Edward Burne-Jones and France

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The Origins of Burne-Jones's Recognition in France

Edward Burne-Jones, together with George Frederic Watts, was the most celebrated contemporary English painter in France at the end of the nineteenth century. This popularity and the forms that it assumed, as well as its possible ramifications, can best be explained by considering the aesthetic, literary, and artistic milieu in England and France at the time. To understand how Burne-Jones was perceived by the art world in France we should keep in mind that, traditionally, English painting was not very well known in France and had always been considered essentially different and strange. This perception, which one finds in nearly all French texts that deal with the English school, often exhibits a certain condescension on the part of the country that was at the center of the European art world. Indeed, the "exoticism" of English art necessarily relegated it to a position that was, at best, marginal. In 1882 the critic Ernest Chesneau (1833-1890) reported the shock experienced at the discovery of the modern English school — the Pre-Raphaelites — and the interest it generated at the Expositions Universelles: "The English painters made their first appearance on the Continent at the palace on the Avenue Montaigne in 1855. It was for us the revelation of an art whose existence we had not even suspected Upon entering the galleries devoted to the English school in our three great international expositions of 1855, 1867, and 1878, the impression was of seeing something striking and unexpected — and not particularly agreeable." 1 This initial reaction, which clearly oscillated between fascination and rejection, made a lasting, if not permanent, impression on

the critical reception of English painters in France, and the case of Burne-Jones was no exception. 2 Another difference that was noted was the school's eminently national character: "The English school as a whole — and I do not mean this as a criticism — is constituted on a principle of exclusivity that seems on occasion excessive; it is a truly national art." 3

The radical aesthetics of Pre-Raphaelitism advanced the idea of a specifically English contemporary art that had no direct link with painting on the Continent. Although the movement was fairly well defined historically and involved only a small group of artists, the term "Pre- Raphael! tism" was used rather loosely in France. Providing a convenient label for a little-known art, it came to be synonymous with English painting in general until the end of the century. 4 "The Pre-Raphaelite school! Everyone speaks of it as if it had only just been discovered. Yet the [Brotherhood] was dissolved nearly forty years ago, so that each [artist] could go his separate way. Everyone talks about it, but who really knows it?" 5

Philippe Burty (1830-1890) was among the first major critics to take a serious interest in English painting. He developed his ideas about the Pre-Raphaelite movement in an article that appeared in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts in 1869, writing, "For the English school, it provided an opportunity for renewal which Realism was incapable of providing [for us]," but immediately qualifying his statement by adding, "It led first to some eccentricity, then to some weariness." In the same text Burty introduced Edward Burne-Jones to the French public, presenting him as the young champion of the movement. He mentioned a visit to the painter s studio in which he was able "to study his work more thoroughly, having already been struck by some works on other trips." He also reported

on Burne-Jones's contribution to the 1869 exhibition of the Old Water- Colour Society. The Wine of Circe (fig. 24) he described as "a painting of the highest value, both for the impression it gives — which, though troubling, is more wholesome than certain parts of Baudelaire's Fleurs du Mai — and for its masterly execution. It is on this basis that this gifted artist must be judged." 6 The comparison with Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), which Burty so subtly underscores, is significant, for it highlights from the outset the importance of the artist's literary and poetic inspiration and its pictorial transcription while at the same time it establishes a direct link with the most productive aesthetic discourse in France at the time. Although to a lesser degree than in The Lament (cat. no. 44), in The Wine of Circe Burne-Jones seems to have come the closest to the Aesthetic movement championed by Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) and James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) in the 1860s. Indeed, in works such as these Burne-Jones subscribed to the necessity of freeing art from all documentary and narrative content. He continued to develop ideas along this line throughout his career. Such ideas, which have all too often been lumped under the heading "art for arts sake," were developed first in France by Theophile Gautier (1811-1872) and then by Baudelaire; and it was in France that Leighton and Whistler became acquainted with these concepts before introducing and developing them in England. There may have been direct contacts between the French and the English along these same lines. We know, for example, that Stephane Mallarme (1842-1898) resided in London in 1862-63. Mallarme met Algernon Charles Swinburne at that time and later contributed to the Athenaeum. Burne-Jones was sensitive to these speculations — which one could term pre- Symbolist — lending to them an intriguing personal resonance. The Wine of Circe already expressed an

anxiety about the period combined with a critique of the materialism of modern life, and contributed to the elaboration of the image of woman as evil and bewitching. 7 These last two themes, which were at the center of the developing Symbolist culture in late-nineteenth-century Europe, were embraced by Burne-Jones from the very beginning of his career and were responsible in large measure for his popularity in France.

Nevertheless, it was not until 1877 that the progressive and informed discovery of Burne-Jones in France finally took hold. This was the year of the first exhibition held at the Grosvenor Gallery, London, founded by Sir Coutts Lindsay. The gallery's purpose was to establish an alternative to the Royal Academy and its outdated policies and to exhibit works specifically by artists rejected by the Academy Although it sparked much controversy, the exhibition served as a kind of consecration of Burne-Jones. The Beguiling of Merlin (cat. no. 64) provoked much discussion and assured him a secure position in the art world. In this painting Burne-Jones transcended the Arthurian legend, creating a fascinating and disquieting new imagery whose counterpart in France at the time could be found only in the work of Gustave Moreau (1826-1898). The exhibition also included works by many foreign artists — the American Whistler, the Dutchman Lawrence Alma-Tadema, the Frenchman James Tissot, and Moreau, who was represented by The Apparition (fig. 25). 8

One of the men responsible for the presence of this seminal Symbolist picture in London was Joseph Comyns Carr, a writer, playwright, and critic whose texts were published both in England and in France. Comyns Carr, deputy director of the Grosvenor Gallery, was one of the most remarkable personalities involved in the dissemination of English art in

France. As English correspondent for the journal LArt, he wrote a landmark text that established Burne-Jones as the leading painter on the English scene: "The major event of the art season in London this year was the exhibition of the work of Mr. Burne-Jones at the Grosvenor Gallery. . . . One attempts to explain what it is that is so strange to the English public about Mr. Burne-Jones's efforts. The English were not accustomed to seeing so much intensity and imagination combined. . . . For the first time in the history of the school, here is an artist who is striving to raise English art to the same heights as English literature and to expand the same horizons." 9

Figure 25. Gustave Moreau (1826-1898), The Apparition, ca. 1876. Watercolor, 41 3 A x 28 3 /g in. (105 x 72 cm). Musee du Louvre, Departement des Arts Graphiques, on loan to the Musee d'Orsay Paris

Figure 26. Adolfe Lalauze (1838-1906). Engraving after Edward Burne-Jones, The Beguiling of Merlin (cat. no. 64)

The message to the Parisian art world could not have been made more explicit: if the work of any English artist could equal the most ambitious paintings of French artists, it was that of Edward Burne-Jones. The article was illustrated by an engraved reproduction of The Beguiling of Merlin (fig. 26), a forerunner of the many reproductions, published both in books and as single prints, that helped Burne-Jones to achieve his reputation. Indeed, the artist called on the services of the photographer Frederick Hollyer (1837— 1933) very early on to establish a nearly exhaustive photographic record of his work. However limited the medium, these high-quality reproductions were the only means by which many artists came to know Burne-Jones's work. In quite a few cases in exhibitions in France and Belgium they even took the place of the origi-

nals. They were also prized by such admirers as the Belgian Symbolist painter Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921) and by connoisseurs like Marcel Proust (i87i-i92a).The latter, describing the apartments of Madame de Lavardin in the posthumously published Jean Santeuil (1952), noted that without the influence of the Duchesse des Alpes, "Burne-Jones would not have taken up so much wall space," and "Loisel . . . even filled the room of the old Madame Loisel with reproductions by Burne-Jones. " 10

Comyns Carr was instrumental in having The Beguiling of Merlin recognized in France as one of the first post-Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces and as a key work in the new aesthetic dialogue that was developing, with his enthusiastic support, between the two countries. The dialogue continued and expanded the following year at the 1878 Exposition Universelle, in which British painting was represented primarily by works from the inaugural exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery This was a decisive event in the dissemination of contemporary British painting on the Continent, and of Burne-Jones s work in particular. Along with The Beguiling of Merlin and two other works by Burne-Jones, Love Disguised as Reason (1870; cat. no. 47) and Love among the Ruins (1870; private collection), 11 the public could admire Watts s Love and Death (1874-77; Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester) and Walter Crane s The Renascence of Venus (1877; Tate Gallery, London).

This exhibition gave many art lovers the opportunity to see Burne-Jones's work and made a lasting impression on such artists as Moreau and Khnopff. The discovery of this painting of ideas and allusive atmospheres was summarized by the critic Charles Blanc (1813-1882): "To my mind, the most surpris-

ing picture from London is the one by Burnes Jones [sic], Merlin and Vivien. It expresses the quintessence of the ideal and a sublimated poetry that are deeply touching. The painter s Vivien seems to have been conjured by an incantation; she is like a figure by Mantegna, retouched and lovingly enveloped by the brush of Prud'hon." 12

Two Aspects of the Recognition:
Decadent and Symbolist

The following decade, 1878-89, saw the progressive appropriation of Burne-Jones's then-known work by the Parisian Symbolists and Decadents. The increasingly frequent references to the English painter had two sides: on the one hand, a form of identification, sometimes fairly superficial, with a decadent culture, and on the other, an acknowledgment of common concerns and ends — if not means — in the elaboration of the Symbolist aesthetic. French critics began to review with regularity the various exhibitions in which he participated, although, significantly enough, the interpretations tended to harp on the more extreme aspects of his work. Morbidity, anxiety, and a hermetic subject matter were the most frequently mentioned traits, and a link with Moreau was quickly established. Edmond Duranty (1833-1880), for example, wrote in 1879: "Mr. Burne-Jones has triumphed at the Grosvenor Gallery His works are imbued with a subtle poetry, a morbid sentimentality, and a deliberate strangeness His art is characterized by a keen languor. ... In four other pictures he has elaborated a poem around Pygmalion and Galatea full of hints and suggestions reminiscent of the complexities of M. Gustave Moreau. . . . There is a sort of hesitancy in these pictures, and their titles are shrouded in vagueness." 13 Ernest Chesneau published his superb Artistes

anglais contemporains in 1882 and, concerning Burne-Jones, wrote: "Our aesthetic in France is surely less subtle, and less complex. But is this a sufficient reason to condemn efforts at Symbolist and mystical expression in the art of our neighbors. . . . Why should the artist be deprived of the quite noble delight of enhancing the sensual pleasures of the eye with the emotion of higher thought?" 14

This interpretation of Burne-Jones, crediting him with subtle literary and poetic intentions and a refined pictorial handling while giving him the benefit of the doubt as to the depths of meaning conveyed by his mysteries, was immediately picked up by the Parisian Decadents. Sufficient evidence of this can be found in the brief but significant passage which Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907) devoted to English painting in A Rebours (Against Nature; 1884), his novel about the extravagant aestheticism of the fin de siecle:

He [the protagonist of the novel, Jean des Esseintes] recalled certain examples he had seen in the international exhibitions and imagined he would perhaps see them again in London: pictures by [John Everett] Millais, an "Eve of Saint Agnes" of a silvery, almost lunar, green; works by Watts with strange colors, blends of gamboge and indigo; pictures conceived by an ailing Gustave Moreau, brushed by an anemic, and retouched by a Raphael drowned in blue; among other pictures, he remembered a "Denunciation of Cain," an "Ida" and some "Eves" displaying the singular and mysterious blend of these three masters and expressing the personality both quintessential and raw of a dreamy, erudite Englishman haunted by fantasies of atrocious colors. 15

This exacerbated sensitivity, which Huysmans heightened to the extreme for the sake of his characterization, explains the strong appeal that this cryptic, and thus elitist, painting must have had. Together with the works of Odilon Redon (1840-1916) and Moreau, the only contemporary French artists of whom des Esseintes approved, this was the only type of painting befitting so forsaken an era.

It was in this spirit that the aesthete Count Robert de Montesquiou (1855-1921), accompanied by the painter and writer Jacques- Emile Blanche (1861— 1942), made his first trip to London in 1884, the year of the publication o&A Rebours. In so doing he was following the advice of the painter Paul Helleu (1859-1927), who had told him that this was "absolutely the place to go," 16 and he returned there in the summer of 1885 with Samuel Pozzi and Edmond de Polignac. For this occasion the American John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) had written a letter of introduction to Henry James which said, "I suppose that Montesquiou will want to see as much of Rossetti s and Burne-Jones s work as he can. I have given him a card for the Comyns Carrs and for Alma-Tadema." 17 James seems to have done his duty, for he wrote to Montesquiou, "We shall see as many Burne-Joneses and Rossettis as possible." 18

A further example of this trend was the poem that Jean Lorrain wrote in homage to Burne-Jones. It was published in 1887 in Griseries y in a section entitled "Le Coin des esthetes," which also included dedications to Louis Abbema, Paul Bourget, Huysmans, des Esseintes, and Moreau. The poem dedicated to Moreau, "Printemps classique," was a counterpiece to the one dedicated to Burne-Jones, "Printemps mystique."The last lines give an idea of the atmosphere of fantasy evoked by Burne-Jones's work, possibly because of — if not

thanks to — the previously mentioned "misunderstanding":

The pale gold of the chrysanthemums
Flares, yellow and sulfurous,
in a sky of pallid clouds,
Dispersed by gusts of pain, 19

Thus the passionate historical and sociological climate that imbued Burne-Jones s reception in France. It led in the 1880s to the perception of Burne-Jones as one of the precursors of Symbolism, and for the younger generation of artists he was endowed with the same aura and significance as Watts, Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898), and Moreau. When Jean Moreas wrote his "Manifeste du symbolisme," which appeared in Le Figaro in September 1886, he not only emphasized the literary principles of the movement but consecrated those tendencies in the pictorial arts that had been evident for several years. Yet there were so many ramifications of the movement, and its forms of expression were so varied, that it was extremely difficult actually to define it. Typically there was a need to assert differences, and advocates regularly issued their own attempts to reveal its quintessential meaning. Among the most comprehensive were those by Gustave Kahn (published in UEvenement in 1886), Edouard Dujardin (published in La Revue Independante in 1888), and Albert Aurier (published in Le Mercure de France in 1891), which took its starting point from an analysis of the work of Paul Gauguin. The Symbolists championed the revelation of ideas through poetic or aesthetic sensation independent of stylistic imperatives and made constant reference to literature and to the most advanced philosophical, religious, and scientific thinking of the times. Although pursued with less intensity and normative "rigor," this redefinition of thought and its expression was

taking place in England at the same time through the agency of Walter Pater (1839-1894) and Arthur Symons (1865-1945). Given this context, the works of Burne-Jones and Watts, along with their literary and philosophical backgrounds, could very well lend credence to the idea of a convergence, if not concomitance, between the Symbolism of the English and the Symbolism of the French.

The Symbolists often defined themselves a contrario, setting themselves primarily against the advocates of Naturalism and Impressionism, who, by their subject matter and aesthetic handling, expressed the rampant materialism of modern society. 20 Interestingly enough it was a French critic, Edouard Rod, who found this tendency represented in the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and Burne-Jones: "In my opinion, their work remains the best protest that artists and thinkers have ever voiced against the vulgar commercialism, self-satisfied platitudes and petty talents to be seen in most of modern art." 21 The theorist and critic Josephin [Sar] Peladan (1858-1918) was among those who conducted a veritable propaganda campaign to reinvest the image with import, to express a specifically modern consciousness by means of literary, legendary, and mythological themes. In the rules governing the Salons of the Rose + Croix, the mystical fraternity he co-founded in 1888, he rejected any number of iconographic categories in favor of "the Catholic Ideal and the Mystical . . . Legend, Myth, Allegory, the Dreamworld, Paraphrase and lyricism in general, with a preference for murals because they are of a superior essence." 22 And so it is not surprising that Burne-Jones was among the artists he wanted to invite to the Salons of the Rose + Croix at the beginning of the 1890s. Given this literary and critical climate, in which genuine affinities were mixed with Anglophiliac

affectation, Paris by 1889 was fully prepared to celebrate a figure for which it been yearning for a decade.

The 1889 Exposition Universelle

Burne-Jones was represented at the 1889 Exposition Universelle by King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid (cat. no. 112), a painting that drew considerably more attention than did the work of Watts and Millais. This event marked the true beginning of Burne-Jones's relations with France. The critic Antonin Proust (1832-1905) applauded his contribution unreservedly: "Burne-Jones, the most interesting of the Pre-Raphaelites, transcribed the figure of King Cophetua from Tennyson's ballad 'The Beggar Maid' with extraordinary power. The picture, with its compelling line, strong color scheme, and harmonious composition, and with its loving references to Carpaccio and Mantegna, has an enduring appeal." 23 Moreau, a member of the jury, arranged for Burne-Jones to receive a gold medal. The English painter was also awarded the cross of the Legion d'honneur and named a corresponding member of the Academie des Beaux-Arts. Moreau also seems to have tried to contact Burne-Jones directly, obtaining his address from the collector and writer Charles Ephrussi/ 4 and in 1892, through a common friend, Margaret, Lady Brooke, he received from him in 1892 a framed photographic reproduction of the six watercolors that constitute The Days of Creation (fig. 27). Moreau's letter of thanks to Burne-Jones, dated April 12, 1892, was couched in the most effusive terms: "Dear Sir and Illustrious Master, You have made me so happy, so proud; I wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart. Through your noble and admirable friend Lady Brook [e], you have sent me a photograph reproducing one of your exquisite works, which is a veritable

delight for the spirit. How thoughtful of you, this fine and

Figure 27. Framed photograph of Edward Burne-Jones, The Days of Creation, 1872-76 (fig. 79)

charming gift! May I assure you that this expression of your sympathy is precious to me on many counts and that it is one of the most rare and beautiful rewards that I have received in my long life of work." 25 Although these superlatives perhaps conceal a certain insincerity, 26 the reciprocal admiration and

Figure 28. Gustave Moreau (1826-1898). Death and the Woodcutter, ca. 1881. Watercolor, 10V2 x 8 in. (26.7 x 20.2 cm). Private collection

esteem of the two artists is nevertheless attested by Burne-Jones's influence on the French painter s work. An example of this maybe seen in one of Moreau's watercolor drawings illustrating "Death and the Woodcutter," from the Fables of La Fontaine (fig. 28), m which the passive male figure and the dominant, entwining female figure present analogies with corresponding figures in The Beguiling of Merlin, which Moreau had seen in 1878. 27 Other works by Moreau clearly display the influence of Burne-Jones: Orestes and the Erinyes (fig. 29) owes much to King Cophetua in its spatial construction, heavy decor, and dark, metallic palette. The grouping of the figures and the imposing presence of the main female figure in The Glorification of Helen (fig. 30) could well allude to The Wheel of Fortune (cat. no. 52) and The Depths of the Sea (cat. no. 119), both exhibited in Paris in 1893. Both painters also used the common compositional device of isolating one part of a larger work from its original context and developing it independently. Probably the best-known example in Burne-Jones s work is the Troy triptych (cat. no. 50).

Another French artist with whom Burne-Jones seems to have been in contact during the early 1890s was Pierre Puvis de Chavannes; unfortunately, some of their correspondence has been lost. As president of the Societe Nationale des Beaux- Arts, Puvis hoped that Burne-Jones would participate in the exhibition of 1892 with The Wheel of Fortune. To quote from his letter: "Most Eminent Master, The promise of your glorious participation in our exhibition at the Champ de Mars is a source of great and sincere personal joy, and the graciousness and insistence with which your noble friend Lady Brooke made this promise is, for me, a most precious guarantee. It is my fervent wish that you might intervene to secure a picture that one of your friends [Arthur Balfour] has the good fortune to own. As for drawings, we would consider them also as an expression of the deepest, purest and highest art." 28

The Wheel of Fortune was not, however, exhibited in Paris; in its place were twelve drawings — one of which was a study for the figure of the goddess in The Wheel of Fortune^ one for Desiderium (cat. no. 62), and two of the ornamental initials for Virgil's Aeneid (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). Two notes of thanks for the drawings by Puvis have been preserved. The first reads: "Thank you from the bottom of my painters heart for your powerful and original symbol of Fortune. Like every-one whom I invited to see it, I was deeply impressed by its sense of grandeur." The second: "I have just received and admired your drawings. They are an invaluable contribution to our exhibition, and I wish to thank you personally and on behalf of my fellow artists for having honored us in this way." 29 Here again, one is struck by. the writer's admiring and respectful tone. Yet it should be noted that for none of these occasions did Burne-Jones make the trip to France. Puvis had hoped to

see him in Paris in 1895, but the meeting never took place. 30 And in any event, this was also the period in which the importunate visits of his French admirers annoyed Burne-Jones to such an extent that he wrote to his friend Helen Gaskell: "William [Morris] announces 'Its the French/ as though it were the Battle of Hastings." 31

The years 1889-94 marked the peak of Burne-Jones s popularity in France, as demonstrated by the acquisition of his works by the French national museums. Leonce Benedite, curator of the Musee du Luxembourg, advocated this policy after the 1892 Salon of the Societe Nationale des Beaux- Arts. Burne-Jones offered to give four drawings, a gift that was accepted in 1892. In the end, however, he sent only three (cat. no. 53). As a token of thanks he was given a Sevres porcelain vase inscribed with his initials. The vase was accompanied by a letter from Benedite that mentioned the three paintings shown at the Champ de Mars which he had presented to the purchase committee, composed of "our most important artists." "One does not know," he wrote, "if one's preference should go to the Perseus [Perseus and the Graiae, cat. no. 89] or to the Siren [The Depths of the Sea, cat. no. 119], but while one may argue about preferences, they were unanimously admired. We immediately spoke of acquiring these pictures. I put a damper on the general enthusiasm by pointing out that they no longer belonged to you, but I made up for it by announcing that I had your assurance that, in the foreseeable future, your work would be represented at the Luxembourg in a more impressive fashion than by the three drawings which we owe to your generosity." 32 Benedite's wish was never realized, but it serves as an indication of the extent of Burne-Jones 's official recognition.

Figure 29. Gustave Moreau (1826-1898), Orestes and Erinyes, 1892. Oil on canvas, 70V2 x 47V4 in. (180 x 120 cm). Private collection

Figure 30. Gustave Moreau (1826-1898), The Glorification of Helen, 1897. Watercolor, 4 x 5V8 in. (10 x 13 cm). Musee Gustave Moreau, Paris

Figure 31. Edward Burne-Jones, Baronne Deslandes y 1896. Oil on canvas, 45Y4 x 23 in. (116. 2 x 58.4 cm). Private collection

Burne-Jones sent works to the 1892, 1893, 1895, and 1896 Salons of the Societe Nationale des Beaux-Arts, and was also approached by Peladan to participate in the Salons of the Rose + Croix. In doing so, Peladan was making good his intention, announced in his "Manifesto" published in Le Figaro: "We will go to London to invite Burne-Jones t Watts and the five Pre-Raphaelites." Burne-Jones seems to have been somewhat disconcerted by Peladan's eccentricity, confiding his impressions in a letter to Watts. 33 In the end, it seems that only photographic reproductions were shown. Peladan nevertheless persisted in his admiration, writing in 1895 that Moreau was "the only artist comparable in stature to the creator of The Golden Stairs [cat. no. 109] and The Fountain of Youth [Tate Gallery, London]." 34

About 1894-95 a certain weariness with Burne-Jones began to be expressed among the critics in the circle of the Decadents. Peladan attributed this to the paucity of exhibi-

tions then showing his work. 35 But sympathy for Burne-Jones diminished, and opportunities for collaboration in France decreased. The author of the program for La Belle au hois dormant (The Sleeping Beauty), for example, a play by Henry Bataille and Robert d'Humieres, which premiered at the important avant-garde Theatre de l'Oeuvre on May 24, 1894, claimed that the costumes had been designed by Burne-Jones and Rochegrosse. We know, however, that Burne-Jones collaborated on only two theater productions, and this was not one of them. 36 A collaboration between Burne-Jones and the director of the Theatre, Aurelien Lugne-Poe, would indeed have been fascinating, but this appears to have been one of those unfortunate rendez-vous manques. The costume for the title role seems to have been only inspired by Burne-Jones rather than designed by him. Moreover, the illustration in the program was actually a facsimile of an etching taken from UEstampe Originale reproducing The Rose Bower (cat. no. 58) from the Briar Rose cycle, and not a work done specifically for the play. The main attraction seems to have been a set design representing a thicket of thorns inspired by the Briar Rose series and by Love among the Ruins. The play was in any event a complete flop and received virtually no critical response. 37

When in 1896 Burne-Jones exhibited his portrait of the Baronne Deslandes (fig. 31), an Egeria of the Aesthetes and a fervent admirer of the artist, 38 it was given a very cool reception. This is clearly not one of his better portraits, but one iconographic detail is notable: in the sitters hands the artist placed a crystal ball, alluding to the iconography of his 1865 watercolor Astrologia (private collection) and introducing a major Symbolist theme, the mirror. 39

The dissenting voices continued to gain in volume. Among

the first was Montesquiou, who nonetheless expressed his disenchantment in moderate terms: "Burne-Jones s muse did smile upon me at one time, and I answered her with tender gazes and with poetry, but today she appears to me with silvery hair, somewhat bland and remote All is irises and rhinestones . . . yet

if Burne-Jones's pictures turned out to be nothing but sublime giant Christmas cards, many youngsters would continue to delight in them — and they would be right." 40 The jaded dandy's barb notwithstanding, in the same text he rightly points out the importance of decoration as an integral part of Burne-Jones's painting and in his creative process.

The fiercest critic was Octave Mirbeau (1850-1917), who wrote an article that appeared in Le Journal entitled "Toujours des lys" (Always Lilies), in which Kariste, a repentant aesthete and Decadent painter, declares, "I too once cried out, 'O Burne-Jones!' with tearful, ecstatic eyes and prayerful lips! It is true that I had no contact with him, and that I was proclaiming my adoration on the strength of enthusiastic aesthetes who were even less acquainted with him! ... As for Burne-Jones, he is becoming increasingly ensnared in the labyrinth of his own symbols." 41

Favorable articles continued to appear, but they were not so much enthusiastic declarations as more thorough, descriptive studies of a scholarly nature written with more distance and without the intention of ranking Burne-Jones among his French contemporaries. One such author was Paul Leprieur, the first of whose many articles devoted to Burne-Jones was published in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts in 1892. Entitled "Burne-Jones, Decorateur et ornemaniste," the article had the merit of providing French readers with a recapitulation of the

artist s career in all its diversity. In 1893 Leprieur reviewed the major retrospective held at the New Gallery in the winter of 1892-93 42 and established a connection between Burne-Jones and Puvis de Chavannes: "Several portraits, . . . which he treats in an idealized manner, not unlike Puvis de Chavannes when he works in this genre, synthesizing, simplifying, distilling the essence of the sitter and of life." He also devoted a long article to Perseus and the Graiae in which he remarked that the artist's innovative pictorial handling placed it among the most significant works of the day. On the other hand, as early as 1892 Robert de la Sizeranne (1866-1932) noted the growing rift between the French Symbolists, who were turning to new pictorial idioms (Cloisonnisme and Divisionism, for example), and the English painters, with their relative inertia, especially insofar as their literary sources were concerned; indeed, though the two schools had originally been quite similar in their objectives, the direction taken by the English painters condemned them to obsolescence. 43

Figure 32. Edward Burne-Jones, Study of a Woman, 1890. Charcoal and red chalk, heightened with white, izVs x 9% in. (31.4 x 23.5 cm). Private collection

Belgium: Way Station or Place of True Recognition?

Burne-Jones s reception in France, and the varied influences that it generated, cannot be dissociated from his reception in Belgium. The two countries were closely linked at this time by an active network of literary and artistic exchange. 44 Furthermore, as the hub of European culture, Belgium may well have been the venue for the realization of the most idealistic aspirations of the Symbolists. 45 The supremacy of the imagination in painting was described by the critic Emile

Verhaeren (1855-1916) in these terms: "The greatest artist of any given era is the one in whose mind the ideal of the times takes its highest flights. In the course of the centuries we have seen painters emerge with, as it were, prominent and illuminated heads. These were the greats, in comparison to whom the likes of Courbet simply do not rate. Their names were Angelico, Botticelli, Rembrandt, Delacroix. Those who today express our more complex aspirations are called Chavannes, Moreau, Watts, Burne-Jones." 46

Figure 33. Fernand KhnopfF (1858-1921), Study for a Sphinx, 1896. Pencil heightened with white, 9 x 5 7 /s in. (23 x 15 cm). Private collection

Because of its geographical location and cultural significance, Belgium was a major center for the dissemination of artistic forms between England and France at the end of the nineteenth century. In the case of Burne-Jones, however, it was more complex. The Belgian Symbolists, more strongly idealistic than their French counterparts, were quick to recognize the English painter as more a master than an equal, and they would absorb his influence for a long time to come, perhaps even until the advent of the Surrealists. The idea that the artist's critical fall from favor in France after 1894 had much to do with the vicissitudes of snobisme and fashion was expressed by Octave Maus (1856-1919). 47 The dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), a champion of the Nordic myth, went even further, concluding that the French spirit, committed to a defense of the classical tradition, was impermeable to foreign influence and in no position to understand the originality of the English movement. 48 For Maus, Burne-Jones's return to past styles and subject matter was a sign of modernity, for it was less "the imitation of the style than an

analogous way of thinking, feeling and seeing — the transporting of the modern artist to a chosen land, at a time when it was silently reliving the days of its forgotten past." 49 It should be noted, however, that Burne-Jones s reception was not always so positive; like that of the French critics, Verhaeren's appreciation of Burne-Jones would suffer a certain reversal. 50 One of the decisive moments in Burne-Jones's relationship with Belgium came in 1888, when he was invited to participate in the exhibition of Les XX but had to decline owing to previous commitments. 51 In 1890 photographic reproductions of his work, as well as that of Rossetti, were shown at the Galerie Dumont, Brussels. In 1895 he exhibited at the Cercle d'Art and at the Exposition des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, which showed two of his most famous works, The Wheel of Fortune (cat. no. 52) and Love among the Ruins (1894; National Trust, Wightwick Manor near Wolverhampton). He was represented again at the Exposition des Beaux- Arts in 1897. He was invited in 1896 to participate in the first Salon of Idealist Art, organized by Jean Delville to take a stand "against decadence, against the confusion of the so-called Realist, Impressionist or libriste schools, all of which are degenerate forms of art." But Burne-Jones turned the offer down, as he had Peladan, and his work, as well as that of Watts and Rossetti, was represented here too only by photographic reproductions. 52 Among the more important publications in which the work of Burne-Jones was included was Georges -Olivier Destrees's Les Preraphaelites: Notes sur Fart decor atif et la peinture en

Figure 35. Fernand KhnopfF (1858-1921), Avec Gregoire le Roy: Mon coeur pleure d' autrefois, 1889. Pencil and chalk, ro x 5 3 A in. (25.5 x 14.5 cm). The Hearn Family Trust, New York

Figure 36. Edward Burne-Jones. Study for The Mirror of Venus, ca. 1873. Pencil, 10 x 7 in. (25.3 x 17.7 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Figure 37. Odilon Redon (1840-1916), The Closed Eyes, 1890. Pencil, 19 V2 x i^ s A in. (49.5 x 37.2 cm). Musee du Louvre, Departement des Arts Graphiques, on loan to the Musee d'Orsay, Paris

Angleterre, published in 1894, which presented portraits of five artists, including Burne-Jones, and a chronological catalogue of his works. The book's popularity was comparable to that in France of Gabriel Moureys Passe le detroit: La Vie et Vart a Londres and Robert de la Sizerannes La Peinture anglaise contemporaine: 1844— 1894, both published in 1895.

But above and beyond the fashion for English art and literature that prevailed in Belgium and France at the time stands the singularly deep friendship of Burne-Jones and the Belgian painter Fernand KhnopfF. An avowed Anglophile, Khnopff went so far as to give his works English titles and to include English references in his French titles. Invited to exhibit at the Hanover Gallery in London in 1890, KhnopfF sent his painting Memories (fig. 39). But he went to London for the first time only in 1891. From then on he visited the city regularly, contributed to The Studio from 1894 until 1914, and wrote articles about English artists for Belgian magazines. In February 1899 he wrote a letter explaining the reasons for this passion to Paul Schultze-Naumburg, who was preparing a publication on his work: "That which demands admiration in the work of a number of English artists is the precise expres-

sion of the sense of legend. " 53

The mutual influence of KhnopfF and Burne-Jones had already been noted by their contemporaries. In 1893, referring to the current Salon of the Rose + Croix, the painter Felicien Rops (1833— 1898) wrote: "KnopfF [sic] no longer imitates the French; he has sunk up to the chin in the boots of the Englishman Burne-Jones." 54 The artists expressed their esteem for one another by exchanging gifts of their drawings. In 1894 Burne-Jones sent Khnopff* a drawing from 1890 with a dedication (fig. 32), and in 1896 KhnopfF sent Burne-Jones an autographed drawing (fig. 33). KhnopfF s near veneration of the English painter was attested by the presence of a reproduction of The Wheel of Fortune in the White Room of his house in Brussels (fig. 34), and he also took up the pen several times in support of his English friend. The three principal texts are the Conference au cercle artistique sur Walter Crane (1894)— which digressed from its purported subject and concluded with a veritable apologia of Burne-Jones — his appreciation of Burne-Jones, which appeared in the Magazine of Arty and his Souvenirs a propos de Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1915). 55 Throughout this impressive and persistent propaganda campaign, in which KhnopfF reveals as much about himself as about Burne-Jones, it is clear that their mutual influence involved less the forms in their paintings than "modes of mental representation"; in his analysis of Burne-Jones's work, KhnopfF recognized the correspondences in their work as those between men haunted by memory and by the shared silence of their inner worlds.

The "Inward Gaze" of Burne-Jones

The representation of withdrawal into the self, of the hidden, inner world, the world of dreams and sleep, recurs like a

Figure 38. Fernand KhnopfF (1858-1921), Marguerite Khnopff, 1887. Oil on wood, jfA x 29VS in. (96 x 7 4.5 cm).

Musees Royaux des Beaux- Arts, Brussels

leitmotiv in the work of Burne-Jones. These themes and their corresponding imagery are the clearest evidence of the links between this artist and the universe of the Symbolists, particularly in Belgium and France. At the heart of many of Burne-Jones's representations is the theme of music {The Lament, Chant d s Amour, The Golden Stairs; cat. nos. 44, 84, 109). which often serves as the inspiration for this inner world. Music also played an important role in the thinking of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), a philosopher whose writings had a profound influence on the Symbolists. The supreme art, music in its immateriality reveals to the individual his deepest and most absolute being and is a source of sensory and pictorial correspondences. Khnopff developed this notion in his analysis of The Golden Stairs, in which "a metallic glissando of brass cymbals evokes the sad golden and faded purple tones of autumnal sunsets." 56 The best illustration of the affinity between Burne-Jones and Khnopff is the mirror, symbol of meditative reflection. In strikingly similar ways, the two artists created the image of woman absorbed in the narcissistic contemplation of her double — Khnopff s Avec Gregoire le Roy: Mon coeur pleure d'autrefois (fig. 35) and Burne-Jones s study for The Mirror of Venus (fig. 36), to cite only two examples. 57

Figure 39. Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921), Memories, 1889. Pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 50 x j& A in. (127 x 200 cm).

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Figure 40. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898), The Sacred Wood Dear to the Arts and Muses, ca. 1 884-89. Oil on

canvas, 36V2 x 91 in. (92.7 x 231 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Potter Palmer Collection

Burne-Jones also frequently represented the ultimate avatar of these psychological states — sleep. His primary artistic sources were such Michelangelesque figures as The Dying Slave (Musee du Louvre, Paris), which he repeated three times in The Wheel of Fortune. It is notable that Redon also refers to this figure in The Closed Eyes (fig. 37). Burne-Jones s preoccupation with the theme of sleep culminated in the Briar Rose (cat. nos. 55-58), which offers a strange and revelatory interpretation of the fairy tale, for while slumbering figures abound, the moment of the princess's awakening is never represented. 58 His very approach to the story was, in effect, a rejection of the conventions of narrative, a claim to beauty alone, here expressed as hypnotic abandon. 59 He used a similar approach in his portrait of Lady Windsor (cat. no. 161), which probably owes much to KhnopfPs portrait of his sister, Marguerite (fig. 38). But he went further in his simplification of the image than did Khnopff, who continued to adhere to the tradition of Flemish portraiture. Burne-Jones s likeness of Lady Windsor displays a marvelous decorative elegance and an ineffable psychological presence, the sitter refusing to return the viewer's gaze.

The timelessness suggested by these different interconnecting worlds and the eclipsing of the subject permitted the elaboration of a fundamentally decorative aesthetic. In this connection The Golden Stairs anticipates KhnopfFs Memories (fig. 39), which was in its turn prefigured by The Wedding of Psyche (cat. no. 41). In all three works the rhythmic repetition of nearly identical figures recalls the hieratic and eternal monumentality of Puvis de Chavannes (fig. 40). Puvis comes also to mind when we consider Burne-Jones's final venture into the Arthurian legend, The Sleep of Arthur inAvalon (fig. 107).

These few examples make it clear that a chronological and factual analysis alone of Burne-Jones's reception in France and Belgium contributes little to our understanding of the phenomenon. The intriguing richness and beauty of his work reside also in his intuitive dialogue with some of the most audacious ideas and works of his time.

1. Ernest Chesneau, La Peinture anglaise (Paris, 1882), pp. 171-72.
2. On the subject of Burne-Jones's critical reception in France, see Allemand-Cosneau 1992.
3. Chesneau, La Peinture anglaise, pp. 171-72.
4. See Jacques Letheve, "La Connaissance des peintres preraphaelites anglais en France (1855-1900)," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, ser. 6, 53 (May-June 1959), pp. 315-28.
5. Raymond Bouyer, "Les Sympathies de l'art actuel," LErmitage, December 1895, p. 279.
6. Philippe Burty, "Exposition de la Royal Academy," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, ser. 2, 12 (July 1869), pp. 53-55. The article included a reproduction of Pan and Psyche (see cat. no. 103). "The woods drawn for us by Mr. Burne-Jones and engraved by Mr. Swain derive from a composition that we saw in preparation in the artist's studio." This engraving was reproduced in Allemand-Cosneau 1992, p. 68.
7. See Christopher Newall, "Themes of Love and Death in Aesthetic Painting of the 1860s," in Tate Gallery 1997-98, pp. 36, 41.
8. See Barbara Bryant, "G. F. Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery," in Yale Center for British Art 1996, p. 120. The watercolor version, noT the oil painting, of The Apparition was shown in London. The owner at the time was Leon Gauchez, proprietor of the review LArt, which gave its office address as the location of the work (information kindly provided by Genevieve Lacambre).
9. J. Comyns Carr, "La Saison d'art a Londres: La 'Grosvenor Gallery/" L'Art 10 (1877), pp. 78, 79. Comyns Carr reviewed the exhibitions at the

Grosvenor Gallery in 1879 and 1880 for LArt, always giving special attention to Burne-Jones and commenting on The Golden Stairs in 1880.

10. Marcel Proust, Jean Santeuil, Pleiade ed. (Paris, 1971), p. 804.

11. This became one of the artist's most famous pictures. It was exhibited again at the Salon of the Societe Nationale des Beaux-Arts. The work was accidentally damaged while being photographed for Boussod, Valadon & Cie. Burne-Jones immediately undertook a new version in oil. See Memorials, vol. 2, pp. 237—38.

12. Charles Blanc, Les Beaux-Arts a ['Exposition Universelle de i8y8 (Paris, 1B78), p. 335.

13. Edmond Duranty, "Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor Gallery," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, ser. 2, 20 (1879), p. 372.

14. "Edward Burne-Jones — W. B. Richmond," in Ernest Chesneau, Artistes anglais contemporains (Paris and London, 1882), p. 13; this text is illustrated with Lalauze's engraving of The Beguiling of Merlin.

15. Joris-Karl Huysmans, A Rebours (Paris, 1884). The English painter alluded to is Watts.

16. Archives of Robert de Montesquiou, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris, Departement des Manuscrits (naf 15335, f 8i) t quoted by Edgar Munhall in Whistler and Montesquiou: The Butterfly and the Bat (New York: Frick Collection; Paris: Flammarion, 1995), French ed., p. 58.

17. Paris, private collection, mentioned by Munhall in Whistler and Montesquiou, p. 58.

18. Joy Newton, ed., La Chauve-Souris et le Papillon: Correspondance Montesquiou- Whistler (Glasgow, 1990), quoted in Munhall, Whistler and Montesquiou, p. 59.

19. Jean Lorrain, "Printemps mystique: Pour Burne-Jones," in Griseries (Paris, 1887), pp. 83-84.

20. Burne-Jones himself openly expressed doubts as to the aesthetic validity of Impressionism.

21. Edouard Rod, "Les Preraphaelites anglais," part 2, Gazette des Beaux-Arts, ser. 2, 36 (November 1887), p. 416.

22. For the complete definition, see Jacques Letheve, "Les Salons of the Rose-Croix," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, ser. 6, 56 (December i960), pp. 363-74-

23. Antonin Proust, Exposition Universelle de 1889 (Paris, 1889), p. 603.

24. Letter from Charles Ephrussi to Gustave Moreau, in Pierre-Louis Mathieu, ed., "Lettres de Gustave Moreau," Archives de Part francais 29 (1988), p. 131.

25. Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Moreau, G.: 9308 a; see Mathieu, "Lettres de Gustave Moreau," p. 131.

26. Mathieu writes that in a letter to Henri Evenpoel of July 1894, Moreau was highly critical of Burne-Jones (ibid.).

27. Gustave Moreau is supposed to have exhibited his watercolors for La Fontaine's Fables at the Goupil Gallery in London in 1886. (Information kindly provided by Genevieve Lacambre.)

28. The letter is dated December 25, 1891; Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Puvis de Chavannes, P. ^308 Bb.

29. The cards are dated February 8, and April 28, 1892; Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Puvis de Chavannes, P.:93o8 bc.

30. Letter from Puvis de Chavannes to Burne-Jones, March 18, 1895: "Moreover, you have given me hopes for a meeting for which I have long wished" (Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Puvis de Chavannes, P.:93o8 Bd).

31. Quoted in Fitzgerald 1975, p. 222.

32. For the complete official correspondence, see Musee du Louvre, Paris, Archives des Musees Nationaux, l8 and d8 Burne-Jones. A certified copy of Leonce Benedite's letter (dated May 1893) has been preserved.

33. Letter from Burne-Jones to Watts, quoted in Harrison and Waters i973> pp. l74-77-

34. Sar Peladan, "Gustave Moreau," LErmitage, June 1895, pp. 33-34.

35. Ibid.

36. Burne-Jones worked in 1894-95 on Comyns Carr's production of King Arthur, which premiered at the Lyceum Theatre in London on January

12, 1895; see Poulson 1986. Fernand Khnopff designed similar costumes in 1903 for Ernest Chausson's RoiArthus (Theatre Royal de la Monnaie, Brussels). Burne-Jones also designed a costume for Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who played the female lead in Maeterlinck's Pelleas et Melisande in 1898. This play premiered at the Prince of Wales Theatre on June 21, 1898, several days after Burne-Jones's death.

37. This matter is not mentioned in the Memorials.

38. Using the pseudonym Ossit, the Baronne wrote an enthusiastic text about Burne-Jones that was published in Le Figaro, May 7, 1893.

39. On Baronne Deslandes, see Hyppolite Buffenoire, Les Salons de Paris; Grandes Dames contemporaines: La Baronne Deslandes (Paris, 1895).

40. Robert de Montesquiou, "Le Spectre (Burne-Jones)," in Autels privilegies (Paris, 1898), pp. 202, 211.

41. Le Journal, April 18, 1895; reprinted in Octave Mirbeau, Des artistes, Union Generale ed. (Paris, 1986), pp. 202-8. See also, "Botticelli proteste!" Le Journal, October 4-11, 1896.

42. Paul Leprieur, "Correspondance d'Angleterre," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, ser. 3, 10 (July 1893), p. 80.

43. Robert de la Sizeranne, "Rose + Croix, Pre-Raphaelites et esthetes: La Renaissance esthetique des deux cotes de la Manche," Le Correspondant, March 25, 1892, pp. 1138-39.

44. See Paris-Bruxelles, Bruxelles- Paris (exh. cat., Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1997).

45. See Paradis perdus: LEurope symboUste (exh. cat., Montreal: Musee des Beaux- Arts de Montreal, 1995).

46. "LEssor," La Nation, March 17 and March 28, 1891; reprinted in Emik Verhaeren: Ecrits sur l'art (1881-1892), compiled and presented by Paul Aron (Brussels, 1997), p. 412.

47. Octave Maus, "Burne-Jones," LArt Moderne, June 28, 1897, p. 205; quoted by Laurence Brogniez in "L'Exemple preraphaelite en Belgique: Barbares, Primitifs et . . . Modernes," in proceedings of the colloquium France-Belgique, 1848- 1914: Affinites — ambiguites (Brussels, 1997),

p. 196.

48. Laurence Brogniez, "Les Preraphaelite s en Belgique: D'etranges reveurs . . . ," in Splendeurs de Videal: Rops, Khnopff, Dehille et leur temps (exh. cat., Liege: Musee de l'Art Wallon, 1996), p. 125.

49. Maus, "Burne-Jones," p. 207; cited by Brogniez, "LExemple preraphaelite en Belgique," p. 127.

50. See, for example, Emile Verhaeren, "Le Salon du Champ de Mars," LArt Moderne, May 9, 1895; reprinted in Emile Verhaeren: Ecrits sur Vart, p. 667. Verhaeren went so far as to prefer the photographic reproduction of Love among the Ruins to the original.

51. Letter from Burne-Jones to Octave Maus, dated November 13, 1888, preserved in the Archives de l'Art Contemporain en Belgique, Musees Royaux des Beaux- Arts de Belgique, Brussels.

52. Brogniez, "L'Exemple preraphaelite en Belgique," p. 130.

53. Quoted in Robert L. Delevoy, Catherine De Croes, and Gisele Ollinger-Zinque, Fernand Khnopff, catalogue de l'oeuvre, id ed. (Brussels, 1987), p. 27.

54. Felicien Rops, "Lettre a Armand Rassenfosse du 5 avril 1893," quoted in Busine 1992, p. 60.

55. For a study of KhnopfFs texts on Burne-Jones, see Busine 1992.

56. Fernand Khnopff, "Des souvenirs a propos de Sir Edward Burne-Jones," Annexes aux bulletins de la classe des Beaux-Arts (1915-1918) (Brussels: Academie Royale de Belgique, 1919), pp. 35-42.

57. For a more detailed treatment of the formal analogies, see Benedetti 1981.

58. Petr Wittlich, "Les Yeux clos, le symbolisme, et les nouvelles formes du pathos," in Paradis perdus, p. 236.

59. See Ironside 1975, p. 178.