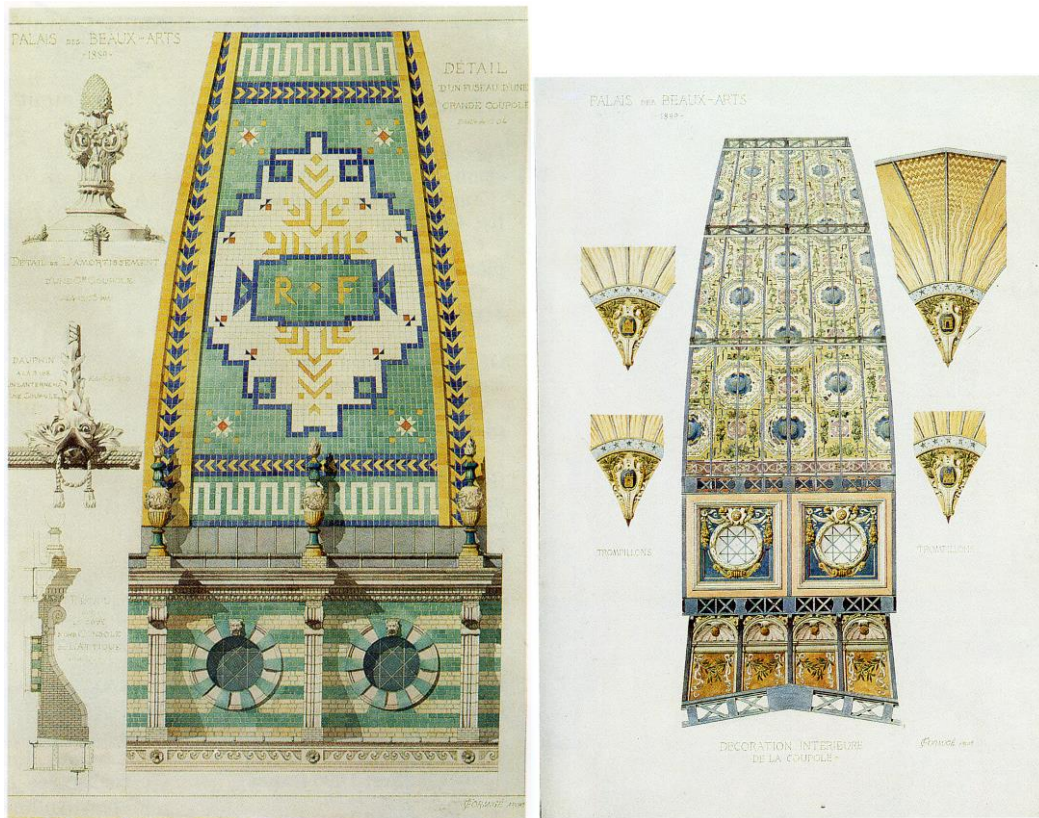


Figure 14. Jean-Camille Formigé, designs for the exterior and interior of the cupola of the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Puteaux, Formigé collection.



Figure 15. Stephen Sauvestre and Gustave Eiffel, Tour à 300 metres (Eiffel Tower), 1889.



Figure 16. Central gallery of the Palais des Beaux-Arts (Exposition Centennale) showing Puvis's *L'Automne*, 1889. Photograph: Paris, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.

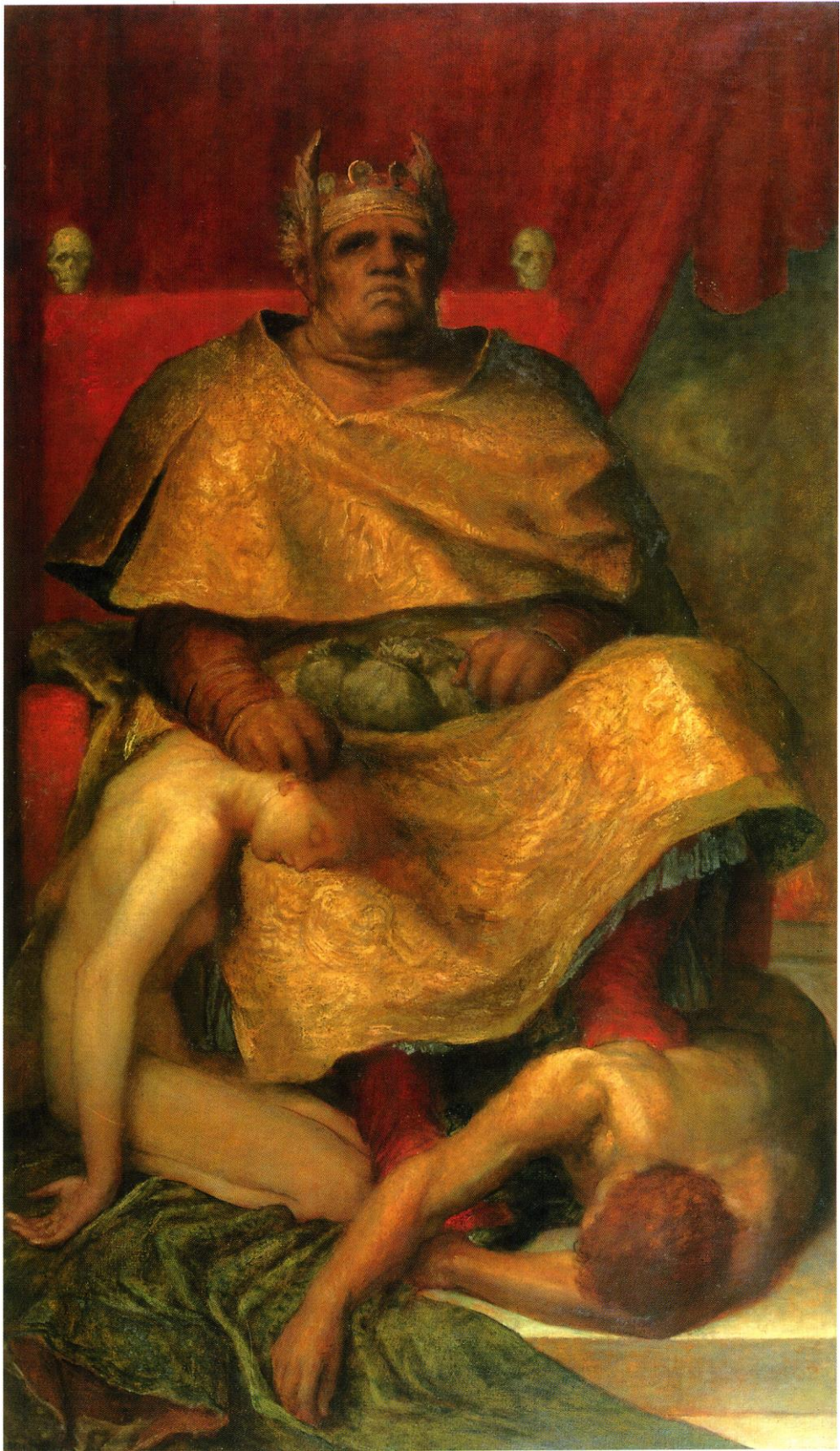


Figure 17. George Frederic Watts, *Mammon: Dedicated to his Worshippers*, 1884-5, oil on canvas, 182.9 x 106 cm. London, Tate Britain.

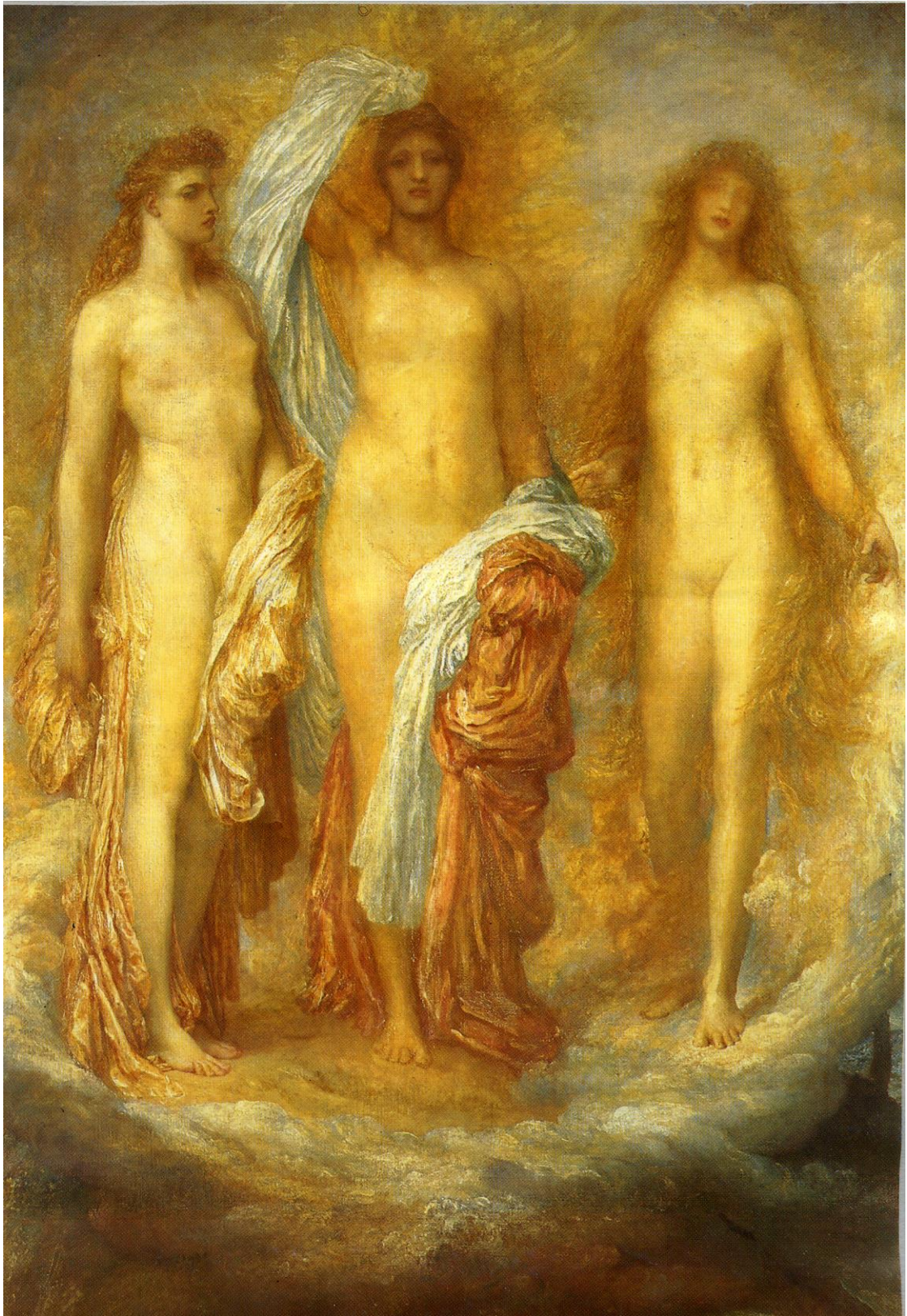


Figure 18. George Frederic Watts, *The Judgment of Paris (Olympus on Ida)*, 1885, oil on canvas, 147.5 x 101.5 cm. Private collection.

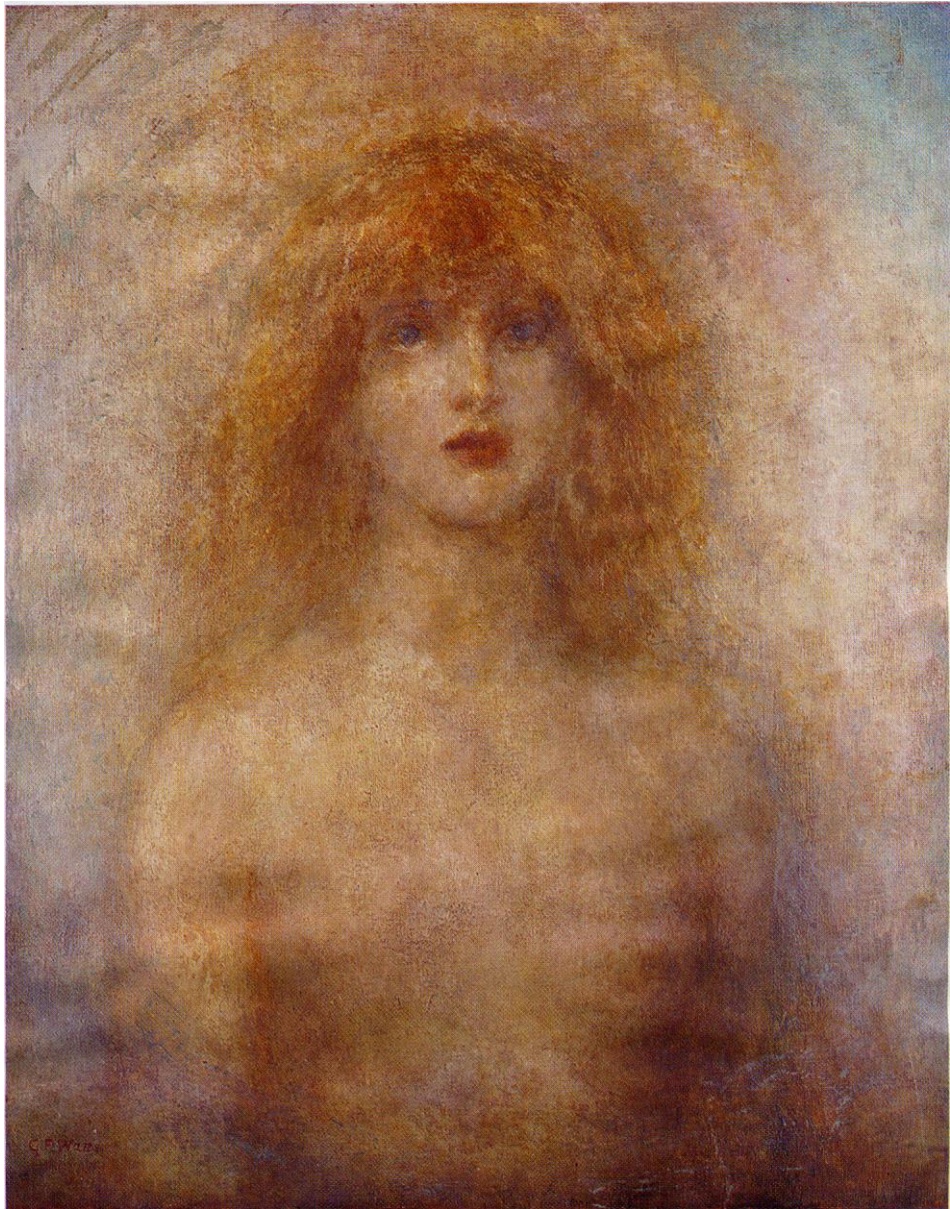


Figure 19. George Frederic Watts, *Uldra*, 1884, oil on canvas, 66 x 53.3 cm. Compton, Watts Gallery.



Figure 20. George Frederic Watts, *Hope* (second version), 1886, oil on canvas, 142.2 x 111.8 cm. London, Tate Britain.

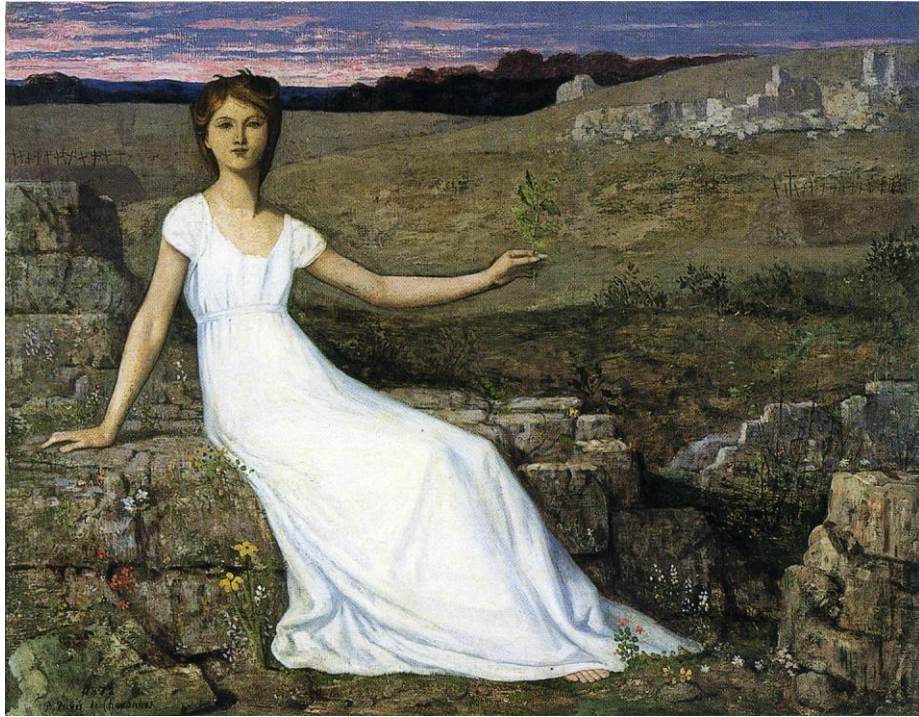


Figure 21. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *L'Espérance* (large version), 1872, oil on canvas, 102.5 x 129.5 cm. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum.



Figure 22. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *L'Enfant prodigue*, 1879, oil on canvas, 130 x 95.5 cm. Zurich, Foundation E. G. Bührle Collection.

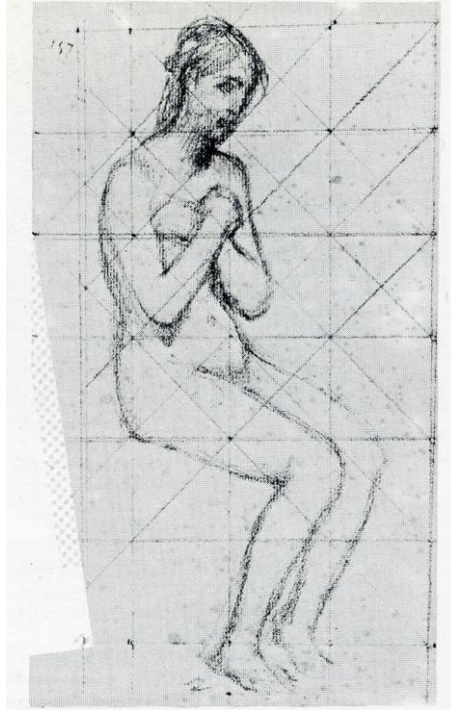


Figure 23. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *Femme nue assise de trois quarts à droite, bras repliés sur la poitrine* (study for *L'Enfant prodigue*), c. 1879, pencil, 28.3 x 16.3 cm. Paris, Musée du Petit Palais.



Figure 24. Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514, burin engraving, 24 x 18.9 cm. Vevey, Musée Jenisch.

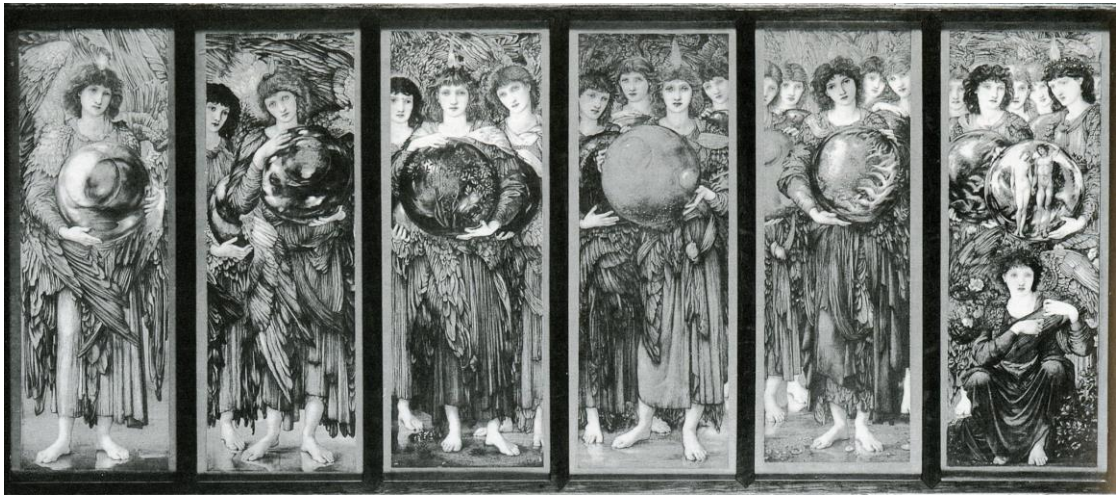


Figure 25. Photograph after Edward Burne-Jones, *The Seven Days of Creation*, photographer unknown. Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau.



Figure 26. Edward Burne-Jones, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, 1880-4, oil on canvas, 290 x 136 cm. London, Tate Britain.

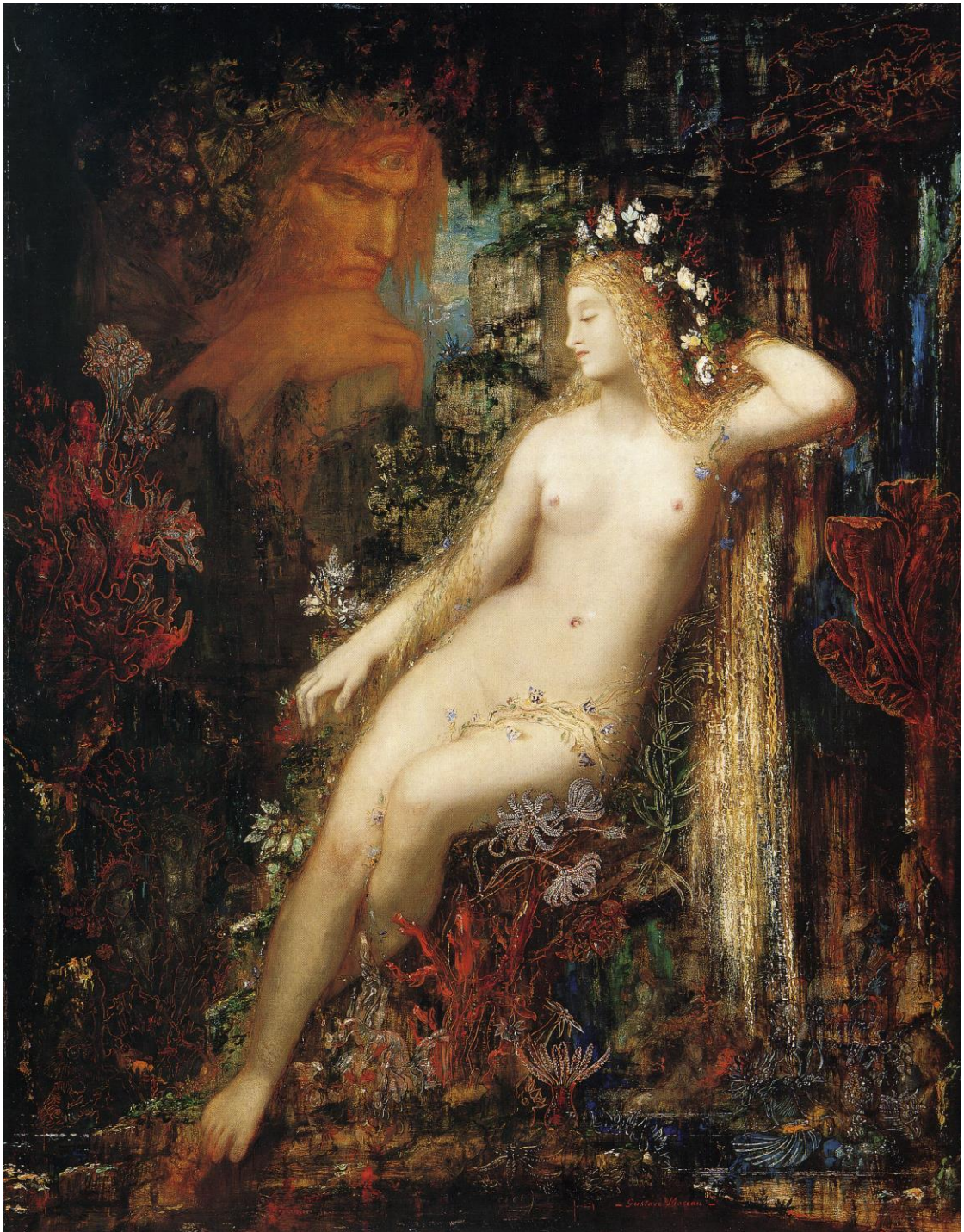


Figure 27. Gustave Moreau, *Galatée* (Mathieu 226), 1880/1, oil on panel, 85.5 x 66 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



Figure 28. Gustave Moreau, *Orphée* (Mathieu 84), 1865, oil on panel, 154 x 99.5 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



Figure 29. Edward Burne-Jones, *Laus Veneris*, 1878, oil on canvas, 122 x 183 cm. Newcastle, Laing Art Gallery.

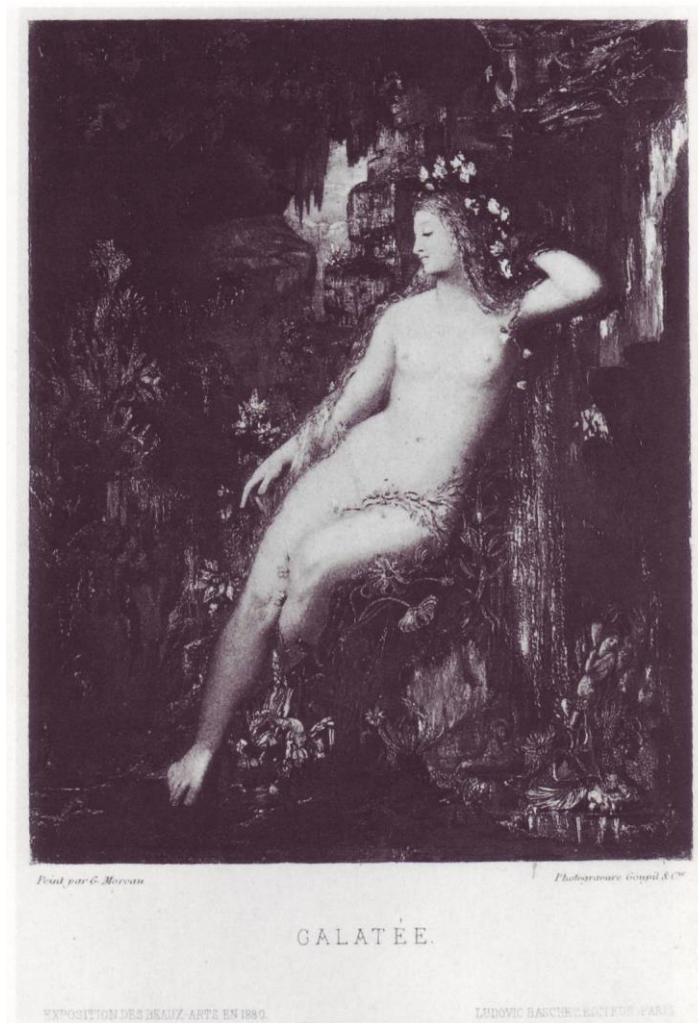


Figure 30. Gustave Moreau, *Galatée*, 1880, photograph published by Goupil.



Figure 31. Edward Burne-Jones, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, 1861-2, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm. London, Tate Britain, on loan to Leighton House.



Figure 32. Andrea Mantegna, *Madonna della Vittoria*, 1496, tempera on canvas, 280 x 160 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Figure 33. Raphael, *The Triumph of Galatea*, c. 1513, fresco. Rome, Villa Farnesina.

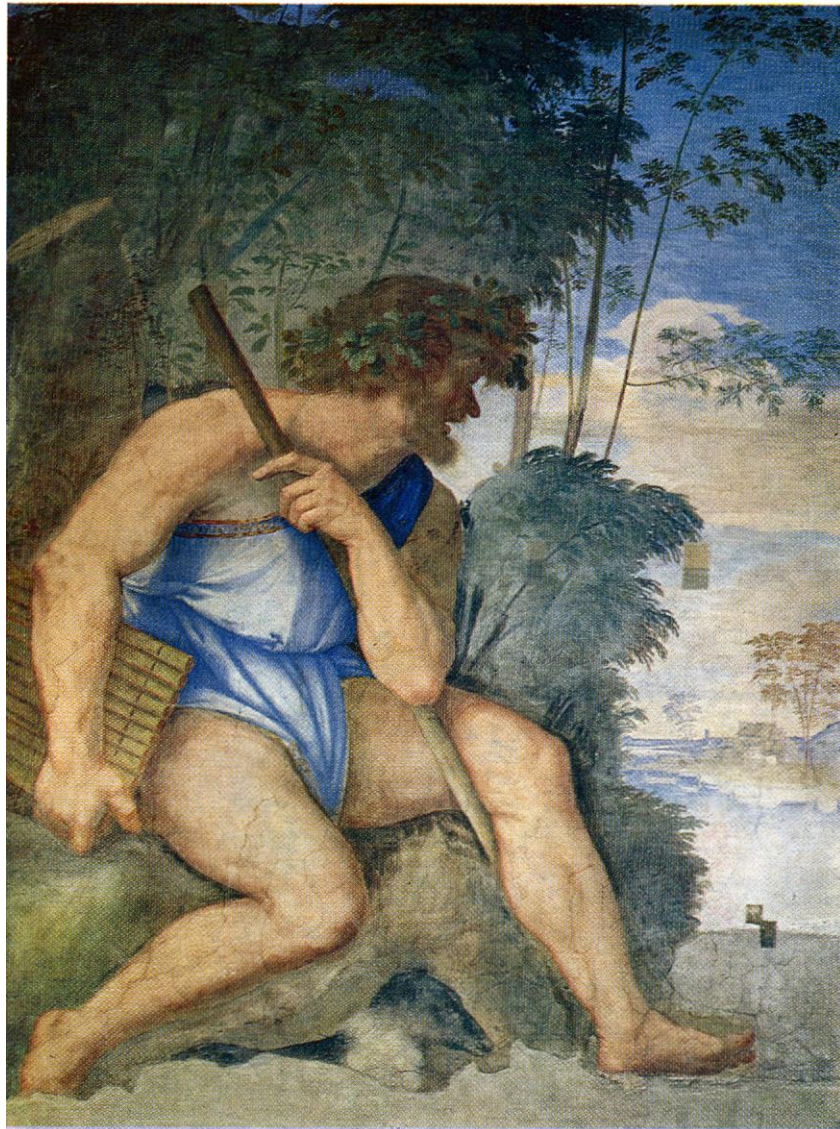


Figure 34. Sebastiano del Piombo, *Polyphemus*, c. 1512, fresco. Rome, Villa Farnesina.



Figure 35. Auguste-Louis-Marie Ottin, *Polyphème surprenant Acis et Galatée*, 1861, bronze and marble, Paris, Jardins du Luxembourg.



Figure 36. Gustave Moreau, *La Fée aux griffons*, c. 1876, oil on canvas, 212 x 120 cm. Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau.

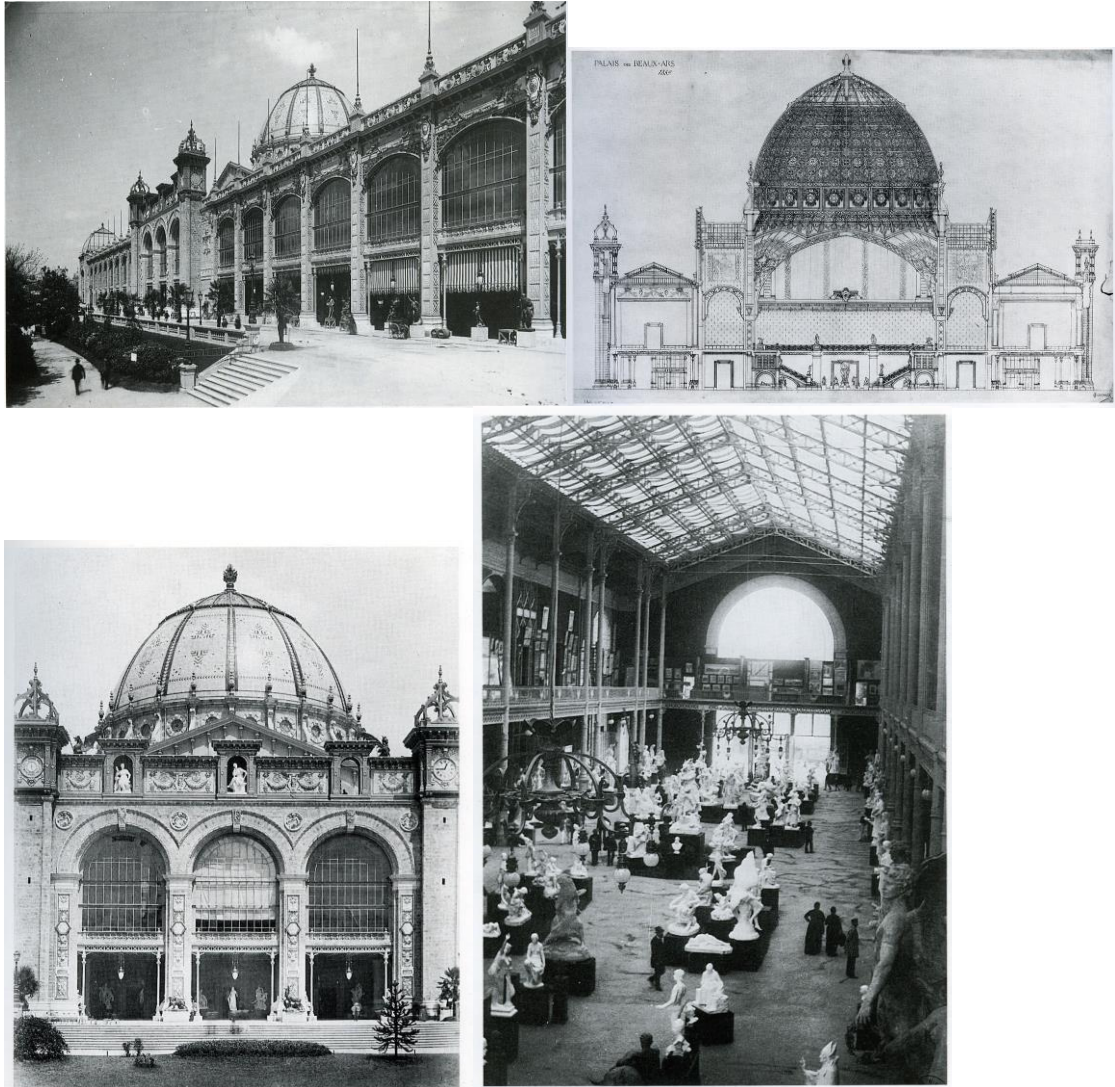


Figure 37.1-4. Jean-Camille Formigé, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1889 (demolished), side view, cross section, central dome and sculpture gallery.

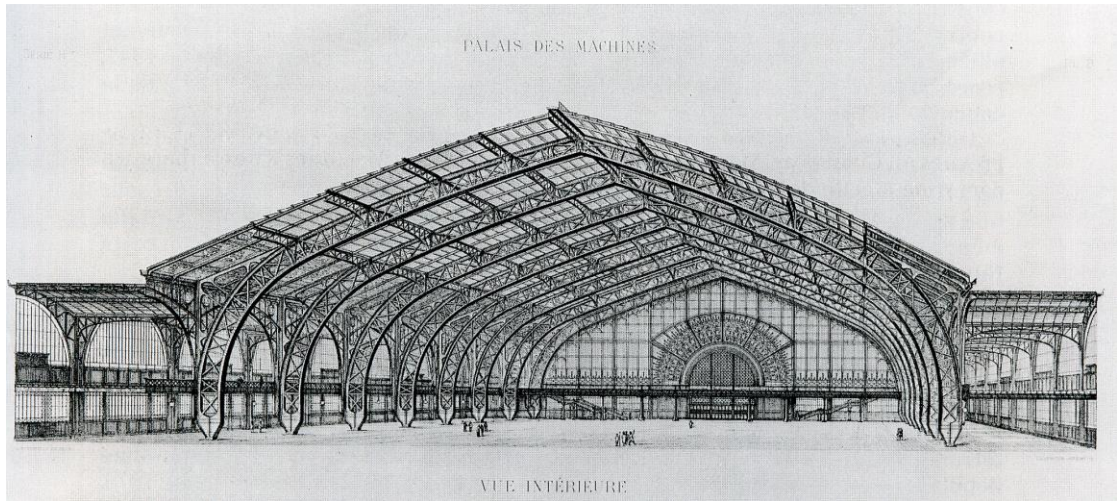


Figure 38.1-2. Charles-Louis-Ferdinand Dutert and Victor Contamin, Galerie des Machines, 1889 (demolished), interior views before and during the Exposition Universelle.



Figure 39. Georges Garen, *Embrasement de la Tour Eiffel pendant l'Exposition universelle de 1889*, 1889, colour engraving. Paris, Musée d'Orsay, fonds Eiffel.



Figure 40. Carlo Crivelli, *Annunciation with St Emidius*, 1486, tempera and oil on panel, transferred to canvas, 207 x 146.7 cm. London, National Gallery.



Figure 41. Edward Burne-Jones, *Golden Shower*, from *The Flower Book*, after 1882, watercolour and bodycolour, 16.5 cm. diameter. London, British Museum.



Figure 42. Edward Burne-Jones, *Welcome to the House*, from *The Flower Book*, after 1882, watercolour and bodycolour, 16.5 cm. diameter. London, British Museum.



Figure 43. Gustave Moreau, studies of marine plants for *Galatée*, undated (before 1880), watercolour, 23 x 15 each (upper two) and 23 x 14.5 cm each (lower two). Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau.



Figure 44. Odilon Redon, *Le Cyclopes*, 1914, oil on panel, 64 x 51 cm. Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller.

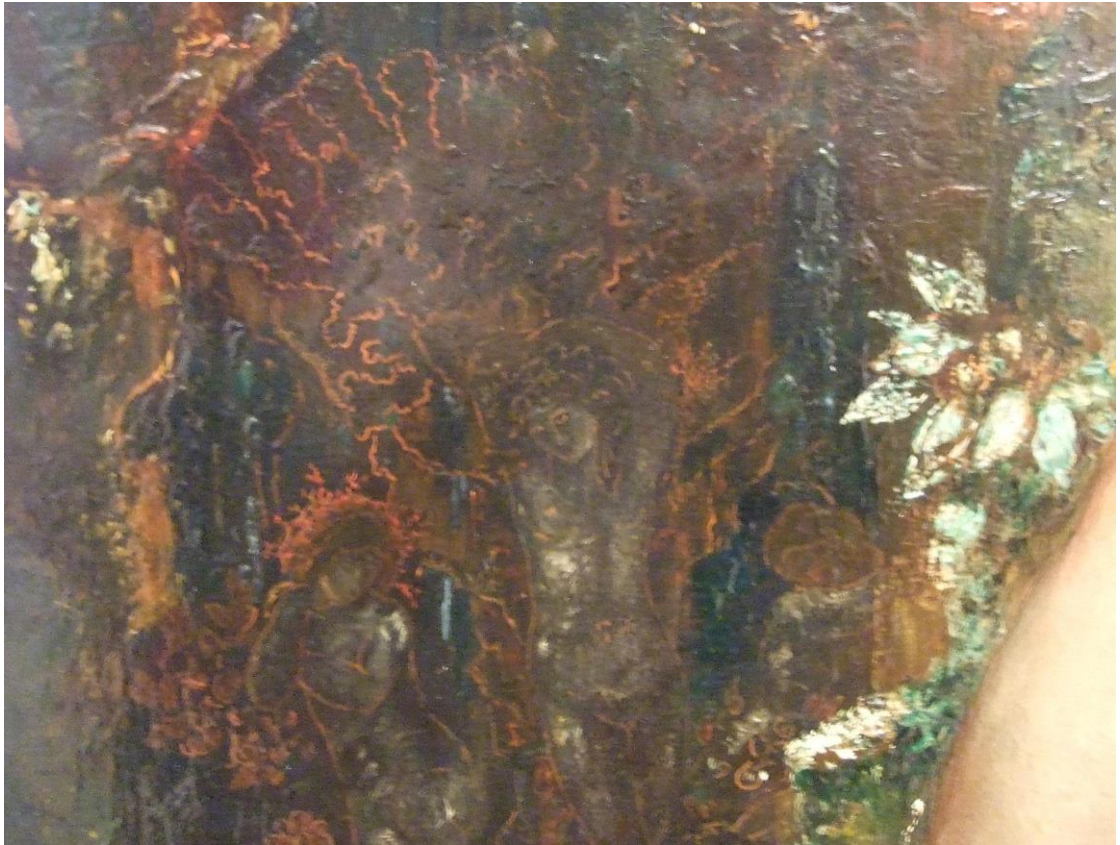


Figure 45. Gustave Moreau, *Galatée*, 1880/1, detail.



Figure 46. Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, c. 1503/1506, oil on panel, 77 x 53 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Figure 47. Edward Burne-Jones, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, c. 1883, watercolour, 72.4 x 36.8 cm. Private collection.



Figure 48. Edward Burne-Jones, 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid, by Rubens', from *Letters to Katie*, 1885, pencil. London, British Museum.

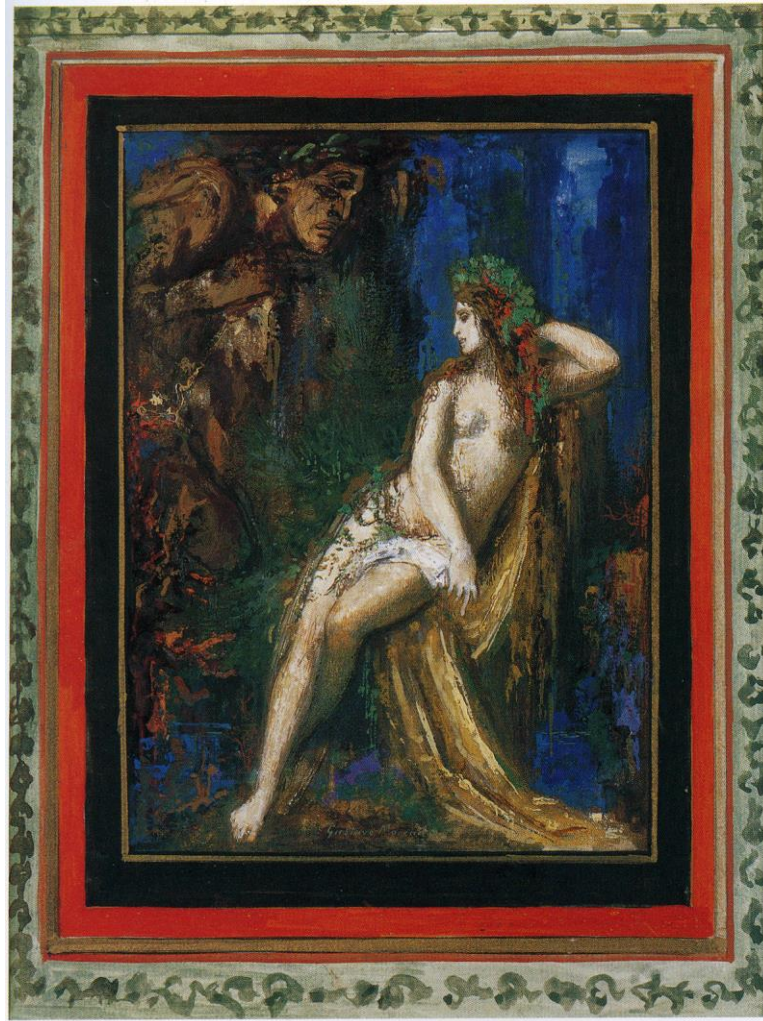


Figure 49. Gustave Moreau, *Galatée*, c. 1878, watercolour, 28 x 16 cm. Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau.



Figure 50. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (S.44), 1849-50, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 41.9 cm. London, Tate Britain.



Figure 51. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix* (S.168), c. 1863-70, oil on canvas, 86.4 x 66 cm. London, Tate Britain.



Figure 52. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Monna Rosa* (S.198), 1867, oil on panel, 68.6 x 53.3 cm. Private collection.



Figure 53. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel* (S.244), c. 1871-78, oil on canvas, 136.8 x 96.5 cm. Cambridge, MA, Fogg Art Museum.



Figure 54. Maurice Denis, *La Damoiselle élue* (C.30), 1892, colour lithograph, 45 x 32 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 55. Maurice Denis, *Mystère catholique*, 1889, oil on canvas, 97 x 143 cm. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée départemental Maurice Denis-Le Prieuré.



Figure 56. Eugène Gaujean, etching after Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *A Christmas Carol*, c.1881 (Salon Nationale des Beaux-Arts, 1891).



Figure 57. Engraving after Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *King René's Honeymoon*, France, before 1892. Paris, Documentation du Musée d'Orsay.



Figure 58. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *St Cecilia*, illustration to 'The Palace of Art' from *Poems* by Alfred Tennyson, published by Edward Moxon, 1857, p. 113. Wood engraving by Dalziel brothers after Rossetti's design, 9.2 x 7.8 cm.



Figure 59. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Dantis Amor* (S.117A), c. 1860, brown ink on paper, 25 x 24.1 cm. Birmingham, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.



Figure 60. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Dantis Amor* (S.117), 1860, oil and gold and silver leaf on panel, 74.9 x 81.3 cm. London, Tate Britain.



Figure 61. Maurice Denis, illustration for *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Maurice Maeterlinck, programme for the Théâtre de l'Œuvre's performance at the Bouffes Parisiens (C.68), 1893, lithograph, 15 x 8.7 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 62. Maurice Denis, *Sancta Martha*, 1893, oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm. Private collection.



Figure 63. Maurice Denis, *Triple portrait de Marthe fiancée*, 1892, oil on canvas, 37 x 45 cm. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée départemental Maurice Denis-Le Prieuré.



Figure 64. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Rosa Triplex* (S.238), 1874, watercolour, 47.9 x 57.8 cm. Collection of Mrs Virginia Surtees.



Figure 65. Print after *Rosa Triplex* (S.238A), n. d. (mid-1890s?). Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 66. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix*, photograph by Frederick Hollyer, 1880s.

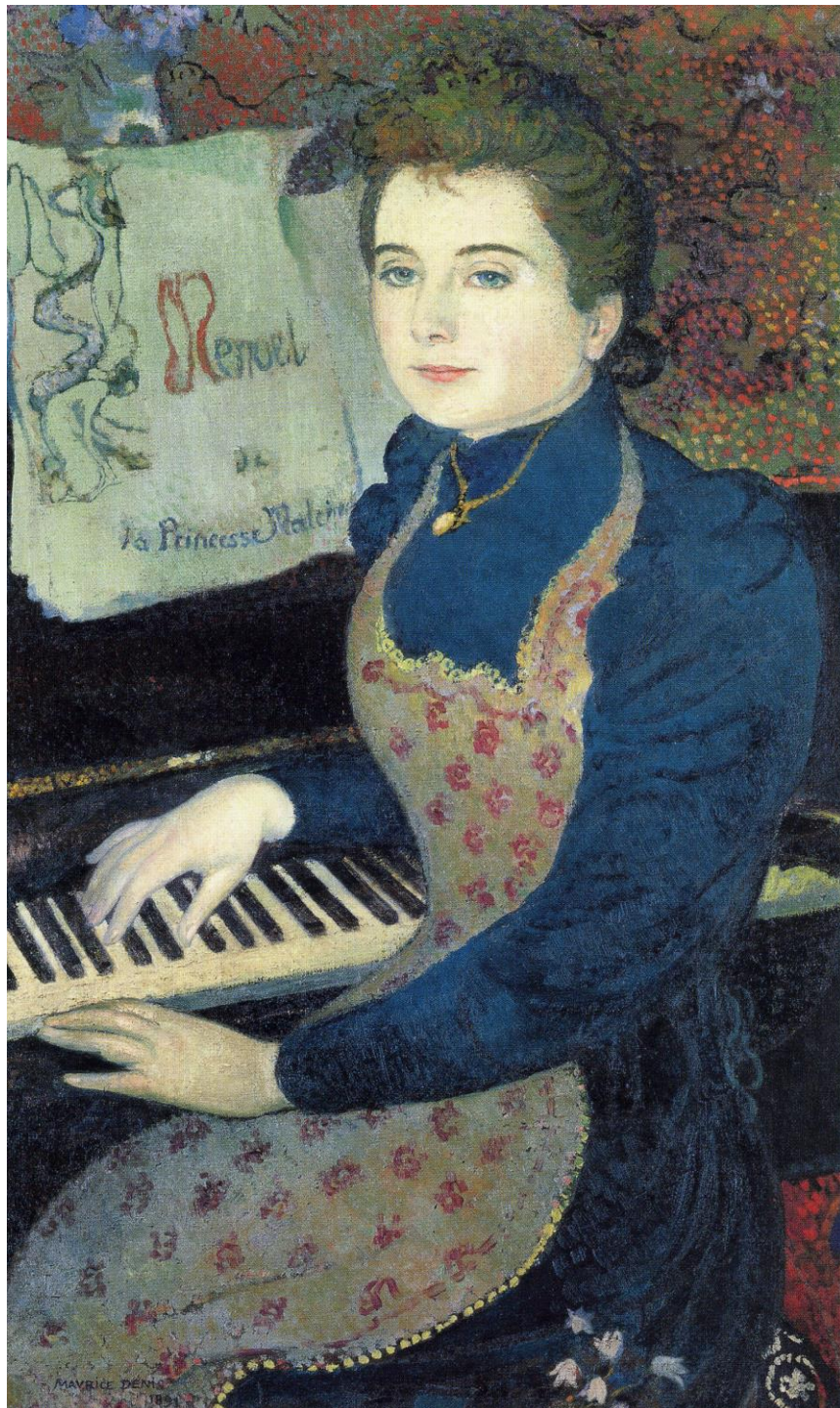


Figure 67. Maurice Denis, *Le Menuet de la princesse Maleine (Marthe au piano)*, 1891, oil on canvas, 95 x 60 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



Figure 68. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Day Dream* (S.259), 1880, oil on canvas, 158.7 x 92.7 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 69. Maurice Denis, 'Mais c'est le cœur qui bat trop vite', *Amour* (C.119), 1892-99, lithograph in four colours, 53 x 41 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 70. Maurice Denis, 'Elle était plus belle que les rêves', *Amour* (C.114), 1892-99, lithograph in three colours, 53 x 41 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 71. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Venus Verticordia* (S.173), c. 1863-68, oil on canvas, 83.8 x 71.2 cm. Bournemouth, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum.

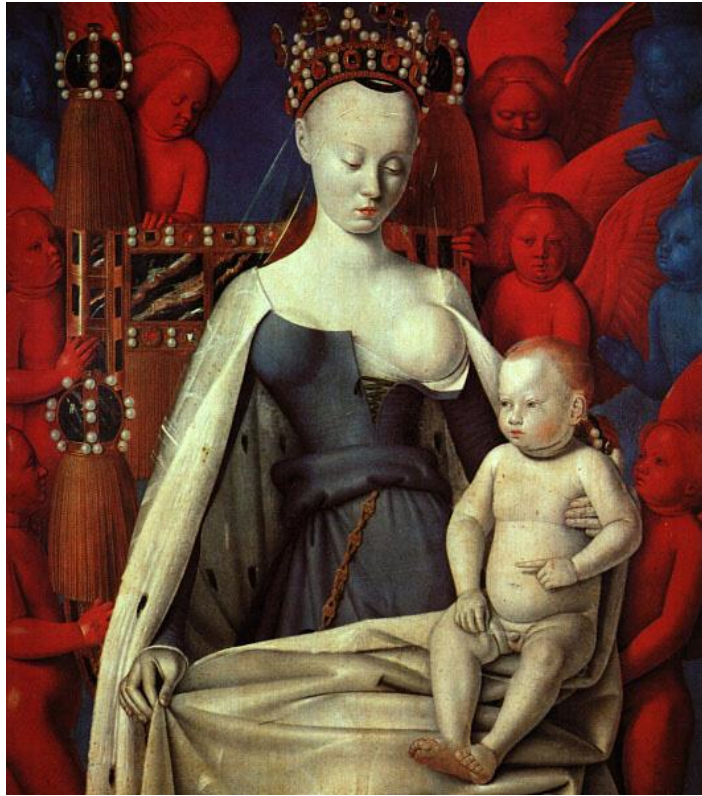


Figure 72. Jean Fouquet, *Virgin and Child (Melun Madonna)*, oil on panel, c. 1450, 93 x 85 cm. Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten.



Figure 73. Edmond Aman-Jean, *Béatrix*, poster for the second Salon de la Rose + Croix, 1893, lithograph, 110 x 60 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.

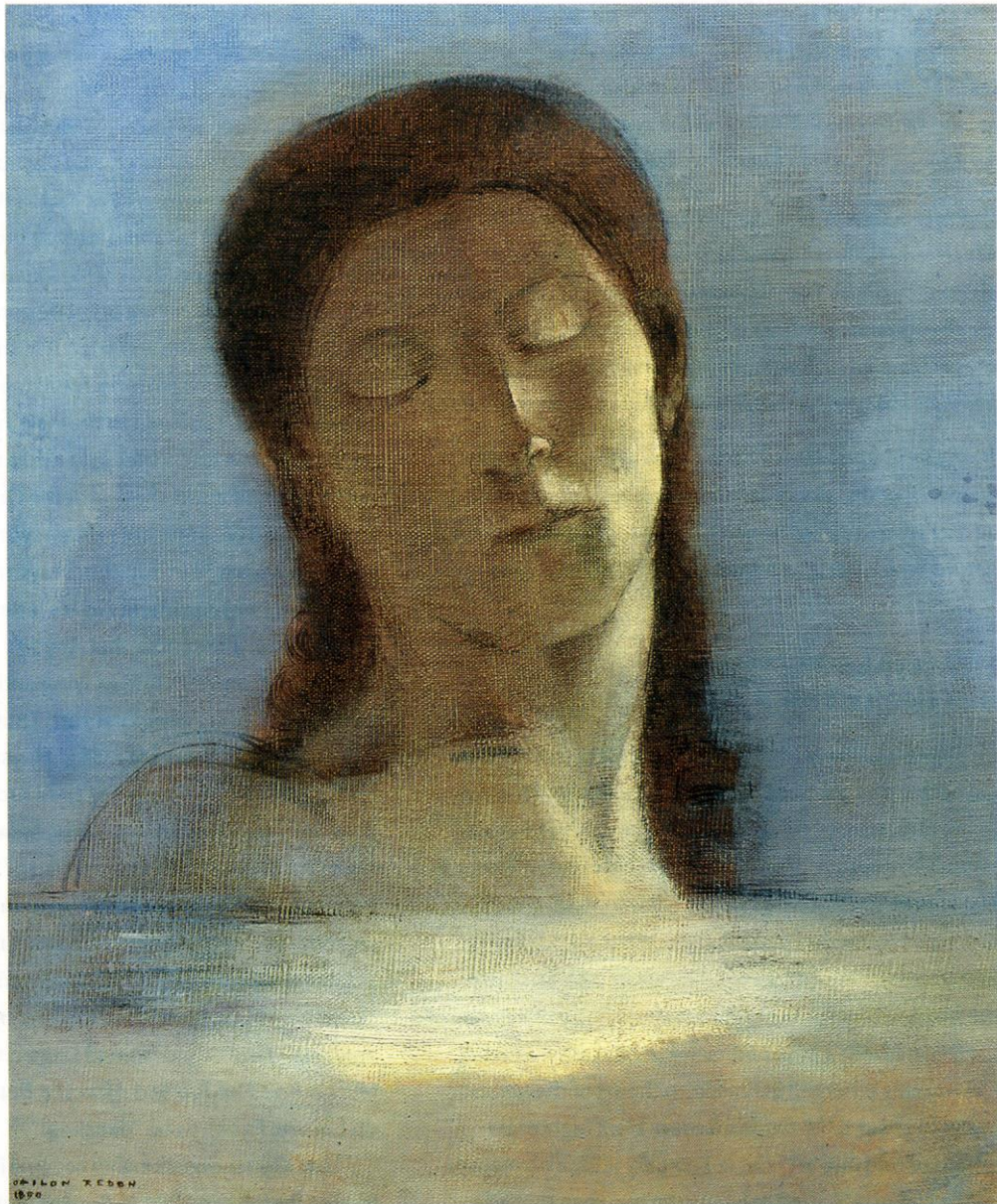


Figure 74. Odilon Redon, *Yeux clos*, 1890, oil on canvas laid down on cardboard, 44 x 36 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

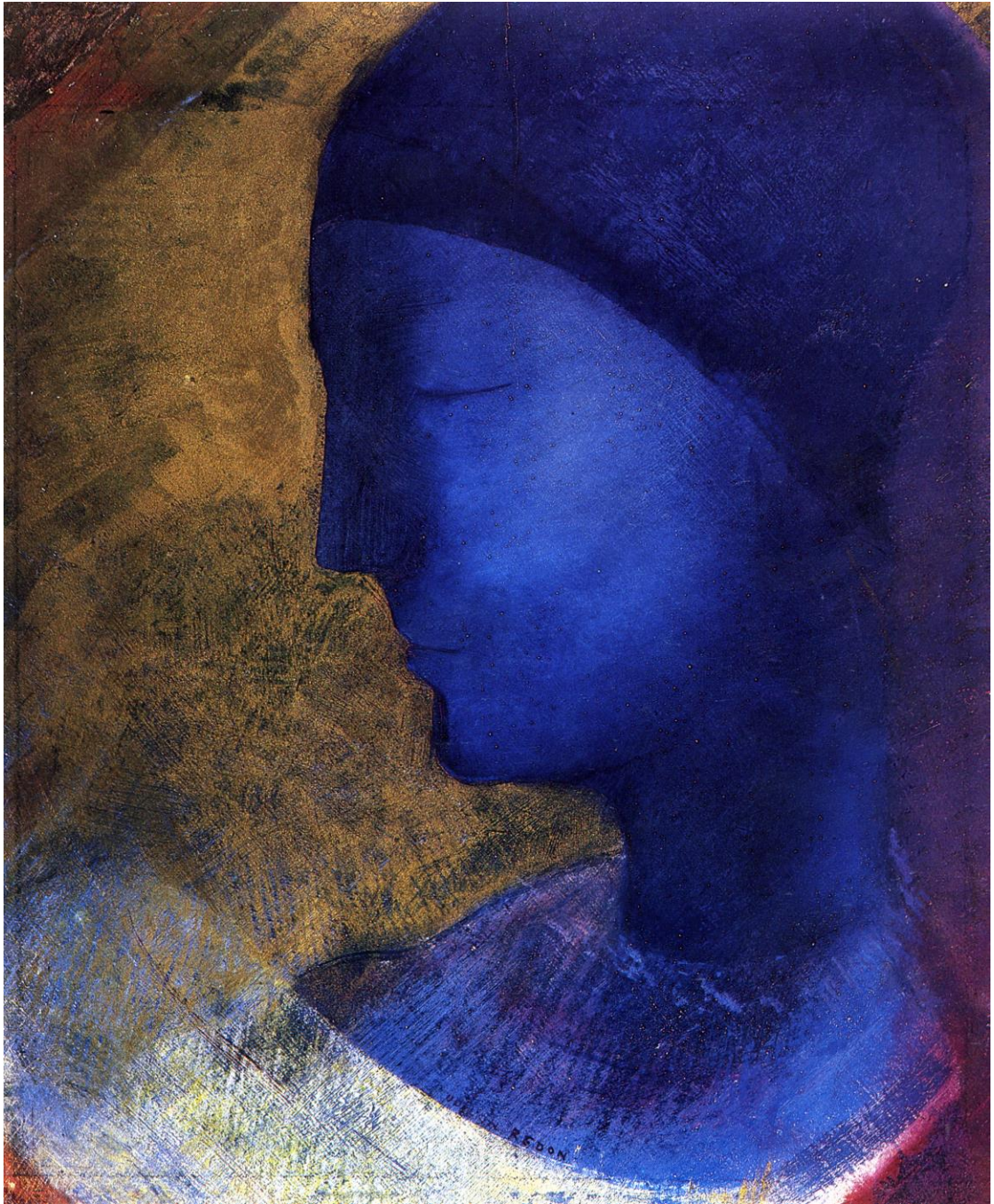


Figure 75. Odilon Redon, *La Cellule d'or*, 1892, oil and gold metallic paint on paper, 30.1 x 24.6 cm. London, British Museum.

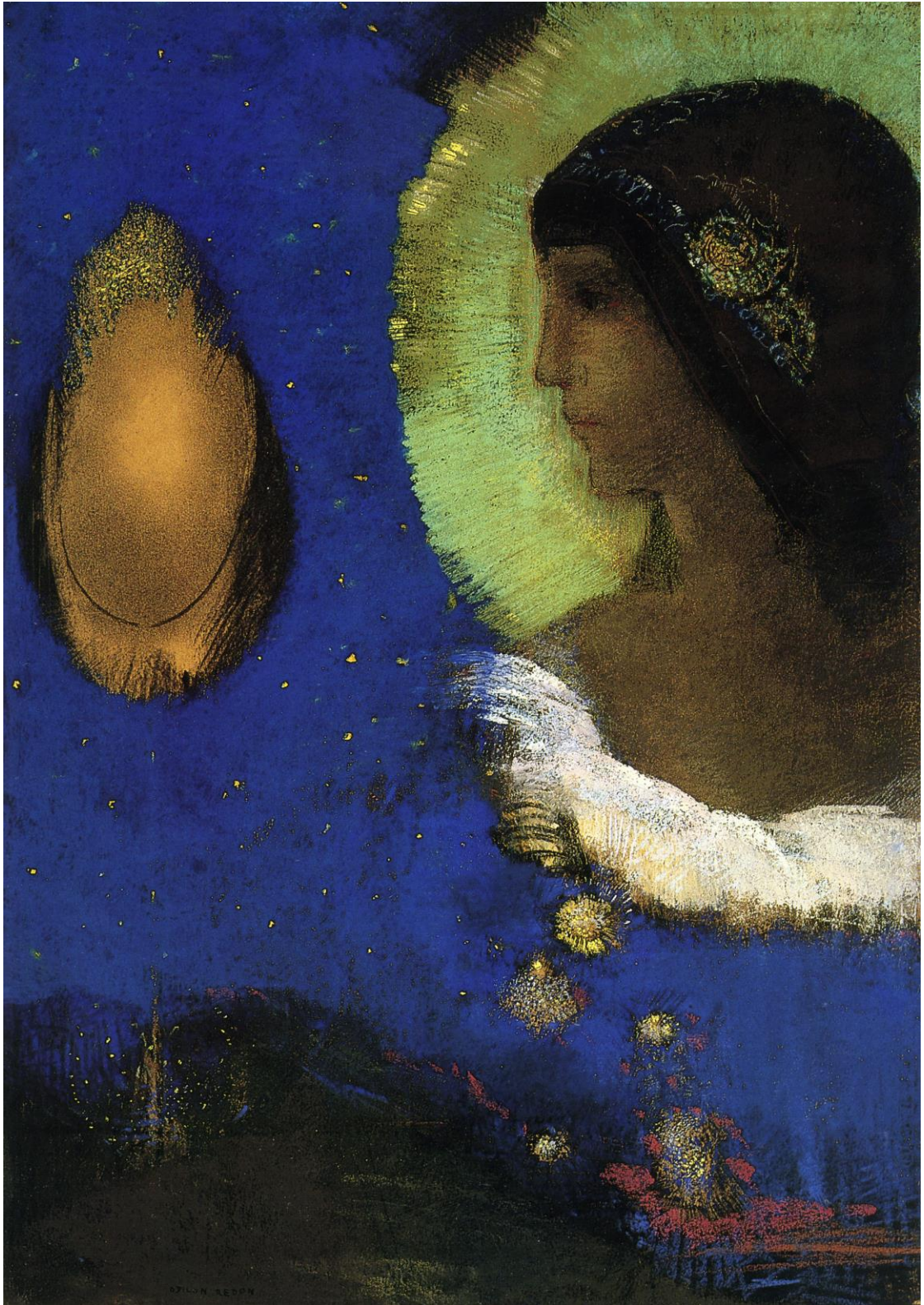


Figure 76. Odilon Redon, *Sita*, c. 1893, pastel and black conté crayon over charcoals, 53.6 x 37.7 cm. Chicago, Art Institute.



Figure 77. Odilon Redon, *Béatrice* (Mellerio 168), 1896, colour lithograph, 33.4 x 29.6 cm. Chicago, Art Institute.

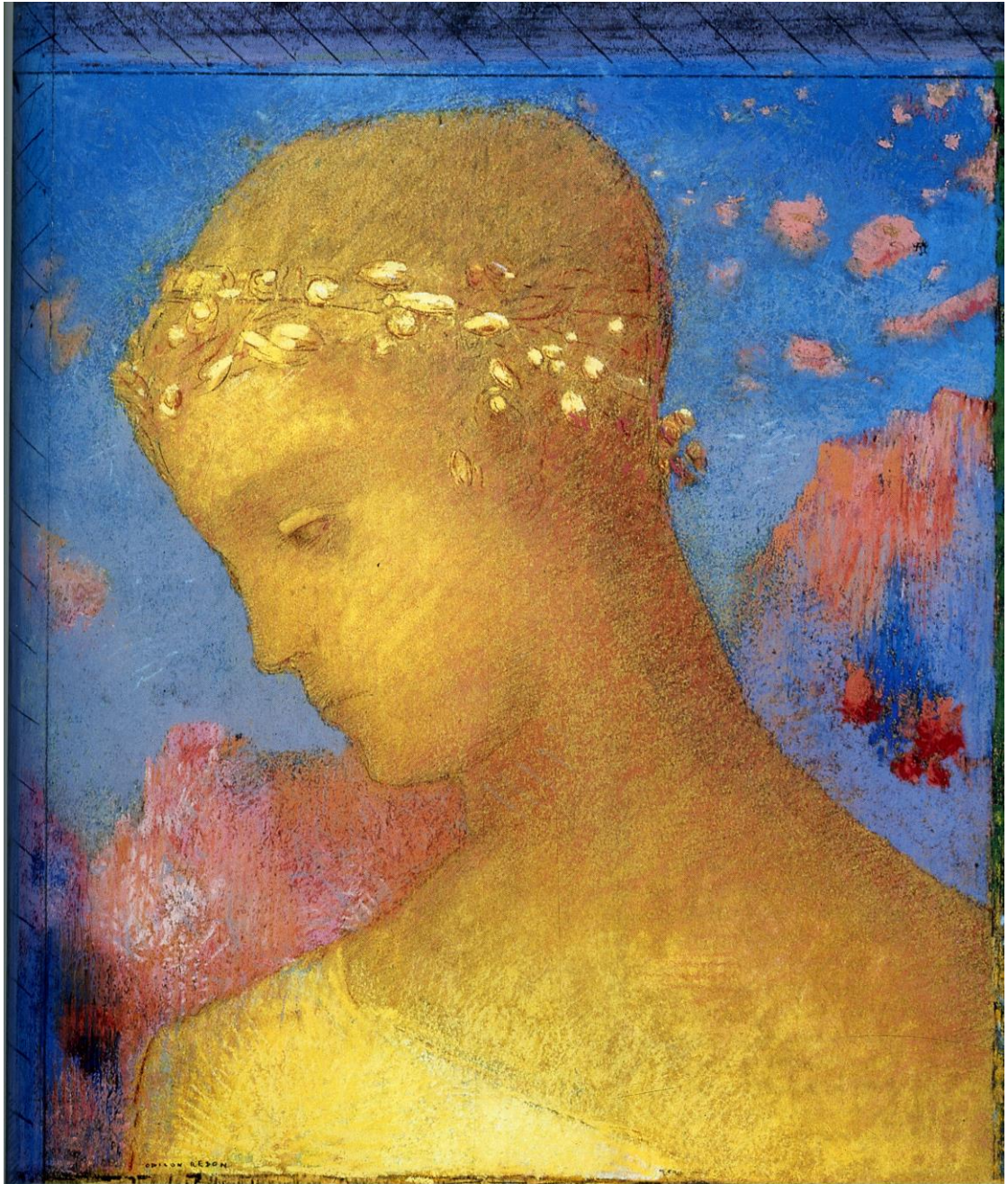


Figure 78. Odilon Redon, *Béatrice*, 1885, pastel over charcoal, 34.5 x 30 cm. Private collection.



Figure 79. Odilon Redon, *Tête d'enfant avec fleurs* (Mellerio 169), 1897, transfer lithograph, 25.1 x 21.3 cm. Chicago, Art Institute.



Figure 80. Gustave Moreau, *Le Sphinx deviné* (Mathieu 203), 1878, oil on canvas, 105 x 62 cm. Private collection.

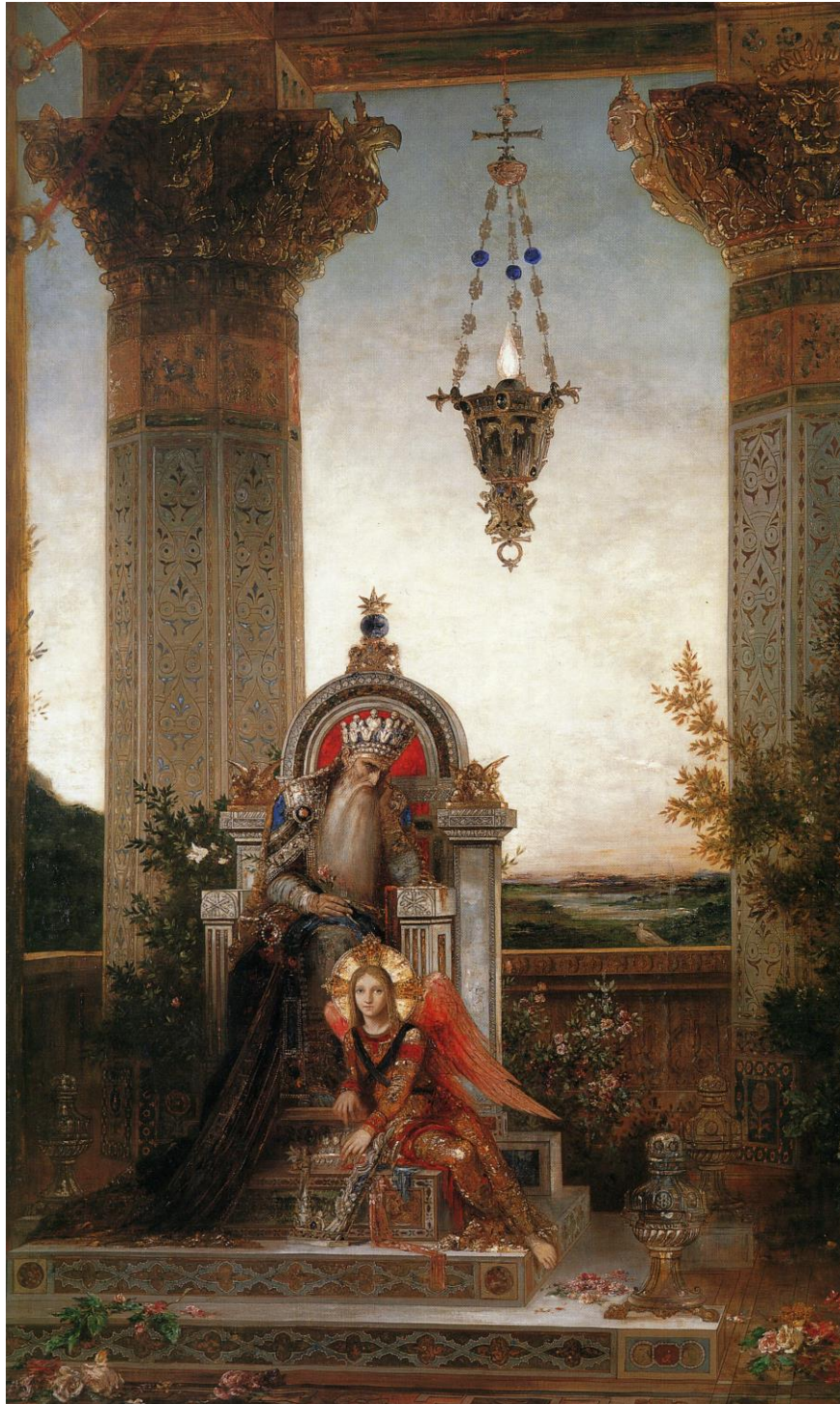


Figure 81. Gustave Moreau, *David* (Mathieu 201), 1878, oil on canvas, 230 x 138 cm. Los Angeles, Armand Hammer Collection.

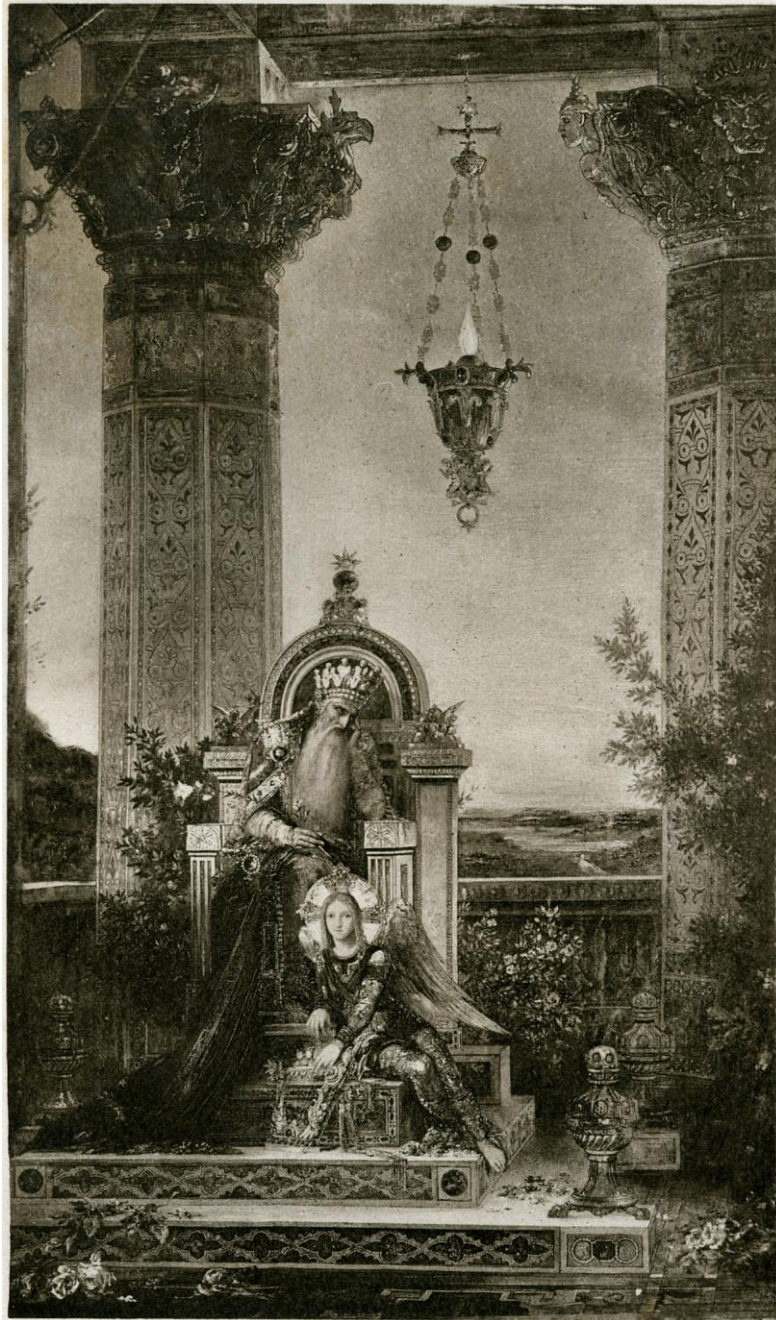


Figure 82. Félix Bracquemond, etching after *David* by Gustave Moreau, 1884. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.

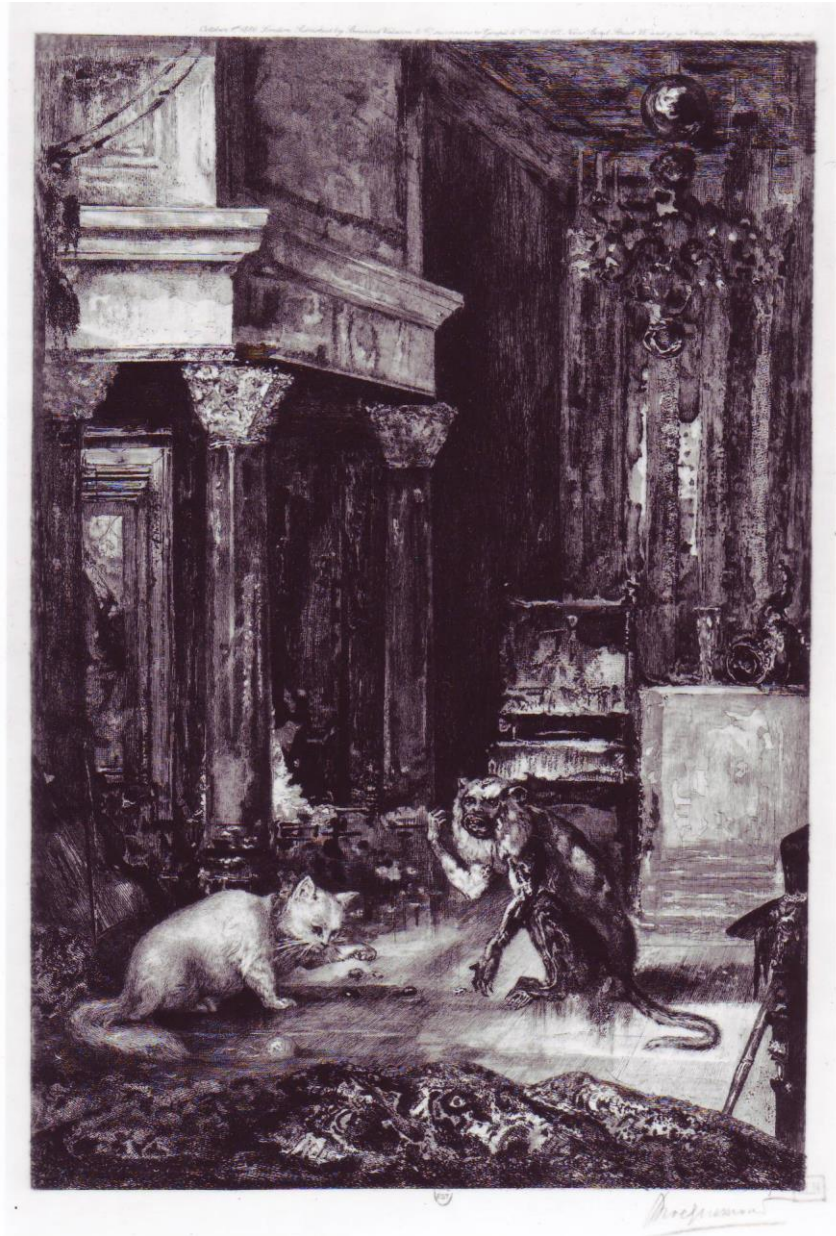


Figure 83. Félix Bracquemond, etching after *Le Singe et le chat* by Gustave Moreau, 1886. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 84. Félix Bracquemond, etching after *Le Songe d'un habitant de Mogol* by Gustave Moreau, 1886. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 85. Félix Bracquemond, etching after *La Discorde* by Gustave Moreau, 1886. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 86. Félix Bracquemond, etching after *Le Lion amoureux* by Gustave Moreau, 1886. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 87. Félix Bracquemond, etching after *L'Homme qui court après la fortune et l'homme qui l'attend dans son lit* by Gustave Moreau, 1886. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 88. Félix Bracquemond, etching after *La Tête et la queue du serpent* by Gustave Moreau, 1886. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 89. Gustave Moreau, *Sapho* (Mathieu 155), 1871/72, watercolour, 19.7 x 13.6 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

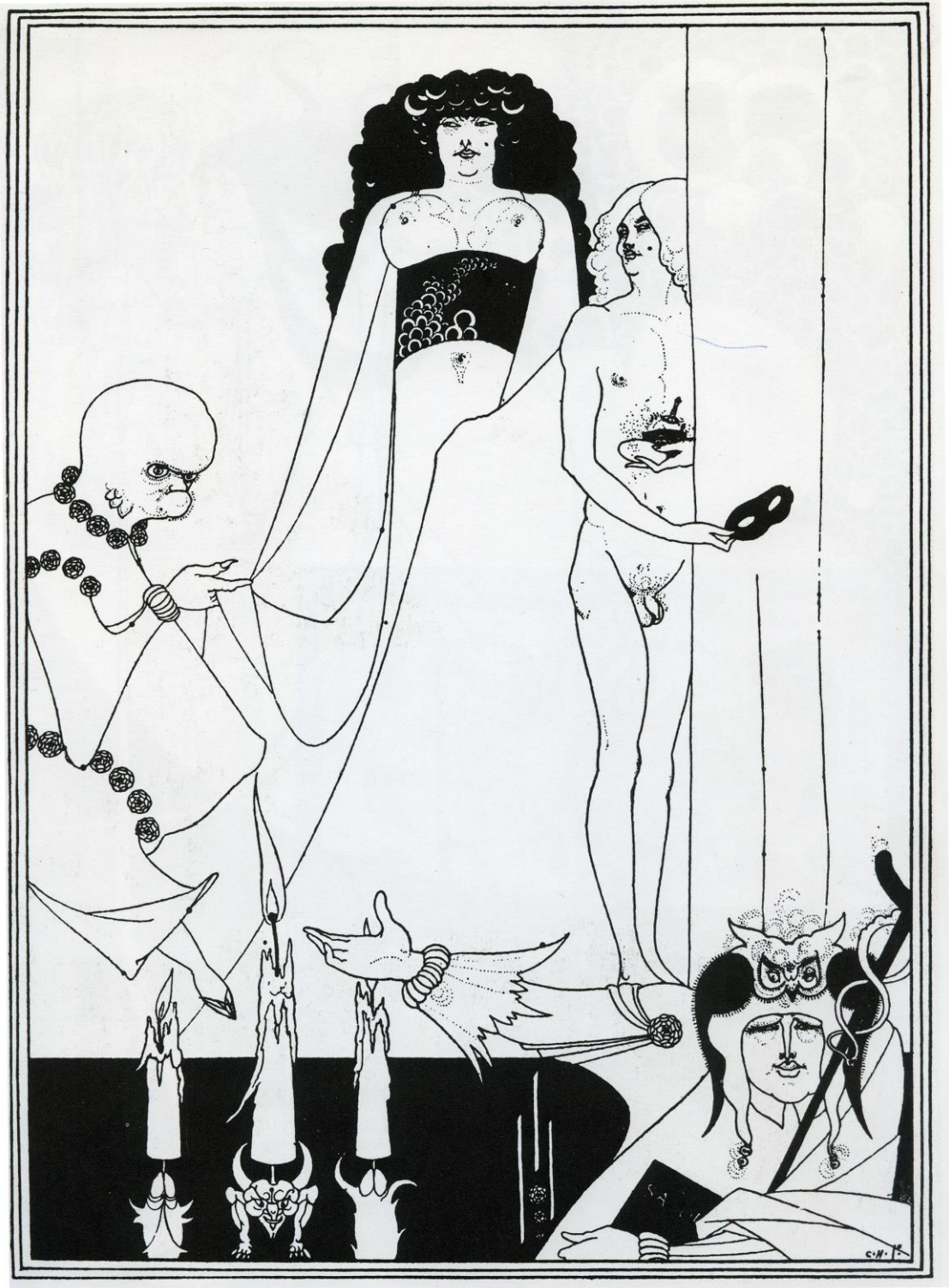


Figure 90. Aubrey Beardsley, *Enter Herodias* (first version, R.285), 1894, line block print, 34.3 x 27.3 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

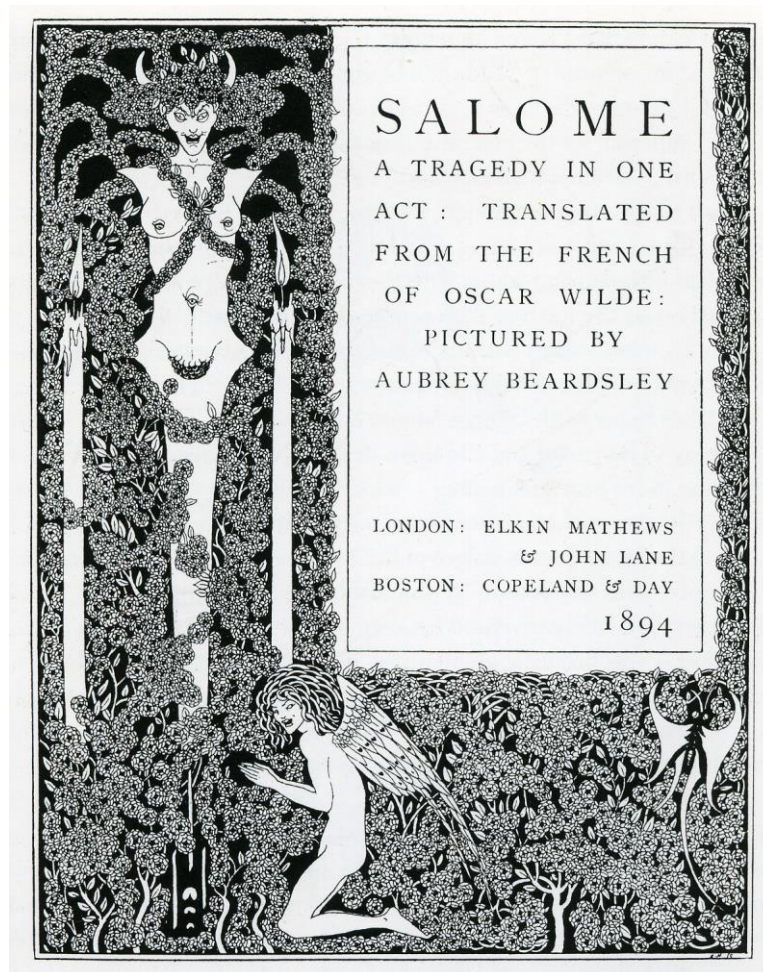


Figure 91. Aubrey Beardsley, title page for *Salome* (R.274), 1894, line block print, 34.3 x 27.3 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

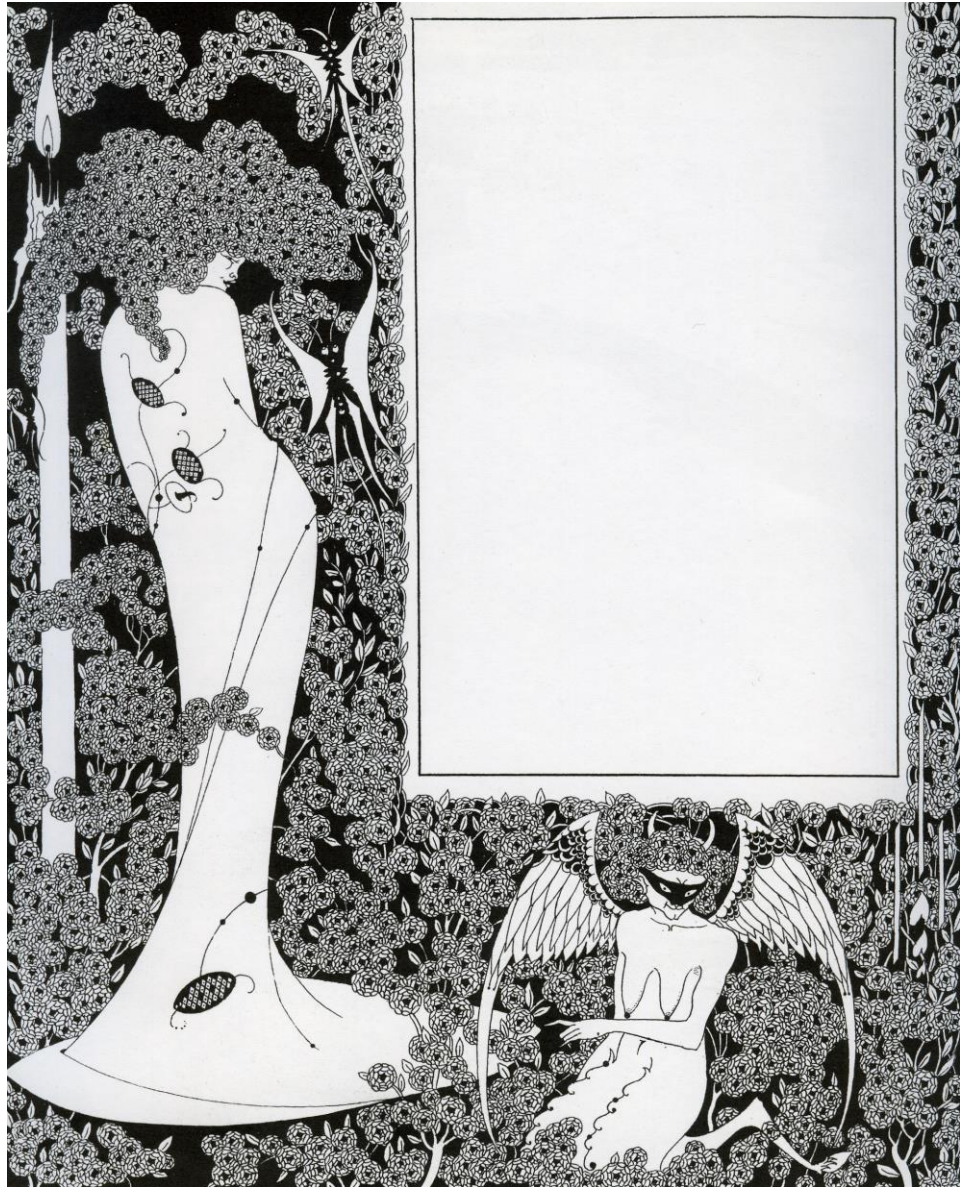


Figure 92. Aubrey Beardsley, design for the list of pictures for *Salome* (R.276), 1894, line block print, 34.3 x 27.3 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 93. Gustave Moreau, *Copy after a Japanese album: Kabuki actor*, 1869, watercolour, 26 x 21 cm. Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau.



Figure 94. Gustave Moreau, *Copy after a Japanese album: Two Kabuki actors in female roles*, 1869, watercolour, 30.8 x 24.6 cm. Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau.



Figure 95. Utagawa Kunisada, *Genji taking the air in summer on the Sumida*, colour woodblock print, 22 x 15.7 cm. Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau.



Figure 96. Nishikawa Sukenobu, *Boy preparing a pipe and food, sumizuri-e* (black ink) for *Bamboo Curtains (Tama Sudare)*. Private collection.

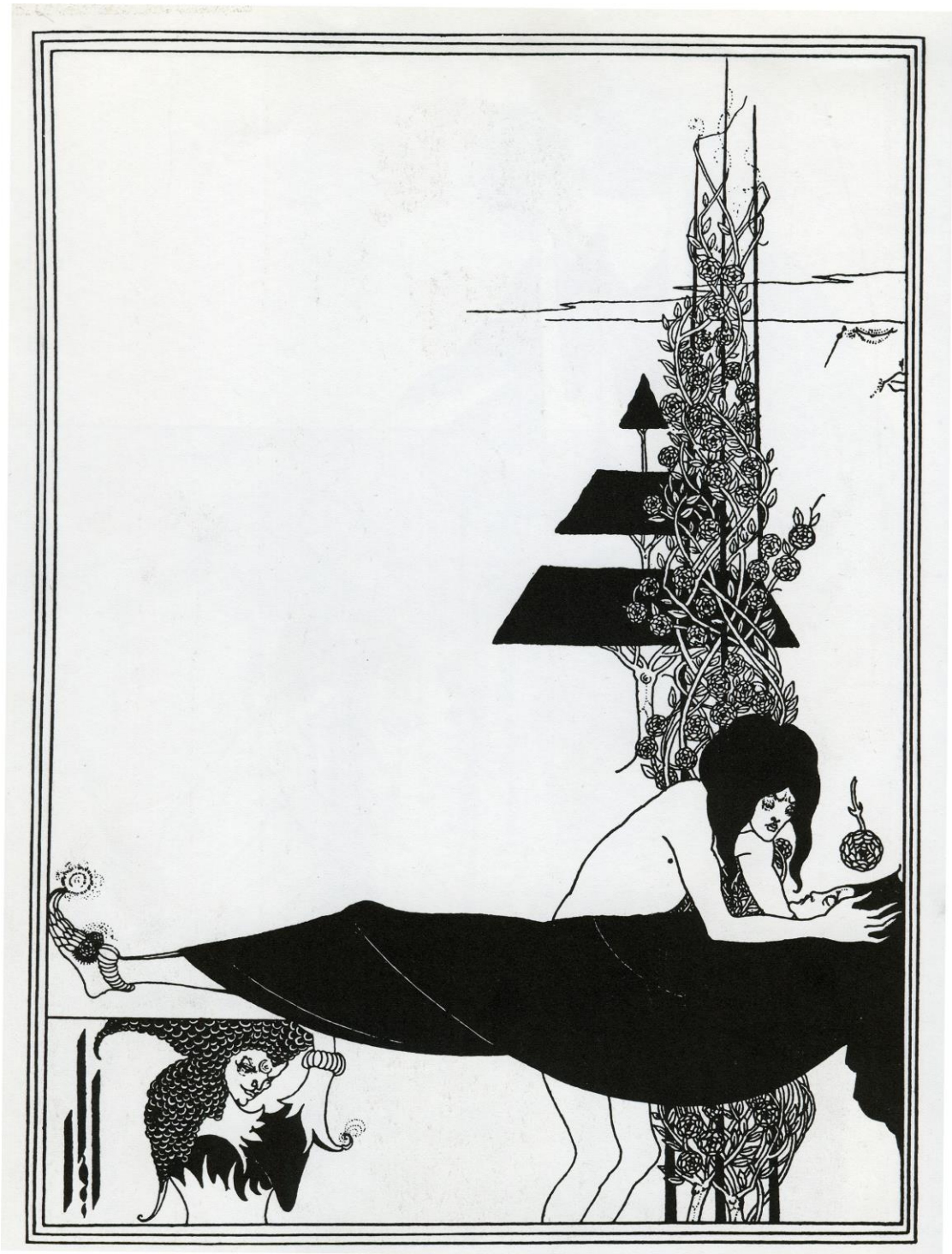


Figure 97. Aubrey Beardsley, *A Platonic Lament* (R.284), 1894, line block print, 34.3 x 27.3 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 98. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Stomach Dance* (R.280), 1894, line block print, 34.3 x 27.3 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 99. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Climax* (R.286), 1894, line block print, 34.3 x 27.3 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 100. Aubrey Beardsley, *Cul de Lampe (The Burial of Salome)* (R.283), 1894, line block print, 34.3 x 27.3 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

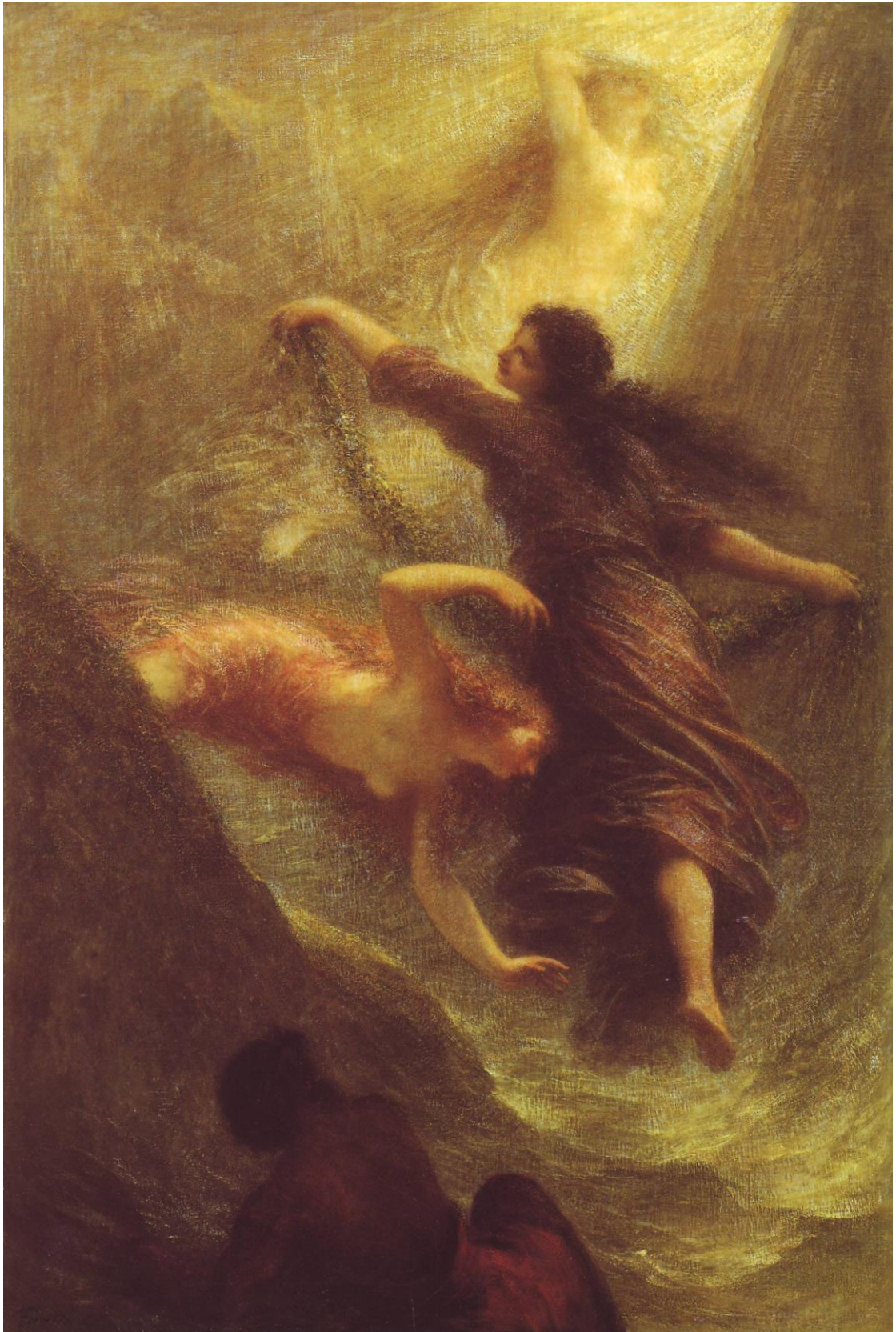


Figure 101. Henri Fantin-Latour, *Scène première de l'Or du Rhin*, 1888, oil on canvas, 116.5 x 79 cm. Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle.



Figure 102. Aubrey Beardsley, *Tannhäuser* (R.19), 1891, pen and black ink with grey wash heightened with white, 18.5 x 18.7 cm. Washington, D. C., National Gallery of Art.

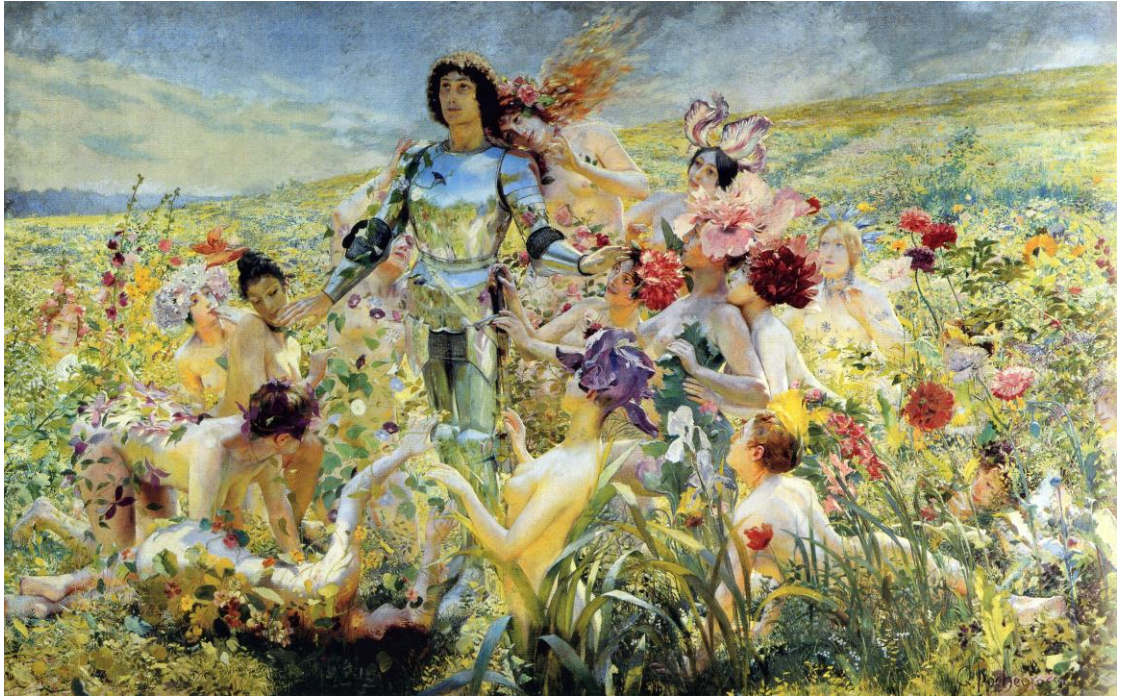


Figure 103. Georges Rochegrosse, *Le Chevalier des fleurs (Parsifal)*, 1894, oil on canvas, 232 x 372 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



Figure 104. Henri Fantin-Latour, *Tannhäuser: Venusberg*, 1864, oil on canvas, 97.4 x 130.1 cm. Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Figure 105. Henri Fantin-Latour, *Scène première du Rheingold (H.8)*, 1876, lithograph, 51 x 33.7 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.

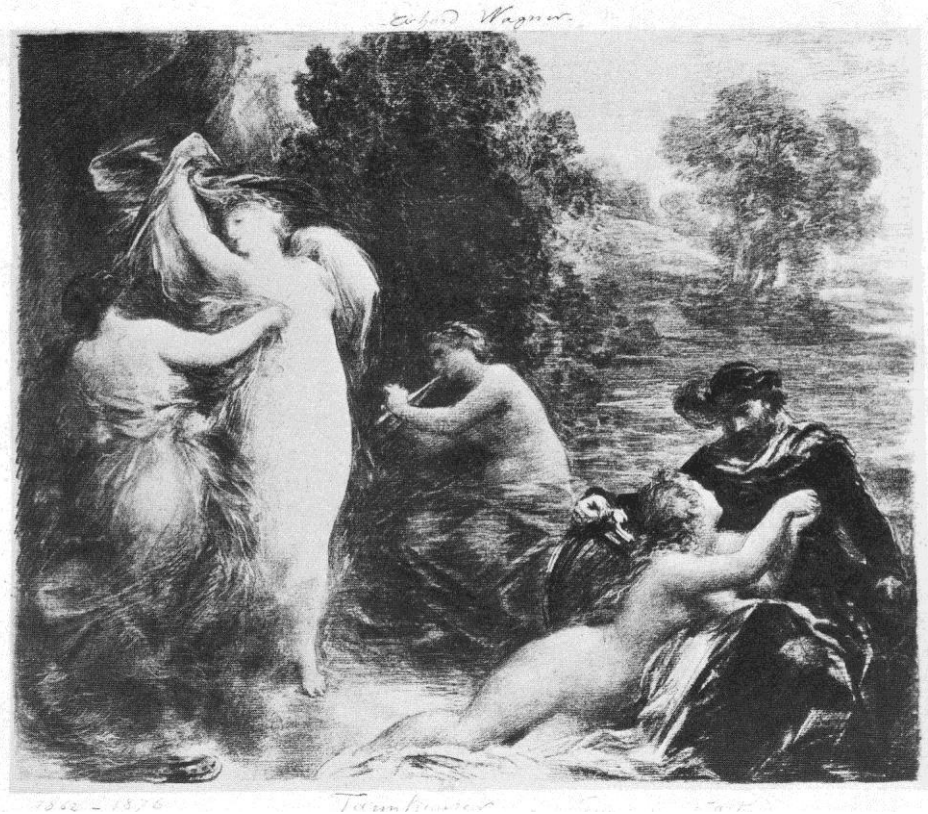


Figure 106. Henri Fantin-Latour, *Tannhäuser: Venusberg (second version)* (H.9), 1876, transfer lithograph, 40.5 x 50 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 107. Henri Fantin-Latour, *Tannhäuser: Acte III. L'étoile du soir* (H.48), 1884, transfer lithograph, 32 x 25 cm. Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kroller-Müller.



Figure 108. Aubrey Beardsley, *Réjane* (R.265), c. 1893, Indian ink, red chalk and pencil, 19.4 x 15.4 cm. Private collection.



Figure 109. Henri Fantin-Latour, *Finale du Rheingold* (H.18), 1877, transfer lithograph, 52 x 40.3 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.

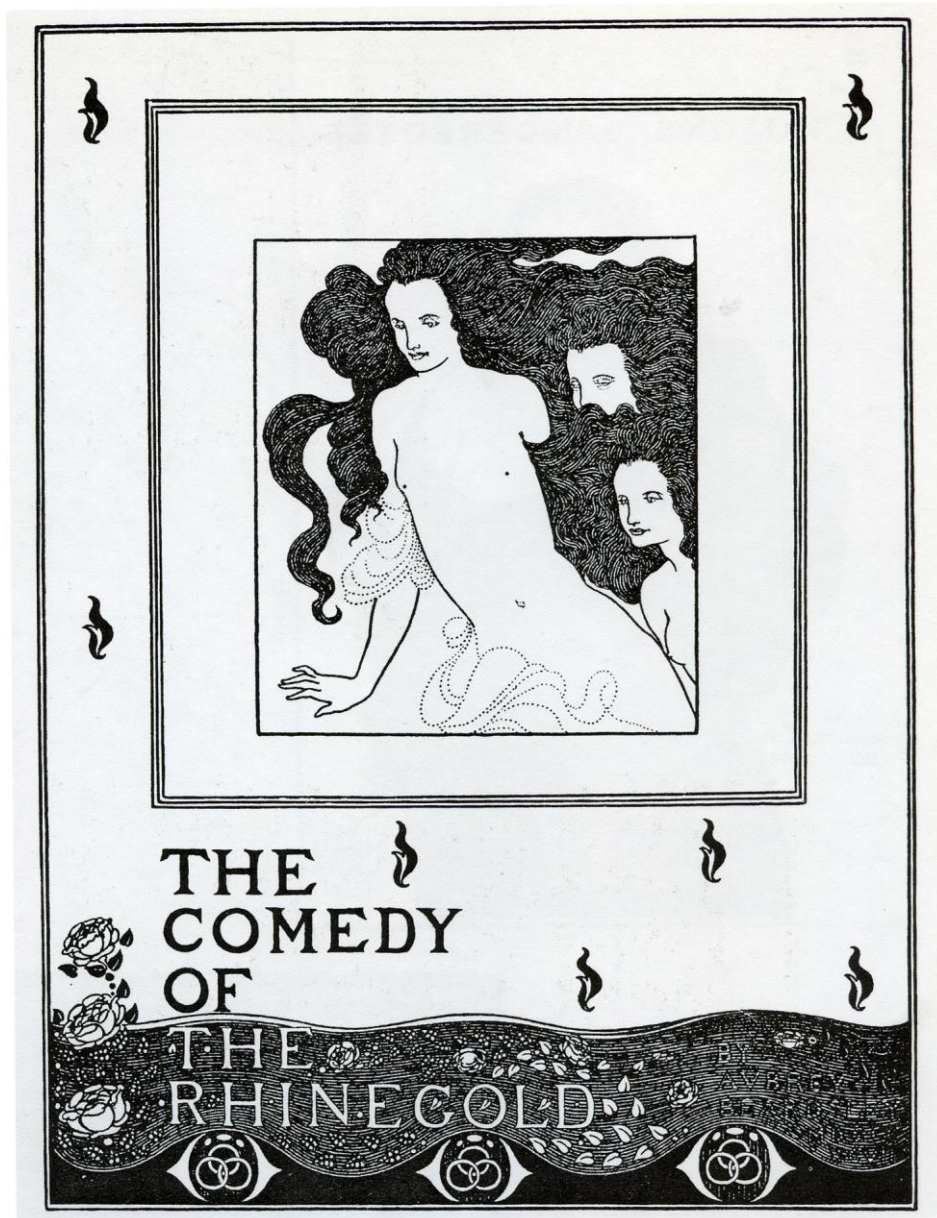


Figure 110. Aubrey Beardsley, *Frontispiece to 'The Comedy of the Rhinegold'* (R.450), 1896, pen and India ink, 24 x 17.7 cm. Palo Alto, Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University.

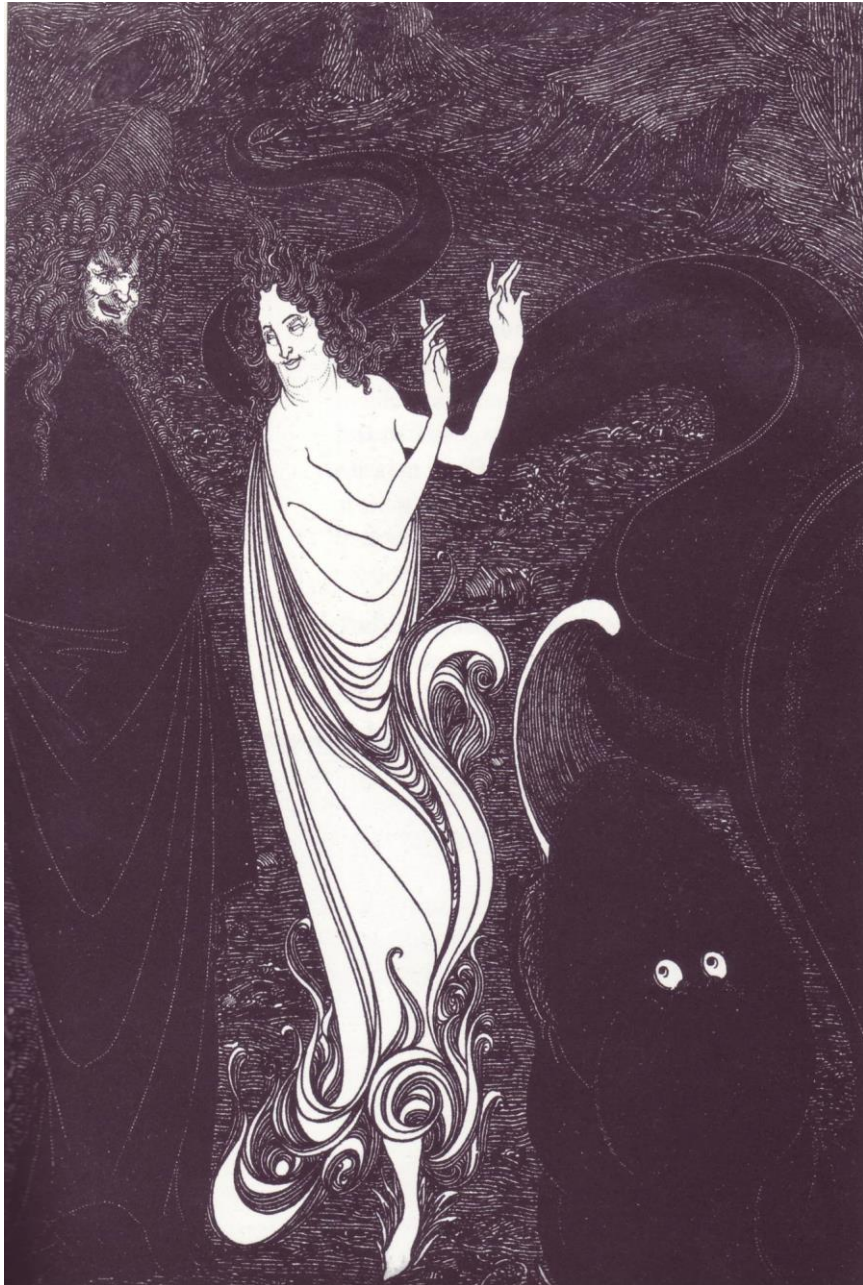


Figure 111. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Third Tableau of 'Das Rheingold'* (R.430), 1896, pen and ink, 25.5 x 17.5 cm. Providence, Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art.

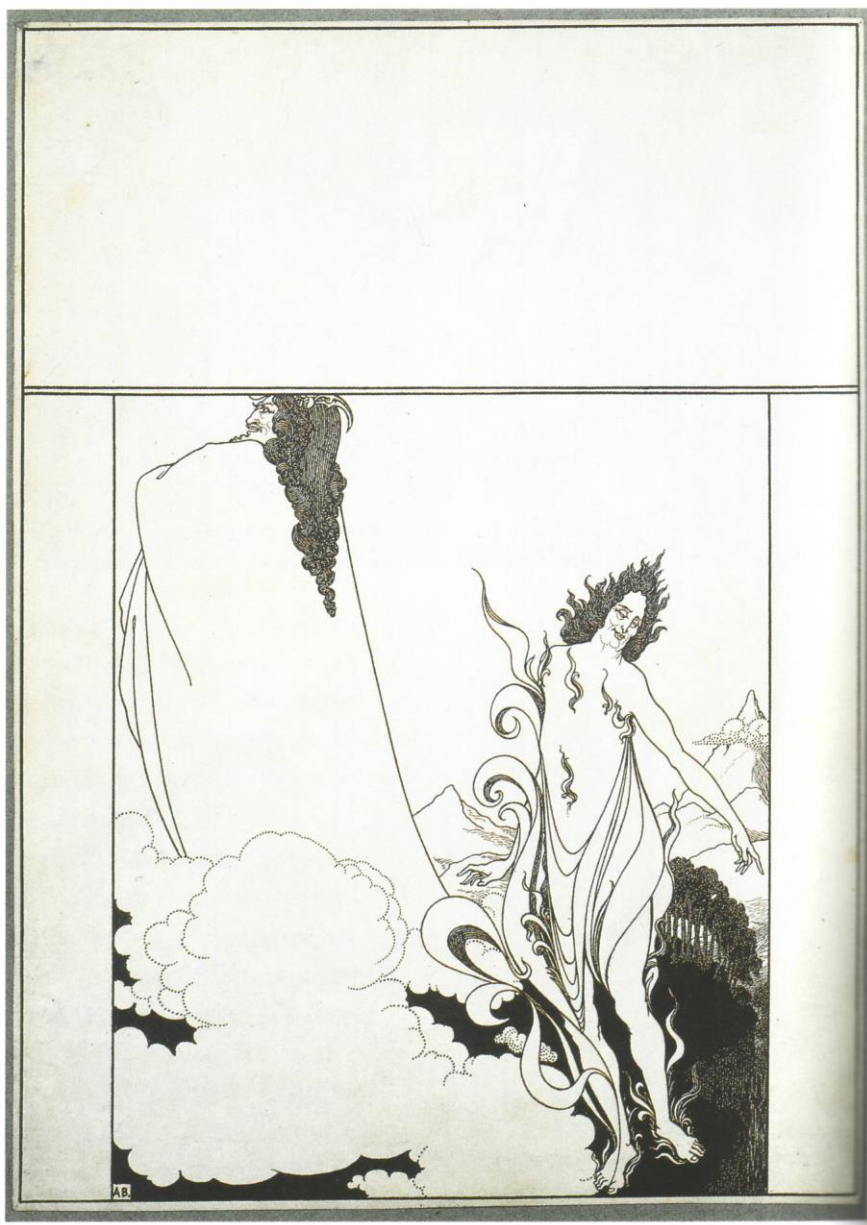


Figure 112. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Fourth Tableau of 'Das Rheingold'* (R.438), 1896, pen and ink, 30.5 x 22 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

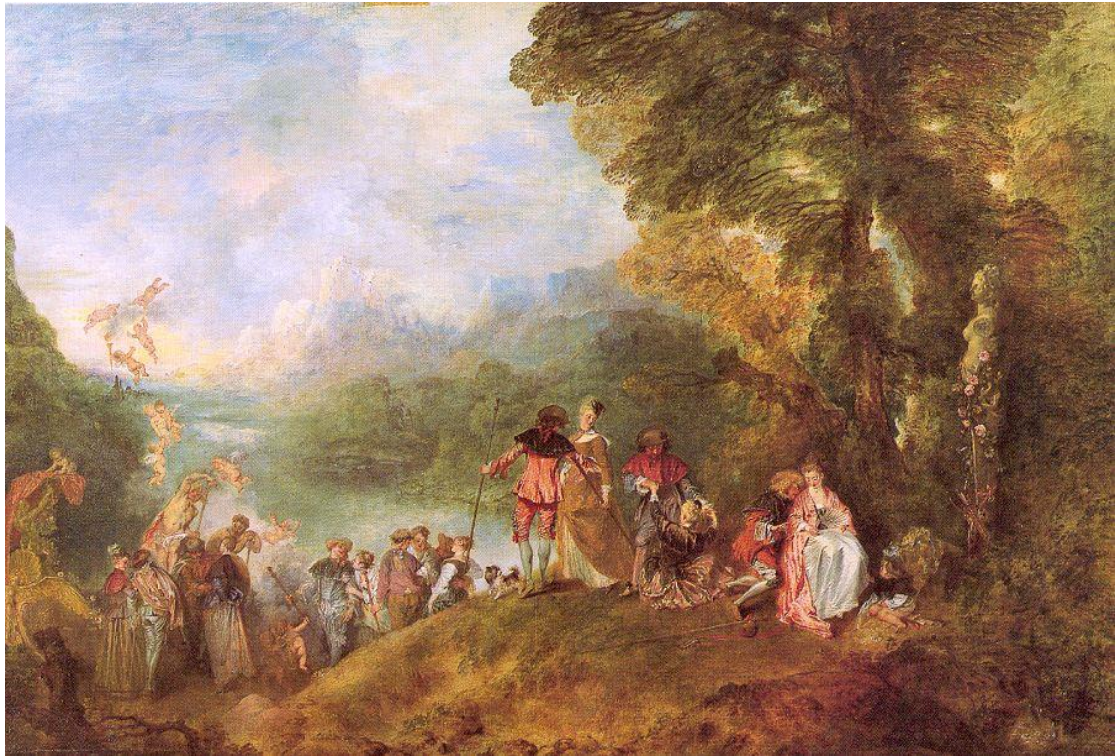


Figure 113. Jean-Antoine Watteau, *The Embarkation for Cythera*, 1717, oil on canvas, 129 x 194 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Figure 114. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Swing* (*Les Hasards heureux de l'escarpolette*), 1767, oil on canvas, 81 x 64.2 cm. London, Wallace Collection.

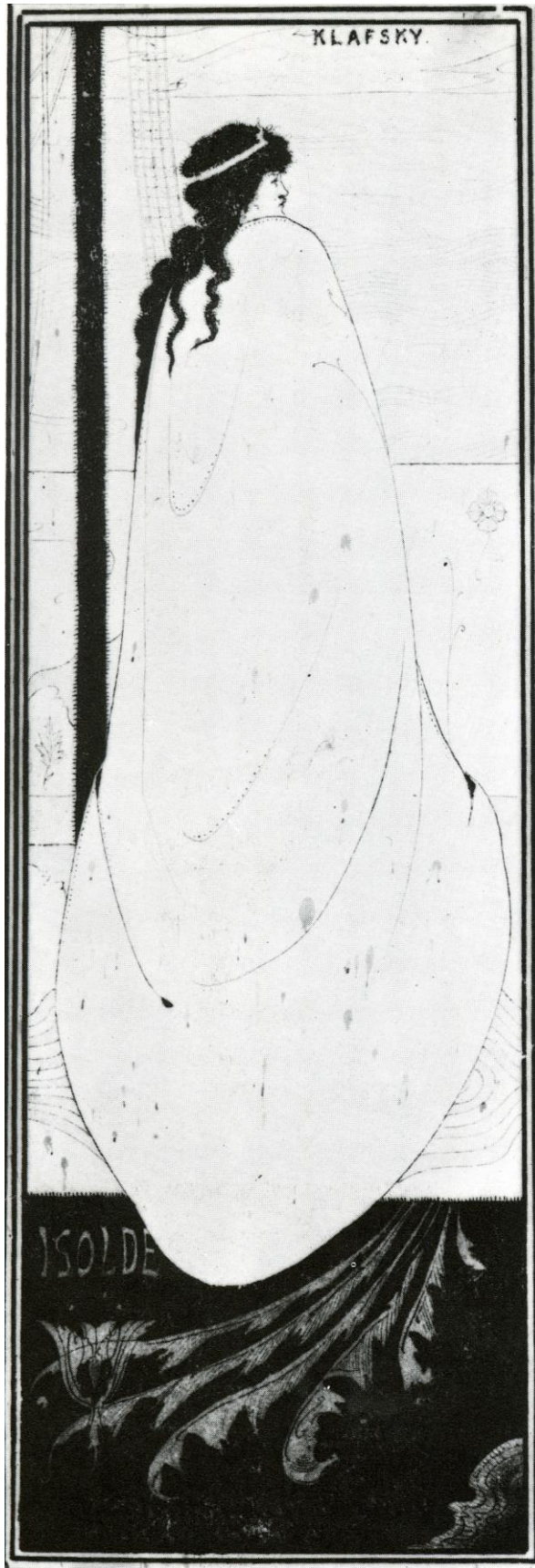


Figure 115. Aubrey Beardsley, *Klafsky* (R.28), 1892, pen, ink and watercolour, 31.8 x 11.1 cm. Princeton University Library.



Figure 116. Henri Fantin-Latour, *Tristan et Iseult: Acte II. Signal dans la nuit* (H.67), 1886, transfer lithograph, 32.2 x 24.5 cm. Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kroller-Müller.



Figure 117. Aubrey Beardsley, *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* (R.104), 1893-94, black ink and graphite, 28.3 x 22.1 cm. Cambridge, MA, Fogg Art Museum.

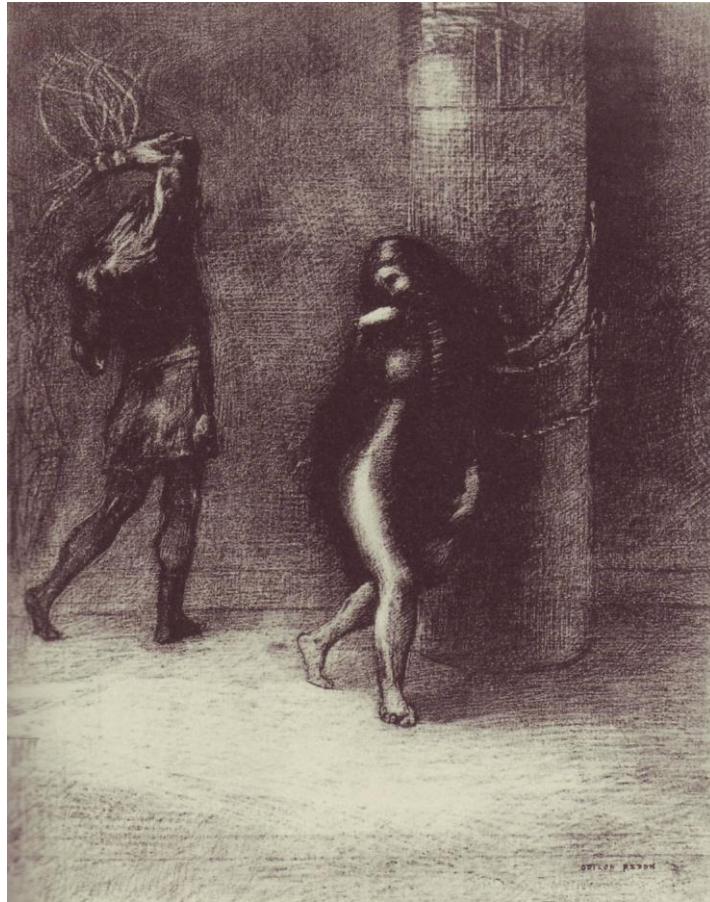


Figure 118. Odilon Redon, *Saint Antoine: ... à travers ses longs cheveux qui lui couvraient la figure, j'ai cru reconnaître Ammonaria...* (A Gustave Flaubert: *Tentation de Saint-Antoine, 2eme série*) (Mellerio 95), 1889, transfer lithograph, 55 x 35.8 cm. Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kroller-Müller.



Figure 119. Odilon Redon, *Brünnhilde* (Mellerio 68), 1885, transfer lithograph, 24.6 x 15.8 cm. Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kroller-Müller.



Figure 120. Odilon Redon, *Brünnhilde (crépuscule des dieux)* (Mellerio 130), 1894, transfer lithograph, 61.9 x 45 cm. Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kroller-Müller.



Figure 121. Odilon Redon, *Parsifal* (not catalogued by Mellerio), 1891, transfer lithograph, 32.1 x 24.3 cm. London, British Museum.

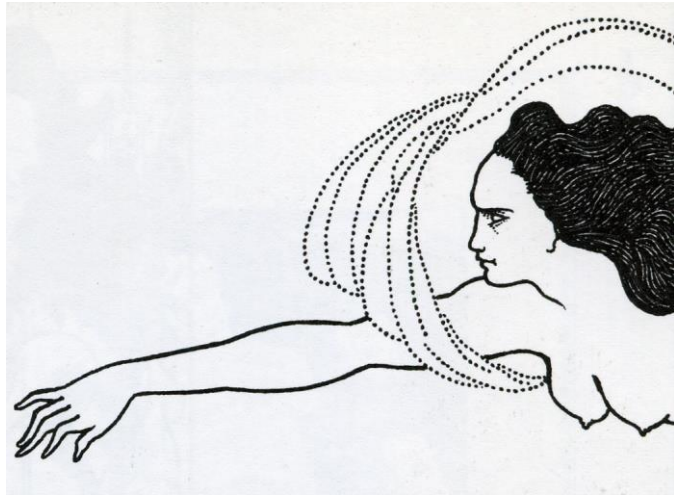


Figure 122. Aubrey Beardsley, *Flosshilde* (R.446), 1896, line block print, published in *Savoy* 8 (December 1896).



Figure 123. Aubrey Beardsley, *Alberich* (R.451), 1896, ink, 8.4 x 8.4 cm. Cambridge, MA, Fogg Art Museum.



Figure 124. Odilon Redon, *Caliban sur une branche*, 1881, charcoal and black chalk, 49.9 x 36.7 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

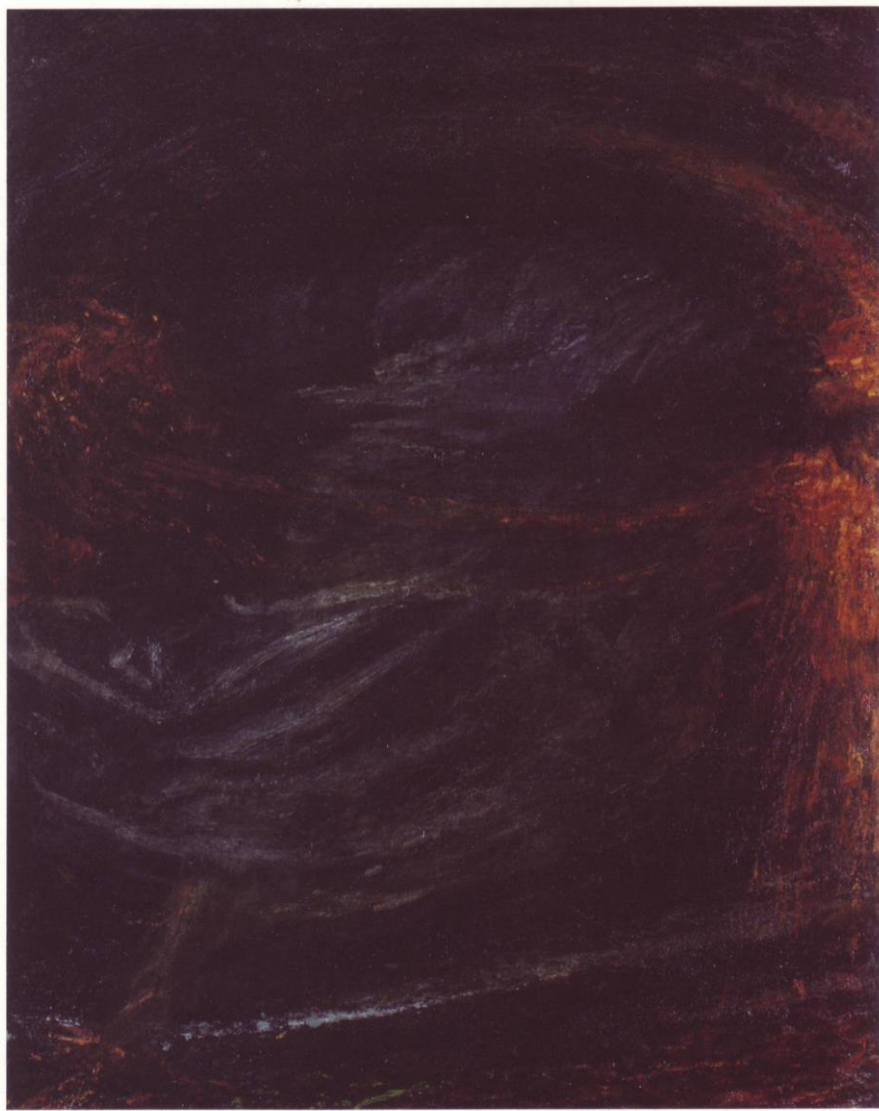


Figure 125. George Frederic Watts, *The Sower of the Systems*, c. 1902, oil on canvas, 65 x 53 cm. Compton, Watts Gallery.



Figure 126. Georges Rouault, *L'enfant Jésus parmi les docteurs*, 1894, oil on canvas, 164 x 130 cm. Colmar, Musée d'Unterlinden.



Figure 127. Eugène Gaillard, dining room, L'Art Nouveau Bing pavilion, Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1900.



Figure 128. Henri Sauvage, Loie Fuller Pavilion, Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1900 (demolished).



Figure 129. Charles van der Stappen, *Sphinx mystérieux*, 1897, ivory and silver gilt, 57 cm high. Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire.