Light and Obscurity in Symbolism

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Edited by

Rosina Neginsky and Deborah Cibelli

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Fig. 18-3. Lorado Taft, *The Blind*, 1909 (cast 1988). Bronze; 9 x 10.5 x 6 ft. Krannert Art Museum and Kinkead Pavilion, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Estate of William S. Kinkead, 1988-7-1.

Fig. 18-4. Malvina Hoffman, *L'Offrande*, 1919. Bronze; 20-5/8 x 24-3/8 x 8-1/8 in. Photo: Courtesy Joyce and Henry Schwob.

Fig. 18-5. Malvina Hoffman, Untitled, 1926. Marble;17 1/4 x 23 x 13 in. (43.815 x 58.42 x 33.02 cm);153 lb. (69.4003 kg). Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Lillian and Derek Ostergard in honor of Henry Hawley.

INTRODUCTION

ROSINA NEGINSKY

The collection of essays published under the title of *Light and Darkness* is a result of the conference on "Light and Darkness in Symbolism, Its Origins and Its Consequences" that took place in April of 2012 at the Allerton Park in Monticello, the University of Illinois Conference Center. This was the second conference organized by the newly founded Research Center on Symbolism that goes under the title Art, Literature and Music in Symbolism and Decadence. The first conference ("Symbolism, Its Origins and Its Consequences") took place in 2009 and the conference proceedings were published in 2010. It addressed the issue of the complex origins of the Symbolist movement and its legacy in 20th-century art and literature.

Art, Literature and Music in Symbolism and Decadence is an affiliated society of the College Art Association and it sponsored four sessions (2011, 2013-2015) at CAA. The Center also organized and sponsored two sessions at the International Congress of Comparative Literature in Paris in 2013 and two sessions at the American Comparative Literature conference in Seattle in 2015, which addressed not only the issues pertaining to the Symbolist movement per se, but to the origins of this movement and especially to its role in the evolution of art and literature of the twentieth century.

The conference on light and darkness, however, is one of the most important events sponsored by the organization. Like the first conference in 2009, its goal was to promote the interdisciplinary and international nature of the Symbolist movement, as well as the role of the Symbolist movement in the development of art and literature in the twentieth century. Therefore the conference presentations centered on art, literature and music of different countries from a variety of periods. Since in the Symbolist movement visual arts and works of literature were intrinsically connected, its interdisciplinary connections are reflected in several papers which, while analyzing works of art, also weave in their inseparable connection to literary culture.

The idea of light and darkness is one of the central ideas of the

Symbolist movement, since this is a movement of contrasts. It encompasses central themes of Symbolism such as good and evil, beauty and ugliness, the visible and invisible, the divine and earthly.

This volume consists of twenty-two articles and is divided into six parts. Part One is dedicated to architecture and stained glass. Part Two contains essays strictly on visual arts: engravings, works on paper, and paintings. Part Three combines the discussion of visual arts (painting, engravings, works on paper) and literature, when both are interwoven. Part Four discusses Symbolist sculpture. Part Five is on literary works, and the final section, Part Six, is dedicated to music.

Part One, Architecture and Stained Glass, contains two articles: "Symbolist Aspects of Macintosh's Architecture" by Larry Shiner and "Symbolist Interiors: Figures, Light, and Colors in Early Twentieth-Century Italian Stained Glass" by Lucia Mannini. "Symbolist Aspects of Mackintosh's Architecture" introduces readers to the interior design of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret and to Mackintosh's architectural works. Shiner asks whether we are "justified in considering Mackintosh's architecture as having a Symbolist and not just symbolic tendencies?" He shows that in his interior design Mackintosh created an interior that has a Symbolist soul and his usages of light play an important role. According to Shiner however, Mackintosh is only partially Symbolist and only partially embraced the ideas of the Symbolist movement, particularly because "Mackintosh was too creative and too much of an individualist to fit comfortably into any of the art historical categories that have been associated with his work, whether Symbolist, Art Nouveau, or Arts and Crafts."

Mannini in her article asserts that "the coloured glass, both luminous and opalescent, enclosing the space but not confining it, was effectively very congenial to the Symbolist metaphorical vision of reality," because "stained glass was suited to the illusionistic vision, with the taste for the artificial," essential in Symbolism and especially favored by Symbolist literature, for example in Huysmans' novel *A rebours.*

Part Two, on visual arts, consists of four articles. The article "The Symbolist Path of Armand Point" by Robert Dore examines different Symbolist themes relating to women such as death, hair, Christianity, mythology, etc. that Point explored in his art.

Joelle Joffe in "Light and Shadow in *The Dream* by Odilon Redon" inquires into the role of *chiaroscuro* in Redon's *noirs.* Adapting a psychoanalytical approach, she argues that Redon's *chiaroscuro* "is not a technique of representation. It is evidence of the gaze of the artist, the core of a man who is looking for a solution to his distress or what Freud called

'Hilfslosigkeit' or helplessness." She demonstrates that through light and shadows of his *noirs* and *chiaroscuro*, Redon conveys the undetermined state of his suffering soul and the effect that his childhood had on him. In her article, she also explains how the Symbolist movement allows the process of evocation through minimalist images of light and shadow.

Irena Kossowska in her article "A Flight from Colour: The Aesthetics of Black-and-White in Polish Symbolism," analyzing the works of Polish Symbolist artists who she often compares to Western European artists such as Whistler and Rembrandt, explains that etching could be perceived as "a perfect vehicle for creating imaginary worlds," while quoting Siedlecki that "etching is ideal for Dionysiac dreams, it marks . . . the threatening opposition between brightness and the depth of darkness." By introducing the reader to the notion of the metaphysics of night in etching, Kossowska demonstrates that in order to personify anxiety, apathy, melancholy, the blackness of night is often represented through "the tenebrous extreme of monochromatic depiction" and through blurring the contours of objects. In her discussion of the metaphysics of sex, Kossowska shows that in order to stress the negative view of a woman whose image dominates the turn of the century art and literature as well as social perception, Polish etchers represented a woman in shapeless patches of aquatint (in *Moulin Rouge* for example), or in colour that would contrast with the background of the story. For example, Kossowska points out that "the contrast between light and shadow comes into focus in Weiss's etched nocturne *Place Vendôme w Paryżu,* 1900 (Place Vendôme in Paris)," so the woman would be represented as a white female figure "tempting the viewer to plunge into the whirl of the metropolis' nightlife." Kossowska asserts that the art of etching began to disappear in the early 20th century in order to give space to art posters, an emerging new form of art that would eventually replace etching.

Jonathan Perkins in "Fantastic Nature: Associations between Paul Klee and Odilon Redon" shows the similarities between Odilon Redon and Paul Klee, which especially arise in their depictions of nature. Perkins stresses the fact that for both artists the representation of nature "might be termed a pseudo-scientific approach with a deeply personal impulse inspired by a desire to approach the spiritual."

Part Three, "Visual Arts, Literature and Philosophy," the largest part of the book, consists of articles that address the works of visual arts such as painting, engravings, or works on paper and their relationship to literature and philosophy.

Deborah Cibelli's "The Duality of Light in Rossetti's Ekphrastic Poems and Paintings" analyzes three Rossetti's ekphrastic paintings *The*

Girlhood of Mary Virgin, Ecce Ancilla Domini (The Annunciation), and *The Blessed Damozel.* Deborah Cibelli demonstrates how Rossetti, "using motifs from the Renaissance, contrasted the earthly and heavenly realms and conveyed the idea that light had the ability to unify the earthly and the spiritual and to represent transcendence." Cibelli explains that "Rossetti used light to separate and distinguish earth from heaven, to create a celestial hierarchy, and to represent physical form imbued with spiritual beauty." She explains that Rossetti's white palette in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* is enhanced by his treatment of light. She stresses the importance of ekphrasis in Rossetti's poetry as a way to translate in words the range of colors through the description of emotions, derived from paintings' colors and light. We learn that Rossetti's work was shaped by the conception of painting as mute poetry and by his perception of his paintings as "silent poems." Cibelli also shows that light played an important role in the representation of the transcendent qualities, especially in the depiction of woman, whose "beauty was embodied in the woman inherent to 'four fantasies,' which included 'the beautiful woman in heaven, *femmes fatales*, sinful women who appeal for help, and the victimized women who cannot be saved (Sonstroem 1970, 3-4).'" Cibelli's analysis convinces readers that "Rossetti developed an aesthetic sense of beauty based upon a duality of light."

Peter Cooke's article "The Ideal and Matter: Gustave Moreau's Ambiguous Dualities" stresses Moreau's constant interplay of complex dualities of an allegorical light and darkness. Cooke asserts that "the artist saw life in terms of the play of interdependent polar opposites founded on the essential duality of the Ideal and Matter." To these ends, Cooke examines Moreau's paintings such as *Oedipus and the Sphinx,* in which "the beautiful yet monstrous sphinx both attracts with its feminine face and breast and repels with its feline animal body," *Orpheus* and *Salome* of 1876, *The Chimeras*, and *Jupiter and Semele.* In analyzing *Oedipus and the Sphinx* Cooke demonstrates how this painting could be interpreted allegorically "as an idealist affirmation of the superiority of mind over matter, of the ideal over the treacherous promises of earthly honours, power and glory," or how it "could be read as a comment on the sensuality of the mythological nude," or as a mythological temptation of St Anthony presenting a form of "iconographical syncretism, mingling pagan mythology with a Christian subject." As Cooke states in his conclusion Moreau's world "is a world of co-existing dualities, of unresolved contradictions in which the Ideal and Matter are eternally co-dependent, forever locked together, in both iconography and style."

"Edward Burne-Jones' *The Sirens"* by Liana de Girolami Cheney

stresses the duality of the Sirens, their “light” beautiful appearance and dark hidden nature. As Cheney argues, “the siren in Burne-Jones’ painting functions much like the Symbolist conception of the *femme fatale* because the siren evokes the dual symbolism of water, represented in light and darkness, as the source of life and death.” Girolami Cheney stresses that in Burne-Jones’ painting and studies, the Sirens are beautifully portrayed creatures with slender beauty “revealed through the wet drapery motif while their gentle expressions conceal their sinister plan.”

Alison Hokanson in “The Soul of Things: Henri de Brakeleer as a Forerunner of the Treatment of Light in Belgian Symbolism” demonstrates de Brakeleer's influence on the “portrayal” of light of the Belgian Symbolist artists. She argues that De Braekeleer, as a Realist artist, was the first to “paint” the light of the interior as an embodiment of the emotional and psychological events that occurred in the given location. She analyzes how Belgian Symbolist artists borrowed from de Brakeleer the ability to paint light and how instead of depicting “a mirror of a person's psyche” as did de Brakeleer, their depiction of light created an interior space “with its own soul.”

Liesbeth Grotenhuis in her article “Isis’ Fingertips: A Symbolist Reading of Lévy-Dhurmer’s *Silence*”, a study of the work *Silence* by Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer discloses the complex meaning of the initiate figure of Silence which takes us from darkness to light through the long history of the process of initiation.

François Lachance-Provençal in his article “Apollo’s Triumph. The Notion of Art for Art’s Sake at the Center of Nietzsche and Redon’s Parallel Shifts from Darkness to Light” explores the duality of Apollonian versus Dionysian aesthetics in Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* and how that aesthetics could be perceived in parallel with Odilon Redon’s aesthetics of art for art’s sake. Although he demonstrates that “this attempt at a comparative study of a philosopher and a painter was meant, in a way, to illustrate the difficulty, even the impossibility, of using Nietzsche’s aesthetics as a tool in pictorial analysis,” Lachance-Provençal argues that Redon’s earlier art, his “Noirs” are a reflection of Dionysian aesthetics, whereas his later works, works of colors, irradiate “contagious fullness and love of life,” the result of Apollonian aesthetics.

The article “The Androgyne, the Transvestite and the Herm: Aubrey Beardsley’s Hybrid Forms for the Yellow Book, Volume III” by Britten LaRue examines Beardsley’s four illustrations *Portrait of Himself*, *Lady Gold’s Escort*, *The Wagnerites*, and *La Dame aux Camélias* and explains the reasons for the sexual duality of his images. She argues that Beardsley creates the new area of illumination, the area of the third sex expressed in

the androgyne, the transvestite and the herm. She demonstrates that “These hybrid figures are not false identities, but empowering forms. Their presence in his illustrations marks the field of the image as a redeeming space which permits independence, autonomy and freedom from the constraints of the world outside the frame.”

“Reflections of Mallarmé: A Comparative Study of Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère”* by Marguerite Li Bassi explores the relationship between Stéphane Mallarmé and Édouard Manet. She argues that these relationships greatly affected both artists. She demonstrates how Mallarmé's view of poetry and some of his poems served as an inspiration for Manet's painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère.* She explains how “the *Bar*’s topography concomitantly recreates Mallarmé’s favorite paradoxes: reality/dream, absence/presence, exterior/interior, sacred/profane, allusion/description.”

Anna Mazzanti's “From 'Fuoco' to 'Notturno': The Interpretation of Light and Shade in d’Annunzio’s Work by His Friends Among Italian Symbolist Illustrators” introduces readers to illustrators of works by the Italian poet and writer Gabriel d'Annunzio. In her article, Mazzanti compares Redon's images inspired by literature with the images inspired by d'Annunzio's literary works. She explains the essential difference between Redon's works and the images that were created to illustrate d'Annunzio's works. She stresses the idea of an illustration in d'Annunzio's case as opposed to the idea of an evocation in works by Redon. She explains that like the Symbolist French writer Huysmans, d'Annunzio promoted art in his literary works. Mazzanti examines a variety of artistic techniques that were used at the turn of the century to illustrate literary works. She shows their similarities with the Pre-Raphaelites, the importance of monochromatic light in lithography, and the development of illustrations in which the woodcutters “preferred a greater clarity of light and shade, abandoning the 'school which gropes in the darkness.'”

Rosina Neginsky in her article “The Dual Nature of Beheadings: Moreau and Redon” explains the different meanings – light and dark, positive and negative – of the decapitated heads in Moreau’s and Redon’s works.

Part Four, “Sculpture,” contains two articles on Symbolist sculpture. This is an area little studied but filled with potential. The article “Art Between Luminous Fluidity and Expressionist Shading: Defining Symbolist Sculpture Using Modeling” by Dominique Jarassé is of particular interest since it explains what type of sculptures could be treated as a part of the Symbolist movement and the role of light, in particular luminosity and shadows, in making sculpture Symbolist. Jarassé

especially focuses on sculptures of the Russian Jewish sculptor, Naoum Aronson, whose work Jarassé describes in the following way: “Here we immediately encounter the dual Baudelairean postulation inherent in Symbolism, the ambivalent nature – profoundly mystical and human – of the Symbolist aesthetic, an aspiration towards the Ideal and the distress caused by a confrontation with the real and with society.” The most important feature of Aronson, as Jarassé demonstrates, is to be able to convey “the 'flow of inner life,'” the psychology of his subjects through light and lines, in ways similar and different from Rodin, who was partially Aronson's inspiration. Jarrassé explains that Aronson's works are interesting not only for their humanistic value, but also artistically. He shows that “by using the double potential of modelling, and by mastering the language of light and shade, Aronson was able, at the same time as Rodin, to produce a profoundly Symbolist work by combining the two idealistic and expressionistic tendencies.” The analysis of Symbolist sculpture encourages Jarassé to provide a definition of it as “a use of the potential of the modelling, understood as the French ‘modelé’.”

Susan Martis in “Light, Obscurity and Symbolist Themes in American Sculpture, 1890-1920” examines the works of the American sculptors George Grey Barnard, Lorado Taft and Malvina Hoffman. Martis demonstrates that Barnard and Taft, being particularly sensitive to the effects of light and shadow, “manipulated them by leaving portions of their works unfinished . . .” Martis explains that one of Taft’s techniques was his ability to create a contrast between emotions represented through exaggerated gestures and the universality of his subjects’ garments. Malvina Hoffman came after Barnard and Taft, when the Symbolist technique in sculpture was already put in place. Hoffman was specifically interested in the body’s reactions to a variety of emotions, such as the body’s response to music, passion, and spirituality. She tried to create sculpture which captures the movement of the soul. Martis stresses that Hoffman was also an art critic. In her book *Sculpture Inside and Out* (1939), she argues that any object created must be “infused with the passionate essence of your own thought,” so the result will be “the merging of matter and spirit.”

Part Five, “Literature,” includes three articles. In his article “Light and Darkness in Dostoevsky’s *White Nights* and Kafka’s ‘Hunger Artist,’” Brent Judd argues that “contrasting opposites, whether they be light and darkness, body and soul, or real and imaginary, are the privileged points of access to the truth that the artist seeks to uncover.” Judd compares the encounter of the Dreamer and Nasten’ka in *White Nights* with the relationship of the hunger artist and the audience/overseer in “Hunger

Artist." He explains that the encounter of opposites is necessary for the production of art and shows that both Dostoevsky and Kafka bring us to the understanding "that Meaning is encountered only in the absence that opposites expose. Light has no meaning without darkness," and "the truth otherwise hidden" could be revealed through art, the result of the encounter of opposites, the intersection necessary for creativity.

Natalia Gamalova in "Colored Lighting in the Poetry of Innokentij Annenskij" analyses Annenskij's rich usage of colors in his literary works. She explains that Annenskij's aspiration for colors comes from classical culture, but his usage of colors in his poetry gives his work a Symbolist flavor.

Luba Jurgenson in her article "Anguish and Modernist Aesthetics" asserts that the Symbolist movement created a new worldview, which lives in dark, light, and in shadow. She contends that the new worldview reflects new human experiences for which there was no language, therefore it caused the creation of a language to express that new experience, a new reality. Jurgenson shows that this reality, as well as the language that describes it, are rooted in anguish, negation and a vacuum.

Part Six, "Music," contains one article, "Symbolic Touch in the Playing of Debussy's Piano Music" by Jean-Pierre Armengaud. In this article Armengaud argues that Debussy's symbolism is very suggestive and that quality is specifically achieved through "first and foremost a symbolism of opposites. . ." such as "immobility/movement, clear image/ blurred resonances, repetition/intermittence, distance/precision or proximity, physicality/sublimity, pale/colorful, narrative/silence, desire for life/ languishing death…his music favors nuance over discourse and the infinite gradation of timbres over the pursuit of a musical construction."

This volume consists of a range of studies for understanding the notion of light and darkness and a variety of its Symbolist interpretations. The articles acknowledge the complexity of meaning attached to light and darkness. They discuss and examine these images' significance for iconography, subject matter, and for aesthetics. The studies stress the interdisciplinary nature of light and darkness in Symbolism as well as a cohabitation and a symbiosis of both, which are together or separately at the core of the Symbolist movement.

PART ONE:

ARCHITECTURE AND STAINED GLASS

CHAPTER ONE

SYMBOLIST ASPECTS OF MACKINTOSH'S ARCHITECTURE

LARRY SHINER

Although the existence of a Symbolist stream in late nineteenth-century literature and painting is widely accepted, there have been few attempts to determine if there was also a Symbolist tendency in architecture. The dominant architectural approach in the nineteenth century, of course, was Historicism, which meant designing buildings in one of the historical styles, Classical, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and so on. Even the Symbolist painter, Franz von Stuck, designed his own villa in a Renaissance style.

The one genuinely new architectural and design approach at the end of the century, Art Nouveau is often treated simply as a curvilinear, organic style and an architectural dead end. But some have argued that Art Nouveau also had affinities with the contemporaneous Symbolist movement in literature and painting, and, among those considered Art Nouveau architects, Antonio Gaudi and Charles Rennie Mackintosh are most often mentioned as reflecting Symbolist tendencies.

Of course, all architecture has a symbolic aspect whether in the more general sense of a poetics of space or in the more specific sense of using traditional symbols. Thus, we need to identify some criteria for distinguishing a specifically Symbolist approach to architecture from a traditional symbolic approach.

First, with respect to method or approach, Symbolists typically avoided explicit statement in favor of suggestion or indirection. This was part of a more general tendency of Symbolists to emphasize imagination and subjectivity over reason. Thus, although Gaudi's celebrated Sagrada Família church deploys strangely biomorphic versions of traditional symbols, the façade of his delightful Casa Batlló has more suggestive

elements such as the famous balconies – are they insect or dragon faces, or perhaps carnival masks?

Second, with respect to content, Symbolists tended to reject the sciences and the ideal of progress in favor of spirituality and mystical transcendence, often turning to occult movements. Within that general context, Symbolists dwelt on a variety of themes, although the motifs of decadence, sexuality and death have become notorious. In Gaudi's Casa Milà, spirit and nature seem to come together in a kind of living organism, with its cell like entry, its twining balconies and, on the roof, the alternately comic and menacing chimney pots. Yet one finds little evidence of the decadent and morbid side of Symbolism either here or in Gaudi's other buildings.

Finally, one can, of course, suggest that an architect or a particular project had an important direct or indirect connection to the work of painters, sculptors, or writers who are typically associated with the Symbolist movement. The first two criteria, the preference for indirection or suggestion and the emphasis on spiritualist content, are easier to explore in literature and painting than architecture, since the latter has a practical dimension that must, after all, call on science and technology. Hence, works of architecture will inevitably be a compromise between form and function, decoration and construction that would tend to restrain Symbolist subjectivity. In a previous paper, I argued that there were typical Symbolist elements of indirection and spirituality in Joseph Maria Olbrich's Secession building in Vienna and also indicated the association of Olbrich, Klimt and other Secession members with artists usually considered part of the Symbolist movement.[1] In this essay, I will focus on these topics in the work and career of Charles Rennie Mackintosh since he seems to have had more direct connections to the larger Symbolist movement than Gaudi.

Like most late nineteenth-century architects, Mackintosh thought of the challenge of producing a genuinely modern (rather than Historicist) architecture in terms of the relation between construction and decoration. Of course, other emerging modernists of the time, like Adolf Loos, believed any kind of decoration or ornament was a "crime" and somewhat later Mies van der Rohe would capture the anti-decoration argument in his famous slogan, "less is more." By the mid-twentieth century, the anti-decoration view had become orthodoxy and Art Nouveau, with which architectural historians usually associated Mackintosh and Gaudi, was considered a wrong headed and aborted experiment. It was only with the arrival of post-modern architectural theory that people like Robert Venturi would dare to say "less is a bore" and retrospectively celebrate the work of

architects like Mackintosh for their creative combination of construction and decoration.

One specific reason it makes more sense to explore Mackintosh's architecture in relation to Symbolism than it does the work of Gaudi is that early in his career, through a circle of young women who were Mackintosh's fellow students at the Glasgow School of Art, he came under the influence of several artists and writers we now consider Symbolists. At the time, Mackintosh and his friend, Herbert McNair, worked for an architectural firm by day, took classes at the School of Art at night and often spent their weekends with the "Immortals," as the group of young women artists jokingly called themselves.

The most talented among the "Immortals" were Frances and Margaret Macdonald whose drawings and paintings using plant-like and erotically charged female figures reflect the sinuous line of Beardsley and Toorop, and to allude to themes in Maeterlinck, three figures now associated with "Symbolist" art and literature. In the early 1890s, Mackintosh began painting Symbolist themed and styled watercolors like *Harvest Moon* (1892), with its erotically entangled figures, and the highly personal *Tree of Influence* (1895) whose allusive meanings are hard to pin down. Soon Macintosh and McNair, had paired off with the Macdonald sisters, the group coming to be known at "The Four." Among other work, the Four produced some striking posters for Glasgow exhibitions and came to be known around Glasgow as "The Spook School," an indication that others recognized what would later be called the Symbolist character of their work at this time.

Eventually, Margaret and Charles married and their collaborations deepened. Although one can often assign individual pieces to one or the other of them during the early years of their relationship, the overall effect of the rooms they designed together must be ascribed to both, and although they are rightly associated with Art Nouveau, I believe these interiors also deserve the label Symbolist. The Macintosh's apartment followed a conventional separation of dark masculine spaces like the dining room from the feminine identified white spaces of the drawing room and bedroom. The cheval-de-frise mirror in the bedroom is a tour de force in whose sides some see an erotically charged female curve.

Both Margaret and Charles were invited to Vienna by the Secessionist group in 1901 to take part in an exhibition in the Secession's new building, a building which is itself an example of what could legitimately called a Symbolist tendency in architecture. The room Charles and Margaret created at the Secession had the cheval mirror and a chair from their apartment along with a gesso panel by Margaret above.

Today, Charles Rennie Mackintosh is best known to the general public for his furniture and for the various Glasgow tea rooms he designed with Margaret. The first tea room, on Buchanan street, is notable for a wall panel based on Charles Rennie's 1896 painting of Margaret, which echoes the Symbolist work to which she had introduced him. But the most famous of the tea rooms is The Willow of 1903, for which Charles and Margaret designed several distinct dining areas. Of all the rooms, the upstairs Room de Luxe is where we see the Mackintoshes' most brilliant work. Much of the symbolism here is drawn from the idea of the willow, the tall chair backs forming a kind of willow woods. But the familiar rose motif dear to Margaret is also omnipresent and a large part of the effect comes from the color palette of gray and violet along with the judicious use of leaded glass heavy with curving plant forms.

In 1902 the firm in which Mackintosh became a partner got a commission for a large house whose exterior design reflects what is sometimes called his Romantic Nationalist, sometimes his Arts and Crafts side. Despite the modernist flavor of the wide expanses of white stucco on the exterior, the design alludes to Scottish vernacular in its massing and towers. On the other hand, the interiors are a stunning example of the approach he and Margaret first developed with their own flat, the darker hallways and dining room, giving way to the brilliant off white of the drawing room with its specially designed furniture— including an unusual chair and a square black table. The bedroom is another tour de force in white accented with spots of color. As always, all the furnishings, including chairs, curtains, and carpets, were new designs by Charles Renne Mackintosh, although it is possible Margaret had some role.

So far, I have focused on the Mackintoshes' joint interior design work. One of the dangers attending the search for indirect and suggestive symbolism in this work is over-interpretation. Some writers have been too quick to see sexual allusions in every upright and curve. I find the interiors of the Mackintoshes to be sensual, occasionally even erotic, but, if they are sexual, it is a sexuality of a much sunnier sort than we find in a good deal of Symbolist writing and painting. To that extent it should either be considered non-Symbolist, or, better yet, evidence that our view of what constitutes "Symbolist" art and architecture needs to be enlarged.

Mackintosh's major architectural work and his undoubted masterpiece is the Glasgow School of Art, designed and built in two stages (1897-1899 and 1907-1909). Despite Mackintosh deep belief in his vocation as an artist, he freely accepted the constraints of the program set by the Board of Directors who required suitable spaces for studio classes, exhibitions, study, research, and administration.

The great windows across the north façade give the building a somewhat austere, modernist look, but closer examination shows that there are also many ornamental details that determine its distinctive character. For example, the ironwork on the windows has horizontal bars to hold the window cleaner's boards, but also upward curving iron tendrils, ending in roseate globes. Mackintosh understandably set his most elaborate symbolic details in a dignified and complex central section of the facade. The tension between the straight and arched, and the protruding and receding elements is complemented by many small details, some in iron, others in stone, such as the striking stone relief over the door, showing two female figures whose shape echoes the Symbolist themes of the Four.

The east end of the building has another complex composition of receding and protruding shapes, adorned with delightful touches like the false tower complete with a spirited finial. Here, as elsewhere, Mackintosh shows that his suggestive symbolism can take a humorous turn often lacking in works considered to exemplify the Symbolist mainstream.

When the art school finally had the money to build the west wing, Mackintosh produced another fascinating and complex work. Its most dramatic external feature is the set of enormously high oriel windows that light the library. And then there is the striking entry with its protruding, almost art deco surround; it has been used as a model for bookends. Is this architectural imagination run riot? It verges on pure play, yet Mackintosh knew how to integrate these intense and sometimes playful elements in a way that gives vitality to the whole.

As for the interior, neither the architectural program nor the budget had a place for any sort of grand atrium to greet one, although the stairwell leading up to the offices, classrooms and museum/gallery on the upper floor does have dignity and interest; but here again the devil is in the details. Consider the great posts that reach up two stories or more and are given flat caps that seem to hover in the air above the second level. Or consider the wooden trusses of the museum ceiling with their bows and central paddles containing cutouts. If we compare these to the trusses of the anatomy and the life drawing classrooms, we see that Mackintosh's restless imagination will not let him use some standard form or even repeat his own forms. A similar originality applies to the Director's office and the Board Room, one light, the other dark, the darker Board Room fit out with Mackintosh's riff on the classical pilaster, perhaps a jab at the Board's conservatism which often led them to resist aspects of his design. And we must not forget the small colored glass insets he designed for many of the building's doors. One is hard pressed to say exactly what each of

Mackintosh's decorative elements in stone, iron, wood, or glass symbolizes. Do they allude to hidden meanings, or are they intended only to remind us that this is an art school, where imaginative creation is the main business?

Finally, we come to the library, lighted from outside by those enormous oriel windows and from within by Mackintosh's hanging lanterns (electric lights were a relatively new technology) whose geometric design would not be out of place in a contemporary building. In the library, the wooden posts are surely a tree symbol, becoming a veritable forest, a dark place of meditation and reflection, yet at the same time it has openings that draw in light and create movement, the whole unified by Mackintosh's big magazine rack and table in the center opening. One should also notice the way he has set back the balcony and decorated this set back with carved and brightly colored up rights, small spots of color that enliven and bring a note of gaiety into a darkly sensuous space. One might argue that the library is indeed a "Symbolist" work in the sense that it seems full of suggestive and indirect meanings; it sets our imagination to work, giving it much to contemplate but shaping no definite thought.

The library spaces and details, like the many symbolic elements in the exterior iron work, or the many colored glass insets in the doors, reflect a suggestive approach similar to that of other Symbolist art forms, although Mackintosh was also quite capable of more direct symbolic references, such as the classical notes in the Board Room or the decorative tower and dummy dovecote on the exterior façade that echo Scottish Baronial architecture. Considered as a whole, the Glasgow School of Art is replete with *both* symbolism and Symbolist tendencies, but it is at the same time an eminently practical building that has been in continuous use for over a hundred years and still serves its purposes very well.

Are we justified in considering Mackintosh's architecture as having a Symbol<u>ist</u> and not just <u>symbolic</u> tendencies? We have seen some evidence in favor of it. But Mackintosh himself made remarks in two of his rare lectures that show he consciously embraced the approach of using suggestion or indirection, and at the same time an emphasis on some of the spiritual and mystical elements we associate with Symbolism, although not its rejection of technology and science or its darker preoccupations.

First, on approach:

> "The fairy tale which architecture embodies, is told in an even more obscure and indirect manner than in painting, literature, or music…"

> "But if you mean by magic that quality which takes architecture above building, and painting beyond paint . . . we must all profess . . . magic."[2]

Then, on content:

> "Art is the flower – Life is the green leaf . . . you must offer the flower of the art that is in you – the symbols of all that is noble – and beautiful – and inspiring – flowers that will often change a colourless cheerless life – into an animated thoughtful thing."[3]

Mackintosh's ideas on indirection have an affinity with the generally Symbolist approach to art making and his ideas on content suggest a brighter and warmer version of the spiritual and mystical aspirations of much art called Symbolist. Yet Mackintosh was too creative and too much of an individualist to fit comfortably into any of the art historical categories that have been associated with his work, whether Symbolist, Art Nouveau, or Arts and Crafts.

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Notes

[1] "Symbolism and Crime: Architecture of the Vienna Secession," in Rosina Neginsky, ed., *Symbolism, its origins and consequences* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 116-128.

[2] Charles Rennie Mackintosh, "Architecture," (1893), in Pamela Robertson, *Mactintosh, Charles Rennie: the architectural papers*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 209.

[3] Macintosh, "Seemliness," (1902), in Robertson, *Macintosh, Charles Rennie: the* a*rchitectural papers,* 224.

CHAPTER TWO

SYMBOLIST INTERIORS: FIGURES, LIGHT, AND COLORS IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY ITALIAN STAINED GLASS

LUCIA MANNINI

The interior of the early twentieth century was shaded and protected. A number of historians of design and decoration have already shown how nineteenth-century interiors were hostile to the penetration of light: thick curtains, with heavy cloth and velvets letting only a thin shaft of light enter through from the window, the pale rays increasing the allure of the objects and figures within. The bright light of day never entered these rooms. Where curtains offered an insufficient barrier against the light, a thick growth of creepers on exterior walls and luxuriant palms and other indoor plants, often arranged on shelves in bay windows, created a green shade.[1] Between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, as Art Nouveau gained hold and especially the modernism of German origin, interiors were reorganized and purified, with the removal of clutter, especially of the ornaments that usually crowded every surface. Art Nouveau also eliminated heavy curtains to let the light in, now considered for its aesthetic value and even more importantly as a moral symbol. However, during this period, light was still attenuated and it was not until the thirties that bright light was allowed to enter unhindered. Before the thirties, the glare of sunlight was filtered through much lighter curtains, but also through coloured glass, which came to play a leading role in architecture and interiors.

The Italian stained glass discussed in this study all belongs to the early twentieth century, to the period when the ideas of Art Nouveau and modernism were spreading in Europe. In this period there was resistance to the aesthetics of the late nineteenth-century for interior design, but there

was a lingering admiration for shadowy and coloured spaces, for cozy and crepuscular atmospheres, and for Symbolist evocations through light. In this regard, stained glass became fundamental in determining the Symbolist interior.

Literary historians have defined the Symbolist interior by studying the rooms described in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Stéphané Mallarmé, Joris Karl Huysmans, etc.[2] We would like to explore similarities between the characteristics described in those writings and those that actually existed in real interiors. We will concentrate on stained glass elements, using a few Italian examples.

The window has been for a long time interpreted as a symbol, especially when it is seen as functioning like a diaphragm, separating and uniting space at the same time. With the ascent of Romanticism the window held a special fascination for painters, writers and poets, often becoming a metaphor for the artist's view of the world, and for even more, as we can see especially in the Symbolist period (see, for example, Baudelaire's celebrated poem *Les fenêtres*).[3]

Stained glass was loaded with hidden meaning and lent itself to Symbolist interpretations on two levels: as a decorative and furnishing element in which the glass became a way of expressing Symbolist themes, in the same way as painting (stained glass is treated as a transparent painting); and, most notably, for the atmosphere the stained glass created within the interplay of light, allowing changing and often ill-defined colours to enter a space, as shifting and uncertain as the soul of the room's inhabitant. The coloured glass, both luminous and opalescent, enclosing the space but not confining it, was effectively very congenial to the Symbolist metaphorical vision of reality.[4]

Fig. 2-1. Historical photograph of a stained glass created by Jacques Gruber, ca. 1900.

Furthermore, stained glass was suited to the illusionistic vision, with the taste for the artificial so much favored by Symbolist literature (see Huysmans, *À rebours*, for the flight from the world in favor of artificial stimuli and the rejection of nature in the proclamation of the triumph of the artificial). In some examples of spaces still existing today or documented in historical photographs (Figs. 2-1 and 2-2), the role of the stained glass is clear in creating an interplay between the natural landscape and an "artificial" nature, as well as causing a sensation of being placed in an aquarium (in literature we think again of the hero of *À rebours*, who lets light in through an aquarium to which he has added drops of colour). In short, this was the general use of stained glass in the shaded interior of the Symbolist period.

Fig. 2-2. Historical photograph of the Otto Wagner House in Vienna, ca. 1900 with stained glass, titled *Vienna Woods in the Autumn* by Adolf Böhm.

In Italy too, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there are examples of stained glass that can be linked to Symbolist culture in two ways: on the one hand, an important role is played by stained glass which represents the same subjects depicted in Symbolist painting (they look like transparent paintings) (Fig. 2-3), and, on the other hand, there is stained glass whose subject is less important than the Symbolist mood, conveyed through the evocative and suggestive lighting, thereby creating Symbolist interiors. I shall later give examples that belong to the second category.

In Italy as in other European cultures, writings of the early twentieth century about stained glass reflect Symbolist aesthetics. In numerous texts, we can find the idea of hiding the ugly outside and separating it from the intimacy of the domestic interior by creating an environment for personal contemplation, and above all by protecting it from the outside world as a refuge and a symbol of a "dreamt" life.

Fig. 2-3. Duilio Cambellotti, *Fireflies*, ca. 1920. Rome, Private Collection.

"Against the wind. Against the cold. Against the light. Against peeping-toms. Against ugliness and for love." Such reads the script in a banderole which links two rose branches, a pattern introduced in 1905 by the decorator Edgardo Calori for the stained glass of a private room.[5] This concise definition, structured on negation, encapsulates the *raison d'être* of stained glass in early twentieth-century Italian homes, uniting practical and functional reasons to aesthetic ones in thinking about an interior space. The description echoes recurring themes from the nineteenth century about the search for protection and refuge from the external world, in the desire to hide and banish the ugly "outside" in favor of domestic intimacy and to create an environment that lent itself to private gatherings and love. The desire for protection from the ugliness of the outside world, which the nineteenth-century houses achieved through having heavy curtains, is instead found in coloured stained glass.

In Italy too, moreover, modern houses began to be designed with cleaner lines and with more sober decoration; interiors were freed from the air of artistic confusion, so unpopular with the new bourgeois society, but the fascination of suffused light lingered on, and was made colourful and even more seductive through stained glass.

Fig. 2-4. Photograph from an Italian stained glass manufacturer's catalogue, early 20th century.

"It is with colour that stained glass becomes an object which assumes different characters, that of magnificence or sweetness, of mystery or pomp. Whether colour is intense and pure or of a subtle and melancholic gradation, coloured glass highlights the values of light, or it makes them softer. It can make the rays vibrate to the point of creating a tumult of colours or it can modulate them to the point of silence."[6] This quotation, written in 1908, comes from a magazine meant for technicians and specialists in the production and processing of stained glass, but uses terms that are similar to the ones many artists and decorators of stained glass used in the early 1900s in Italy. Fascination for coloured light was not set against the scientific approach that characterized these years, because many artists often applied the strong emotional power of colours to an interior drawing taking the scientific studies as their starting point. Those scientific studies were investigating and demonstrating the influence of colours on mood and the psyche. For example, in the same magazine, we read: "nowhere else…does the moral meaning of colours (I mean their secret relationship to our emotions) strike us more profoundly than with glass, because the transparency adds expression and even poetry… It follows that if one colour dominates in the stained glass, it will impose a character on the objects of the furnishings."[7]

In Italy there were several cases of illusionistic stained glass, in which the compositions, representing in an illusionistic – and often theatrical – manner the real architectural elements, suggested, with deliberate ambiguity, the presence of nature outside the window. Through the glass one could attempt to immerse oneself in and "escape" into nature. But even in this search for nature, one moved simultaneously in the direction of the artificial (Fig. 2-4).

In our analysis of the role of stained glass in the Italian cultural milieu, we can now direct our focus to an exemplary cultural circle, worthy of our attention as it allows a comparison between interiors incorporating stained glass that were actually designed and realized, and theoretical writing. I refer to a modernist group in Rome that included artists Duilio Cambellotti, Umberto Bottazzi, Vittorio Grassi among them, but also the poet, scholar and critic Guido Menasci and the pedagogue Alessandro Marcucci. They were all united by the ideal of extending modern beauty into daily life through a unified approach to architecture and interior design, according to the aesthetics of functional simplicity (often with a distinctly medieval, anti-Liberty flavor). The stained glass designed by the artists of this group, was always realized by the glassmaker Cesare Picchiani.[8]

The artists often worked together putting their ideals into practice and their theories were established and discussed in the magazine *La Casa*, published between 1908 and 1913 (Fig. 2-5).

Fig. 2-5. Title page of the magazine *La Casa.*

The type of house they built that was described in *La Casa* was a single family unit, the so called *villino* (Fig. 2-6). The term *villino* refers to a building type that was gaining in popularity throughout Italy, with the growth of the social class destined to inhabit it: the middle class. It shared a number of characteristics, but varied according to the owner's social and economic position and in relation to the buildings around it. In general it might be described as a small villa with a small garden. It was supposed to be built back from the road to create space for a garden around the house so that nature was visible from every window. Often, however, green space was sacrificed for economic reasons: the gardens were reduced to a minimum and the *villini* were surrounded by other larger apartment buildings. The stained glass was often relied upon to substitute for nature. With this in mind, we can understand how the main theme of the stained glass was naturalistic, loaded with allusive and Symbolic meaning.

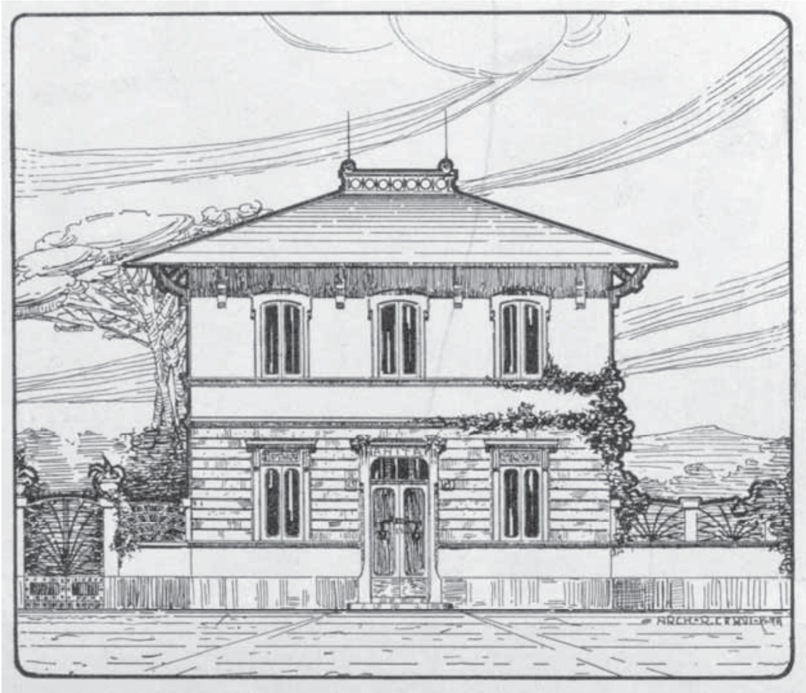

Fig. 2-6. Illustration of a *villino* from the magazine *La Casa*.

In 1908, the year it first appeared, the magazine *La Casa* gave ample space to the window that brought life and joy into the domestic interior, combining advice regarding hygiene and aesthetics with reflections on stained glass. The first recommendation was to eliminate heavy curtains as the repositories of dust and germs. The health-giving benefits of light were promoted, although at that time it was still to be filtered: thin, light curtains were to be adopted, shielding the eye from the monotony of a neighboring wall beyond, but also bringing "to the eye and spirit the grace of flowers." These curtains were embroidered, and flowers were variously represented as a main theme whenever nature failed to provide them.[9] Similarly, stained glass was designed to bring spiritual nourishment in the form of landscapes and tumbling flowers.

A characteristic way of furthering an illusionistic relationship with the exterior world that these artists also used was to limit the decorative sections of the glass to the borders of the window letting light flow freely though the transparent centre, like a pergola: an allusion, perhaps, to the structure which stood, or should have stood, against the walls of the *villino*. Thus, the windows were decoratively framed with trellises of vines, and especially with cascades of wisterias and roses, the very plants that the magazine recommended for growing on the outside walls (Figs. 2-7 and 2-8).[10]

Fig. 2-7. Duilio Cambellotti, *Grapevines*, 1914-1915. Rome, Museo della Casina delle Civette.

The stained glass might also show other subjects drawn from nature, but so distorted or enlarged as to appear fantastical: it could shatter any naturalistic illusion in order to create an unexpected and bewildering effect, and to evoke magical visions. Examples include giant dragonflies and butterflies (Fig. 2-9), and especially fish (Fig. 2-10) that glanced across the glass, or moved in ambiguous spaces, the glass suggesting the shifting light of the sea.[11]

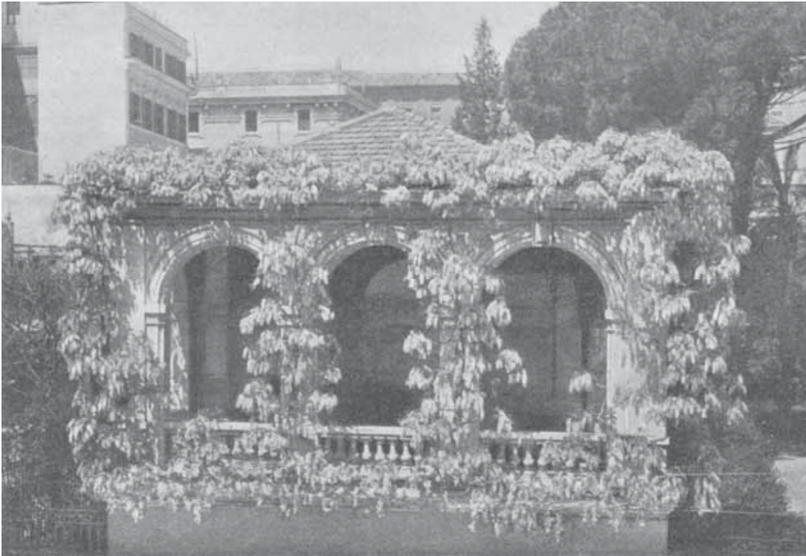

Fig. 2-8. Illustration of a Roman exterior with wisteria, from the magazine *La Casa*.

Many natural subjects can be seen in the so called *Casina delle Civette (House of Owls*) in Rome, a very large and special *villino* restored in the early twentieth century by Prince Giovanni Torlonia and decorated by Roman artists (circa 1913-1920).[12] Here the stained glass designed by the Roman artists was produced by the glassmaker Cesare Picchiani. Vegetation on the outside played an important role and was echoed by stained glass with pergolas of grapevines and roses, like those that also grew outside the building (Fig. 2-7).[13] While in the bedroom there were the windows *The Owls of the Night*, the presence of the owls probably did not correspond to any external reality, but was an allusion to the personality of Prince Giovanni Torlonia, who had the villa decorated with owls and other animal motifs because of their symbolic meanings.

In this regard, we must remember that in addition to the naturalistic repertoire – used in the illusionistic or fantastical manner – the Roman artists used stained glass to convey Symbolist meanings,[14] but this is not the place to attempt an analysis of their significance, as our present interest is in the creation of lighting effects and atmosphere.

Indeed, Roman artists considered the Symbolist value of the glass to be found, above all, in the light and atmosphere created inside the house, rather than in the nature of the subject matter. For example, in 1909, the artist Umberto Bottazzi wrote: "Flowers, animals, clouds, geometrical patterns, anything could be used" in the design of the stained glass, as long as it assisted in the creation of "a corner in which to meditate and dream with open eyes. And meditation and dreaming were provoked by the various colours of the glass."[15]

Fig. 2-9. Umberto Bottazzi, *Butterflies* in a photograph. Location unknown.

In 1908, the stained glass windows in *La Casa* are described as "fantastic paintings, vague shadows that inhabit the world of dreams, where it is precious and life-giving to dwell for short spells, removed from the trials and blows of life…; unreal visions and imaginative colour harmonies, like some silent music, lead us into a fabled land." Since people complained that the view from the windows was no longer that "restorative expanse of countryside, nor the comfortable proximity of a tree, nor the august vision of a monument, of a building, but the squalid line of houses and high, modern buildings, long, flat, crammed together,

hostile and thus it is fitting that the inhabitants of the city would ask for help from art (stained glass) to allow them to meditate, enjoy, and fantasize in their own home."[16]

The stained glass made by the Roman artists and exhibited in Rome in 1912 was described in similar terms by Giuseppe Sprovieri, the critic and gallery owner, who was close to the group. He emphasized how the stained glass differed from paintings: "while in a painting, it is essential to create a setting, stained glass enhances it." Furthermore, stained glass "creates thousands of colour effects, with a different play of light and shadow during the course of the day, a delicate web of seduction and alluring fascination causing the imagination to surrender and navigate with open sails towards the land of dreams and nostalgia."[17] The characteristic of stained glass evoked here responded to the aesthetic ideals of the Roman modernist group amenable to the dreams and imagination of those who could abandon themselves to their charm as they would to the sound of music.

Fig. 2-10. Vittorio Grassi, *Fish* in an historical photograph. Rome, Private Collection.

The Roman artists saw glass then primarily as a means of abandonment to visions and dreams, analogous to music. However, scientific research on the influence of colour on the psyche also

contributed to the important emotional role played by coloured light that these artists had recognized as well. Those who wrote for *La Casa* gave considerable weight to a room's colour and its effect on the nervous system[18] and mood. Roman artists demonstrated these theories in their creations. In a *villino* created by Bottazzi and Grassi in 1911, for example, the varied chromatic effects of different rooms were closely studied. These chromatic effects were achieved by coloured plaster walls and majolica cladding, but especially by stained glass. It is a work in stained glass that exemplifies the importance the artists gave to coloured light and as well as the complex link between art, music, and science: Vittorio Grassi designed glass for the music room of this *villino*. The window is now lost but a painting,[19] which has been the source of inspiration, and a sketch for it have survived (Fig. 2-11). The work reflects Grassi's interests in issues regarding light, colour and music. As a matter of fact, the artist had been following lectures from classes held by the physicist Pietro Blaserna, looking into the relationship between light and sound,[20] and he had also invented a special piano connected to a panel made of coloured divisions which lighted up when the corresponding chord was played.[21]

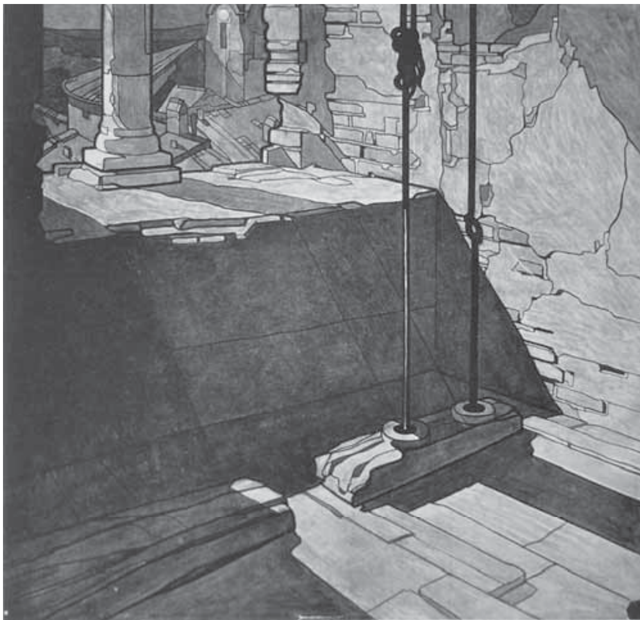

Fig. 2-11. Vittorio Grassi, *Chopin Nocturno op. 48, n°1,* ca. 1908. Sketch for the stained glass.

We cannot discuss this theme at length here, but the stained glass of the 1911 *villino* merely offers some indication of Grassi's approach. The titles of the painting and of the stained glass were related to a musical "nocturnal" composition by Chopin: the musical reference is not clear from the subject (the interior of a bell-tower in the moonlight), but with the nocturnal atmosphere and the colours enhanced by light and shade, the pictorial language aims to evoke the same fascination and feelings evoked by Chopin's music. While the parallel between sound and light can be grasped intuitively from the chromatic harmonies and emphasized chiaroscuro of the extant painting, it must have been more clearly demonstrated in the stained glass of the 1911 *villino*.

Indeed the stained glass panel, "of a cold, bluish tone with pale yellows and intriguing transparencies,"[22] was devised for a small room whose dark blue colouring "encased it in a strangely inviting shadow"[23] and was described as a "pictorial sensation akin to a nocturne by Chopin."[24] The artist's intention was clearly to inspire a "sensation," demonstrating the parallel between sound and coloured light, through the relationship between acoustic vibrations created in the room by the "Welte piano" (a modern mechanical instrument reproducing the recorded performances of famous composers) and light vibrations created by the stained glass, spreading blue and yellow throughout the room, just like music diffused intangibly, in that space full of suggestions of light and shadow.

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Notes

[1]See, for example, the description of the nineteenth-century interior in Dolf Sternberger, *Panorama; oder, Ansichten vom 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: H. Govert, 1938), in the Italian trans. *Panorama del XIX secolo* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1985), 192-193.

[2]See Liana Nissim, *Storia di un tema simbolista, gli interni* (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1980).

[3]"Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermé. Il n'est pas d'objet plus profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux, plus éblouissant qu'un fenêtre éclairée d'une chandelle. Ce qu'on peut voir au soleil est toujours moins intéressant que ce qui se passe derrière une vitre. Dans ce trou noir ou lumineux vit la vie, rêve la vie, souffre la vie".

[4]Definition from Rossana Bossaglia, « Il fenomeno Liberty », in *La vetrata Liberty a Milano*, catalogue of the exhibition held in Milan in 1990 (Milan: Comune, 1990), 15.

[5]"Invetriate dipinte per un piccolo quartiere d'abitazione", *Arte Italiana Decorativa e Industriale*, (1905): tav.49.

[6]Francesco Rolandi, "Note tecniche. Il vetro", *Arte ceramica e vetraria*, (March 1908): 42.

[7]Francesco Rolandi, "Note tecniche. Il vetro", *Arte ceramica e vetraria*, (April-May 1908): 57.

[8]For the stained glass of these artists see the catalogue of the exhibition held in Rome, Alberta Campitelli and Daniela Fonti, *Tra vetri e diamanti: la vetrata artistica a Roma 1912-1925*, (Rome: Edizioni Carte Segrete, 1991) and Alberta Campitelli, *Il Museo della Casina della civette* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1997).

[9]Alma [Alessandro Marcucci], "La casa da cima a fondo. VI. Le finestre", *La Casa*, (1908): 209.

[10]Armando Foresta, "Vera decorazione floreale", *La Casa*, (1908): 7-10. This Italian trend developed by the artists of the group *La Casa* mirrored the international taste; in Italian stained glass, vines, wisteria, roses recalled a familiar and daily image but at the same time evoked an allusion to artificial nature. Similarly, at Laurelton Hall, Tiffany's home on Long Island, wisteria hung from pergolas outside the window just as it was depicted on the glass within. (We refer to Tiffany because he was among the first and most famous to use stained glass in this way, and also because the Roman artists were undoubtedly influenced by him).

[11]The fish were drawn from Japanese models (previously used by La Farge and Tiffany), and were perfectly suited to reinforcing the underwater or aquarium

associations already mentioned.
[12]Prince Giovanni Torlonia lived there until 1938. After a period of neglect, the villa was restored and now serves as a museum dedicated to stained glass.
[13]It is not just by chance that there were pergolas of vines and roses between plants documented outside the *Casina*: see Alberta Campitelli, in *Il Museo della Casina della civette* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1997), 48-52.
[14]Their glass was often decorated with complex motifs; many of the more obscure symbols have still to be deciphered, such as the idol or the prism by Vittorio Grassi or the fireflies or the fairy by Cambellotti.
[15]Umberto Bottazzi, "Ceramiche e vetri", *La Casa*, (1909): 44.
[16]"La casa da cima a fondo. VI. Le finestre", *La Casa*, (1908): 209.
[17]Giuseppe Sprovieri, "Cronachetta artistica. La mostra della vetrata a Roma", *Emporium*, (1912): 2.
[18]See, for example, Alma [Alessandro Marcucci], "La casa da cima a fondo. Le pareti", *La Casa*, (1908): 169-171 (about walls colours); V. G. (Vittorio Grassi), "Camera da letto per signora, *La Casa*, (1909): 184-185.
[19]The first idea of this subject dates from 1905, when Grassi presented the painting *Notturno I opera di Chopin*, now lost; then in 1908 he presented the painting *Chopin Notturno I opera IX, n. 1*, that is now in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome. The stained glass derives from this second painting. About this painting and Grassi's predilection for musical and nocturnal themes, see the catalogue of the exhibition held in Padua, Italy in 2011-2012, Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli and Fernando Mazzocca, *Il simbolismo in Italia*, (Venezia: Marsilio, 2011), 244.
[20]See the catalogue of the exhibition held in Rome in 2007 for the essay by Francesco Tetro, "Le radici del modernismo di Vittorio Grassi: dalla 'profondità del vero' e dal richiamo del Medioevo verso la sintesi delle arti", in *Il modernismo a Roma, 1900-1915: tra le riviste "Novissima" e "La Casa"* (Roma: Palombi, 2007), 33, 36. About artists interested in professor Blaserna's lessons, see Anna Mazzanti, *Simbolismo italiano fra arte e critica: Mario de Maria e Angelo Conti* (Firenze: Le lettere, 2007), 67-68.
[21]Francesco Tetro, "Le radici del modernismo di Vittorio Grassi: dalla 'profondità del vero' e dal richiamo del Medioevo verso la sintesi delle arti", in *Il modernismo a Roma, 1900-1915: tra le riviste "Novissima" e "La Casa"*, 33-38.
[22]"Alcuni particolari decorativi del villino costruito dalla società *La Casa*", *La Casa*, (1911): 201-211. Compared with the painting, the sketch for the stained glass reveals an intensification of blue and yellow.
[23] "Il villino della Società *La Casa*", *La Casa*, (1911): 186.
[24]"Il villino della Società *La Casa*", *La Casa*, (1911): 198.

PART TWO:

VISUAL ARTS

CHAPTER THREE

THE SYMBOLIST PATH OF ARMAND POINT

ROBERT DORE

Fig. 3-1. Armand Point, *Self-Portrait*

Armand Point becomes a Symbolist[1]

At the end of 1888, Péladan[2] introduced Armand Point to Symbolism. One of his first works marked by this aesthetic is *Portrait d'Élémir Bourges* (Fig. 3-2), a depiction of one of Point's greatest friends.[3]

Fig. 3-2. Armand Point, *Portrait d'Elémir Bourges*

During his early years as a Symbolist, Armand Point created art with a rather melancholy mysticism. His works represented feminine figures, nudes with slender forms or young women with long, old-fashioned dresses, sitting or walking in landscapes of forests and lakes that reflected a crepuscular deadened light. The artist's palette also changed: there was more gray, ocher, and deadened mauve. He enhanced the tints and used delicate and fine techniques in pastel and red chalk, although the majority of his works were in pastel.

Symbolist Themes by Armand Point

Since the revival of interest in Symbolism during the 1960s and with the Exhibition *Paradis perdus*[4] in 1995, studies conducted throughout Europe, have put European and American artists in a prominent position. The exhibition of *Peintres de l'Âme,*[5] curated by M. Jumeau-Lafond, and the publication of *Symbolisme idéaliste en France* focused mainly on artists of *la Rose-Croix* and *les Artistes de l'Âme*[6] and included an extensive commentary on Point.

The following addresses important *Symbolist* works of Armand Point and the main themes that were taken up by the artist.

Woman

Woman, a major theme of Symbolist thought, has been the subject of a special exhibition,[7] *Le Symbolisme et la Femme* in which Béatrice de Andia established a large survey of art addressing the subject.[8] Works of Point exemplify the popularity of this theme.

Until 1892, young ethereal women embodied ideal beauty for the artist. Works presented in 1893 reveal various aspects of women: a mysterious woman is depicted in *Tête de rêve* (Fig. 3-3) and another is dressed in velvet, as a symbol of purity, as in *Virginité*[9] (Fig. 3-4).

Fig. 3-3. Armand Point, *Tête de rêve*

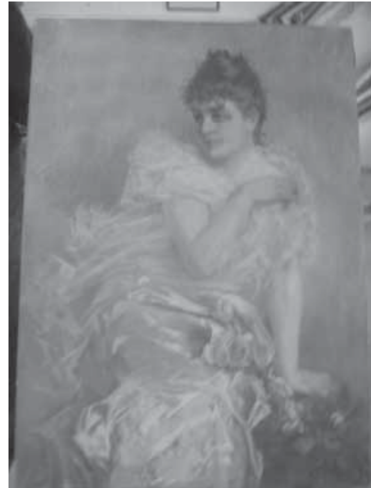

Fig. 3-4. Point, V*irginité*

Muses

From 1891, Armand Point shared his life with Hélène Linder who appeared more than fifty times in his oeuvre. In *La Dame à l'anémone*, Hélène Linder's[10] portrait testifies to a serene passion between model and artist, a passion that lasted until 1899 before their relationship turned into an enduring friendship.

In 1901, the arrival of the Scandinavian beauty Helga Weeke in Marlotte produced in Point a passion which stimulated his desire to create

new portraits, particularly *Jeune femme à la toque verte* (Fig. 3-5). But Armand and Helga did not last beyond 1908 as a couple.

Fig. 3-5. *Jeune femme à la toque verte*

Fig. 3-6. *Salomé dansant*

Hair

Hair was a charming feminine weapon; fastened or loosened, it was a sign of availability or *don de soi*. Point is sensitive to the charm of hair, particularly in *Tête de rêve* (Fig. 3-3), in *Salomé [dansant]* (Fig. 3-6) and in *Baigneuse aux lauriers,*[11] which has the figure with red, almost infinite, wavy hair recalling Mary Magdalene.[12]

Twilights and Nocturnes

Few works of Armand Point deal with the theme of twilight or night. Hélène still personified these temporal symbols in *Symphonie du soir*[13] (Fig. 3-7). These moments of solitude and melancholy depicted the young lady set against a background of calm water reflecting a setting sun. She inhabited the unreal realm of the dream.

Fig. 3-7. *Symphonie du soir*

Fig.3-8. *La Sirène*

Feminine Evil and Eroticism: The Siren and Salome

The temptress who leads man on the road to ruin appears in Point's world in 1897. Her presence is probably related to emotional problems; the first signs of a breakdown in his relationship with Hélène Linder appeared during their stay in Capri where the image of women changes. *La Sirène* (Fig. 3-8) shows a new feminine type with more detail, creating a face far from Hélène's and closer to the Greek classical canon,[14] with a cold, impersonal and disturbing expression.

Salome was a very frequent subject for the fin de siècle thinkers, particularly Gustave Moreau and Oscar Wilde.[15] On the extreme opposite side of their tragic and bloody visions, Point was principally inspired by Filippo Lippi and his *Danse de Salomé*.[16] In *Salomé [dansant]* (Fig. 3-6) the young woman with her slender, arched lines and her swirling veils, tipped back her head and looked into Herod's eyes with a deep intensity.[17]

Death

With *Ophélie,* a pastel, Point found the theme in which the purity of the budding flower contrasted with the eroticism of the red hair of the dead young woman floating on water and represented the ambivalence of desire

and death.[18] He used this subject again, shortly after 1900, in the *Coffret d'Ophélie.*[19] Affected by the sudden death of Gisèle Gouverneur in 1926,[20] he called her posthumous portrait, *La rose des ruines* (Fig. 3-9).

Fig. 3-9. *La rose des ruines*

Fig. 3-10. *Ancilla Domini*

Christian Themes

Ancilla Domini (Fig. 3-10), from 1890-1897, is the most significant work of Christian inspiration. In *Coffret aux paons,*[21] both principal motifs, peacocks and grapes, common in the Middle Ages, were also inspired by Christianity.[22]

The Middle Ages, their Princesses, and the Golden Legend

For Point, woman became princess as in *Princesse de légende, Princesse d'automne* or fairy as in *La Fée du lac* (Fig. 3-11). All of the characters of young women were derived from stories and myths of the

Middle Ages.[23] Hélène Linder with her stylized face is depicted in *L'éternelle chimère* walking quietly at the water's edge, absorbed in her reading, ignoring the apple tree from the Garden of Eden.[24]

Fig. 3-11. *La Fée du lac*

Probably influenced by Stuart Merrill, Point inhabited the marvelous fairy world of the Middle Ages as a Christian and layman. As in numerous works of Haute-Claire, such as the enameled panels of *Coffret aux paons,*[25] graceful musicians with undulating profiles charm us and reside among a stylized vegetation where one meets the tempting snake, a goat, peacocks, and butterflies….

Fig. 3-12. *Légende dorée* (Chromolithographie)

Armand Point created the *Légende dorée* (Fig. 3-12) which shows two young women, one on the left (Hélène), with half-closed eyes and her hair twisted into a complicated chignon and long braids, the other one, with her loose hair, slightly smiling; they represent a wise and mad virgin.

In 1882, the Musée de Cluny purchased a set of six tapestries, called *La Dame à la licorne.*[26] In *Princesse à la Licorne,*[27] Armand Point adapted the theme and depicted an idealized Hélène Linder,[28] with a distant expression on her face and an aggressive demeanor.

Mythology

The few mythological themes that occurred at the beginning of Point's Symbolist career were given more importance until they represented the core of his inspiration during his last period (probably because of Élémir Bourges's influence). About 1916, in a set of works among which is *Psyché [au bain]* (Fig. 3-13), Gisèle Gouverneur personified a new transformation of the goddess that should be viewed within the context of the war. The grave face of Gisèle, nude at the Styx's edge with her immaculate whiteness. contrasts with dark trees and rocks. Such gravity takes the place of joy and serenity found in depictions of women in previous periods.

Fig. 3-13. *Psyché au bain*

In 1896, Armand Point referred to the theme of Perseus[29] in the poster for the 5th *Salon de la Rose+Croix*. He transposed the fatal moment of the beheading of Medusa who is replaced here by Emile Zola, the most important contemporary realist author and a great admirer of Impressionist art. Perseus was conceived as the executioner of the *Ordre de la Rose+Croix*, managed at that time by Joséphin Péladan. In the background, the rising sun heralds the triumph of Symbolism.

Fig. 3-14. *L'Effort humain*

In 1913, Armand Point finished his greatest composition, *L'Effort humain*, in Rome (Fig. 3-14) after almost fourteen years. It was inspired by *The Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel and by Bourges' *La Nef,* the masterpiece that his friend had labored on since 1893. What are the symbols in *L'Effort humain*? Aristide Marie tells us: "En 1913, c'est bien une pensée de Bourges qu'il résume dans cette vaste page qu'il intitule 'Le néant de l'effort humain.'" The scene spreads out under a dense group of trees, symbolic of nature's durability, at the base of which men and women of all ages are busily engaged. Narcisse and Beauty are dying on the ground while a child, aided by Homer, climbs up the summit; a woman suckles and the Danaids testify to the Sisyphean task of humanity.[30]

The Sources of Armand Point's Imagery

Gustave Moreau

In 1969, Philippe Jullian commenting on *La Sirène* described Point as "froid imitateur de Gustave Moreau."[31] However, the two artists probably never met each other and works of Moreau were not very accessible during his life,[32] except at the exhibit of 1889. Point may have seen reproductions of some of Moreau's work such as '*L'Apparition*'[33] or enameled plaques by Grandhomme and Garnier. Despite some similarity of subjects by Moreau and Point (the Siren, Unicorn and Salome), the dramatic atmosphere of Moreau's paintings is very different from the atmosphere in Point's work. This is why we might question the aesthetic

similarities of work by both artists. We think that Point is not '*un imitateur'* of Moreau and cannot be considered as a member of his artistic domain ('*mouvance*'); the similarity of some themes by both artists is probably not a deliberate intention of the painter from Marlotte.

Armand Point and the English Pre-Raphaelites

Artists of the *Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (PRB) who formed their group in 1848 chose a name that referred to Raphael. What knowledge of these Pre-Raphaelites may Armand Point have had at the beginning of the 1890s?

He had probably seen the two paintings of Burne-Jones, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* and *Perseus and the Graiae*, exhibited in Paris in 1889 and 1893 and he had perhaps consulted the books of Ernest Chesneau.[34] However, there is no evidence of a direct relationship between Point and the Pre-Raphaelites that some critics still maintain. To my mind, Point had followed, more simply, the rules of Péladan that he had accepted as a member of the *Salons de la Rose-Croix*. During his first Symbolist period Armand Point knew little about the Pre-Raphaelites, but in 1894 he lived for many months in Italy where he studied Italian painting. Point wasn't an aesthetic descendant of the Pre-Raphaelites; he descends in direct line from Italian Primitives. He is only the cousin of those Pre-Raphaelites and was a rather distant cousin at that time.

This situation changed after the creation of Haute-Claire in 1896 because Stuart Merrill instilled his knowledge of William Morris in Point and helped him work in a new way.[35]

Conclusion

For Armand Point, Symbolism was founded on the "lien mystérieux des choses et des êtres" as Baudelaire's quotation points out in the epigraph of his article about Symbolists:

> La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
> Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles ;
> L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
> Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.[36]

Armand Point still pursued a past Golden Age in many works. He painted an ideal, intangible and indestructible world, inherited from the past, of which the ancient Greeks formed the perfect model. He wished for the return of a Golden Age that could be eternal. This quest took place

in an atmosphere of a dream, close to Signac's *Au Temps d'Harmonie* from 1895. Signac's painting is a testimony to a quest for an ideal future that is akin to Point's ideal, founded on a mythical past.

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Fig. 3-2. Armand Point, *Portrait d'Elémir Bourges*, 1890, drawing with charcoal on cardboard, 37 x 27 cm. Exhibition Esthètes et Magiciens, Paris, Musée Galliéra, 1970. Private Collection (Photo Credit: Private owner).

Fig. 3-3. Armand Point, *Tête de rêve*, drawing, circa 1892, 32 x 25 cm. Salon de la Rose+Croix 1893, Sale, London, Sotheby's, XIXth century-European paintings, drawings ..., 2nd March 1987 (Photo Credit: Private owner).

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Fig. 3-7. Armand Point, *Symphonie du soir*, 1893, oil on canvas, 87 x 5 cm. Exposition internationale de Peinture et Sculpture, Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 1893.

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Fig. 3-13. Armand Point, *Psyché [au bain]*, 1916, oil on canvas, 98 x 71 cm. Mairie-musée de Bourron-Marlotte. Photograph Courtesy of Les Amis de Bourron-Marlotte.
Fig. 3-14. Armand Point, *L'Effort humain*, 1913, oil on canvas, 400 x 800 cm. Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts, 1914.

Notes

[1] Armand Point studied in Paris from 1870 to 1878 and began his artistic career in Algeria, where he was born in 1861; he worked in Algiers and Bou-Saâda. His *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 3-1) dates from early in his career as an Orientalist before he set himself up in France and gravitated towards an aesthetic of light. See Robert Doré, *Armand Point et son œuvre*, Thèse d'Histoire de l'Art, Université de Paris-I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2007 and Robert Doré, *Armand Point: de l'orientalisme au symbolisme, 1861-1932* (Paris: B. Giovanangeli, 2010).
[2] See in particular Christophe Beaufils, *Joséphin Péladan (1858-1918) : essai sur une maladie du lyrisme*, (Grenoble: Jérôme Million, 1993). This book includes an important bibliography. See also Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult symbolism in France, Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix*, (New York and London: Garland), 1976.
[3] Bourges sits in the darkness, his face in full light, as he leafs through the books on the table. The Symbolist light resembles the lighting of Rembrandt's engraving *Self-Portrait at a window*.
[4] Exhibition *Paradis perdus–L'Europe symboliste*, Montréal, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1995.
[5] Presented since 1999 in different European countries, in Japan and in Mexico, they concern a Symbolist current different from those of Pont-Aven and the Nabis.
[6] Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, *Les Peintres de l'âme, le symbolisme idéaliste en France*, (Gent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon ; Antwerp: Pandora, 1999), edited for the exhibition *Les Peintres de l'âme*, staged in the Musée d'Ixelles in Brussels from 15 October to 31 December 1999.
[7] Catalog of exhibition *Le Symbolisme et la Femme*, Paris, Toulon, Pau, (Paris : Délégation `a l'action artistique de la ville de Paris, 1986).

[8] Béatrice de Andia, Introduction to the catalog, *Le Symbolisme et la Femme*: "Toujours présent dans le Symbolisme, l'éternel féminin apparaît [dans un premier cas] transposition d'images mariales, la femme surgit entourée de fleurs et de féeries. À l'aube du printemps, angélique, méditative, douce, cette madone dicte un chemin, révèle un salut sibyllin dont personne ne connaît le sens."

[9] His general standpoint of refusal, anxiety and resignation was inspired by the Virgin of *The Annunciation* by Simone Martini in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence. From this Virgin of *The Annunciation*, in love with divinity, he paints *Virginité,* as a much more profane figure but she is still a symbol of purity because of the model's beauty, the color of her clothes and the roses.

[10] *La Dame à l'anémone*, 1894, oil on canvas, 39 x 33 cm. Salon de la Rose+Croix 1896, Exhibition *Les Peintres de l'âme*, Ixelles 1999, Exhibition *Painters of the Soul, Symbolism in France*, Tampere (Finland) and Laren (Nederland) 2006-07.

This portrait of Hélène accentuates her watchful look and her diaphanous beauty. She is depicted with deadened colors, where the flower may symbolize her sensibility affected by exterior influences. This was painted in Florence when the artist felt exhilarated because of his discovery of town's artistic treasures.

[11] *Baigneuse aux lauriers*, pastel on paper, 88 x 46 cm. Reproduction on the cover of the catalog of the exhibition of Armand Point, Mairie-Musée de Bourron-Marlotte, November 2003.

[12] In the Salon de la Nationale of 1894, Tristan Bernard and Toulouse-Lautrec praised Armand Point and entitled their article, " *Le Salon du chasseur de chevelures*, " perhaps because of the elements they considered excessive.

[13] ". . . et sans doute, M. Armand Point, en peignant des iris, des femmes et des cygnes, pressent le mystère de sa sensibilité sous des formes essentielles.
Ainsi M. Armand Point peint des femmes oubliées dans les îles glacées du désir, contemplant les oiseaux . . . Les unes comparent d'un geste calme leur espérance à des iris; [...] Leurs lignes sont pures, . . . , leur chair n'est pas diverse de celle des fleurs, leurs vêtements sont soyeux et richement colorés, parce qu'il faut aimer la beauté et penser que les âmes ne doivent pas être inharmonieuses. Un songe païen et voluptueux les exalte. Des femmes, . . . , l'ombre du soir . . . , la souplesse des roseaux frissonnants, c'est la vie et tout le rêve de M. Armand Point, et peut-être n'y-a-t-il rien de plus nécessaire pour rêver et pour vivre, et peut-être est-ce là l'éternel objet de nos larmes et de nos sourires, tant nous tenons à peu de choses. " Camille Mauclair, "Armand Point", *Mercure de France*, (December 1893): 331-333.

[14] "Et l'auguste Circé alors m'adressa ces paroles : '. . .Tu arriveras d'abord chez les Sirènes, dont la voix charme tout homme qui vient vers elles. Si quelqu'un les approche sans être averti et les entend, jamais sa femme et ses petits-enfants ne se réunissent près de lui et ne fêtent son retour; le chant harmonieux des Sirènes le captive. . . . Passe sans t'arrêter; pétris de la cire douce comme le miel et bouche les oreilles de tes compagnons, pour qu'aucun d'eux ne puisse entendre. Toi-même, écoute si tu veux; mais que sur ton vaisseau rapide on te lie les mains et les pieds, debout au pied du mât, que l'on t'y attache par des cordes, afin que tu goûtes le plaisir d'entendre la voix des Sirènes. Et si tu pries tes gens de te délier, qu'ils te

serrent de liens encore plus nombreux. Puis, quand ils auront dépassé les Sirènes, je ne te dirai plus avec précision laquelle des deux routes il te faudra suivre; c'est à toi d'en délibérer en ton cœur …'"
Homère, "Chant XII," *L'Odyssée,* (Paris: Garnier, 1959), 176-177.
[15] Gustave Moreau depicts a very strong Salome in *L'Apparition*. *Salomé* by Wilde, shown on 11 February 1896 in the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, presents this passionate and gruesome personage dancing under a frozen moonlight and pursuing in horror the Baptist's decapitated head, stating: "I have kissed your mouth, Iokanaan…"
[16] Probably seen by Point in the Cathedral of Prato during his second trip to Italy.
[17] Let's look at the radiant aura in *Salomé [dansant].*
First, notice the 'appearance of distance' in the performance of a scene more mythical than historic in it religious aspect; the temporal distance increases this quality. It is exactly this subject of Herod, Hérodiad and Salome, twenty centuries of history depicted in the Prato frescos which inspired Point.
Secondly, let's consider the 'givenness' of the work. According to Yvonne Sherratt, this givenness of the scene results from the contrast of line's thickness, sometimes accentuated in 'Hérodiade's and Salome's heads and in Herod's head on the one hand and sometimes applied very lightly as in the surrounding scene on the other hand.
Thirdly, in these works, Armand Point gives greater place to his research on grace and beauty and writes: "The line corresponds to our all thoughts, to all our feelings, [it is part of a] mysterious language which emerges from all material. […], Through the line, there is thought transferred into created work. "
[18] The morbid outlook and the attraction to violent scenes are related to the pessimism that was characteristic of many Symbolist artists.
[19] Armand Point et Haute-Claire, *Coffret d'Ophélie,*1900-1902, H 21 cm, L 16 cm, P 10,2 cm, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.
[20] "J'accompagnai mon ami à ces tristes obsèques: ses forces défaillaient et il dut s'appuyer sur mon bras pour suivre le convoi". Marie Aristide, *"La Forêt symboliste Esprits et visages"*, (Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1936), 236-7.
[21] *Ancilla Domini* shows the scene when the Virgin answers "Ecce ancilla domini" to the angel, placed in the highest part of the panel, near the Holy Spirit. He is generally presented face to face with the Virgin in *"Ave Maria gratia"*. The Virgin's head is, probably, inspired by an Italian Renaissance painting, seen in Florence by the artist in 1894. On the left, the garden closed by a lattice is a symbol of Mary's virginity separated from the real world represented above. The peacock is a symbol of eternity in this panel as in the *Coffret aux paons.*
An aura radiates from this panel because the appearance of the architecture inspired by Italy in the Middle Ages and the garden painted with a technique inspired by Flemish Primitives that Point had admired in Bruges.
Armand Point et Haute-Claire, *Coffret aux paons*, 1898, H 39 cm, L 39,6 cm, W 29 cm, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais.
[22] The peacock which represents resurrection and immortality is accompanied by grapes which recall the Passion of Christ and the Eucharist.

[23] M. Jumeau-Lafond writes in *Les peintres se l'Ame*, quoted in note 6: "L'admiration pour le Moyen Âge et la Renaissance, le souci du métier et l'inspiration féerique étaient pour Point, comme jadis pour Burne-Jones et les Préraphaélites, le moyen de lutter pour l'Idéal, l'arme ultime pour résister à la fuite du temps artistique grâce à un paradoxal renouveau des valeurs ancestrales."

[24] See the reproduction in Cassandra Sciortino, "Armand Point's Eternal Chimera: The Florentine Quattrocento and Symbolist Currents in Britain, France, and Italy," in Rosina Neginsky, *Symbolism, Its Origins and Its Consequences*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), Fig. 3-5, page 71.

[25] See note 21.

[26] In the Middle Ages, the unicorn was considered a very rare animal, born by crossbreeding an Asian rhinoceros and an African antelope. Its " existence " has been " proven " seeing that we have some rare exemples of its horns which are, in reality, narwhal's incisors. The significance of the unicorn is complicated by way of its virtues. It symbolises power and honesty while its horn, with phallic connotations, also represents the incarnation of God's Word in the Virgin's womb. In a layman's realm, it symbolises passion and the amorous quest of a lover. However, spotlessly white, the unicorn is also considered a Christlike animal.

[27] *Princesse à la licorne*, 1896, drawing with pencil and charcoal, 90 X 71 cm. Exposition *Paradis perdus – L'Europe symboliste*, (Montréal: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1995), reproduction on n° 17, p. 43.

[28] As M. Jumeau-Lafond explained in 1999: "En dehors même des sources médiévales, dont la signification symbolique n'était pas toujours connue des contemporains de Point, l'artiste se plaît à figurer l'animal fantastique, l'irréel étant toujours pour lui gage de rêverie et de méditation supérieure. La référence aux figurations anciennes de la licorne reste d'ailleurs relative puisque, à l'encontre du modèle de Cluny […] la tête de l'animal représenté par Point tient plus du cheval que de la chèvre cependant que la coiffe ailée de la princesse fait penser davantage à l'iconographie wagnérienne ou à des ailes de chimère qu'à quelque parure médiévale."

[29] The fifth *Salon de la Rose+Croix* was open on 20th March 1896 and featured a poster. Sarluis drew Zola's head with closed eyes, his mouth distorted by a grin. Zola is shown spitting at the wound of the beheaded figure with different kinds of snakes bearing the names of the titles of his novels: *La Terre*, *Nana, L'argent, La débâcle*, *Mes voyages, Lourdes et Rome.*

The executioner, drawn by Point, is probably inspired by Perseus beheading Medusa, the single mortal Gorgon. Perseus had received Athena's shield and Hermes's sword to assist him. The eagle was an animal that could stare at the sun and also meet Medusa's penetrating stare. The rose recalls the Rose+Croix.

This lithograph was perhaps inspired by a drawing by Félicien Rops published in 1887, as the frontispiece for "L'Initiation sentimentale", in the third volume of 'L'Ethopée' by Péladan.

But, the most probable influence may be Benvenuto Cellini who realized two versions of Perseus holding the beheaded Medusa, both in Florence. Point had certainly admired them in 1894, especially the one exhibited in the *Piazza della*

Signoria. The realism of Cellini's representation of blood flowing out of the Gorgon's head was associated by Point and Sarluis with the supposed moral impurity of Zola's novels. Zola published, in his turn, a destructive article against the Symbolists on the occasion of the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in "Le Figaro", the 2nd May 1896. The Symbolist sun will rise any higher; on the contrary, its twilight approaches.

See the reproduction in Cassandra Sciortino, "Armand Point's Eternal Chimera: The Florentine Quattrocento and Symbolist Currents in Britain, France, and Italy," in Rosina Neginsky, *Symbolism, Its Origins and Its Consequences*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), Fig. 3-3, page 65.

[30] It is worthwhile to compare this painting with *La Nef,* the Homeric poem which describes the eternal fight of Prometheus, the archetype of Man, against the Gods of Olympus. Bourges and Point have both immortalized the dramas of humanity. The first one supports the fall of Valhalla and has Wagnerian echoes, whereas the second, more sensitive to Michelangelo's compositions, reacts negatively to violence.

[31] Philippe Jullian, *Esthètes et Magiciens*, (Paris: Librairie académique Perrin, 1969), 208.

[32] The main works of Moreau were exhibited during his life in Paris whereas Point still lived in Algeria or was too young to have seen them.

[33] The work was revealed to the public by Paul Flat in 'La revue de l'Art ancien et moderne' in March 1898. Point had probably never seen the original.

[34] See in particular Chesneau Ernest, *La Peinture anglaise*, (Paris: Quantin, 1882). Armand Point had probably seen the engraving after *Merlin et Viviane*, 239.

[35] Henry Marjorie Louise, *Stuart Merrill La contribution d'un américain au Symbolisme français*, (Paris: Champion, 1927), 143-144.

[36] Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal.* Also see his sonnets and correspondence from 1857.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIGHT AND SHADOW IN THE DREAM BY ODILON REDON

JOELLE JOFFE

This work will focus on the black paintings (or "*noirs*") by Odilon Redon and on the imaginary, guided by the question of the role of *chiaroscuro* in Symbolism. While color appears in his work at times, the *noirs* are the main focus of Redon during the first fifteen years of his work. Our exploration will be guided by Redon's writings along with images on canvas and our conceptualization of the work. The contributions of other artists and psychoanalytic theory will allow us to consider further aspects of this period.

I. Why *Chiaroscuro*?

In a letter to his friend and biographer Andre Mellerio in 1898, Redon wrote:

> I never used the defective word of 'illustration'. You will not find it in my catalogs. We need new words; I can only see those of 'transmission', 'interpreting'. And yet they do not describe accurately how my readings get into my organized 'noirs'.[1]

Redon informs us of two fundamental things. First, his noirs are 'organized', not random. Second, they transmit his personal interpretations. Similarly, the French poet Mallarme tells us: "Artists should not paint the object, but the effect it creates."[2] Redon is for him the ideal reader who can evoke what words suggest, exemplifying the following:

> Shapes become blurry, lines flicker and the whole depiction becomes confused. The unconscious keeps a virtual substance. [3]

Redon emphasized that the challenge is not to create an image in black and white but one with *chiaroscuro*. He noted:

> Around the year 1875, everything happened under pencil and charcoal, this ethereal powder, elusive in the hand.[4]

> Those two allowed me to express myself the best, and stayed with me. This mundane material that has no intrinsic beauty helped me in my research on beauty and the invisible.[5]

We find here the Lacanian 'forced choice'[6] (*choix forcé*): the artist's unconscious imposes the choice of the medium, with the subjective perception of an uncanny beauty, the transience of life, the shadow of death and its melancholic tones. Redon sees himself as a martyr or Christ figure offered up for a tragic fate. Redon is on a quest for the invisible, a strange mission for a draughtsman and painter. His work builds upon his loss for words.[7] Light is not separated from shadow, as found in paintings by Caravaggio or Rembrandt, whom Redon admired, or even Georges de La Tour. There is no divine light.

The unconscious stays dark and the charcoal shows bits of the underlying truth.[8] We are closer to finding out the artist's intention and target, the representation of the invisible, and the expression of the artist's 'repression.' This is a step toward a subjective reality of a singular subject, different from naturalism. The invisible, the unknown and the return of Freud's 'repression' characterize the Symbolist movement in art. This movement is tied to the scientific discoveries that mine the mysteries of nature such as electricity, X-rays, photography and the exploration of the unconscious.

From the viewpoint of psychoanalysis, an interpretation is not limited to its meaning or the uncovering of truth. There is a step towards meaning.[9] It also shows a hole, a void beyond meaning and "rings the bell of *jouissance*"[10] – the ultimate and painful form of pleasure. Artworks too belong to this realm. Symbolist painting strays away from the usual codes, where one symbol conveys a definite meaning. Instead of the usual pet dog illustrating loyalty or decadence, or the mirror, jewels and skull representing *vanitas*, the visual metaphors and allegories give way to the crudest 'return of the repressed.' The gaze presented is not reflected in a mirror, but coming from a severed head, a face or disembodied eyes. This gaze is at times worried, anguished, questioning or afraid but is also frightening and ambiguous. The gaze is isolated from the person or context. It is suspended in mid-air, in a void that is mysterious and enigmatic. René Magritte commented on his own work:

> My research looked like the pursuit of solutions for problems with three elements: the object itself, the thing connected to it in the shadow of my consciousness, and the light where this thing should come out.[11]

This is a new definition of light and shadow. It is no longer the visual contrast in the picture, but the coming into light of the dark or the unknown, or in other words of the unconscious of the artist. Painters are great observers of the world, but the gaze is here on the canvas, observing and regarding us. Redon provides us with some clues about his art in his writing on his family history:

> I used to believe art was useless. Now I think it might be necessary. My drawings inspire and are not to be defined. They place us, as does music, in the ambiguous realm of the undetermined.

Redon imagined his birth on the boat that brought his parents back from the French colony of Louisiana. To be born on the sea, "a place beyond nations, above an abyss" is how Redon vividly describes these peculiar circumstances. Redon grows up away from his parents for ten years in the countryside, which he imagines submerged in ancient times "where the ocean used to cover those deserted lands… [and] one can feel alone." Redon's graphical talent leads him to art. He expressed his sad and lonely childhood using charcoal. In his drawings one can find humanity, "…whose eyes are sunk into self-abnegation and a desolated world. The artist comes to life for mysterious accomplishments. He is an accident, born naked on hay."

Accidents are what awaken him — the meaning of "accident" ranging from the unexpected to failure, misfortune… — and the unwanted child. The undetermined will thus be what dominates the artist's fate.

II. Which style of *chiaroscuro*?

What does the viewer think in front of those dark works? Is what is shown readable? Is Redon making visible the invisible? Are we in a dream, where images prevail over words? Are we in a nightmare?

Let us consider some of the *noirs*:

Generally, *chiaroscuro* is used to highlight the most important part of the scene, in contrast with its surrounding darkness. The luminous part "pops" out of the work like a loud voice or an underlined word or a divine presence. Here one sees preponderant eyes cast in a forceful gaze.

For Redon, the Fallen Angel has trouble walking, naked and blind in the darkness on the edge of the abyss. The Winged man runs away, naked,

carrying a severed head on a plate. Would this be Saint John the Baptist? A martyr? Is it a skull or a mask? The sky is empty or filled with a blurry circle, cloud or haze. Is it the absent Father or a threatening God? The character is sad and powerless. The *Head of a Martyr* represents a severed head on a plate. The Angel of Darkness or the angel from the Bible is reading Dante's *Inferno*. The angel here is not the usual messenger of joy announcing the birth of a messiah with a graceful aerial dance. He is rather abandoned, cast away by his father.

A mask sounds the knell (Fig. 4-1) is inspired by a story of Edgar Allan Poe.[12] This work mixes transgression, religion, curses, death, and derision; it embodies the voice of the father.

Fig. 4-1. Odilon Redon, *A mask sounds the funeral bell*

In *Eyes Shining Everywhere* (Fig. 4-2), an eye is floating in the sky above a mountain looking up. Is this gaze a plea or an appeal to the father? Is it God's gaze with its oppressing ubiquity?

Fig. 4-2. Odilon Redon, *Eyes shining everywhere*

Is the figure in *Cactus Man* wearing Christ's crown of thorns? The *Flower of the Bog* represents a mask, the face of a sad clown with a pitiful collar. Is it a holy halo or a crown of thorns?

In 1884, Huysmans, who made Redon famous by featuring him in his cult novel "Against Nature," writes: "The *'Head on a stem'* shows a round flower, an emaciated head with meditative traits." [13] *The Smiling Spider*

depicts a hairy body with a human face. Its gaze is both terrified and terrifying, and enhanced by a grin showing its teeth.

The *Cyclops* and the *Eye-Balloon* highlights again the importance of the gaze. The *Eye-Balloon* (Fig. 4-3) includes the severed head facing us within the heavens.

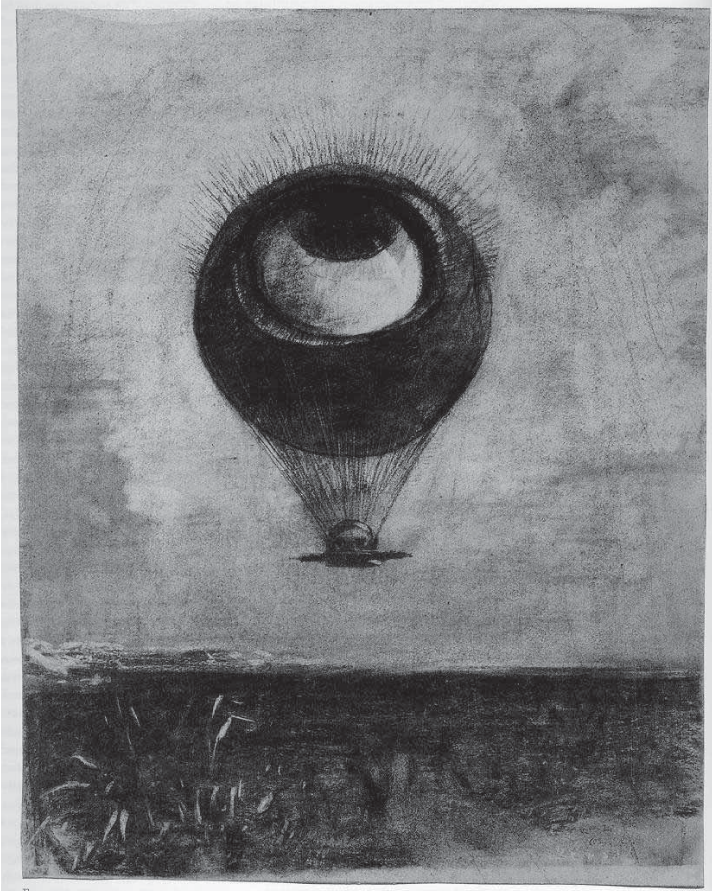

Fig. 4-3. Odilon Redon, *Eye-Balloon*

The painting *"And in the sun shines the face of Jesus Christ*" portrays a black sun resembling an eye. Does the pupil contain Christ's face watching the artist or us?

The characters are imaginary, out of time, disembodied and not distinct. Redon's titles do not provide explanations to the works; they are poetic evocations. The backgrounds of Redon's *noirs* do not stand out. The horizons are devoid of life; the skies are empty. The being of the painter, or the Other, has only the eye, the missed gaze, as a partner. Immense and on occasion monstrous, he wanders tied to the clouds. These are the links to his distant parents. In the same way, during the 1870 war, balloons connected soldiers like Redon to the civic realm. Along with balloons, clouds and sun, the sky also contains the fear of death, abandonment and dreams of a father. Redon's father used to tell him: "Can you see those clouds? Can you figure those changing forms?" And he pointed at strange, ethereal and marvelous apparitions in the moving sky. During his childhood, Redon spent days watching clouds. He grew up in a world of solitude. The tragic meaning of his life seemed overcome by its meaninglessness, and was replaced by a delirious and poetic vision. The mystical note often found in his paintings is here only allusive. Clouds do not unify the sky. Eye or gaze, face or head, hang suspended, at best tied to a floating balloon. This lost gaze is Redon himself. Along with severed heads, that are either alive or dead, ghosts float in the air, and angels walk aimlessly. The anguish of origins blends with the daily horror and the abyss of the future. The world is empty, hopeless, without humans and God to save him, help or give meaning to his unhappiness. The scene is barely represented; it is an evocation. The innovation lies in the absence of direct representation, in keeping the image in the shadow. We are between a dream and a vision, with glimpses of horror behind the blur of imagination. While Goya's *Caprichos* show his terrifying visions, Redon shows their effect in the glare of light itself.

III. Conclusion

The *chiaroscuro* in Redon's *noirs* is not merely a technique of representation. It is evidence of the gaze of the artist, the core of a man who is looking for a solution to his distress or what Freud called "Hilfslosigkeit" or helplessness. The Symbolist movement allows the evocation through minimalist images of light and shadow. It goes beyond appearances and blurs the limits to focus on the impression felt by the artist and the observer. Redon is thus a pioneer of Surrealist painting. Everything becomes possible, colors explode, bodies are cut and recomposed in infinite ways, and common objects are used in uncommon ways. Redon states that the artist does not understand his own creation. This view is confirmed by psychoanalysis. The traumatic encounter with

the horror of a reality can be found in the painful *jouissance.* Its symptom is the endless repeating of a special moment, cast in a terrified gaze. For the artist, his work is, at the same time, the main symptom, but also his solution and cure. Redon's *noirs* with their intense gaze, either disembodied or in a dehumanized body, are the light cast by Redon's inner shadows and despair. They are either a Freudian sublimation or a Lacanian solution to a missed encounter. We are close to the strangeness and the fragmentation of Magritte, whose mother lost the will to live and drowned in the Sambre river.[14] Redon's *noirs* bring into the light the inner darkness that the artist experienced in his early childhood. They are an undetermined depiction of his melancholia, the representation of the invisible. As such, they are both light and shadow.

After the birth of his son Ari, Redon gave up the *noirs* for colored depictions. He wrote that he couldn't use pencil and charcoal anymore. His mood had changed. Did his creative work cure him? Did late fatherhood lighten his life and allow him to leave his suffering childhood? Redon represented his son using pastel in 1898 when Redon was fifty-eight years old, with another eighteen years to live. While the general impression we have of Ari is peaceful, it is significant that the eyes are there somewhere on the child's face.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 4-1. Odilon Redon, *A mask sounds the funeral bell.* 1882. Lithograph in black on ivory China paper collé, laid down on white wove paper. 260 x 193 mm (image/chine); 440 x 305 mm (sheet). The Stickney Collection, 1920, 1572. The Art Institute Chicago.

Fig. 4-2. Odilon Redon, *Eyes shining everywhere*. Lithograph. 20 x 15"(50.8 x 38.1 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Fig. 4-3. Odilon Redon, *Eye-Balloon. 1878.* Charcoal and chalk on colored paper 16 4/8 x 13 1/8" (42.2 x 33.3 cm). Gift of Larry Aldrich 4.1964. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Notes

[1] Odilon Redon, Lettre a son ami et biographe Andre Mellerio en 1898.

[2] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Lettre a Cazalis" in *Œuvres complètes. Correspondance. Lettre sur la poesie.* (Paris, 1995), 657.

[3] Michel Draguet, *Le symbolisme en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Fonds Mercator, 2010), 120.

[4] Michael Gibson, Odilon Redon and Chris Miller, *Odilon Redon*, *1840-1916: the prince of dreams* (New York: Taschen. 2011), 43.
[5] Odion Redon and Jacques Morland, *A soi-meme, journal (1867-1915); notes sur la vie, l'art et les artistes* (Paris: H. Fleury, 1922).
[6] Jacques Lacan and Russell Grigg, *The psychoses* (London: Routledge, 1993).
[7] Rodolphe Rapetti, *Le symbolisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), 54.
[8] Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), livre XIX.
[9] Jacques-Alain Miller, "Introduction au séminaire V," 18
[10] Jacques-Alain Miller, "L'Economie de la jouissance." *La Cause freudienne: revue de psychanalyse,* 77 (February 2011), 146.
[11] René Magritte, *Les mots et les images,* (Bruxelles: Labor Collection Espace Nord, 1996).
[12]Edgar Allan Poe, Nouvelle. "Un masque sonne le glas funebre dans Le Diable dans le Beffroi," in *Histoire extraordinaires. Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires.* Translated by Charles Baudelaire (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1900s).
[13] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature (À rebours),* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).
[14] Magritte, op. cit., 123.

Chapter Five

A Flight from Colour: The Aesthetics of Black-and-White in Polish Symbolism

Irena Kossowska

Franciszek Siedlecki, a prolific printmaker and art critic, saw etching as a perfect vehicle for creating imaginary worlds, for it possesses "the broadest and most subtle gamut of blackness, permitting the most difficult problems of light and shadow to be faced, for reaching into the mysticism of light, for bringing out from the depths of fantasy the black-and-white compositions that conceal in them a glowing illusion of real forms. . . . Etching is ideal for Dionysiac dreams, it marks . . . the threatening opposition between brightness and the depth of darkness" (Siedlecki 1927, 8-9).

The promotion of etching was part of a campaign undertaken at the turn of the nineteenth century to transmute the aesthetic awareness of the Polish audience and convince them of the artistic value of printmaking techniques - these more "intimate," allegedly "inferior" to the colourful depiction of painting – as a means of expression.[1] Siedlecki's convictions converged with Max Klinger's diagnosis presented in his treatise "Malerei und Zeichnung" (1891) which had a decisive impact on Polish art criticism. [2] According to Klinger, graphic art had surpassed painting in discovering new imaginative realms. Black and white, along with a whole gamut of intermediate tones, replaced the multicoloured representation of surrounding reality, creating a world more sublime than that perceived by sight. Graphic experimentation accompanied a search for unconscious sensations, vivid memory and mystic exultation. Etchings, aquatints and lithographs, as well as black crayon, ink and charcoal - these were media more sensitive to the artist's emotions and more subservient to his symbolic vision than painting. Owing to the intensified expression of prints and drawings new meanings were revealed and tangible reality distorted. Klinger stressed the high level of abstractness attained in the

world created by burin and pencil. It is precisely in drawing and print where "these sensations live, unspoiled by our vulgar sensual life. Dürer's print is a representative of drawing, this separate form of art which only a great artist will use for expression. To present his ideas, a master of this kind requires just light and shadow. … He is aware that realistic colour would disrupt this particular, spiritual world, which is common only for poetry and drawing among all the art forms" (Klinger 1908, 8). According to Klinger, it is in graphic composition that "one can pack the strongest of sensations into small space, and in rapid change one can present the most contradictory feelings" (Klinger 1908, 21).

The Young Poland movement marked a turning-point in Polish printmaking.[3] While developing the principles of the aesthetics of black-and-white, artists advanced a subjective perception of the empirical world, faced the challenge of depicting the most ugly and the most mysterious aspects of life, and sought original morphological solutions in the creation of fantastic visions. The history of original Polish printmaking began in 1897 with a series of etched landscapes by Józef Pankiewicz who initially sought stimuli in the graphic *oeuvre* of Charles Méryon and the Barbizon school.[4] Nevertheless, the predominant influence on him was James McNeill Whistler.[5]

Lacking a national tradition of original printmaking comprehended as an autonomous discipline freed of auxiliary—illustrative and reproductive—functions in the service of literary text and painting, the pioneers of Polish graphic art looked towards Western Europe in search of iconographic models and technical dexterity.[6] The attraction of the black-and-white imagery derived mostly from the graphic revival developing in Paris since the 1860s.[7] On the other hand, the pictorial devices of Polish *peintres-graveurs* were conditioned by the experience they gained in the domain of painting.[8] Gradually, however, a new generation of Polish printmakers liberated itself from this tangle of external influences. Józef Pankiewicz (1866-1940), Leon Wyczółkowski (1852-1936), Franciszek Siedlecki (1867-1934), Feliks Jabłczyński (1865-1928), Zofia Stankiewicz (1862-1955), Jan Rubczak (1884-1942), Jan Skotnicki (1876-1968), Wojciech Weiss (1875-1950) and Konstanty Brandel (1880-1970)—to mention only the most important artists—each of them created his/her own visual language which was both ingenious and specific to graphic media.

The Metaphysics of Night

In the Symbolist's perception, by disabling clear vision of the physical eye, the darkness of night, which obliterates details of objects and blurs the

shapes of nature, opened the sphere of vision of the artist's inner eye, stimulated his memory, and fueled the fear of the unknown and the unrecognizable as well as angst of forms turning into oblivion. Albert Aurier, in his programmatic text "Symbolism in painting - Paul Gauguin," elaborating on invigorated imagination, referred to the words of Emanuel Swedenborg: "Tonight the eyes of my inner I were open: they became capable of looking at heaven, into the world of ideas and into hell! But is this not the preliminary, indispensable initiation which needs to be experienced by a true artist, a complete artist?" (Aurier 1891, 157). The blackness of night—the tenebrous extreme of monochromatic depiction—has become a catalyst for nostalgic moods and phantasmagorical imagery also for Polish Symbolists.[9] A profusion of nocturnal scenes has been considered an idiosyncratic feature of Polish Symbolism. A propensity to evoke anxiety or express apathy became prevalent in the situation of political oppression and subjugation. In numerous prints, a deep shadow of melancholy falls on the architecture of Warsaw, Cracow, Rome, Venice, Florence, and Paris, blurring the contours of tenements and church towers; a depressive twilight, veiling village yards and orchards turned these ordinary places into mysterious things.

The silhouette of a chapel in Pankiewicz's etching *Duboj na Polesiu* of 1897 (*Duboj in Polesie Region*) is shrouded in the darkness brought out by the dense hatching. Pankiewicz cast a dramatic shadow of hovering clouds onto the ruins of the Forum Romanum in Rome rendering the flow of time in *Forum Romanum in Rome,* 1899. The twilight falling upon the deserted square in the artist's etching *Targ rybny w Chartres,* 1899 (*Fish Market in Chartres*) has created the atmosphere of somnolent silence and a place for contemplation of the passing day. Ephemerality was the theme of Wojciech Weiss in his etching *Ogród Luksemburski w Paryżu*, 1899 (*The Luxembourg Garden in Paris*), where the black silhouette of a tree-trunk contrasts with the whiteness of a statue that resembles an apparition from the past.[10]

Along with images of the growing density of nightfall, there were more arbitrary renderings of the pictorial space in prints. In C*yprysy,* 1901 (*Cypresses)*, the black curtain of cypresses seems almost abstract, spread in the foreground over which Weiss outlined streaks of the luminous evening sky with a thin trace of the needle as well as depicting the miniaturized shapes of a castle. It is the moonlight that sharpens the contours of a columned portico of a typical Polish manor house, which emerges from behind a clump of monumentalized thujas in the etching *Dom rodzinny,* 1911 (*Family House)* by Zofia Stankiewicz, evoking her childhood memories. A moonlight reflection shatters the darkness hovering over cottages in the

Ukrainian graphic landscapes by Stankiewicz. The dramatic *chiaroscuro* employed by the artist brings to mind the compositions of Alfred East – nocturnes with a Whistlerian provenance. In the aquatint *Noc nad jeziorem*, c. 1903 (*Night by the Lake*) Stankiewicz directly borrows the vision of a horizontally stretched, zoned landscape from Whistler. The omnipresent, bluish *sfumato* is torn apart only by a white beam of dawn emerging over the horizon of the Ukrainian steppe. Yet, the means of expression does not serve to refine the aestheticized vision, but rather reflects the pursuit of capturing the spiritual essence of nature.

The pantheistic sense of the spiritual element pervading the natural world appears in fragmented views of gardens and orchards in etchings executed by Jan Stanisławski, Jan Rubczak and Karol Mondral. In the lithograph *Zmierzch. Sad,* 1900 (*Twilight. Orchard*) by Stanisławski, the grainy trace of the lithographic crayon blurs the contours of the crooked branches and evokes a depressive mood. The thickly intertwined net of black boughs and twisted branches dominates the expansive sky in the prints, *Sad. Drzewa w śniegu,*1909 (*Orchard. Trees in Snow*) and Mondral's *Jabłonki,* 1913 (*Apple Trees).* The stark contrast of black and white acquires a dramatic expression. In Tadeusz Rychter's lithograph *Drzewa w zimie,* 1904 (*Trees in Winter*) the feeling of anxiety is introduced by shades cast on the white patches of snow, which are gnarled tree trunks and intertwined, brittle twigs of trees bent under the pressure of wind. The consonance of the artist's mood with the rhythms of nature becomes fully exposed in a pencil drawing *Wieczorny promień,* 1898 (*Evening Beam)* by Weiss in which the vertical strings of the forest wall are drawn by a sunbeam taking the shape of God's hand. A dramatic intensification of the power of nature was achieved by Jan Skotnicki in the etching *Burza,* c. 1911 (*The Storm),* in which unbridled forces snatch at the tops of fragile trees and violently strike the sky. In Jabłczyński's *Pożar,* 1911 (*The Fire*), the threat of massive destruction appears in the shape of a bright glow spreading over a monochrome, naked landscape shrouded in darkness, with a riverbank upon which the artist outlined silhouettes of mute witnesses staring into the horizon.

The confrontation of the elements of sea and sky manifested the pantheistic attitude of the artists and their aim to unveil the transcendent dimension of nature. Konstanty Brandel[11] enhanced the contrast of light and shadow in his landscapes of Erquy, drawing on the Rembrandtesque tradition of supernatural light being a vehicle of mystic experience. The luminous sea surface in *Erquy – przestrzeń*, c. 1913 (*Erquy – Space*) merges here with the sky expanse connoting the infinity of the universe. The oblique course of the sun beams apparently extends beyond the composition's

frame, making it inherently dynamic. The correlation between sky and water takes on a dramatic expression in Brandel's etching *Chmury w Erquy*, c. 1913 (*Clouds at Erquy*) (Fig. 5-1), where the light passes with difficulty through billowing clouds, casting a reflection on the stormy waves.

Fig. 5-1. Konstanty Brandel, *Chmury w Erquy* (*Clouds at Erquy),* c. 1913. Etching with drypoint on paper support 100 x 118 mm. National Museum in Warsaw, NO Gr.W. 3811/1

Pankiewicz gave *Castello del'Ovo*, 1900 (*Castello del'Ovo*), a structure in Naples, a ghostly look, its outline emerging from the depth of the sea as foam reaches the very edge of the etching's framing. This motif of a wave forcing itself upon the viewer was transposed by Rubczak in *Fala,* 1911 (*Wave)*, when he etched the arching lines of the sea foam in a decorative manner, clearly influenced by Japanese woodcuts.

Polish *Japonisme*

The motif of tree-trunks set against distant buildings was borrowed by Polish printmakers—similar to the Parisian *Les Nabis*—from woodcuts by Katsushiko Hokusai and Ando Hiroshige.[12] A thick "grid" made from boughs is placed in the foreground in compositions done by Jan Rubczak such as *Kościół św. Seweryna w Paryżu,* c. 1912 (*Church of Saint-Séverin in Paris*) (Fig. 5-2) and in Karol Mondral's *Nad Sekwaną,* 1910 (*By the Seine*).

Fig. 5-2. Jan Rubczak, *Kościół św. Seweryna w Paryżu* (*The Church of St. Sévérin in Paris*), c. 1911. Etching on paper support 196 x 87 mm. National Museum in Warsaw, NO Gr.Pol. 169193/1

The lacy network of dusk-darkened trees with the looming silhouette of the Wawel Castle was rendered by Wojciech Jastrzębowski in his lithograph *Drzewa,* 1909 (*Trees*). The decorative flatness of the composition is enhanced by the glittering, silvery stripe of the Vistula River which reflects the light of the passing day.

The horizontally stretched silhouette of a bridge depicted in Włodzimierz Błocki's *Most o zmierzchu* (*A Bridge at Twilight*) adheres to Japanese woodcuts with the bridge motif. In the darkness, the spanning bridges merge with their own reflections on the river's surface, creating abstract, ellipsoid forms. The pictorial space is additionally flattened by the emphatically rough, flickering texture of the lithographic stone, and the clouds densely scratched on the night sky. Faint reflections of lights on the water are balanced by two minute silhouettes of passers-by vanishing into the dark. Mieczysław Jakimowicz's *Florencja. Arno po zachodzie słońca (Florence. Arno after Sunset*) is a drawing even closer to the Japanese compositions. The foreground is delineated here by a building's façade, as if a curtain, radically cut by the drawing's framing; its distinct verticality balances the strip of the Arno escaping into the illusionary depth of the image as well as balancing the empty surface of the expansive sky over the river. The rule of asymmetrical balance, peculiar to the aesthetics of *Japonisme,* is achieved here by the bridge arcade ornamented with balls of light.

The motif of water, frequently employed by Polish printmakers, shows the marked impact both of Whistler and of the Japanese, especially in the use of broad blank planes of white that create asymmetrical compositional equilibrium. In a landscape of the Vistula bank (*Wisła pod Kazimierzem*; *Vistula River at Kazimierz*, c. 1909), Skotnicki drew the fluid contour of the naked embankment around the surface of the river, leaving its plane untouched by the burin. The sharp contrast with a shady plane of the ground covered with a decoratively meandering pattern apparently transforms the element of water into an etheric substance.

Included in Leon Wyczółkowski's portfolio *Tatry. Ośm akwatint,* 1906 (*Tatras. Eight Aquatints*), are the views of Tatra ponds that best exemplify the rules of Japanese aesthetics. In the narrowed framing of Wyczółkowski's aquatints there has been a condensation of the artist's psychic surrender to the majesty of the mountain massifs. Rendering the pictorial space, Wyczółkowski employed a device borrowed from the Japanese woodcuts of representing a very narrow fragment of scenery which completes itself in the viewer's imagination thanks to the reflections cast on the motionless pond surface by these parts of the landscape that are not visible in the frame. The compositional strata accumulate here, one over the other, creating an almost

abstract harmony of subtly diversified grays and blacks which becomes distorted only by the white of snow patches.

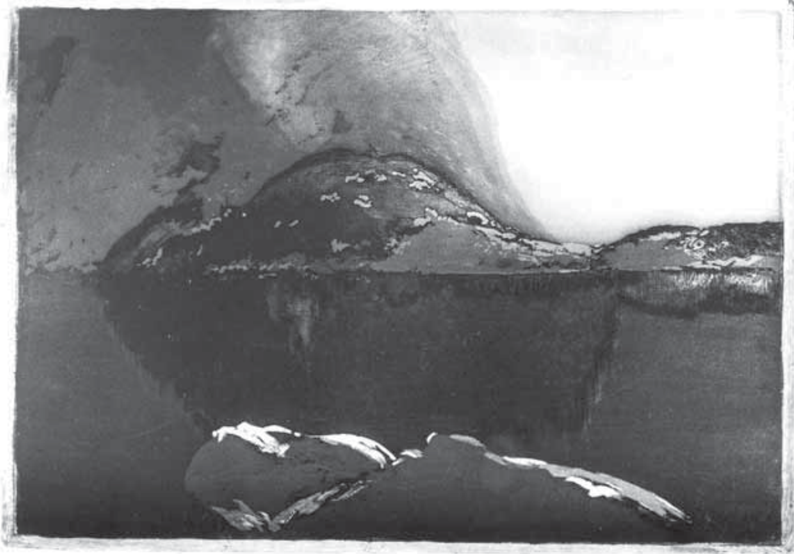

Fig. 5-3. Leon Wyczółkowski, *Czarny Staw*, z teki *Tatry. Ośm akwatint* (*Black Pond. From Tatras. Eight Aquatints*), 1906. Aquatint with etching on paper support 244 x 349 mm. National Museum in Warsaw, NO Gr.Pol. 5485

The Vagueness of Form

The strongest impulse for Pankiewicz's imagination came from Whistler's Venice series: *Venice, a Series of Twelve Etchings* (1880) and *A Set of Twenty-six Etchings* (1886).[13] Also, an important reference point for Pankiewicz was Whistler's views of Amsterdam dating from the late 1880s. His work, whose mastery was best epitomized by morphologically extraordinary nocturnes, has become a model for graphic cityscapes caught at night. Pankiewicz's etching *Port włoski nocą* (*Italian Harbor at Night,* c. 1900) (Fig. 5-4) is closely related to *Nocturne: Dance House* (1889), a composition transgressing the aesthetic norms of the epoch owing to its nearly abstract form.

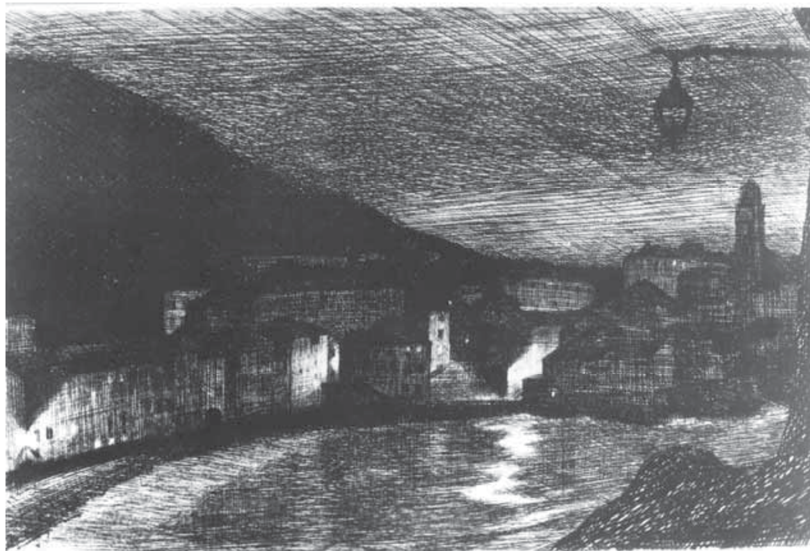

Fig. 5-4. Józef Pankiewicz, *Port włoski nocą* (*Italian Harbor at Night*), c. 1900. Etching on laid paper support 156 x 234 mm. National Museum in Warsaw, NO Gr.Pol. 22449

Luminism, continuing Rembrandt's tradition, manifested itself here in an avant-garde manner. The façade of an Amsterdam tenement house has been reduced by the artist to a black plane through stratifying nets of dynamic hatching. There is only the glow of a street lamp and the sifting light of irregularly placed windows that pierce through the thicket of lines. The mysterious aura has been achieved by Pankiewicz who used a similar visual language. The outlines of the harbor *veduta,* engulfed in darkness, are vivified in his print by dramatic contrasts of black and white. The blackness of the vigorous hatching covers the surface of both sky and water, allowing only meager reflections of light from the quayside street lamps. The curtain of night is torn by a zigzag of a light reflected onto the dormant surface of the sea.

Whistler's nocturnes played a crucial role in the formation of Feliks Jabłczyński's[14] graphic style. Akin to Whistler, Jabłczyński created his nocturnes from memory. The morphological solutions applied by Whistler in his etching *Nocturne: Dance House*, 1889 were transposed by Jabłczyński into night views of Rome, Venice, Florence, and Siena by dissolving the architectural contours and reliefs in a densely woven network of lines.

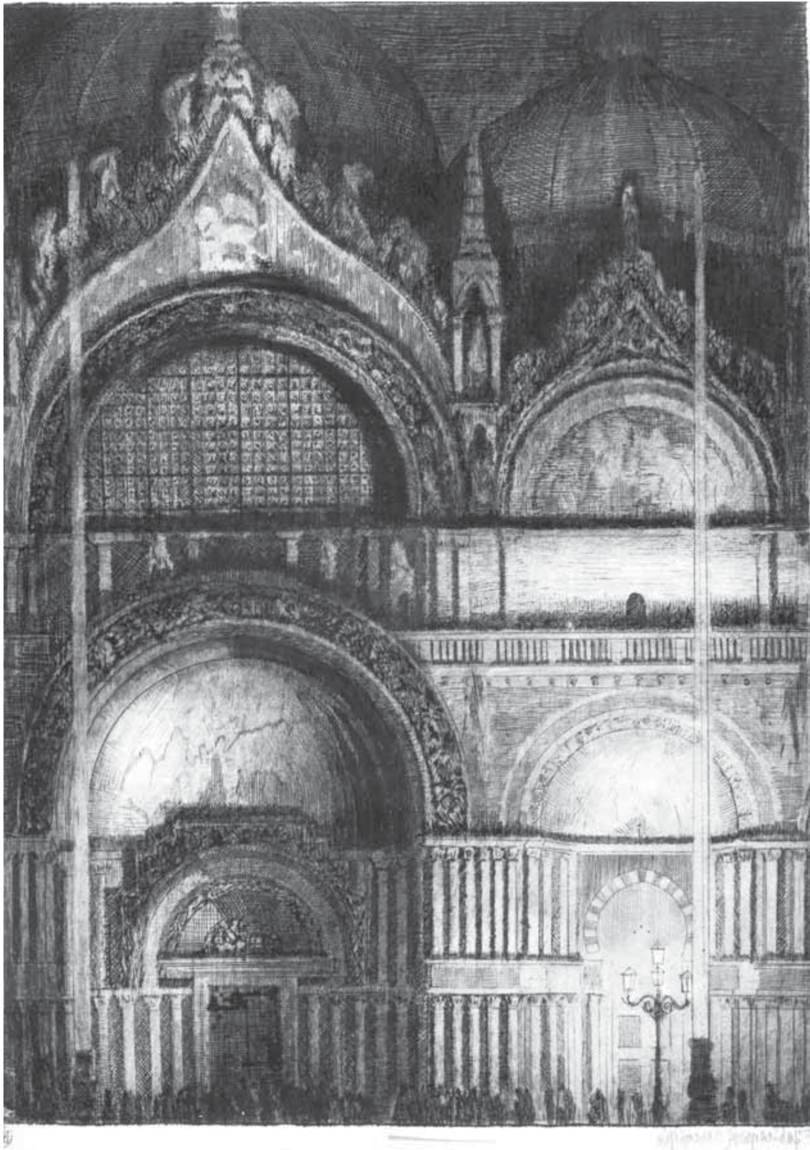

Fig. 5-5. Feliks Jabłczyński, *Portal kościoła św. Marka w Wenecji* (*A Portal of St Mark's Basilica in Venice*), 1910. Oilcloth engraving on Japanese paper support 420 x 318 mm. National Museum in Warsaw, NO25587.

White spots of light reflected from street lamps penetrate the dark *sfumato* and make the texture of the walls and the arabesque of ornaments fade away. The Rembrandtesque mysticism of light, similar to Whistler's, manifests itself in the contrasts between the sharp, concentrated glare and the omnipresent darkness. The effect of framing a fragment of the façade, and its radical flattening, is especially striking in an oil-cloth engraving by Jabłczyński *Wenecja. Wieża ratuszowa w nocy,* 1908 (*Venice: City Hall Tower at Night)*. It is only the allure of a street lamp and its fading reflections cast on the clock face that peep through the curtain of night. The network of architectural articulations vanishes behind the veil of darkness.

It was from Whistler's Venetian nocturnes that Jabłczyński borrowed the mode of "painting" with printing ink on the plate surface, while from the tradition of "artistic printing" initiated by Auguste Delâtre he has adapted the *retroussage* method which involved applying additional strokes of ink in order to intensify the strength of the individual lines.[15] In the two most morphologically radical of Whistler's etchings, *Nocturne* and *Nocturne: Palaces*, 1879-1880, the drawing reduced to parallel hatching is covered by a masterly modulated, clear film of ink which, on the one hand, suggestively reproduces the luminous effects, and on the other hand, unveils the path of the artist's hand and becomes a sign of originality. The boats and buildings seem to be a mirage here; void of substance, they blend with their shadows and merge into the darkness. Such treatment of the plate's surface resulted from Whistler's previous experiences: it was Delâtre, a well-known Parisian printer, who, while working on the artist's first portfolio *Douze eaux-fortes d'après nature,* taught Whistler how to manipulate ink to create rich tonal effects.[16] Whistler continued this experiment in the Venetian etchings by wiping the ink with three cloths, his palm and fingertips until he achieved a film of desired thickness. In *Nocturne: Palaces*, representing the Venetian cityscape from the Riva degli Schiavoni side, Whistler initially wiped the plate horizontally, applying more pressure in the center and leaving more shade at the edges; he later used concentric strokes to depict the glow of the setting sun on the darkened sky. The artist has printed the matrix of *Nocturne: Palaces* in nine versions representing different night times, from dusk to dawn, by changing the configuration and intensity of tonal effects. To a great extent the colour of the printing ink determined the expressive qualities of these nocturnes. It was only in the earliest sets of the first Venetian series that Whistler used black ink; in the remaining ones he introduced dark or pale tones of brown.[17] Jabłczyński imitated the orchestration of sienna and umbra in Whistler. The composition of *Nocturne: Palaces*, in which Whistler dematerialized the walls of Renaissance buildings thanks to the effect of a reflected lamp light, has been transposed in Jabłczyński's most representative

oil-cloth engravings from 1908-1909, such as R*zym — Forum Nervae* (*Rome: Forum Nervae*), *Florencja - Ponte Vecchio* (*Florence: Ponte Vecchio*) and *Wenecja - kościół św. Marka* (*Venice: St Mark's Basilica*). Jabłczyński turned the architecture into an unsubstantial phenomenon. The silhouettes of buildings grow in Jabłczyński's prints to "cyclopean" dimensions, reminiscent of the multiplied architectural spaces peculiar to Piranesi's *Rome: View of the Capitol*, 1911. Light reflections relieve the architectural masses of their weight and make them resemble a spidery veil through which light periodically pierces in *Portal kościoła św. Marka w Wenecji,* 1910 (*A Portal of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice*) (Fig. 5-5). The tightly woven graphic fabric unifies the architectural divisions. The bleak expression gets intensified by ink smudges billowing as clouds or by ink dynamically spread over the surface of a print to obliterate the contours of façades.

In the oil-cloth engraving entitled *Wenecja - wejście do Pałacu Dożow*, 1910 (*Venice: The Entrance to the Doge's Palace*), Jabłczyński framed a fragment of a façade, focusing attention on the richness of the architectural detail. By multiplying particularities and juxtaposing ornaments of diverse texture, the artist achieved an effect close to Whistler's famous etching from the set of Amsterdam's views, *The Embroidered Curtain* (1889). Like Whistler, he subordinated the concise description of floral and geometrical patterns to the overall decorativeness of the composition. In façade close-ups and the ornamentation of the portals, Jabłczyński referred to etchings such as *The Doorway* from the set *Venice: A Series of Twelve Etchings* and *Hangman's House, Tours,* 1888. The artist approached Whistlerian models while rendering the vibration of light reflections on the late Gothic traceries and Renaissance reliefs. In the oil-cloth engraving *Wejście do San Pietro in Vincoli w Rzymie*, 1910 (*Entrance to San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome*) Jabłczyński paraphrased one of Whistler's favorite motifs: the motif of an interior surrounded by a dark architectural frame, with glare emanating from it. In the etching *Nocturne: Furnace* from *A Set of Twenty-six Etchings,* harsh light is pouring from a steel mill and falling on the canal surface as a bright streak. In a night view of the Roman church depicted by Jabłczyński, a luminous arcade topping a flight of stairs introduces a strong accent of white.

The poetics of Whistler's nocturnes affected mostly the imagination of those Polish printmakers for whom the visual language became a medium of pantheistic faith, and for whom the "twilight records" would most suggestively reflect the spiritual essence of nature. The Whistlerian views of a riverside *veduta* were reflected in the work of Zofia Stankiewicz. She studied at the Parisian Académie Julian in the years 1880-1883, i.e. during the period when Whistler's visual *oeuvre* was already widely acclaimed. The artists were inspired by both the oil paintings, such as *Nocturne, Blue and Gold -*

Southampton Water, c. 1871-1872, and lithographs, such as *Nocturne: The River at Battersea,* 1878, in which the synthesis of landscape forms has been pushed to the boundaries of abstraction. The lithograph *Nocturne: The River at Battersea,* 1878, from the portfolio *Notes,* 1887[18] was described by Whistler in *Ten O'Clock Lecture*, which perfectly conveyed the alluding capacity of the imagery: "And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces of the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens . . . and Nature, who for once, has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone" (Whistler 1888, 20).

A similar mood is evoked in Stankiewicz's aquatint *Warszawa w nocy*, c. 1910-1913 (*Warsaw at Night*). Piercing through the nightly *sfumato* that shrouds the view of the Old Town is the glow of the riverbank lamps, as well as the windows scattered over the surface of the façades. The fine-grained patches of aquatint, which were employed by Stankiewicz to substitute for the textural qualities of the lithograph, make the barge passing by and the distant strip of architecture look unsubstantial. Though the artist did not achieve the same degree of abstraction as Whistler, yet, by modulating minute spots of white, gray and black, she conveyed the glimmering of the light reflections on the waves. The motif of dim lights being reflected on the river surface, peculiar to Whistler's nocturnes, was translated by Stankiewicz in the aquatint *Ulica Szeroki Dunaj w Warszawie*, c. 1910-1913 (*The Wide Danube Street in Warsaw*) with a streak of white and reflections sliding on the surface of wet pavement. The bleak expression of this print is akin to the watercolour nocturnes made by Whistler in 1884 in Amsterdam. The sketchy articulation of tenement houses dematerialized by the darkness surrounding them is animated thanks to the minute accents of light dripping from the windows.

The idiosyncratic morphology of young Polish printmaking was less constrained by the predominant aesthetic norms, and was more experimental, than painting. This phenomenon was best exemplified by the graphic matter and splashing of dark particles over the etching's surface in *Wawel,* 1913 (*The Wawel Castle*) by Jan Rubczak. The massive silhouette of the castle, devoid of detail, looms behind the transparent veil of a blue dawn, conveyed by the tinted paper.

The Metaphysics of Sex

The image of the modern metropolis took shape in Polish printmaking at the fin de siècle, under the influence of the philosophy of Stanisław

Przybyszewski who, in 1898, introduced the concept of Early Expressionism into Cracow Bohemian circles. Probing into the human *psyche* in all its strata, the writer created the theory of "the naked soul." As an ardent follower of the views of Schopenhauer, he saw the main source of human existence in the sexual instinct. In light of the fatalistic theory of *Geschlechtstrieb*, sexual drive was seen as a cosmic elemental force, which inevitably destroyed the individual for the sake of the preservation of the species. Based on Schopenhauer's ideas, Przybyszewski formulated his own "metaphysics of sex," a philosophy of the eternal struggle between man and woman, in which the latter emerges victorious as the embodiment of the "apocalyptic harlot." In his apocalyptic vision, Przybyszewski made the city the domain of all evil, a realm ruled by demonic powers and by Satan himself. In the act of devastation, Satan had allied himself with woman. The motif of a Satanic woman emerged in Polish printmaking both under the influence of Przybyszewski's philosophy and the perverse iconography of Rops, as well as in the phantasmagorical imagery of Goya.

The city of the Symbolists became the domain of fallen women; the signs of a promiscuous woman are the signs of temptation and an omen of destruction. The silhouette of the legendary Moulin Rouge cabaret was rendered by Jan Rubczak using shapeless patches of aquatint in *Moulin Rouge,* c. 1909 with a fragmentary view of Montmartre. The twinkling shadows, brought out in Feliks Jasiński's print *Przed domem*, c. 1900 (*In Front of the House*) through a fine-grained aquatint lure the viewer into following a mysterious female figure. A pale face of a woman wearing a sweetly ironic smile emerges, in Mieczysław Jakimowicz's drawing *Kobieta w nocy* (*Woman at Night*), from the vibrant atmosphere of twilight created with a soft crayon. The contrast between light and shadow comes into focus in Weiss's etched nocturne *Place Vendôme w Paryżu,* 1900 (*Place Vendôme in Paris*). Separated from the black patch of the aquatint lining a street tunnel is a white female figure tempting the viewer to plunge into the whirl of the metropolis' nightlife. Shining through the web of dynamic lines, the bright spots, akin to lively light reflections emerging over the silhouette of a Parisian whore, intrigue us with their amorphous shape and provoke anxiety. The most literal variant of the prostitute motif is represented in a drawing *Upadła kobieta – rozpustnica*, 1904 (*Fallen Woman: Wanton*) by Witold Wojtkiewicz. The artist's ironic interpretation makes the fate of the drama's main character materialize in a form of a winding "path of life" strewn with roses. This "milky way", similar to the male silhouettes on pedestals, petrified as puppets, has been elicited – as in "negative" Japanese woodcuts – from a homogeneous black background with a white patch.

The Expressionist, anti-civilization myth found its clearest expression in scenes of suicide created by Wojciech Weiss under the influence of Edvard Munch's art, itself propagated by Stanisław Przybyszewski.[19] In Weiss’s etching *Samobójczyni nad Arno* (*Suicide on the Arno*), a despairing woman appears like a ghostly silhouetted against the dark cityscape of Florence. In his etching *Morgue. Paris,* 1900, the sole evidence of the desperate action is the cloak – as if the shadow of a human being – thrown on the balustrade of a bridge, and the pale, drowned bodies carried away by the current. Evidently under the influence of Przybyszewski’s “metaphysics of sex” Weiss conceived his “Kompozycja satanistyczna” (*Satanic Composition*, 1899), where the body of a woman experiencing an orgasm is intertwined with the spidery figure of the devil. The ecstatic couple, sitting on a glowing lunar globe, hovers above a dark silhouette of a man flung in despair to the earth.

In a sexual union with a man, the woman has taken possession of his soul and thoughts. In Weiss's drawing “Chuć”(*Lust.* 1899), a male figure, cringed in a gesture of despair, is overwhelmed by an obsessive recollection of a naked female body. In the drawing *Wampir* (*Vampire,* 1899*)* a lethal embrace of a woman overpowers the lover's head which relates in its iconographic motif and in composition to Munch's woodcuts. Similarly, in a drawing by Mieczysław Jakimowicz *Pocałunek. Ręce* (*A Kiss. Hands*) (Fig. 5-6)*,* a woman has overtaken male existence, while the gray ring of her hair covers the lover's face depriving him of his identity.

Fig. 5-6. Mieczysław Jakimowicz, *Pocałunek. Ręce* (*A Kiss. Hands*), c. 1907. Mixed techniques: crayon, ink, gouache on paper support 116 x 165 mm. National Museum in Warsaw, NO Rys.Pol. 159277.

The naked female body entwines the figure of a defenseless man, pulling him deep into the abyss in Konstanty Brandel's drypoint *Pająk* (*Spider,* c. 1911). Their petite silhouettes are clearly cut off from the neutral, totally abstract background of the composition, symbolizing the everlasting space of myth.

Erotically charged motifs, such as the inseparable unity of Eros and Thanatos, reoccurred in Polish printmaking, as they did in the Symbolist art of all of Europe. The unbridled powers of instincts leading to death found its expression in the motifs of Weiss's Dionysian processions and Brandel's erotica where naked bodies of bacchantes and lovers in a dark abstract space focus the whole light on their pale skin symbolizing ultimate annihilation. The blind urge of a human being towards death was portrayed by Brandel in *W otchłań*, 1913 (*Into the Abyss*) with the motif of a male and female body falling into the abyss, referring to the fall of the Greek gods in Gustave Flaubert's novel *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. These visions represent an extreme of the Expressionist attitude, rarely achieved in Polish painting at the turn of the 19th century.

The Depths of Darkness

The mystery of existence has been concealed in the boundless universe or in the "depths of darkness", as Franciszek Siedlecki put it. In the technically refined etchings of Siedlecki the divine element takes form as brilliant personifications of stars and celestial constellations that emanate an inner light. These enrobed and bejeweled silhouettes whirl and embrace in an undefined space, bringing to mind paintings by Gustave Moreau such as *The Kiss Among Stars*.

Fig. 5-7. Franciszek Siedlecki, *Dwie gwiazdy* (*Two Stars*), c. 1914. Soft-ground etching with aquatint, and mezzotint on Japanese paper support 212 x 240 mm. National Museum in Warsaw, NO Gr. Pol. 169216

As the great critic, Jan Kleczyński, wrote about Siedlicki: "with a glittering rainbow of jewels he attired his figures, born of the mythical Slavic fantasy, full of Indian, Persian, Byzantine reflections, as well as those of folk and noblemen's Poland" (Kleczyński 1913, 120). The visions of the formation of the universe in Siedlecki's prints reflect his fascination with the work of Odilon Redon. Siedlecki took over from Redon the mystic sense of light, dynamically piercing darkness with a beam in *Dwie gwiazdy*, c. 1914 (*Two Stars*)(Fig. 5-7). In the print *Narodziny – Trzy wróżki,* 1913 (*Birth: Three Fairies*), the effect of a rough crayon drawing achieved by the artist through combining soft-ground etching, roulette and dry point, highlighted the supernatural essence of the fairies conducting a magical ritual over a new cosmic being, or over a newborn human; a ritual demarcating the course of its future fate. It was from Redon's *noir*

representing death's masquerade, *Le masque de la mort rouge* (1883), that Siedlecki borrowed the motif of a procession of figures in fantastic outfits (*Korowód; Procession,* c. 1913). The combined techniques of etching, aquatint and soft-ground etching enabled the artist to merge the chain of looming silhouettes into the dark background of the night whereas historic content is evoked by the print *Na krańcach horyzontu—Jadwiga i Jagiełło,* 1902 (*At the Edge of the Horizon: Jadwiga and Jagiełło*). Emerging from darkness, the figures of the royal couple, powerfully reigning in the medieval Polish-Lithuanian monarchy, inscribe an individual and collective existence into the cosmic perspective and the everlasting cycle of history.

Siedlecki referred to the heritage of Polish Romanticism, especially to the mystical overtones of Juliusz Słowacki's poem "Król Duch" ("King-Spirit"). The symbolism of this poem was adapted also in the work of Konstanty Brandel, reflecting the syncretic entanglement of inspirations drawn from the romantic literature, East Asian culture and the art of the European Middle Ages, classic antiquity and French Symbolism, Moreau's fantasy and Piranesi's visions.[20] He subordinated historical erudition to his imagination, constructing visions of enormous architectural spaces from stylistically heterogeneous elements, magnified by mirror reflections in shiny floors.[21] Brandel would seek pictures of imaginative buildings in his beloved book, Flaubert's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, to create their visual counterparts. In the etching *Pogrzeb własny,* 1913-1915 (*One's Own Funeral*), Brandel extracted a white patch of petite silhouettes of the deceased and the mourners from a thicket of lines, elevating the deceased into endless space. The artist shared his fascination with the motif of the abyss with Flaubert; in the print *Śmierć Apollina,* c. 1910 (*Apollo's Death*), amidst the panic of the fleeing muses, the fragile body of the mythical god is drowning in the abysmal depth rendered with a velvet black of the aquatint. The motif of ascension and fall, of perpetual change, would reoccur frequently in Brandel's printmaking. In the etching *Niepokój,* c. 1907 (*Unrest)*, under a vault of wavy, as if animated, construction, perceived from a number of vantage points simultaneously, a slender figure of a winged man hangs, embodying the artist's emotions. A visionary perspective transformed the architectural structure of the cathedral, depriving it of constructive logic and concrete substance.

The dramatic climax of this theme is represented in the etching *Walka. Przepadniesz w krysztale,* 1917 (*Fight: You Shall Fail in Crystal*). The scene of struggle between two contradictory forces personified by a naked woman and a predatory bird is taking place in a monumental landscape encapsulating all the elements. Revealing themselves in the print are the reminiscences of

Klinger's graphic cycles embracing motifs of a confrontation between a woman and a beast, in work such as *Schaukel,* 1879 and *Bär und Elfe,* 1881, typical of Symbolist iconography. Likewise, the various compositions depicting abysmal depths, with couples levitating in space, show kinship with Klinger's etchings *In Nichts Zurück* and *Neue Träme von Glück*, 1887.

At the same time, Brandel's etching *Venite et videte,* 1915 delivers an optimistic message of humanity's rebirth, paraphrasing Rembrandt's famous print *Christ Crucified Between the Two Thieves (Three Crosses*, 1653). Brandel was fascinated by the dramatic *chiaroscuro* effects and the light pouring from the sky which, in Rembrandt's composition, demonstrates the divine nature of the Messiah, and was transformed by the artist into a halo emanating from the resurrected, victorious Christ on the Cross.

Epilogue

In 1917, graphic art succumbed to the same rhythms of transformation that were revolutionizing painting. In adopting innovative artistic attitudes, prints sometimes even superseded the latter. Hence, 1917 terminates the introductory phase of original Polish printmaking, anticipating the tremendous flourish of the avant-garde graphics in the interwar period. The year drew a close to the Impressionist trend serving to record the ephemeral phenomena of nature; it symbolized the spiritual essence of nature, and penetrated the human psyche. There was less expression of emotional disquiet and fewer flights of fantasy. In 1917 a new way of perceiving art and its role in society was born. After Poland regained its political sovereignty, fine arts ceased to be regarded as the sole sphere wherein patriotic ideology and pervasive national sentiment were embodied. Art began to be seen as a field for experimentation opening up broad possibilities and a new way of understanding morphology in art.

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Fig. 5-2. Jan Rubczak, *Kościół św. Seweryna w Paryżu* (*The Church of St. Sévérin in Paris*), c. 1911. Etching on paper support 196 x 87 mm. National Museum in Warsaw, NO Gr.Pol. 169193/1.

Fig. 5-3. Leon Wyczółkowski, *Czarny Staw*, z teki *Tatry. Ośm akwatint* (*Black Pond. From Tatras. Eight Aquatints*), 1906. Aquatint with etching

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Fig. 5-7. Franciszek Siedlecki, *Dwie gwiazdy* (*Two Stars*), c. 1914. Soft-ground etching with aquatint, and mezzotint on Japanese paper support 212 x 240 mm. National Museum in Warsaw, NO Gr. Pol. 169216.

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Notes

[1] The path towards recognition of the achievements in printmaking was forged by critics and connoisseurs such as Feliks Jasieński, Zenon Przesmycki, Cezary Jellenta, Stanisław Lack, Antoni Chołoniewski, Tadeusz Jaroszyński, and Władysław Wankie, who undertook the difficult task of transforming the aesthetic awareness of a conservative public, fought with determination for the ennoblement of graphic media, and won acceptance for the aesthetics of black-and-white. For a detailed discussion of the development of Polish turn-of-the-19th-century

printmaking see Kossowska 2004, 101-161; Irena Kossowska "Narodziny polskiej grafiki artystycznej 1897-1917" (The Beginnings of Polish Original Printmaking 1897-1917), Cracow: Uniwersitas 2000; Kossowska 1999, 229-246; Kossowska and Milicer, 1998; Irena Jakimowicz, *Pięć wieków grafiki polskiej* (Five Centuries of Polish Printmaking), Warsaw: National Museum n Warsaw, 1997.

[2] Klinger 1908, lviv.

[3] The Young Poland movement, understood as a cultural formation, included a variety of ideas and diverse artistic attitudes, not linked by a common goal or an exclusive program. The period 1890 to 1917 is recognised as one of the peak stages in the development of the national culture, a phase which summed up the intellectual achievements of the 19th century and opened up new artistic perspectives, to be developed in the coming decades of the 20th century. What distinguished Young Poland from the other revitalising movements of Europe was the political situation of a nation which, for over a century, had been deprived of statehood. Hence the cultivation within Polish intellectual and artistic circles of the traditions of Romanticism, a movement which raised literature to the rank of the most significant manifestation of national identity. Hence the understanding of culture as an enclave of Polishness. Hence the constant involvement with national history and martyrology. Finally, the exceptional nature of the Symbolist movement linked to the formation of Young Poland; a movement which, as in the rest of Europe, manifested itself in a rich variety of ways and forms. The burden of the Romantic tradition served here to weaken and delay the search for new artistic languages. Yet, when an appreciation of the autonomous value of art entered the aesthetic consciousness of Poles, it took on a distinct form, specific to Polish culture. For detailed discussion of early modernist Polish art see: Wiesław Juszczak. 1977. *Malarstwo polskie. Modernizm* (Polish Painting: Modernism). Warsaw: Auriga. WAiF. 7-98; Irena Kossowska and Łukasz Kossowski. 2010. *Malarstwo polskie: Symbolizm i Młoda Polska* (Symbolism and Young Poland). Warsaw: Arkady.

[4] Pankiewicz himself executed in Paris in 1899 the first Polish portfolio ever, entitled *Quatorze eaux-fortes*, comprising Italian and French urban views (Kossowska 2000, 18).

[5] The various thematic and morphological aspects of Whistler's *oeuvre* came to act as a creative impulse for many of the pioneers of Polish original printmaking. Pankiewicz, Feliks Jabłczyński, Jan Rubczak, Zofia Stankiewicz, Jan Skotnicki, and Karol Mondral - all of these artists captured various moods, transformed different motifs, and transposed diverse compositions borrowed from the etchings and drypoints of the master. Whistler's graphic output was to stand as a matchless model of technical virtuosity and revealed the boundless capabilities of this medium (Kossowska 2000, 116-148).

[6] The majority of Polish artists studied in Italy, France, Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia, thus exposing Polish art to new trends in Europe. Polish printmakers often travelled to Paris to admire the art of Redon, Moreau and the members of the Nabis; some also continued their training in Munich, Berlin, and Leipzig. At the same time, in Cracow, Warsaw and Lviv, connoisseurs and critics promoted

printmaking through exhibitions, lectures, reviews and the typographical layout of periodicals. One of the most impassioned among them was Feliks Manggha-Jasieński, who collected and showed to befriended artists as well as the broader public prints by Dürer and Rembrandt, Piranesi's etchings, Japanese woodcuts, Vollard's portfolios, woodcuts by Rivière and Klinger's etchings.

[7] Among others, the "black and white" exhibitions which, following the example of Paris gallery shows, were held at the Krywult Salon and the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Warsaw contributed to the appeal of the black-and-white imagery. At first these exhibitions presented monochromatic painting, and later added prints and drawings. Moreover, the Warsaw Salon of Aleksander Krywult played a key role in 1900-1906 in propagating the art of eminent European printmakers and draughtsmen – Klinger, Redon, Rops, Kubin, Munch, Rivière, Whistler, Carrière, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec and Goya. French, British, American, German, Scandinavian, and Japanese prints were frequently on display at the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Warsaw. These exhibitions, being a part of the carefully planned strategy propagating the graphic revival and stirred the imagination of many artists, such as Franciszek Siedlecki, Konstanty Brandel, Witold Wojtkiewicz, Mieczysław Jakimowicz, Stanisław Rzecki, and Feliks Jabłczyński. Prints by Rembrandt, Piranesi, Goya, Whistler, Redon, and Rops in particular became a point of reference in terms of technical skills, intense expression and symbolic meaning.

[8] It should be emphasized that the leading role among Polish printmakers of the time was played by accomplished painters such as Józef Pankiewicz, who accepted the first chair at the Graphic Department of the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts in 1909, and Leon Wyczółkowski, who after 1900 abandoned painting in favour of graphic media for three decades and who in the 1930s also began to teach graphic techniques.

[9] The nocturnal paradigm in Polish symbolist painting has been discussed by Aleksandra Melbechowska Luty in *Nokturny, widoki nocy w malarstwie polskim* (*Nocturnes: the Views of Night in Polish Painting*), (Warsaw: Arkady, 1999); Andrzej Turowski, Peindre la nuit, in: Francis Ribemont (ed.), *Le Symbolisme polonaise,* (Paris: Somogy éditions d'art), 183-186.

[10] Wojciech Weiss was one of the first Polish artists who, under the influence of the Parisian milieu in the 1890s, embraced printmaking as an activity independent from painting.

[11] Konstanty Brandel, a prolific Polish etcher, who ultimately settled in France in 1903.

[12] A detailed analysis of the methods of rendering the pictorial space, derived from Japanese woodcuts, is included in the book by Siegfried Wichmann *Japonisme. The Japanese Influence on Western Art since 1858*, (London: Thames & Hudson. 1999). Łukasz Kossowski was first to discuss the influence of Japanese woodcuts on Polish modernist art in *Inspiracje sztuką Japonii w malarstwie i grafice polskich modernistów* (*Japanese Inspirations in Polish Modernist Painting and Printmaking*). *Exh. Cat*. (Kielce: National Museum in Kielce, 1981), followed by Anna Król's *Japonizm polski* (*Polish Japonism*), (Cracow: Manggha, 2011).

[13] The innovative formula depicting visual sensations, applied in these two sets, constituted a turning point in the development of the etching and drypoint techniques. At this point, Whistler put into practice the idea of *belle epreuve* by quickly and perfectly etching the plate with a needle and by carefully modulating the layer of ink left on the surface of the plate in order to achieve a subtle gradation of tones. These additional tonal effects, different in each edition, turned the artist's prints into original, unique works of art comparable to monotype. *Etchings of James A.McN. Whistler*, selected and introduced by Maria Naylor (New York: Dover Publications. 1975), xi.

[14] Jabłczyński resided in Paris in the years 1909-1911, where he was honing his graphic skills. His interest in printmaking was initiated thanks to his close contacts with Pankiewicz with whom he shared his studio. As a chemistry graduate, he would give Pankiewicz advice in his first attempts of mastering the etching technique. In 1893 they went together on a trip to Italy. In 1907 Jabłczyński invented an original *intaglio* technique – oil-cloth engraving - that consists of scratching the line with a metal point into the surface of an oilcloth (Kossowska 2000, 54-55).

[15] Delâtre published two portfolios, *Souvenirs: Six pointes sèches* (1871) and *Six pointes-sèches* (1873), presenting the capacity of *retroussage* – additional procedures performed on the plate surface which imply the use of a muslin wipe in order to “soften” the line path (Naylor 1975, xii)

[16] Naylor 1975, xii.

[17] Naylor 1975, xiii.

[18] Whistler worked with a type of a lithographic technique – lithotint – in the years 1878-1879, under the supervision of Thomas Way. For detailed analysis of the artist’s lithographic techniques see Martha Tedeschi (ed.), *The Lithographs of James McNeill Whistler: A Catalogue Raisonne. Vol. II: Correspondence and Technical Studies* (Chicago: Art Institute Chicago, 1998).

[19] Stanisław Przybyszewski was the main activist behind the expressionist tendencies in the Polish artistic milieu. He arrived in Krakow from Berlin in the autumn of 1898, famed as ‘der geniale Pole’, a friend of Edvard Munch and August Strindberg, a prodigal critic, novelist, pianist, and dramatist, a satanist and an occultist, one of the leading personalities of the Berlin bohême that frequented the tavern nicknamed “Zum schwarzen Ferkel” (“The Black Piglet”). He achieved fame publishing philosophical and literary essays, such as *Chopin und Nietzsche* (1892), *Psychischer Naturalismus* (1894), *Auf den Wegen der Seele* (1897) and the prose poem *Totenmesse* (1893). At the beginning of 1899 he published in the elite literary and artistic journal Życie (*Life*) the manifesto of the new aesthetics, *Confiteor*. This programmatic declaration affirmed the unity of art and religion, and the apotheosis of the artist as a priest. Rejecting any utilitarianism in art, any patriotic, ethical or social functions, Przybyszewski claimed that true art ”has no purpose, it is a purpose in itself, it is absolute because it is a reflection of the soul.” For an insightful discussion of Przybyszewski’s relationship with the Cracow artistic milieu see Łukasz Kossowski and Jacek Chromy (eds.), *Totenmesse: Munch-Weiss-Przybyszewski,* exh. cat. (Warsaw: Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, 1996).

[20] Siedlecki and Brandel maintained close contact with each other during their stay in Paris. Siedlecki persuaded Brandel to join the École Nationale et Spéciale des Beaux-Arts in 1907. They were both inspired by the religions and cultures of Asia, particularly India.
[21] A thorough analysis of the mirror reflections employed by Brandel, a motif taken from Renaissance treatises on the rules of ceiling perspective, was included in the article by Joanna Szczepińska. 1969. "Fantazje architektoniczne Konstantego Brandla" (Architectonic Phantasies of Konstanty Brandel). *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 31, no. 3: 291-299. The artist spoke of his creative process as follows: "I try to see 'from my own angle.' To look from places from which an eye normally does not look at the world, for instance, as if my eye was located where my toes are". See Witold Leitgeber. 1979. *Rozmowy z Brandlem* (*Conversations with Brandel*), (Warsaw), 29.

CHAPTER SIX

FANTASTIC NATURE: ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN PAUL KLEE AND ODILON REDON

JONATHAN PERKINS

Scholars have not explored the relationship between the French Symbolist Odilon Redon who lived from 1840 to 1916 and the Swiss Modernist Paul Klee, who was born in 1879 and died in 1940. My paper argues that there are multiple associations between the creative approaches and the artistic productions of these two leading figures in modern art. Both in general themes, as well as in terms of specific artistic motifs, the artists have important relationships. As a way to focus our study, we will concentrate our examination on the ways both artists depict nature, particularly plant-forms, in their work.

But before we compare specific artworks, let us examine the broader creative associations between the two artists. Odilon Redon wrote that "my originality consists in putting the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible."[1] Paul Klee wrote, comparing himself to another artist, Franz Marc the following: "My fire is more like that of the dead or of the unborn. … In my work I do not belong to the species, but am a cosmic point of reference."[2] For both artists, artistic creativity is inextricably linked with an almost mystical connection with the spiritual. Indeed, through their highly personal imagery, both artists *merge* the physical and the spiritual, and create forms that are not visible, do not exist, other than in the artworks themselves.

Both artists' representations of plant life in particular link what might be termed a pseudo-scientific approach with a deeply personal impulse inspired by a desire to approach the spiritual. For Redon and Klee, a fundamental aspect of their artistic creativity is a concern for the *processes* of nature. In 1883, Redon produced a series of lithographs entitled "The

Origins," which depicted fantastic forms of plant and animal life that were the supposed prehistoric precursors of human life. Even though the inspiration is clearly associated with Darwin's theory of evolution, the approach is not really scientific, and clearly related to the artist's fertile imagination, as in his earlier series "In Dreams." Although there are depictions of familiar mythological beings such as satyrs and Pegasuses, there is incredible imagination everywhere, particularly in the early depiction of a plant with an eye (Fig. 6-1). This work bears the following caption: "There was perhaps a first vision attempted in the flower." The series as a whole explores the *process* of the development of life. That theme is the impetus for Redon's artistic creativity.

Indeed, eyes play a prominent role in the work of both artists. In Redon's "eye-plant" the eerie eye calls attention to itself, and the plant is transformed into a hybrid of the plant-like and the animal. This merging is crucial for the creativity of both artists. Paul Klee does a group of works which, by their titles, merge the plantlike and humans. Klee's 1917 watercolor entitled *Mourning Flowers* (Fig. 6-2) forms an interesting comparison with Redon's lithograph.

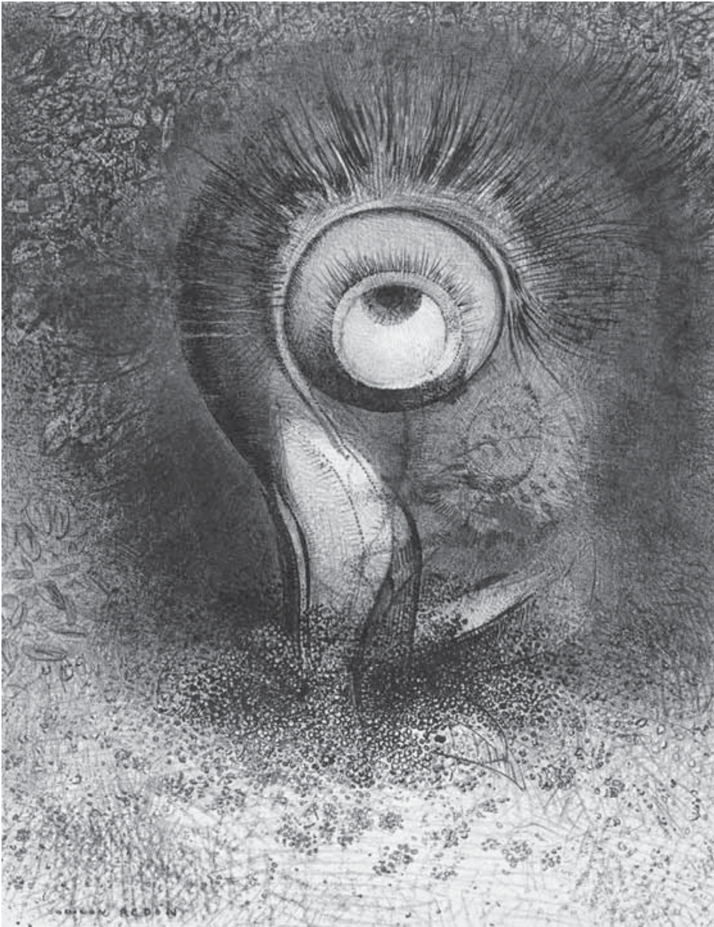

Fig. 6-1. Odilon Redon, *There Was Perhaps a First Vision Attempted in the Flower*

Eyes are assertively depicted in both works, and immediately recognizable, yet at the same time they function to transform the plants into something utterly fantastic. The eye to the bottom left of Klee's work is "disembodied" and draws the viewer into the emotional, transformative world of the image. Other round forms, particularly the upper left circle, can be read as additional eyes that are clearly part of the other overtly plant-like shapes. Even though Redon's style is more three dimensional,

particularly regarding the eyeball, the elegant curving forms of Redon's work can find parallels in many of the lines in *Mourning Flowers*.[3]

Both Redon and Klee's hybrids of plants and humans focus on emotions, as signaled in their forms and titles.[4] For Redon, we will focus on the lithograph from his Homage to Goya Series, with the full title *The Marsh Flower, a Sad Human Head* (Fig. 6-3). Analogously, Klee created his drawing *Passionate Plants* in 1914, whereas the scholar Richard Verdi

Fig. 6-2. Paul Klee, *Trauerblumen*

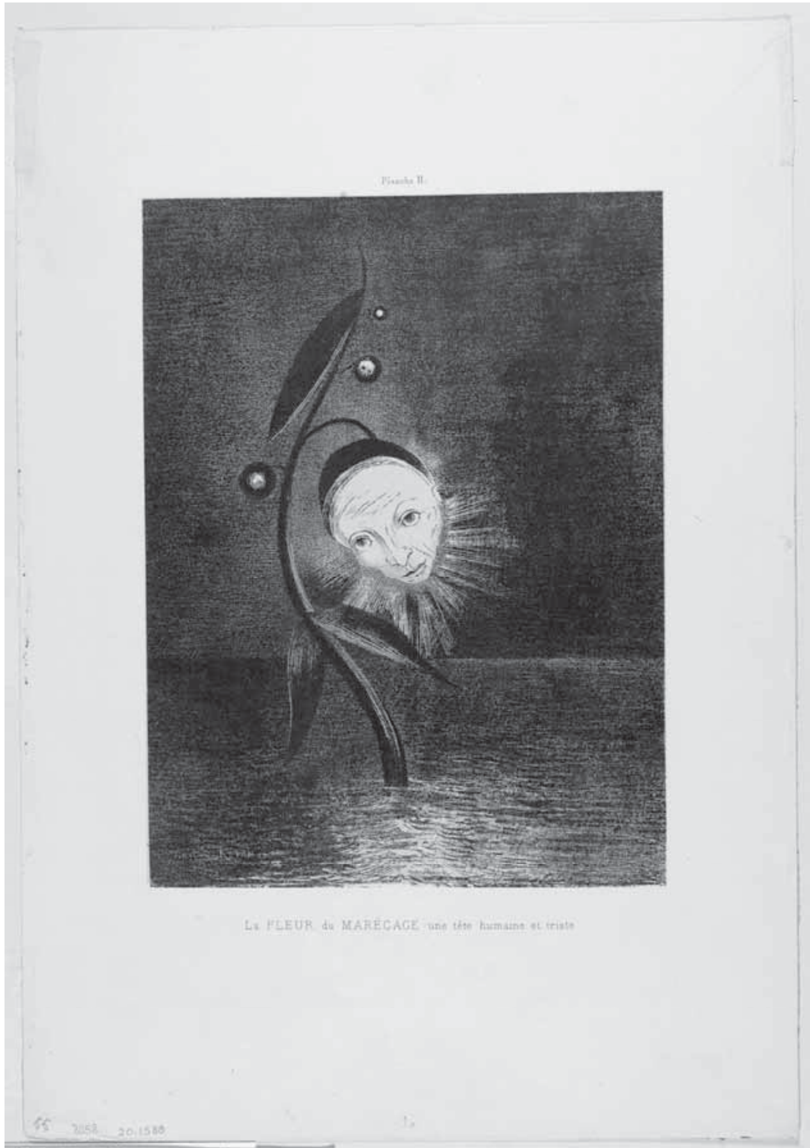

Fig. 6-3. Odilon Redon, *The Marsh Flower, a Sad Human Head*

writes "…a lusty male 'blossom' gazes leeringly in the direction of a prospective partner…."[5] Other expressive plant humans by Klee include *Strange Plants* of 1921, *Dying Plants* of 1922, and *Vegetal Evil* of 1927.[6] Comparing the approach of these artists, there are clear stylistic differences, yet both find their aesthetic creativity sparked by a merging of human emotions onto plants. Redon very clearly gives faces to the plants, grafting the human heads into the areas where flowers would be. In Redon's lithograph, as in a group of related charcoal drawings, the setting is bleak, and the artist presents the fantastic plant in the foreground as the focus of our attention. There is a delicate melancholy to the depiction, for the face gazes just slightly upward, a bit away from the viewer, and has a somber, underplayed expression that only hints at sadness. The subtlety of the emotional evocation in this work is only possible, I would argue, because the flower is turned into a face.[7]

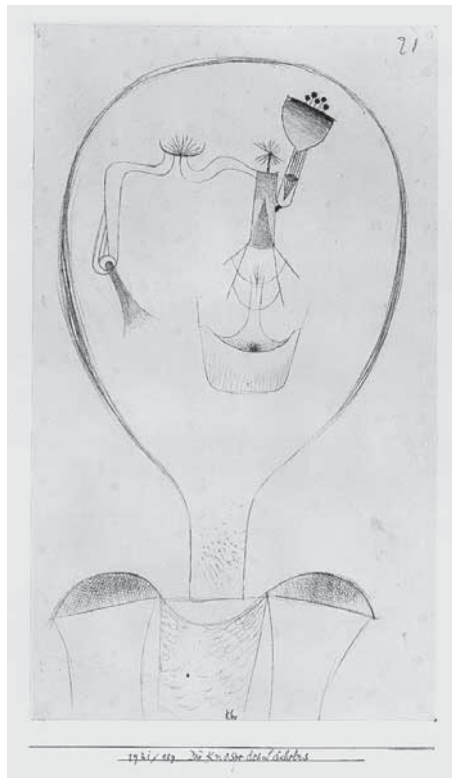

Fig. 6-4. Paul Klee, *The Bud of the Smile*

Paul Klee's style is much more abstracted and ambiguous, and also more varied. To make clearer the differences, let us examine Klee's drawing *Bud of the Smile* (Fig. 6-4), and compare it with Redon's *Marsh Flower* (Fig. 6-3). Both are "flower faces" and both face out to the viewer, but they are radically different. Redon's work depicts a more or less naturalistically modeled face. Here the outline of human head is made explicit, and the facial features clearly "read" simultaneously as a stylized plant. The upwardly curving forms of the "mouth" may be seen, in Klee's typically whimsical way, as a smile, but the face remains enigmatic because of the particular stylization of the forms: We do find an "eye" and perhaps a nose, but unlike Redon, we do not have a clear human face here. In fact, the "smile" paradoxically underscores the lack of humanity in the figure.

Let us now turn to works that focus explicitly on *processes* of nature, a key element of commonality between the artists. Of particular importance is the first lithograph from Redon's first print series, "In Dreams," which dates to 1879. This image, entitled *Blossoming* (Fig. 6-5), depicts a face inside a spherical form. The title signals both the plant associations, as well as the concern for biological processes which is so central to both Redon and Klee. The next print in the series is entitled *Germination* and it depicts multiple floating heads seemingly associated with a similar central large head inside a sphere.[8]

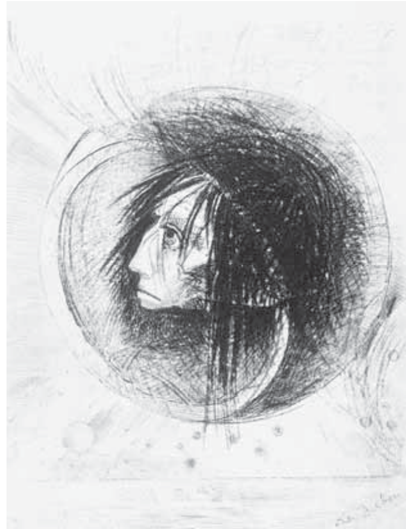

Fig. 6-5. Odilon Redon, *Blossoming*

Klee was also very interested in both nature and transformative processes, and the interconnection between the two: "In my productive activity, every time a type grows beyond the stage of its genesis, and I have about reached the goal, the intensity gets lost very quickly, and I have to look for new ways. It is precisely the way which is productive—this is the essential thing; becoming is more important than being."[9] Numerous works, including many that have clearly natural forms, deal with processes in one way or another. In his "Recollections" Paul Klee's son Felix discusses trips to a park with his father in the early 1920's: "How fascinating my father made these walks with his observation about nature. The world of bird and flowers had especially bewitched him."[10]

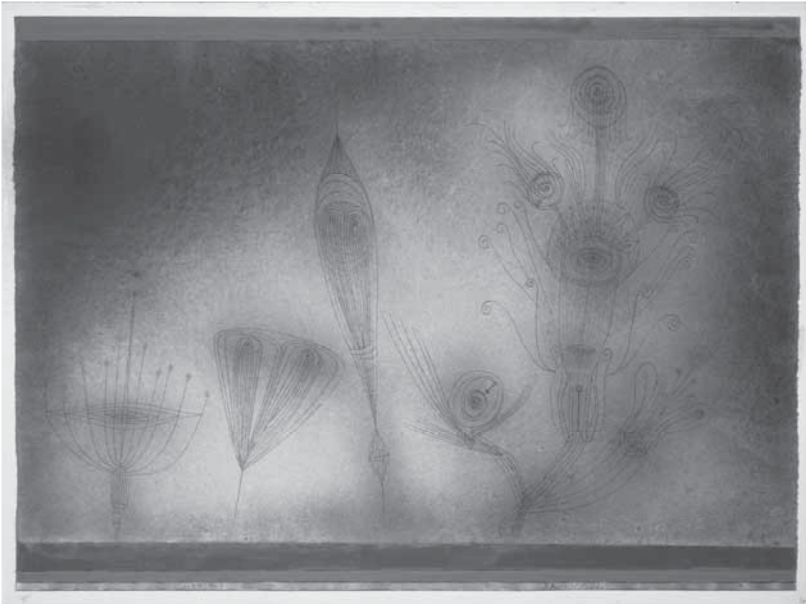

Fig. 6-6. Paul Klee, *Ardent Flowering*

We may compare Redon's works to Klee's *Ardent Flowering* from 1927 (Fig. 6-6), which shows plant-like structures with stylized forms that can be read as eyes and mouths. Moreover, the title of "Ardent Flowering" makes explicit Klee's concern for biological processes. This brilliant work is worth a more extended analysis. The reliance on a linear stylization, with Klee's particular individualistic sensibility, conveys a sense of the processes of nature: The parallel lines of the plants swoop up

in an energetic manner, expressing their "ardent flowering." The fertility of the flowering is so extravagant that a face has formed. In order to capture the processes of nature, Klee transforms literal appearance. The evocation of the flowering of the plants, their means of fertilization, their means of creating other plants, is paralleled with artistic creativity: Klee's creative imagination, his evocative personal stylistic approach "encourages" the plants, in a sense, to become more fertile. Like Redon, that approach involves making the plants hybrids between plants and animals, by giving them pseudo-faces.

Klee's late work from 1939, entitled *Pathetic Germination* (Fig. 6-7), forms a fascinating comparison with the earlier work. By this time, Klee knew he was dying, (he would die the following year), and many of his works have an ominous tone. In a sense, this work is the complement to *Ardent Flowering*. The titles are opposite in meaning, and the forms are opposite in some ways, as well. Instead of the delicate lines and the beautiful, underplayed color harmony of yellow and pink, we have three stark white forms against an unforgiving black background. The lines are thick and rough. The form at the left appears drawn inward, perhaps destined not to reproduce. The center and right forms echo one another, and "face" one another, but their fate is undetermined. Remarkably, however, Klee gives these plant-like shapes forms that suggest human features, as he does in his earlier work. The two appendages in the central

Fig. 6-7. Paul Klee, *Pathetic Germination*

form can be read as "arms" reaching out for the form on the right. The right plant does not respond clearly, and the outcome of their attempt at germination is ambiguous.

In conclusion, the paper has intended to argue the correspondences, but also the fundamental differences between the work of the two artists, as can be seen by comparing *Blossoming* (Fig. 6-5) with *Ardent Flowering* (Fig. 6-6). Redon's *Blossoming* is a startling work, but one that, for all imaginative freedom, relies on a naturalistically modeled head as the focus of the composition. Klee's picture creates a face most clearly in the plant to the right, yet the abstraction in the forms makes what we are viewing quite ambiguous. The parallel lines read simultaneously as simply lines, and also as suggestions of plant-like and human forms. With its flatness and assertive stylization, Klee's work aligns with nonrepresentational art of the twentieth century, yet the imaginative hybrid of the plant-like and the human finds parallels in the inspirational art of Redon.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 6-1. Odilon Redon, *There Was Perhaps a First Vision Attempted in the Flower*, plate 2 of 8 from *Les Origines*, 1883, Lithograph in black on light gray chine laid down on white wove paper 22.5 x 17.7 cm (image/chine), 51.1 x 35.6 cm (sheet), The Stickney Collection, 1920.1579, The Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 6-2. Paul Klee, *Trauerblumen*, 1917, 132, *Mourning Flowers*, 1917, 132, Watercolor and pen on paper on cardboard 23.3 x 14.8 cm, Private Collection, Germany.

Fig. 6-3. Odilon Redon, *The Marsh Flower, a Sad Human Head*, plate 2 of 6, 1885, Lithograph in black on ivory China paper laid down on ivory wove paper 27.2 x 20.2 cm (image/chine), 44.1 x 30.6 cm (sheet), The Stickney Collection, 1920.1588, The Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 6-4. Paul Klee, *Die Knospe des Lächelns*, 1921, 159 (*The Bud of the Smile*, 1921, 159), Pencil on paper on cardboard 28 x 16.5 cm, Albertina, Vienna, Promised gift of the Carl Djerassi Art Trust II.

Fig. 6-5. Odilon Redon, *Blossoming*, 1879, Lithograph on mounted ivory China paper 33.4 x 25.9 cm, The Stickney Collection, 1920.1556, The Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 6-6. Paul Klee, *Heiss blühendes*, 1927, 272, (*Ardent Flowering*, 1927, 272), Pen and watercolor on paper on cardboard 34 x 46 cm, Private Collection, Germany.

Fig. 6-7. Paul Klee, Swiss, 1879-1940, *pathetisches Keimen*, 1939, 281, (*Pathetic Germination*, 1939, 281), Colored paste on primed paper on cardboard, 25.5 x 48.5 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

Notes

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[1]Candice Black, ed. *Odilon Redon: I am the First Consciousness of Chaos; the black album* (Washington, D.C.: Solar Books, 2010), 9.
[2]Felix Klee, ed., *The Diaries of Paul Klee* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), entry 1008, pages 344 and 345.
[3]Many other works by both Klee and Redon depict assertive eyes. One of the most startling by Redon is the huge eyeball from his 1879 print series "In Dreams" entitled *Vision* (illustrated in Black, ed., *I am the First Consciousness of Chaos*, 47). Even more haunting is the eyeball within a sphere, a charcoal drawing also entitled *Vision.* In this work, by placing the eye within a sphere and by indicating hair, Redon has created a being that is dominated by one feature—the eye. The eye in Redon's work forms a valuable comparison with the eye in Klee's watercolor of 1918 entitled *With the Eagle,* illustrated in *Paul Klee Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 2, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 473. Even though Redon's eye is modeled in three dimensions and Klee's eye is flat and simplified in form, the eyes function analogously in both works, asserting their central presence by looking out at the viewer. They are immediately identifiable and the central focus of both works. They have an immediate connection to the viewer, yet the eyes exist in and of themselves without any connection to a identifiable object from reality. They are solely the creation of each artist's imagination.
[4]Other Redon "hybrid" human-plant works include the charcoal drawings *Swamp Flower: A Sad and Human Head*, *Marsh Flower* and *Strange Flower*. These works are illustrated and discussed in Barbara Larson, *The Dark Side of Nature: Science, Society, and the Fantastic in the Work of Odilon Redon* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 75-79.
[5]Richard Verdi, *Klee and Nature* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), 126.
[6]Verdi, see pages 146, 141 and 137 for illustrations of these works.
[7]Each of the related charcoal drawings gives a slightly different feel (see footnote 4*)*. In *Swamp Flower: a Sad Human Head* the downward gaze of the profile face and the fact that the plant droops under the weight of the head gives the drawing a melancholy tone. The *Marsh Flower* drawing displays a very similar composition, but the face is depicted head on, and with eyes gazing upward instead of down. The tone, however, is similar to the other work, and is conveyed primarily in the expression of the face, clearly sad. Whether downcast or upcast, the expression conveys a bleakness corresponding to the setting. *Strange Flower* contrasts with these works in three aspects: the face appears youthful, it looks directly out at the viewer, and it has a neutral expression.
[8]Illustrated in Larson, *The Dark Side of Nature*, 111.
[9]Felix Klee, ed., *The Diaries of Paul Klee,* entry 928, page 307.
[10]Ibid., 416.

PART THREE:

VISUAL ARTS, LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE DUALITY OF LIGHT IN ROSSETTI'S EKPHRASTIC POEMS AND PAINTINGS

DEBORAH H. CIBELLI

Rossetti scholar and art historian Alicia Faxon has noted that the writing and art of Dante Gabriel Rossetti complement each other and that "from the time of his first oil painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (Fig. 7-1), he wrote poems to accompany his paintings" (Faxon 1989, 18). She qualified this statement about the close relationship between Rossetti's poems and paintings, noting "except for a work specifically commissioned after an earlier poem, *The Blessed Damozel,* he never created paintings to go with his poems, though many of his images refer to writings by others" (Faxon 18). More needs to be said about the relationship between Rossetti's poetry and painting throughout his career, because on a fundamental level Rossetti translated visual imagery into different media. Rossetti himself defined the process of literary translation as "perhaps the most direct form of commentary."[1] To that end, he refined and developed his ideas about imagery translating paintings into texts and literary descriptions of art into actual paintings.

The literary descriptions of art that Rossetti relied upon to create his paintings are examples of *ekphrasis,* a technique that followed classical models developed first by Homer to describe the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* XVIII as representing a microcosm of the cosmos. Other sources for *ekphrasis* include the classical literature of Philostratus who described ancient Greek and Roman sculpture and painting, and the work of Lucian who wrote of the famous *Calumny* of Apelles, that later became the source for a Renaissance painting by Sandro Botticelli (Williams 2009, 10-13). During the nineteenth century, Rossetti undertook ekphrastic exercises as he translated Dante's *Vita Nuova* c. 1850 and used the *Divina Commedia* as a source for his own depictions of the Virgin Mary, Beatrice, and other female types. In assessing examples of Rossetti's art related to poetry, Rossetti developed a form of Symbolist *ekphrasis* rooted in his concept of

translation in which painting and poems are both a "direct form of commentary." In other words, his sonnets on art and his paintings related to poetry were inter-textual with one text becoming part of a critical discourse on another.

Dante's description of a relief in the last lines of *Purgatorio* Canto X inspired Rossetti's early painting, *Ecce Ancilla Domini* "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" from 1849-53 (Fig. 7-2), which depicted the Annunciation.[2] The canto stated:

> And in her mien this language had impressed,
> "Ecce ancilla Dei," as distinctly
> As any figure stamps itself in wax (*The Divine Comedy, 1869,* 2, 60).

Fig. 7-1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Girlhood Mary Virgin*

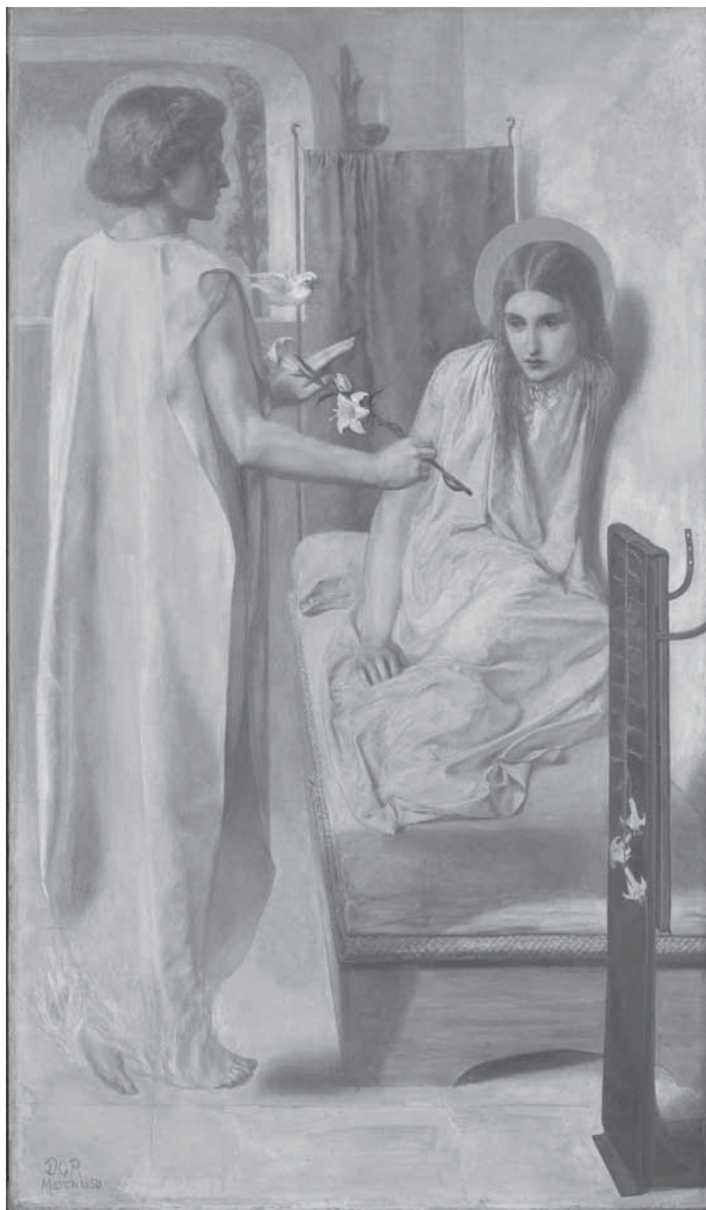

Fig. 7-2. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini (The Annunciation*

For Dante it was the Virgin's compliance as the Lord's servant that was "imprinted in her attitude" (Barkan 2011, 67). In crafting the painting based upon this verse, Rossetti made her acquiescence explicit, showcasing his knowledge of Renaissance poetry and the iconography of Renaissance paintings. Rossetti's adaptation of Dante and his references to Renaissance art in his painting of the Annunciation titled *Ecce Ancilla Domini* and in other paintings and poems warrant further study. Using motifs from the Renaissance he contrasted the earthly and heavenly realms and conveyed the idea that light had the ability to unify the earthly and the spiritual and to represent transcendence. Thus, Rossetti used light for more than the modeling of form and explored the limitations of mimesis. Light was manipulated to separate and distinguish earth from heaven, to create a celestial hierarchy, and to represent physical form imbued with spiritual beauty.

To understand the significance of light as a paradigmatic symbol in Rossetti's oeuvre, we must discuss the iconography and style of ekphrastic paintings such as *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. Rossetti's siblings Christina and William Michael Rossetti served as models for *Ecce Ancilla Domini* allowing him to make the religious figures quite lifelike. William posed for the head of the Archangel Gabriel while Christina was shown as vulnerable in two figure studies. In one of the drawings she was portrayed as the Virgin Mary dressed in a plain white garment (Fig. 7-3) (Fredeman 2002, 228; Surtees 1971, 2, plates 30-31). In the second, a nude figure study (Fig. 7-4), Christina is portrayed as Mary responding to the angel's salutation, *"Ave gratia plena Dominus tectum"* / "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee" from Luke 1:28, with a wide-eyed, horror stricken look on her face as she raises one hand to her face and the other above her head.[3] This pose was to show that Mary was at first troubled by the utterance and wondered what it meant (Van Dijk 1999, 420). Her violent response recorded in the drawing recalls the pose and attitude of the Virgin in the sumptuous *Annunciation* by Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi from 1333 in Siena in which Mary turns her body away from the angel clad in a fluttering plaid garment who leans forward to deliver his salutation. While it is tempting to consider that the pose rendered in the nude study and adapted for the final painting may have been interpreted as recording Christina Rossetti's unease, it falls within the conventional iconography for religious painting. Indeed, the pose reinforces the message of *"Ecce ancilla domini*" and signals the Virgin's acceptance of her role after she received the "troubling" news and responded affirmatively to Gabriel's salutation.

The Archangel gestures as he holds lilies that are the traditional symbols of purity in scenes of the Annunciation that are either held in the angel's hands, as they are here, or are displayed in a vase. The unopened bloom may refer to the Incarnation and is shown with two opened blossoms to represent the Trinity.[4] Gabriel holds the lilies diagonally with the stem at an angle that directs the viewer's attention to Mary. Three more lilies cascade downward in the unfinished embroidered panel on a stand located in the foreground and may refer to the transitory nature of life. The embroidery stand is unique to Rossetti's Annunciation in his attempt to portray the daily life of the Virgin. It is also similar to one he included in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-1849) where Mary is shown with St. Ann working on the embroidery panel.

In his correspondence of 14 November, 1848 to Charles Lyell, a friend and translator of Dante, Rossetti noted that Christina modeled for the Virgin in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and described the embroidery stand:

> I have represented the future Mother of Our Lord as occupied in embroidering a lily - always under the direction of St. Anne; the flower she is copying being held by two little angels. At a large window (or rather aperture) in the background, her father, St. Joachim, is seen pruning a vine. There are various symbolic accessories which it is needless to describe. I have made several studies in chalk for the picture, besides the design for the composition: but the only parts yet painted in on the canvas, are the background (which would admit of no delay for the reason before alluded to) and a portion of the figure of the Blessed Virgin, for which Christina sits to me; her appearance being excellently adapted to my purpose (Fredeman 2002, 75-76).

Fig.7-3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Study for Ecce Ancilla Domini (The Annunciation)*

Fig. 7-4. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini- Female Nude- Study for the Virgin*.

While Rossetti regarded most of the motifs as well known, he felt it necessary to explain the symbolism of the briar and crossed palm fronds placed on the floor before them in his sonnet related to the painting: "The seven-thorn'd briar and the palm seven-leaved/ Are her great sorrow and her great reward" (Rossetti 1897, 2, 354). Rossetti suggested that the plant imagery referred to the joys and sorrows of the Virgin because of her happiness regarding Christ's majesty and the grief she would experience with Christ's death.

Rossetti continued to embellish the floral symbolism of the Renaissance in his painting of the *Annunciation*. In *Ecce Ancilla Domini* a single vine climbs the rear wall beyond the archway of the austere interior. The lilies are part of the white palette inspiring Rossetti who had just turned to painting to refer to the work as the "blessed daub" and in a self-deprecating way as the "white eyesore" (Fredeman 2002, 225). Nonetheless, he selected white for its association with purity. Writing to F. G. Stephens in 1874, Rossetti stated that the painting was, "in point of time the ancestor of all the white pictures which have since become so numerous—but here there is an ideal motive for the whiteness."[5] Rossetti suggests that he regarded his own painting as more successful than work such as Whistler's *White Girl* (1861-62), later known as *Symphony in White No. 1,* and *Symphony in White No. 2* (1865), both portraits of Whistler's mistress Joanna Heffernan, when he commented on the unique idealism of his *Annunciation* (Grieve 1971, 219-224).

The white palette was enhanced by Rossetti's treatment of light which played an essential role in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. While the simple interior of the room is illuminated by the flame in the wall sconce, a source of artificial light located on the back wall of the chamber, a spiritual light emanated from the haloes of the figures, from the entire figure of the Archangel, and from the dove referencing the Holy Spirit. In addition, the wingless Archangel, hovering near Mary, had an unusual source of illumination in the form of the yellow flames that flickered around his feet. The hovering, light-imbued angel is a dynamic figure who is animated because he plays a key role as interlocutor in the narrative. Mary, shown without a halo, is separated from Gabriel as she inhabits an earthly realm illuminated by the artificial light of the wall sconce. In a most profound sense Rossetti used light in this painting to separate the figures and distinguish between the angel sent from heaven and the earthly figure of Mary of Nazareth. Rossetti's painting of the Annunciation also relied upon the poses and expressions of the figures to convey the narrative. His work differed from many of his Renaissance predecessors in that he did not inscribe Gabriel's salutation or Mary's response on the painting.[6] Indeed,

he had decorated the original frame before it was reframed in the seventies with "religious mottoes in Latin copied from a medieval brass" (Grieve 1973, 19). Rossetti relegated the text to the margins and chiefly relied upon the physical properties of the painting to convey meaning. His work was shaped by the conception of painting as mute poetry, an idea that was based upon an aphorism that Plutarch attributed to Simonides from antiquity.[7] In turn, Rossetti thought of his other artwork as "silent poems" and used art as the subject of many sonnets (Stein 1975, 21). For Rossetti, Simonides' dictum also meant that poetry was a speaking picture.

Part of the discourse regarding *ekphrasis* that remained relevant for Rossetti was the debate about the emotive quality of poetry and painting. In 1870, Rossetti wrote to Dr. Thomas Gordon Hake:

> As with recreated forms in painting, so I should wish to deal in poetry chiefly with personified emotions; and in carrying out my scheme of the *"House of Life*" (if I ever do so) shall try to put into action a complete *dramatis personae* of the soul (Doughty and Wahl 1965, 1, 850, qted in Stein 1975, 201-202).

The affective nature accorded to art and writing was also part of the aesthetic sensibility of the period exemplified by the work of the critic Walter Pater who wrote on Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites and referred to Gotthold Ephriam Lessing and the eighteenth-century discourse comparing the sister arts of poetry and painting (Pater 1893, 52).

Rossetti was keenly aware of the ekphrastic tradition, producing his "Sonnets for Pictures" for *The Germ* when he was 22 years old. In the journal he published sonnets about paintings by Mantegna, Hans Memling, Giorgione, and Ingres after visiting the museums and galleries in France and Belgium with William Holman Hunt during the fall of 1849 (Ormond 2006, 156). The aesthetic experience of viewing the masters was such that Rossetti felt inspired to write descriptive poetry to capture fleeting emotion using expressive, lyrical forms.

In the sonnet "For An Allegorical Dance Of Women By Andrea Mantegna" he envisioned in *Parnassus,* as a painting in which Mantegna was projected into the place of the poet and musician, Apollo (Helsinger 2009, 420). As Rossetti noted in a telling passage:

> But I believe that, leaning tow'rds them, he
> Just felt their hair carried across his face
> As each girl passed him; nor gave ear to trace (Rossetti, 1897, 1, 346).

In the verse describing the painting, Apollo is physically absorbed by the music he creates. The female dancers move as a group with the individual

figures envisioned as coming in such close proximity to Apollo that their hair brushes across his face. With their graceful movements the women are physically alluring and represent beauty.

Beauty was essential to his aesthetic vision as Rossetti made clear in a statement forging a relationship between men, women, painting, and poetry included in his notes published by his brother:

> Picture and poem bear the same relation to each other as beauty does in man and woman: the point of meeting where the two are most identical is the supreme perfection (Rossetti 1897, 1, 510 quoted in Stein 1975, 197).

There was the possibility of transcendence because beauty, as noted by David Sonstroem, was embodied in the woman inherent to "four fantasies" Rossetti related to salvation. The four types include the beautiful woman in heaven, *femmes fatales*, sinful women who appeal for help, and the victimized women who cannot be saved (Sonstroem 1970, 3-4). In his work dedicated to these types, Rossetti portrayed sensuous women as "virtuous sources of spiritual energy" (Morrison 2011, 70). He created a duality that encompassed the sacred and profane, endowing the figures with a sensuality that often elicited criticism.

In his famous review titled, "The Fleshy School of Poetry," published in *The Contemporary Review* in 1871, Robert Buchanan chiefly took offense at the content of the sonnet "Nuptial Sleep" and other poems from *The House of Life*. Similarly, Walter Pater singled out "The Blessed Damozel*,"* when it was first published in 1850, for its seemingly unwholesome physical reality (Buchanan 1871, 334; Fredeman 1964-65, 299).[8]

In *Appreciations,* Pater noted:

> One of the peculiarities of *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 (Pater 1889, 230 qted in Stein 1975, 125).

Despite his acknowledgement of the negative criticism of Rossetti's poetry and the aberrant qualities he found in "The Blessed Damozel," Pater defended the sensuality stating that it was rooted in Dante, "Like Dante, he knows no region of spirit which shall not be sensuous also, or material" (Pater 1889, 236).

As a love-sonnet modeled on the work of Dante, Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel," developed an ekphrastic description of a picture that Rossetti translated into two paintings with the same title. Rossetti created those works using Alexis Wilding for the principal figure, his other favorite model. The first painting of 1871-1878 (Fig. 7-5) produced for the

cotton and wine merchant William Graham of Glasgow and Liverpool is now in the Fogg Museum and the second painting of 1875-1879 (Fig. 7-6) made for the Liverpool shipper Frederick Richard Leyland is from the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Liverpool (Thomas 2000, 82).

Fig. 7-5. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*

Fig. 7-6. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*

One of the ways in which Rossetti suggested that the sensual female figure was in heaven was to include Marian imagery in the painting that he referenced in the first sestet:

The blessed Damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven:
Her blue eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven (Rossetti 1897, 1, 232).

The three lilies, evoking the Incarnation and the Trinity in paintings of the *Annunciation*, and seven stars alluding to the seven joys and sorrows of Mary suggest that the figure is worthy company for the Virgin (Bentley 1982, 38). Similarly, the pairs of lovers derived from Botticelli's *Mystical Nativity* are shown with the dove of the Holy Spirit overlooking them (Faxon 1989, 209).

The religious iconography explored in the poem motivated Graham to ask Rossetti to create a predella panel so that the painting of the Blessed Damozel he commissioned resembled a Renaissance altarpiece. The frame bisecting the top half of the painting from the predella also evoked the "gold bar" described in the poem. While Rossetti inscribed fragments of the verse on the elaborate frame of the painting, the second version of the painting Rossetti made for Leyland had a carved and gilded classical frame without text (Fredeman 1964-65, 308). The background of the second version was modified to include the head of a small winged child above the Damozel that was placed there to make the painting more poignant (Thomas 2000, 74). The flames surrounding the two other figures were accentuated to represent the movement of the angelic souls described in the verse, "And the souls mounting up to God / Went by her like thin flames." The winged child and flames show Rossetti revised the painting to conform to the poetic imagery (Surtees 1971, 1, 141). He made the modifications to suggest heaven and earth are "simultaneously knowable" and to convey the possibility for the soul to ascend to heaven (Bentley 1982, 36). With the quest for an earthly and spiritual duality in his art, Rossetti's poem and paintings referred to different sources of light to refer to the celestial hierarchy and to describe the imaginary reunion of the lovers, making their meeting almost sacred.

In a telling passage, the Damozel states:

When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I'll take his hand, and go with him
To the deep wells of light;
As unto a stream we will step down,
And bathe there in God's sight (Rossetti 1897, 1, 234).

The aureole resembles a halo that illuminates the male lover who would ideally enter the field of light. The Damozel imagines him in a stream of light as she waits to see if he will join her. Despite her expression of hope, the sonnet ends on a somber note, with the speaker providing a record of the Damozel's reactions to the separation:

> (I saw her smile.) But soon their path
> Was vague in distant spheres,
> And then she cast her arms along
> The golden barriers,
> And laid her face between her hands,
> And wept. (I heard her tears.) (Rossetti 1897, 1, 236).

The "golden barriers" separate heavenly from earthly lover and circumscribe a realm that seems divine and magical. Nonetheless, the failure of the couple to reunite introduces an element of skepticism and perhaps even religious doubt because heaven has become far removed from the earthly lover (Bentley 1982, 43; Stein 1975, 151-152). As critic Ronnalie Roper Howard notes, "the poem is an overstatement: heaven is hell to one separated from a lover, or, heaven would be an eternity of the highest moment of human love" (Howard 1972, 48-49).

In these two paintings Rossetti captured all of the attendant fears and desires of the lovers by casting his figures in a dividing light. Light represents the lover's longing for the celestial woman's physical presence that ultimately results in alienation and despair rather than divine grace. At the same time there is the aesthetic sensibility that beauty will positively affect viewers offering them the possibility of transcendence.

In Rossetti's art and writing, encompassing the first painting of Mary's childhood, the naturalistic Annunciation, and the images of separated lovers, Rossetti explored the affective properties of ekphrastic poetry and painting and used the duality of light and other elements drawn from the Renaissance to divide heaven from earth, to denote the hierarchy of the "Dantesque Heavens," and to endow physical form with spiritual beauty.[9] Rossetti examined the light-infused and emotionally laden themes in the life of the Virgin and the happiness and despair of the beautiful woman in heaven over the course of thirty years in image and text, as he practiced his own form of Symbolist ekphrasis. He described paintings in poems and gave visual expression to poetry in painting. He also developed an aesthetic sense of beauty based upon a duality of light.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 7-1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Girlhood Mary Virgin*, 1848-1849. Oil paint on canvas support 832 x 645 cm; frame 1080 x 905 x 75 mm. Tate Britain. Bequeathed by Lady Jekyll, 1932, N04872.

Fig. 7-2. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini (The Annunciation), 1*849-1850. Oil on canvas support 724 x 419 mm. Tate Britain, N01210.

Fig. 7-3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Study for Ecce Ancilla Domini (The Annunciation),* circa 1849. Drawing on paper with support 194 x 137 mm. Tate Britain, T00287.

Fig. 7-4. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini- Female Nude-Study for the Virgin,* 1849. Pencil on pale blue paper 98 x 177 mm. Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, 1904P290.

Fig. 7-5. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*, 1871-1878. Oil on canvas. 136.84 x 96.52 cm. Predella 35.2 x 96.2 cm. Framed 212.09 x 133.03 x 8.89 cm. Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art Museum, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop, 1943.202. Photo: Imaging Department President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Fig. 7-6. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel, 1875*-1879. Oil on canvas 111 x 82.7 cm. Predella 36.5 x 82.8 cm. Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool, LL3148.

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Notes

[1] According to Rossetti, translation,"(involving as it does the necessity of settling many points without discussion,) remains perhaps the most direct form of commentary" (Rossetti, "Preface," *The Early Italian Poets* (1861), in *Collected Works* 2, 1897, xiii, qted in Prettejohn 2007, 106).

[2] Rossetti sold the painting to Francis MacCracken, from Ireland, in 1853, renaming the painting the Annunciation. At the time of the sale Rossetti was reworking the painting. In other letters he called the painting the "blessed daub" and the "white eyesore" (Fredeman 2002, 225).

[3] Surtees 1971, Vol. I, 14, writing of the sketch dated 1849 of the clothed figure, notes, "it is reasonable to assume that the figure is that of Christina Rossetti." The nude study in pencil on blue paper from c. 1849 with strong lines delineating the face was in the possession of Fanny Cornforth, Rossetti's model and mistress whom he met in the late 1850s.

[4] Koch 1964, 75 discusses the theological writings and biblical verses referring to lilies. Of the lilies in the Cloisters *Annunciation* he notes, "Christ announced by Gabriel but not yet born would be the single bud, the two opened blossoms the other aspects of the Trinity.

[5] Unpublished letter in the Bodelian Library, Oxford qted in Surtees 1971, 1, 14.

[6] The painting by Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi has the phrase, *"Ave gratia plena Doninus tectum"* (Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee, from Luke 1.28) inscribed on the painting. See Van Dijk 1999, 420-36.

[7] For Plutarch see Lee 1967, 171. Similarly, in a verse letter on *The Art of Poetry*, the Roman lyricist Horace stated, "as is painting, so is poetry," painters and poets have always enjoyed the same prerogative to dare whatever they would" (Williams 2009, 42).

[8] *The Blessed Damozel* first appeared in the second issue of *The Germ* and was later revised and republished in the 1870s and in Rossetti, *The Collected Works* from 1879. See Rossetti 1897, 232-236).

[9] Rossetti attributed the phrase, "Dantesque Heavens" to William Holman Hunt who used it when he commented on his poetry. See Fredeman 2002, 63.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE IDEAL AND MATTER: GUSTAVE MOREAU'S AMBIGUOUS DUALITIES

PETER COOKE

Moreau's art is haunted by unresolved contradictions. The artist saw life in terms of the play of interdependent polar opposites founded on the essential duality of the Ideal and Matter. He developed a reactionary spiritualist ideology in opposition to the prevailing Naturalism of his time, which he despised as a manifestation of materialism and democracy. Although trained in the academic tradition, his major works, inspired by Greek mythology and the Bible, do not conform to academic norms of didactic clarity, offering instead ambiguity and polysemy. Through the analysis of five major paintings, I shall endeavour to show how the fundamental ideological opposition between the Ideal and Matter found increasingly complex expression in ambiguous relationships between masculinity and femininity, life and death, line and colour, spirituality and sensuality, Christianity and paganism.

Let's begin with *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), Moreau's manifesto painting of 1864 (Fig. 8-1). Duality lies at the heart of this powerful picture. First, in the tense confrontation between the male and female figures: a wiry, sculptural Oedipus, whose vertical masculinity is underscored by the red spear he is holding and by the adjacent polychrome column, meets, with a determined expression, the round-eyed gaze of the female creature latched onto his body. The sphinx's femininity is emphasised by her comely girl's face, her ornate hair, and her prominent breast, together with her jewels. But she in turn is characterised by duality, part human, part animal. Moreover, earthbound in her human and lion form, she is also endowed with wings that suggest the capacity to soar above the earth. Both Oedipus and the sphinx, although immobile, are intensely alive, with their psychic energy concentrated in their eyes. At their feet, however, lie fragments of human bodies. Death lurks nearby, as the price for the failure to answer the riddle

proposed by the sphinx.

In a commentary written at the time of composition, Moreau interprets the sphinx as 'the earthly Chimera, vile like matter, and attractive like it, represented by this charming female head, with wings that still promise the ideal and the body of a monster, of a carnivore that tears and annihilates'.[1] Starting from Moreau's comments, the painting can be read allegorically as an idealist affirmation of the superiority of mind over matter, of the ideal over the treacherous promises of earthly honours, power and glory.[2] The latter are symbolised by the golden crown, the purple cloth and the laurel wreath lying at bottom right, beneath the snake – the biblical serpent – crawling up the shaft of the column towards the ornate cinerary urn. A butterfly – a traditional symbol of the soul – flies up to safety, just above the urn and opposite a stunted fig tree on the left, a symbol of sin. According to this optimistic allegorical reading, just as Oedipus resists and dominates the sphinx, the soul escapes from sin and death. However, a more open-minded examination of the picture, seen in its historical context, reveals fundamental ambiguities.

In the aesthetic and moral context of the 1860s, *Oedipus and the Sphinx* may be read as a comment on the sensuality of the mythological nude, the dominant form of academic figure painting in the Salon exhibitions of the time, as exemplified by Alexandre Cabanel's *Nymph Abducted by a Faun* of 1861 (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille). Whereas Cabanel's figures give themselves up to an erotic embrace, Moreau's austere Oedipus grimly but calmly resists the temptation of the eroticised sphinx, a traditional symbol, as Scott Allan has pointed out, of *voluptas*, of lust.[3] In this respect, I have suggested elsewhere that, on one level, *Oedipus and the Sphinx* is a mythological Temptation of St Anthony.[4] In this respect it presents a form of iconographical syncretism, mingling pagan mythology with a Christian subject. The Christian aspect is underscored stylistically by archaising, Pre-Raphaelesque elements: the slim anatomy of Oedipus, the strict profile presentation of the sphinx and of Oedipus's head, the gothic folds of his drape, the quattrocento style of the drawing, with its sharp, wiry contours, that evoked, for the critics in 1864, the influence of Andrea Mantegna.[5] Now, in the Romantic period, the pre-High Renaissance, the Pre-Raphaelite style, had been codified as a pure spiritual style, adopted by some French Catholic painters in opposition to the pagan materialism of modern naturalism.[6] The paradoxical combination of a subject from Greek mythology – inherently associated with pagan sensuality – and a Pre-Raphaelite style created what Théophile Gautier called 'Gothic hellenism', a stylistic oxymoron.[7] In fact, the style of the picture is even more paradoxical, for the austere linear

elements co-exist with rich Venetian colour and a dense materiality of facture in the landscape setting. The presentation of the moral opposition between *voluptas* and chaste resistance is also fundamentally ambiguous. The remarkable effect of erotic fascination that Moreau's sphinx was capable of producing in the male spectator is exemplified by the reaction of Charles Beaurin, writing in 1864:

> It is a woman with a lion's body and vast wings. Her nipples touch Oedipus, left practically naked by the knot torn from his cloak; her leonine hindquarters are voluptuously curved. Desire makes her wings palpitate and her fallen tail twists gently. Her profile is raised towards Oedipus's with an imperious, irresistibly seductive grace.[8]

In fact, *Oedipus and the Sphinx* partakes of the moral ambiguity inherent in the iconographical schema to which it refers: like the typical nineteenth-century versions of the Temptation of Saint Anthony, Moreau's picture simultaneously stigmatises and incites sexual desire.[9]

Thus, the allegorical motifs that Moreau added to the composition as a moral commentary in emblematic form do not at all suffice to impose semantic closure on the picture. Its unresolved dualities remain, not only in the iconography, but also in the style. The 'vile' matter that Moreau professed to abhor is celebrated in the rich colour and facture, while juxtaposed with wilfully controlling lines: feminine *couleur* and masculine *dessin* confront each other.[10] In terms of iconography, the confrontation between male and female is fixed in an immobile duel of riveted gazes. The beautiful yet monstrous sphinx both attracts with its feminine face and breast and repels with its feline animal body.

In some respects, *Orpheus* (Fig. 8-2, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), presented two years later at the Salon of 1866, is the opposite of the earlier picture: now the female figure gazes down at the male figure. But, instead of a duel of confrontational gazes, gently lowered eyes meet eyes closed in the sleep of death. Death no longer lurks as a peril to be avoided, it has already happened. Orpheus has been hacked to pieces by the Maenads. The male figure has been overcome by the females and, in his amputated form as a relic – or trophy – is at the mercy of a woman. Has the Ideal been destroyed by Matter?

The picture, once more, is saturated with ambiguities and dualities. Orpheus, dismembered, remains beautiful even in death,[11] while his ornate lyre has survived intact. The lyre – 'the eternal instrument of human thought,' as Moreau once called it[12] – remains, but who will play it now? Perched on a rock above, sit shepherds, one of whom plays pipes. Do these figures signify the continuation of music, of art, beyond Orpheus's

martyrdom, or do they denote the permanence of mediocrity, the perpetuation of rustic, mortal art in a world that has no place for the supreme, divinely inspired Poet? The tortoises at bottom right can be read as allusions to the mythical origins of the lyre, created by Hermes out of a tortoise shell, but also as symbols of eternity, or of silence.[13]

Equally ambiguous is the figure of the girl holding the lyre and the head. As some critics recognized in 1866, her pose recalls the traditional iconography of Salome bearing the head of Saint John the Baptist.[14] Simultaneously, her tender gravity evokes the devotional paradigm of the Pietà: for Paul de Saint-Victor, the young girl resembled 'a Holy Woman of the German school'.[15] But the girl's demure head, with its chaste hairstyle, is contradicted by the sensual, fetishistic appeal that her naked feet offered contemporary male viewers. Is she a Muse or a Maenad, a holy woman or a femme fatale? The Thracian girl's paradoxical identity resists closure.

The landscape setting is also ambiguous. In a notebook Moreau described two antithetical conceptions of the subject of the girl carrying Orpheus's head, one situated in a 'veiled, muffled & soft autumn landscape', the other characterized as 'The opposite: wild & rocky aspect'.[16] Moreau seems to have blended the two conceptions. The figures are situated in a barren landscape dominated by a large, Leonardo-like rock, but the mineral sterility of the grassless earth is alleviated by the evergreen lemon shrub at left, and the jagged outlines of the rocks are softened by the cloudy sky and the mellow light of the sunset, which creates a romantic mood of melancholy, while also suggesting the passing of time. In its nuances and contradictions, the setting contributes to the indeterminate character of the painting, in which music coexists with silence, time with eternity, male with female, death with life. *Orpheus* exemplifies what Moreau once proudly described as the "caractère indécis et mystérieux" – the indeterminate and mysterious character —of his art.[17]In the famous *Salome* of 1876 (Armand Hammer Collection, Los Angeles) the identity of the female protagonist is no less paradoxical. In Moreau's eyes, Salome is a misogynistic symbol of the seductive powers of 'the eternal woman'.[18] She incarnates the archetypal temptress, Eve, as Moreau indicated in a drawing (Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Des. 12867) in which the pose of Salome, holding the lotus flower, is made to echo that of Eve, taking the forbidden fruit. But Moreau's Salome is no typical vulgar fin-de-siècle femme fatale: her eyes are demurely lowered, in keeping with nineteenth-century ideals of feminine modesty. In contrast to her modestly lowered eyes, however, Salome's left arm is extended in a powerful gesture that echoes the famous gestures of David's oath-taking

triplets, in *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784, Musée du Louvre, Paris). She thereby assumes their dynamic masculine power. Yet David's gestural eloquence, which conforms to traditional norms of legibility, has been subverted by Moreau, who has replaced it by a disconcerting lack of semantic closure. Instead of indicating a striking material and yet symbolic presence, in a human drama—the heavy iron swords clasped by Horatius––the dramatic gesture of Moreau's Salome, who does not belong to the plane occupied by Herod, points to the unseen, the immaterial, and is therefore a sign at once empty (of any ordinary communicative function) and transcendent. In her right hand she holds a no less ambiguous lotus flower. Salon critics found the flower mysterious and hieratic, while more recent historians have debated its meaning inconclusively,[19] interpreting it as a symbol of sexual desire or of purity. Perhaps the flower—whose form seems to partake of both the lotus and the lily – symbolises both sensuality and purity. For Salome, the powerful seductress, is both a courtesan—as critics of the time recognised[20]—and a priestess performing more of a ritual than a dance. Meanwhile Salome's extraordinarily ornate costume, which Moreau compared to a reliquary,[21] is heavy with glittering finery, yet she practically hovers on the very tips of her pointed toes in a gravity-defying pose that not even the most accomplished ballet dancer could maintain for a moment. She is thus both emphatically material, yet weightless. She is also fixed in one of Moreau's most rigidly hieratic postures, yet the fluttering scarf that trails behind her suggests forward motion. Salome is an accumulation of opposites. The picture as a whole, with its mummified Herod enthroned like an idol[22] in the midst of a vast, highly eclectic palace, more reminiscent of a temple than a banquet-hall, is saturated with symbols of lust[23] and drenched, metaphorically, in the blood of Saint John the Baptist that is to be spilled by the sword-bearing executioner. *Salome* is a pictorial tragedy, in which the sacred and the profane, the pure and the impure, the spiritual and the material, are inextricably intermingled.

The misogynistic conception of the 'eternal woman' that found such a memorable expression in *Salome* is developed even further in the large, but unfinished, canvas *The Chimeras,* 1884, (Fig. 8-3, Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris).[24] In this 'Satanic Decameron', as Moreau called it, populated with hundreds of female figures distributed in a mountainous landscape, the artist has sought to represent human passions in a highly original way. The dominant passion, the 'visible dream' of each woman, is symbolised by a variety of individual chimeras, 'capricious emblems' representing 'the living thought of the being they accompany'.[25] As Moreau explained in a note for his mother:

> I am personifying the tastes, the caprices, the passions by groups corresponding to these different feelings. Thus, to give you an example, the figure borne by a water insect called Damselfly represents those delicate natures which dream only of being carried by the wind, light and airy, etc, etc, etc.
>
> I will have passionate natures carried away by fiery chimeras, other devoured by their chimeras, the emblems of their devouring passion, others hurled into space in pursuit of an unobtainable and unrealisable chimera.[26]

The composition has thereby become, in Pierre-Louis Mathieu's words, "a vast plate of teratological invention, populated by harpies, snake-women, tortoise-women, griffin-women, etc.,"[27] a canvas swarming with nude or elegantly dressed women accompanied by a compendium of monsters in which the painter has given free reign to his fantasy.

On the conscious, moralising level, which finds unequivocal expression in Moreau's commentaries,[28] *The Chimeras* is a religious painting fustigating human vice and folly, a representation of "the satanic round" of evil, centred on "an overall idea: the triumph and the blossoming of the seven deadly sins."[29] In the centre of this symbolic world stands "the lascivious goat mounted by lust that will be adored as it passes."[30] Out of this hell – which is in fact a representation of human life, here and now – this "satanic empire" populated by "processions of damned Queens." only a few rare ascetic souls, "weary, bruised, panting, bleeding figures," as Moreau wrote, aspire to the ideal, painfully ascending the mountain towards "the cross of sacrifice" at the summit, "the emblem of effort and redemptive suffering."[31]

In contrast to the coherent moral perspective developed in Moreau's commentaries, the pictorial composition is founded on two incompatible paradigms. On the one hand, the picture is an archaising moral allegory, inspired by an early Renaissance religious painting, Vittore Carpaccio's *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand Christians on Mount Ararat* (after 1512, Accademia, Venice), a picture that he copied in Venice in drawings dated November 1858.[32] Indeed, Moreau's canvas contains a similar abundance of figures to Carpaccio's, as well as the important motif of the pierced Mount Purgatory. On the other hand *The Chimeras* displays an abundance of female nudes in all manner of poses, and in this respect it belongs to the erotic paradigm of the gynaeceum or harem that was so fashionable in the nineteenth century. One thinks for example of Chassériau's *Tepidarium* (1853, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and, of course, Ingres's *Turkish Bath* (1863, Musée du Louvre, Paris). One also thinks of Moreau's *The Daughters of Thespius* (Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris), that singular version of the

erotic gynaeceum.[33] *The Chimeras* thereby illustrates the duality, or rather, the complementary nature, of Moreau's artistic identity as a sensual spiritualist, marked by sincere religious and ascetic aspirations, but obsessed by the beauty of the female body. In one of the commentaries on *The Chimeras*, Moreau has surely revealed his own moral struggle when he mentions 'this moving and tenacious contrast between the call of the divine and the ideal and the physical nature that resists'.[34] This 'contrast' is not only to be found in the opposition between the steep, narrow and ascetic path leading to the cross and the realm of sin that swarms below, but is inherent in the essential conception of *The Chimeras*.

As a final example, I would like to turn to *Jupiter and Semele* (Fig. 8-4, Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris), completed in 1895.[35] This extravagantly strange picture combines the spirit of a late medieval altarpiece—inspired, as Geneviève Lacambre has shown, by the central panel of a polyptych by Jean Bellegambe representing the Holy Trinity[36]—with that of a Buddhist thangka. The highly ornate style blends Christian Pre-Raphaelitism with the sensuality of Indian sculpture. The central figure of Jupiter, Indian in his decorative details, possesses the frontality of a Romanesque Christ Pantocrator while holding an oriental lotus flower in one hand and resting the other on the lyre of Apollo. Here syncretism has been taken to its limits. Meanwhile the male-female relationship that lies at the centre of so much of Moreau's art has taken a new turn. According to the Greek myth, as related by Ovid, the jealous Juno has tricked the beautiful mortal Semele into compelling her lover Jupiter, bound by an oath, to reveal himself to her in his divine form. Thereupon, she is burned to ashes.[37] Jupiter then takes up the foetus of Bacchus and sews it into his own thigh. Moreau has transformed this myth—at least in his own mind—into a mystical celebration of a neoplatonising hierogamy, a transfiguration inspired perhaps by Édouard Schuré's *Les Grands Initiés* (1889),[38] in which a purified human mortality is transformed into divine essence. Moreau wrote in a commentary:

> Semele, regenerated, purified by this fire, this coronation, penetrated by the divine current, dies thunderstruck <in an ineffable supreme embrace>, and with her the spirit of the senses, goat-footed animal and earthly love.[39]

This is Moreau's *a posteriori* interpretation. The picture has its own ambiguous eloquence, however. Whereas the Oedipus of 1864 stares defiantly at the beautiful and monstrous temptress, the Jupiter of 1895 is utterly unaware of the white bleeding body of the terrified Semele lying elegantly draped across his thigh. The impassive, wide-eyed, Apollonian, lyre-bearing Jupiter is Moreau's symbolic, ideal self-portrait as

transcendent Poet, altogether beyond temptation. Yet, at the foot of his throne lie the symbols of mortal, sorrow-bound life. Among them sits Pan, in chains. Half divine, half animal, he is the symbol of Man bound to nature. At his feet lies a dark demon-haunted world ruled by a staring, emerald-eyed Hecate, Queen of the night. Here, a multitude of infernal faces, though sharply drawn, traced with a very fine brush on the canvas, emerge murkily from the glazes, among the saturated, iridescent opacity of the paint. According to Moreau's commentary these creatures – the 'sombre phalanx of the monsters of Erebus'—are 'beings of shadow and mystery, the indecipherable enigmas of darkness' who 'still have to await the life of light'.[40] They are undecipherable, I would suggest, because they represent the denizens of the sub-conscious mind. In this respect, *Jupiter and Semele* may be interpreted as both a symbolic description of human life and as a psychological self-portrait. For all Moreau's talk of spiritual regeneration and purification, his painting remains saturated with a sombre, heavy, encrusted materiality. At its summit reigns a figure of transcendence, while at its base lurks an unredeemed realm of baleful nocturnal beings. While the flowery apex of the architecture soars heavenwards, the structure as a whole remains weighty, immobile and earthbound.

Moreau's art, then, from *Oedipus and the Sphinx* of 1864 through to *Jupiter and Semele*, completed in 1895, is a world of co-existing dualities, of unresolved contradictions in which the Ideal and Matter are eternally co-dependent, forever locked together, in both iconography and style. This paradoxical cohabitation of opposites, in which ideological allegory is undermined by subconscious symbolism, is what makes Moreau's art so profoundly poetic. Like great late Romantic and Symbolist poetry—that of Gérard de Nerval and Stéphane Mallarmé, for example – Moreau's painting is a domain in which spiritual aspirations and the conflicts of the psyche are played out, in which the deep tensions of the inner being are given aesthetic unity.

Fig. 8-1. Gustave Moreau, *Oedipus and the Sphinx*

Fig. 8-2. Gustave Moreau, *Orpheus*

Fig. 8-3. Gustave Moreau, *The Chimeras*

Fig. 8-4. Gustave Moreau, *Jupiter and Semele*

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Fig. 8-4. Gustave Moreau, *Jupiter and Semele,* 1895. Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris.

Notes

[1]Moreau, *Écrits sur l'art*, ed. Peter Cooke, 2 vols, (Fontfroide: Fata Morgana 2002), vol. 1, 73: 'C'est la Chimère terrestre, vile comme la matière, attractive comme elle, représentée [par] cette tête charmante de la femme, avec les ailes encore prometteuses de l'idéal et le corps du monstre, du carnassier qui déchire et anéantit.'

[2]Henri Dorra, 'The Guesser Guessed: Gustave Moreau's *Oedipus*,' *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 6th series, 81 (1973): 129-40; J. D. Kaplan, *The Art of Gustave Moreau. Theory, Style and Content*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 40–41.

[3]Scott S. Allan, 'Interrogating Moreau's Sphinx: Myth as Artistic Metaphor in the 1864 Salon', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide, Spring 2008*: http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org

[4]'Gustave Moreau's *Oedipus and the Sphinx*: Archaism, Temptation and the Nude at the Salon of 1864 ', *Burlington Magazine*, 146 (2004): 609–15.

[5]See for example Paul de Saint-Victor, 'Salon de 1864', *La Presse*, (7 May 1864), and Théophile Gautier, 'Salon de 1864', *Le Moniteur universel*, (27 May 1864).

[6]See Michael Paul Driskel, *Representing Belief. Art and Society in Nineteenth-Century France*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

[7]Gautier, 'Salon de 1864'.

[8]Charles Beaurin, 'Les Salons de 1864 et 1865', *L'Artiste* 1 (1866): 156: 'C'est une femme qui a le corps d'un lion et de vastes ailes. La pointe de ses seins touche Œdipe, que le nœud arraché de son manteau a laissé à peu près nu; sa croupe léonine se courbe voluptueusement. Le désir fait palpiter ses ailes, sa queue tombe en se tordant doucement. Son profil est levé vers celui d'Œdipe avec une grâce impérieuse, irrésistible de séduction.'

[9]See Michèle Haddad, 'Une Image "déversoir": la Tentation de Saint Antoine dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle', in *Usages de l'image au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Stephane Michaud, Jean-Yves Mollier and N. Savy (Paris : Créaphis, 1992), 101-13.

[10]For a representative presentation of the gendered conception of *dessin* and *couleur* in the nineteenth century, see Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, Paris 2000 (1st ed. 1867 Paris: École nationale superieur des Beaux-Arts, 2000). 53.

[11]His face was inspired by a plaster cast of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*, in the

Louvre: see Odile Sébastiani-Picard, 'L'influence de Michel-Ange sur Gustave Moreau', *Revue du Louvre* 3 (1977): 140-52.
[12]Moreau, *Écrits sur l'art*, 1, 58: 'l'instrument éternel de la pensée humaine, la lyre'.
[13]See Evanghélia Stead, 'Du silence d'Orphée aux voix ménades: réflexions sur Gustave Moreau et Auguste Rodin confrontés aux textes,' *Revue de littérature comparée*, 4 (1999) : 581□99.
[14]Théophile Gautier, 'Salon de 1866', *Le Moniteur universel*, (15 May 1866): 'On his large lyre with its red horns rests the head of Orpheus, like that of Saint John the Baptist on its silver charger in the hands of the daughter of Herodias [Sur la grande lyre aux cornes rouges repose la tête d'Orphée, comme celle de saint Jean-Baptiste sur son plat d'argent aux mains d'Hérodiade]'; and Ernest Chesneau, *Les Nations rivales dans l'art*, (Paris: Didier, 1868), 203: 'She [the 'Thracian' girl] recalls Salome in the Scriptures who also contemplated, but with a very different look, the severed head of Saint John the Baptist [Elle rappelle la Salomé des livres saints qui contemplait, mais de quel autre regard, la tête coupée de saint Jean-Baptiste].'
[15]Paul de Saint-Victor, 'Salon de 1866,' *La Presse*, (13 May 1866).
[16]Gustave Moreau, *Cahier de notes (rouge)*, Musée Gustave Moreau, archives, GM 500, p. 5 : 'paysage d'automne voilé ouaté & moelleux'; 'Le contraire: aspect rocailleux & sauvage'.
[17]Moreau, *Écrits*, 2, 259.
[18]*Ibid*.: 'Je traduis la femme éternelle dans cette figure.'
[19]Ragnar Von Holten, *L'Art fantastique de Gustave Moreau*, Paris: Pauvert, 1960), 20); Pierre-L.ouis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau. Complete Edition of the Finished Paintings, Watercolours and Drawings*, trans. J. Emmons, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977),124); J. D. Kaplan, *The Art of Gustave Moreau*, p. 65; Luisa Capodieci, in Geneviève Lacambre, Peter Cooke and Luisa Capodieci, *Gustave Moreau. Les aquarelles*, (Paris : Réunion des musées nationaux ; Somogy, 1998), 90.
[20]Thus, for Pierre de Savarus, Moreau's Salome is 'la courtisane' (*Dix Années d'art. Souvenirs des expositions*, (Paris, 1879), 90), while Huysmans compares her to 'la royale Prostituée de l'Apocalypse', likewise calling the dancing Salome in Moreau's *The Apparition* a 'courtisane' (*À rebours*, ed Daniel Grojnowski (1884, Paris: Flammarion, 2004), 92 and 94).
[21]Moreau, *Écrits*, 99: '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'.
[22]In an annotation on a preparatory drawing Moreau described his Herod as 'Exhausted and dozing / oriental mummy / sacerdotal / hieratic look. idol. [momie orientale / exténuée & sommeillan [*sic*] / aspect sacerdotal / hiératique. idole]' (Marie-Cécile Forest, Samuel Mandin and Aurélie Peylard, *Gustave Moreau. Catalogue sommaire des dessins du musée Gustave Moreau*, Paris, 2009, no. 2275. Henceforth, this catalogue will be abbreviated as 'Des.').
[23]See Pierre-Louis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau*, 124.

[24]For a more detailed analysis of this picture, see Peter Cooke, '*Les Chimères* (1884) de Gustave Moreau: allégorie morale et fête du nu féminin', *Revue des musées de France. La Revue du Louvre* 3 (2010): 60□72.
[25]Moreau, *Écrits*, 1, 119: 'Ces femmes sont toutes exprimées dans leur rêve visible par des symboles, des emblèmes capricieux qui sont la pensée vivante de l'être qu'elles accompagnent.'
[26]*Ibid*., 118□119: 'Je personnifie les goûts, les caprices, les passions par des groupes correspondant à ces divers sentiments. Ainsi, pour te donner un exemple, la figure portée par un insecte des eaux appelé Demoiselle représente ces natures délicates qui ne rêvent que d'être portées par le vent, légères et aériennes, etc, etc, etc. / J'aurai des natures passionnées emportées par des chimères fougueuses, d'autres dévorées par leurs chimères, emblèmes de leur passion dévorante, d'autres lancées dans l'espace à la poursuite d'une chimère imprenable et irréalisable.'
[27]Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau*, 156.
[28]Moreau, *Écrits*, 1, 116□25.
[29]*Ibid*., 118: 'la ronde satanique', 120: 'Tout cela est relié par une idée mère: le triomphe et l'épanouissement des sept péchés capitaux'.
[30]*Ibid*., 123: 'bouc lascif monté par la luxure qu'on adorera au passage'.
[31]*Ibid*., 118: 'cet empire satanique'; p. 123: 'des théories de Reines maudites'; p. 124: 'figures lassées, meurtries, pantelantes, saignantes'; p. 119: 'la croix du sacrifice, l'emblème de l'effort et de la souffrance rédemptrice'.
[32]Des. 1033, 4341 and 4342 and Geneviève Lacambre, *Gustave Moreau, maître sorcier*, (Paris, 1997), 72, ill.
[33]See Peter Cooke, '*Les Filles de Thestius* (1853–1897) de Gustave Moreau: "gynécée cyclopéen" ou bordel philosophique', *Revue du Louvre. La revue des musées de France* 4 (1998): 64-72.
[34]*Ibid*., 118: 'ce contraste si pénétrant et si tenace entre l'appel vers l'idéal et le divin et la nature physique qui résiste'.
[35]For a more detailed interpretation of this picture, see Peter Cooke, 'Text and Image, Allegory and Symbol in Gustave Moreau's *Jupiter et Sémélé*', in *Symbolism, Decadence and Fin de Siècle: French and European Perspectives*, ed. Patrick McGuiness, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 122-43; 300-04. For an analysis of the iconography, see J. D. Kaplan, 'Gustave Moreau's *Jupiter and Semele*', *Art Quarterly*, 33 (1970): 393-414.
[36]Geneviève Lacambre, 'Un Modèle pour Gustave Moreau: le polyptyque d'Anchin de Jean Bellegambe', in *Hommage à Michel Laclotte. Études sur la peinture du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance*, ed. Pierre Rosenberg et al. (Milan : Electa; Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994), 599-606.
[37]Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 30-89.
[38]Kaplan, *The Art of Gustave Moreau*, 87.
[39]Moerau, *Écrits*, 1, 145.
[40]*Ibid*., 146: 'la sombre phalange des monstres de l'Érèbe . . . qui doivent attendre encore la vie de lumière, les êtres de l'ombre et du mystère, les indéchiffrables énigmes des ténèbres'.

CHAPTER NINE

EDWARD BURNE-JONES' *THE SIRENS*: SEA MUSES OF ENCHANTED MUSIC

LIANA DE GIROLAMI CHENEY

> Slow sail'd the weary mariners and saw,
> Betwitx the green brink and the running foam.
> Sweet faces rounded arms, and bosoms prest
> To little harps of gold; and while they mused
> Whispering to each other half in fear.
> Shrill music reach'd them on the middle sea.
>
> Lord Alfred Tennyson, *The Sea-Faires*[1]

This essay analyzes the symbolism of sirens as creatures of water in the spectacular painting, *The Sirens* (1870-98, Fig. 9-1), by the Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones.[2] Sirens are hybrid creatures, half-animal and half-human with strong feminine identities.[3] It shall be argued that the siren in Burne-Jones' painting functions much like the Symbolist conception of the *femme fatale* because the siren evokes the dual symbolism of water, represented in light and darkness, as the source of life and death.

Burne-Jones began painting *The Sirens* in 1870 and struggled for over two decades, reworking it in 1880, 1891, 1895 and 1896. As noted in his *Memorials,* published in 1904, it was one of the subjects that he always wished to paint and yet, despite his many attempts, the painting was unfinished at his death in 1898.[4] Burne-Jones was able to continue working on the painting for such a long period because it was intended for a noble patron, Sir Frederick Leyland, who died from a heart attack while traveling the London Underground in 1892 and never received the work.

In the early 1870s, Burne-Jones constantly experienced nightmares regarding this painting. He described a nightmare he represented in a cartoon, now at the Birmingham Museum and Art Galleries in England

(Fig. 9-2), where he is on a shore "full of wraithlike women who lure me to their destruction, looking out from the rock, tall and beautiful."[5]

As late as October 1891, Burne-Jones wrote a letter to his dear friend and patron Leyland, outlining his idea for the subject matter of the painting and noting his continued obsession with it:

> I am making a plan for a picture that will not be very big and will need to be very pretty. It is a sort of Siren-land. I don't know when or where – not Greek Sirens, but any Sirens, anywhere, that lure on men to destruction. There will be a shore full of them, looking out from rocks and crannies in the rocks at a boat full of armed men, and the time will be sunset. The men will look at the women and the women at the men, but what happens afterwards is more than I can tell.[6]

Fig. 9-1. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Sirens*

Numerous sketches and drawings – perhaps the largest study being the watercolor of 1875 found in the National Gallery of South Africa, Cape Town – attest to Burne-Jones' assiduous and inexhaustible commitment to complete such an ambitious project (compare Figs. 9-1 and 9-3).[7] Other elements for the composition of *The Sirens* derive from studies such as a chalk drawing using chiaroscuro that was a large preliminary compositional study and is now in a private collection in England. A pastel study from the 1870s is in a Spanish private collection.

In Burne-Jones' painting, a group of sirens stand before the rocks awaiting the arrival of a ship that has been mysteriously captured. The debris on the beach reveals the sirens' cryptic and ominous intent—men's bones and abandoned armor decorate the foreground of the painting. In the boat, the innocent sailors gaze with lust and passion at the mystifying beauty of the sirens, unaware of their destiny. However, the horizon with the last beam of light alerts and warns the viewer of their impending doom.

In her monograph on the artist, Fitzgerald describes Burne-Jones' reference to this painting as "a picture where magic is in control—truer than real—a ship under full sail, without wind, harbors into a shallow cove."[8] Although Burne-Jones only saw the sea twice before he was 23 years old, his impressions of, and passion for, the beauty of ships and the sea are expressed in his words: "I think a three-masted vessel in full sail is one of the loveliest sights in the world."[9] In his eagerness to understand the magical aspects of the sea, Burne-Jones even made a model of such a boat to study.

Burne-Jones drew portraits of different models for the faces of the sirens. For the depiction of the slender female figures, for example, he was inspired by Renaissance paintings, particularly by Botticelli's *The Coronation of the Virgin*, which he viewed at the National Gallery of Art in London. He referred to a musical angel from Botticelli's painting for the depiction of a siren holding a musical instrument. This beautiful figure of the siren is visualized so as to suggest the alluring magical power of her melodious music to sailors. Burne-Jones strongly admired Botticelli because of his imagery and sensitivity toward beauty. "Botticelli thinks well about [a painting] before he begins, and does what is beautiful always,"[10] observed Burne-Jones.

Fig. 9-2. Edward Burne-Jones, *Nightmare of the Sirens*

Burne-Jones' conceit may also derive from the Renaissance emblematic and mythographic traditions, as shown in Andrea Alciato's "Emblem 102. *Sirens,"* in the French version as *Les Emblems* (Lyon 1584) and in *Choice of Emblemes* (1586), the version of Alciato's *Emblems* by Geoffrey Whitney, an English poet. The epigram in Whitney's text alludes to seductive women that resemble the figures in Burne-Jones' *The Sirens*.

> Birds without wings and girls without legs and fish without a mouth, they nevertheless sing with their lips.
>
> Who would think that any such creatures exist? Nature denied that these things can be combined; but the Sirens show that it is possible.
>
> She whose forms ends in a black fishtail is a woman of seductions, because lust, carries with itself many monsters.
>
> Men are attracted by appearances, by words, and by brilliance of spirit, that is by Parthenope, by Ligia and by Leucosia.
>
> The Muses tear off their feathers, and Ulysses mocks them, that is to say, scholars have nothing to do with a harlot.[11]

The Renaissance mythographer Vincenzo Cartari also referenced the emblematic sources of Alciato in *Imagini Dei degli' Antichi* (1557). Cartari's ancient sirens are mermaids, who play flutes and lyres to entice sailors to their rocky inlet. He cites the incident of Odysseus (Ulysses) as an example of the enchantment of the sirens with their sweet melody, which causes the transformation of the sailors' bodies into sediments of stone or sea-rocks.[12] The emblematic texts of Alciato and Cartari influenced the European visual tradition of engravers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In these historical images, the sirens have hybrid aquatic bodies, but do not play any instruments. Only the huge rocky constructions suggest the perils of approaching them for sailors.

In Burne-Jones' painting and studies, the sirens are beautifully portrayed with long, classical garments. Their slenderized bodies are revealed through the wet drapery motif while their gentle expressions conceal their sinister plan. Many are patiently waiting for the ship to enter into the alcove of no return. The ship approaches the watery area with caution. The anchors are still raised, and the sailors are holding on to their shields. As the ship enters the forbidden place, the sailors and sirens make eye contact. Some of the sirens coyly gaze at the sailors, some camouflage their bodies with the rocks and some extend their arms over the rocks. The rocks are the result of the transformation of previous sailors' bodies.

Burne-Jones depicts these rocks with some of the shapes suggesting the bodies and faces of men, assisting the viewer in realizing that the angelic-looking female figures among the rocks are actually vicious women.

Fig. 9-3. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Sirens,* 1875, watercolor

In all of his studies for *The Sirens*, Burne-Jones provides a watery alcove for the ship to arrive. It is a semicircular form that serves as an analogy for welcoming open arms and a metaphor for a sweet embrace. The sides of the alcove are populated with watchful standing sirens who will crush the seamen with their melodious music. A compositional allusion to their sweet embrace is indicated by the remains of the sailors' helmets on the shore of the inlet. On the left of the scene, among the group of the sirens, three stand out: two hold musical instruments, while the third floats waiting for her prey. None of them are shown chanting, although it is possible they might be murmuring.

Burne-Jones depicts a foreground with small rocks, pebbles, and spurry weed (*spergularia marina*, a plant commonly encountered in wasteland areas near the sea in England). The flower of this plant in the shape of a poppy is an allusion to lethal sleep as it can have an effect similar to that of mellifluous music.

As has been noted regarding the *Perseus and Andromeda* cycle (1875-88, Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, Germany),[13] Burne-Jones visually bewitches the viewer with *The Sirens,* inviting them to admire the beauty of the painting without considering its dramatic consequences; the viewer remains suspended in a paradoxical state. Burne-Jones' goal is to create images of love, for love, and for beauty's sake. As he notes, "Only this is true, that beauty is very beautiful and softens, and comforts, and inspires, and rouses, and lifts up, and never fails."[14]

Fig. 9-4. Siren Painter, *Odysseus and the Sirens*, 480 BCE from Vulci

Burne-Jones, like the Symbolist painters throughout Europe, employed varied imagery for the sirens. He demonstrated his fascination with this

disturbing subject and associated the visual imagery with the symbolism of the *femme fatale*, a beautiful alluring woman but dangerous and evil.[15] The Symbolists connected imagery of the *femme fatale* with the depiction of harpies, as in Gustave Doré's engraving of harpies for Dante's *Inferno* (Canto XIII, 1-45) and with the depiction of sphinxes such as in Gustave Moreau's *The Triumphant Sphinx* of the 1870s from a private collection in France. These hybrid woman-beast forms allude to the attraction of the beautiful and the repulsion of ugliness, and evoke the excitement and fear prevalent during the fin de siècle.[16]

The Symbolist painters and writers, like Burne-Jones, were mesmerized by the myth of the sirens (Fig. 9-4). They depicted three types of theme. One focused on the telling of an ancient tale, e.g., the story *of Ulysses and the Sirens* as with Gustave Moreau's *Ulysses and the Sirens* (Fig. 9-5), Musée Gustave Moreau in Paris; William Etty, *The Sirens and Ulysses* of 1880, private collection in England; Carl von Blaas, *Ulysses and the Sirens* of 1882, private collection in Vienna; John William Waterhouse, *Ulysses and the Sirens* of 1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Herbert Draper, *Ulysses and the Sirens* of 1909, Ferens Art Gallery, Hull; and the American Thomas Moran, *Ulysses and the Sirens* of 1900, Christie's.

Fig. 9-5. Gustav Moreau, *Ulysses and the Siren*

The second type of theme emphasized the luring aspect of the siren and her sensual desire for a man, such as in Moreau, *The Poet and the Siren* of 1882, Musée Moreau, Paris; Frederic Leighton (Fig. 9-7), *The Fisherman and the Syren* of 1865-58, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, UK; John Williams Waterhouse, *The Siren* of 1900, private collection in London; Gustav Wertheimer, *The Kiss of the Siren* of 1882, Indianapolis Museum of Art; and the very disturbing image of Arnold Böcklin, *The Sirens* of 1875, Conrad Fiedlers Kustsammlung in Munich.

The third type of depiction viewed the mysterious qualities of the siren, sometimes depicted in a trio, at times playing the harp, and other times just gazing at her future prey as seen in Moreau, *The Sirens* of 1882, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA; Henrietta Rae, *The Sirens* of 1903, at the Royal Academy of London; Armand Point, *The Siren* of 1896, private collection in Paris; Evelyn de Morgan, *Sea-Nymph* of 1890s, Morgan Foundation, London;

Fig. 9-6. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Depths of the Sea*

Fig. 9-7. Frederick Leighton, *The Fisherman and the Syren*

Louis Loeb, *The Siren* of 1904, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Edward Armitage, *The Siren* of 1888, Leeds City Art

Gallery, UK; Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ligeia Siren* of 1873, private collection in London; and Edward Poynter (Fig. 9-8), *The Siren* of 1864, private collection in London.

Burne-Jones' *The Sirens* belongs to the first group, where a narrative story is presented to the viewers. As he expressed numerous times in his writings, "I mean by a picture a beautiful romantic dream, of something that never was, never will be—in a light better than any that ever shone—in a land no-one can define or remember, only desire—and the forms divinely beautiful."[17] Burne-Jones' quest was to arouse the viewers' aesthetic sensibilities with his beautiful painting as well as to engage them in an intellectual quest based on the signification of the images.

Burne-Jones visualized the second type of thematic representation on the sirens in the *Depth of the Sea*. He painted several versions, one in 1875, a watercolor at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, a second painting in gouache of 1886-87 at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, a third painting in a private collection in London (Fig. 9-6), and a fourth, an oil on canvas of 1880s, now in a private collection in England, originally for Robert Henry Benson.[18] Here, a siren or mermaid drags her prey of a handsome nude man deep inside the caves of her sea palace. Rustic architecture of tall post and lintel frames and shimmery sand are to be the new lodging for the victim. Her seductive smile directed toward the viewer reassures them that she is successful in her allurement and has conquered her prey.

Burne-Jones depicted two portrait drawings for the face of the siren. One was of a very alluring and engaging female model, Lady Lewis (now at the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight),[19] while the second was based on the remembrance of a dear friend Laura Lyttleton, who died during childbirth in 1886. This event caused him great pain and inspired him to immortalize her with a drawing.

Years later, Burne-Jones developed another composition on this theme. The watercolor design for *Flower Book*, entitled *The Grave of the Sea*, of 1905, portrays a siren contemplating a handsome man who finds solace in her watery residence.[20] Burne-Jones studied the seaside of Rottingdean for this watercolor.

Burne-Jones' mythical fascination with the theme of the sirens was in part connected to his aborted relationship with Maria Cassavetti Zambaco (1843-1914), an accomplished Greek sculptress as well as his model. Even though Burne-Jones was married to Georgiana and had numerous affairs with other women, Zambaco remained his constant muse all through his life. Zambaco, daughter of wealthy Anglo-Hellenic merchants, Euphrosyne and Demetrios Cassavetti, married a Greek physician,

Demeter Zambaco in 1860. She moved to Paris from London with him and had two children, a boy and girl.[21] Because of marital problems, Zambaco left her husband in Paris and moved to London with her two children to stay with her family. Her uncle, Alexander Constantine Ionides, Greek Consul in London, and her family were patrons of Burne-Jones. In 1866, Burne-Jones was commissioned by the Cassavetti family to paint her portrait. Maria Cassavetti Zambaco immediately became Burne-Jones' model, lover and muse for the rest of his life. Unfortunately, the romantic affair ended in a melodrama, as the brother of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, literary writer William Rossetti, recounts:

> Poor old Ned's affairs have come to a smash together, and he and Topsy [Morris], after the most dreadful to do, started for Rome suddenly, leaving the Greek damsel beating up the quarters of all his friends for him and howling like Cassandra, Georgie staying behind. I hear today however that Top and Ned got no further than Dover, Ned being so dreadfully ill that they will probably have to return to London.[22]

Despite such bitterness, in his art Burne-Jones never tired of depicting the magic beauty of his muse Maria, as visualized in his many portraits of her, including *Portrait of Maria Zambaco* of 1870 (a pencil drawing in a Private Collection in UK, Fig. 9-9).

Fig. 9-8. Edward Poynter, *The Siren*

The writings of his friends John Ruskin, Algernon Charles Swinburn and William Morris provided other significant influences on his imagery. Ruskin's *The Queen of the Air: Being a Study of the Greek Myths of Cloud and Storm*, for example, states:

> Thus the Harpies, as they represent vain desire, are connected with the Sirens, who are the spirits of constant desire: so that it is difficult sometimes in early art to know which are meant, both being represented alike as birds of women's heads; only the Sirens are the great constant desire – the infinite sickness of heart – which, rightly placed, give life, and wrongly place, waste it away; so that there are two groups of Sirens, one noble and saving, as the other is fatal.[23]

Burne-Jones' *The Sirens* recalls Ruskin's words in *Queen of the Air*: "The Sirens are the spirits of constant desires–the infinite sicknesses of the heart –which rightly placed, give life, and wrongly placed, waste away; so that there are two groups of Sirens, one noble and saving and the other is fatal."[24]

The tragedies of Algernon Charles Swinburn's *Chastelard* and *Mary Stuart*[25] allude to the cruel nature of women residing on an island where they capture the men on a boat with their eyes. William Morris's *The Life and Death of Jason* of 1868 (Book XIV) also refers to a Greek tragedy. It is well established that the close friendship of the two men, beginning with their schooling at Oxford University, continued to be an important influence throughout their careers and is made evident by their continuous collaborations on their artistic endeavors.

In Burne-Jones' *The Sirens*, the spooky light coming from a lantern in the rear of the ship, the bluish shades and tints suggesting an unsettling evening, the slow movement of the ship, where a few ripples of the waves are marked, and the sirens' watchful glances, all allude to a dreadful event. But in what way is the event dreadful and for whom? The ship has no space to maneuver. Ulysses circumspectly looks at the clusters of sirens guarding the entrance of the death's cove. In the foreground, Burne-Jones depicts the sirens ceasing their playing and chanting, thus preparing to capture their prey. Their tense glances signify that they too are afraid of their destructive powers and the events that have been prophesied. In earlier studies for the painting, it is suggested that the sailors might escape and there is the depiction of adequate physical space for the ship to retreat. Only the Sarasota version shows there is no means of escape. In the Sarasota version, the ship is too large, the water pool is too shallow to retreat, and the boat with the sailors can only advance and enter into the deadly harbor of the sirens. These vicious creatures are swiftly closing the open space behind the ship, forcing the boat to advance between rocky formations and travel into shallow waters and visual darkness. The malignant sirens close the gap for the sailors' retreat. Burne-Jones also creates the metaphorical spatial embrace within the painting, making the

artist himself and the viewer, who anthropomorphize the contours, accomplices in the negative outcome.

Burne-Jones' depiction of the visual entrapment of the sailors by the sirens is viewed by some scholars, such as Martin Harrison and Bill Walters, as signaling pre-sexual tension, since both males and females depicted in the work seem apprehensive. Both are victims who will be destroyed one way or another. As prophesied, the sirens will die if they are unable to transform the sailors into rocks. Sailors, allured by their sensual desire, will be unable to fulfill their appetite and experience the pleasures provided by the sirens. Instead they will experience castration, a common fear of the fin de siècle.[26]

Unlike his artistic compatriots, the Symbolists, Burne-Jones did not overtly represent "idols of perversity or fantasies of feminine evilness, and the formation of the new woman".[27] Burne-Jones implies that his siren's weightless physical beauty casts a spell of death on to man's transcendent soul. Here, he alludes to his own personal soul, to his inability to overcome his passion for Zambaco after twenty years.

Fig. 9-9. Edward Burne-Jones, *Maria Zambaco*

For the Symbolists, the "new woman" remains a witch with an evil, "predatory sexuality or watery surface."[28] The "new woman" establishes a novel type of sexual revolution that men are not prepared to accept as a reality, but only as fantasy. In their paintings, the Symbolist painters reveal men's tacit wishes uncovered in dreams, illusions and the subconscious. In his book *Idols of Perversity*, Dijkstra stresses the importance of the literature at the close of the nineteenth century, including Theodore Strong's *The Smart Set* of 1900, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. During the period in which the books were written, "constitutional equality terrified the male."[29] The liberated female, although appealing in her sexual freedom, needed to be apprehended, controlled and punished, because she was a virago or unnatural.[30]

Fig. 9-10. Edward Burne-Jones, *Mermaid and Child*

Burne-Jones' imagery explores another aspect of the *femme fatale*, which is the constant presence of a memory or a wanton desire. It is interesting to note the dominance of the ship or boat in *The Sirens*. Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) consider the boat an image of a journey, not just a physical sojourn, but also an aesthetic or creative voyage of the spirit, thus a metaphysical transformation of the soul. In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley the word "serene" refers to the spirit or the desire of the soul of which he writes: "My soul…[moves] into a sea profound…[it] is the boat of my desire."[31] The French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) in *Les Sept Viellards* echoes Shelley's notions about the permutations of the sea and the boat. For Baudelaire, the boat is the aging vessel of time, while the sea symbolizes the vicissitudes of life.[32] The sensuality of the sea is compared to the woman's hair and eyes in the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) as in *Le Bateau Ivre* and Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) as in *L'Angoisse*.[33]

Perhaps this is why in Burne-Jones' paintings the presence of the viewer is implied or the viewer seems to be participating in a metaphorical act of embracing the sirens. The painter himself is also formulating a visual and aesthetic reconciling with his own vicissitudes during the voyage of life. The enchanted music alluded to in Burne-Jones' *The Sirens* is about the metaphysical metamorphosis of the self.

Burne-Jones further examines these physical and metaphysical transformations in his paintings of the sirens, focusing on the dual symbolism of sea, ocean or water. The sea may be associated with storms and disaster or with fertility and sustenance. In previous imagery, he uses water as a symbolic vehicle for revealing human emotions and instinctive desires as well as mysterious secrets of the individual subconscious.[34] Perhaps this association is revealed in the dark nature of the human condition as in *The Sirens* and the *Depth of the Sea.*[35] However, Burne-Jones also reveals a different disposition of human nature, a benevolent connection between the sea and the individual in the depictions of mermaid paintings such as the *Mermaid and Child* of 1870 at the Tate Gallery in London (Fig. 9-10); the *Sea Nymph* of 1881, at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts; *Mermaids in the Deep* (*The Mermaid Family*) of 1882 in a private collection in England; and a *Mermaid with her Offspring* of 1885, in a private collection in England.

In these mermaid paintings, Burne-Jones composes another type of representation where there is harmony in nature or at sea. Moving across the waters, the mermaid[36] parallels the wave movements with her sinuous floating figure and long flowing tresses. In these paintings, he compares

the mermaid and water with human embryonic gestation and motherhood. In the *Mermaid and Child* of 1870, Burne-Jones selects a maternal composition of a gentle and sweet mermaid cuddling her baby. The sea-mother's warm embrace and her child recoiling in her bosom recalls the paintings of Botticelli's *Madonna and Child* of 1474-1500, which Burne-Jones carefully studied at the National Gallery of London, Musée du Louvre and the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence during his numerous European journeys. In the painting, the mermaid with her child just surfaced from the deep, calm sea and is posing to admire the earthly panorama. In the background, fields and hills surround an extended beach. In the other mermaid paintings, the composition varies from depicting a solo image of a mermaid holding fish in an intense blue sea, as in the *Sea Nymph* of 1882, to a family of mermaids and their children swimming in the deep blue sea, as in *Mermaids in the Deep* or *The Mermaid Family* of 1882. An unfinished and unusual painting of a *Mermaid with Her Offspring* of 1885 portrays a mother holding two children in an aqueous area, with an earthly landscape in the background. Burne-Jones combines two Christian motifs or allegories of motherly love, a Charity or *Virgin Lactans* and Virgin and Child.[37] In Burne-Jones' imagery of the *Mermaids*, the figures of the mermaids, unlike the figures of the sirens, do not chant or magically whisper to allure and destroy the passing sailors. On the contrary, these mermaids are depicted nourishing the sea and amusing themselves in the rhythm of the waves.

With the depictions of *The Sirens* and the *Mermaids*, Burne-Jones reveals the dualism of his persona, or male psyche, and female psyche, or *anima*.[38] Perhaps as part of the culture and psychology of the fin de siècle, he was attempting to reconcile the fear of his sexual desires for women and the love for the mother that he never knew.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 9-1. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Sirens*, 1870-89, Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Florida, Photo credit: Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida.

Fig 9-2. Edward Burne-Jones, *Nightmare of the Sirens*, 1870s, drawing cartoon Birmingham Museum and Art Galleries, UK
Photo credit: Birmingham City Museum and Art Galleries, UK.

Fig. 9-3. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Sirens,* 1875, watercolor, National Gallery of South Africa, Cape Town, South Africa, Photo credit: National Gallery of South Africa, Cape Town, Bridgeman Art Library (MH 11908).

Fig. 9-4. Siren Painter, *Odysseus and the Sirens*, 480 BCE from Vulci British Museum, London, Photo credit: Eric Lessing/Art Resource, NY (ART 200838).

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Fig. 9-9. Edward Burne-Jones, *Maria Zambaco*, 1870, pencil drawing Private Collection, UK, Photo credit: author.

Fig. 9-10. Edward Burne-Jones, *Mermaid and Child*, 1870, Tate Art Gallery, London, Photo Credit: Tate London/Art Resource, NY (ART 456458).

Notes

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[1]The poem continues:

Whither away, whither away, whither away? fly no more.
Whither away from the high green field, and the happy blossoming shore?
Day and night to the billow the fountain calls:
Down shower the gambolling waterfalls
From wandering over the lea:
Out of the live-green heart of the dells
They freshen the silvery-crimson shells,
And thick with white bells the clover-hill swells
High over the full-toned sea:
O hither, come hither and furl your sails,
Come hither to me and to me:
Hither, come hither and frolic and play;
Here it is only the mew that wails;
We will sing to you all the day:
Mariner, mariner, furl your sails,
For here are the blissful downs and dales,
And merrily, merrily carol the gales,
And the spangle dances in bight and bay,
And the rainbow forms and flies on the land

Over the islands free;
And the rainbow lives in the curve of the sand;
Hither, come hither and see;
And the rainbow hangs on the poising wave,
And sweet is the colour of cove and cave,
And sweet shall your welcome be:
O hither, come hither, and be our lords,
For merry brides are we:
We will kiss sweet kisses, and speak sweet words:
O listen, listen, your eyes shall glisten
With pleasure and love and jubilee:
O listen, listen, your eyes shall glisten
When the sharp clear twang of the golden chords
Runs up the ridged sea.
Who can light on as happy a shore
All the world o'er, all the world o'er?
Whither away? listen and stay: mariner, mariner, fly no more.

See Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), *Sea-fairies and other poems* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1890), n.p.

[2]A shorter version of this essay was delivered as a plenary talk at the International Symposium on *Light and Darkness in Symbolist Movement,* University of Illinois at Allerton Conference Center, April 2012, organized by Prof. Rosina Neginsky, University of Illinois at Springfield. A revised version was published in Liana De Girolami Cheney, Edward Burne-Jones' *Mythical Paintings* (New York/London: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013).

The Sirens (Fig. 9-1) has been at the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Florida, since 1949.

[3]Dorothy Dinnerste *The Mermaid and the Minotaur:* Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise (New York: Open Press, 1999, revision of 1976), passim, and Carl G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), 55, observers that "a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning."

[4]*GBJ, Memorials* of *Edward Burne-Jones* (London: MacMillan, 1904), I, 308 and II, 222.

[5]Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite* (London: Farber and Faber, 2011), 229.

[6]See Curtis G. Coley, *The Pre- Raphaelites* (New York: The Herron Museum of Art at Indianapolis, 1964), catalogue entry n. 14, for a discussion on the commissions and drawings related to the commissions.

[7]This beautiful work is a preliminary compositional study for *The Sirens*. The allegory of shipwreck appears in other works, including *The Voyage to Vineland* (stained glass window) and *The Holy Grail* (tapestry). A pastel of 1875 is in a Spanish private collection and a watercolor of 1875 in the South African National Gallery are both reminiscent of this drawing. The Cape Town study was exhibited numerous times, namely, by Mass Gallery (1967); Piccadilly Gallery (1971);

Grolier Club (1971). Provenance: Virginia Surtees; Hartnoll and Eure; Kenneth A. Loft; Frederick R. Koch; and Sotheby's.
[8]Penelope Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1990), 236.
[9]Fitzgerald, *Burne-Jones*, 236.
[10]Mary Lago, ed. *Burne-Jones Talking* (London: John Murray, 1981), 51.
[11]Andrea Alciato's emblem is influenced by the literary tradition on this subject noted in Dante's *Purgatorio*, Canto XIV; Fulgentius, *Mythologies*, II.8, The Fable of Ulysses and the Sirens; Homer, *Odyssey*, XII.39-62, 155-202; Ovid, *Art of Love*, III.311-328; Apollonios Rhodios, *Argonautika*, IV.885-924; Argonauts and the Sirens. See also, Evrart de Conty, *The Chess of Love*, trans. Joan Jones (University of Nebraska, Lincoln); Samuel Daniel, *Certaine small poems lately printed: with the tragedie of Philotas* (G. Eld for S. Waterson, 1605), ed., F. D. Hoeniger and I. Lancashire, Dept. of English (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1997). See also, Joseph Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth-Century British Classical-Subject Painting* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 47-48, 70-72, and 289-300, on Ulysses and the sirens.
[12]See Vincenzo Cartari, *Imagini Dei degli' Antichi* (Venice 1557) (Genoa: Nuova Stile Regina, 1987, facsimile), 133.
[13]See Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Burne-Jones' *Andromeda*: A Mythological Legend," *Artibus et Historiae* (2003), 35-55.
[14]William Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), 152. Burne-Jones is aware of Walter Pater's philosophical writings, particularly *Plato and Platonism* (London, 1893), 241-244, where Pater discusses Plato's ideas of Beauty and Nature. See also Robin Spencer, *The Aesthetic Movement: Theory and Practice* (London: Studio Vista Ltd., 1972), 37, and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Edward Burne-Jones: Mannerist in an Age of Modernism," *Pre-Raphaelite Art in Its European Context*, eds., Susan Casteras and Alicia Faxon (Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleight Dickinson Press, Associated University Press, 1994), 103-16.
[15]See Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 90-96; Shearer West, *Fin de Siècle: Art and Society in an Age* (New York: Overlook Press, 1994), 1-16 and 86-104; Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art In Context* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 129-44; and Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny* 6-13, 38-44, and 77-86, on the sirens.
[16] See Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny,* 65-112, on Burne-Jones' life dilemma of love with women, in particular Maria Cassavetti Zambaco, revealed in his paintings, including *The Sirens*. Burne-Jones' schooling at Oxford University provided him with remarkable visual and literary sources for his imagery.

For him, the origin of the word siren – deriving from Middle English, alluding to an imaginary type of winged snake – was of great interest, as he connected the image of a woman with the malignant symbolism of a serpent, thus echoing the sentiments of the fin de siècle. In *Etymologies* (Book 11, 3:303-31), Isidore of

Seville, claimed that in Arabia there were winged snakes called sirens whose bite was followed by pain before death.

The etymology of Siren from a Greek word “siren” signifies a temptress that entices and entraps men’s senses. According to Greek mythology (Fig. 9-4), the sirens are special sea nymphs who live on the isolated island of the Faiakes or Sirenum scopuli, perhaps Surrentum, near Naples, where there is a temple dedicated to them (Strab. i., 23, v., 246). Surrentum (Sorrento today), a Latin word for murmur, is an interesting association with the incantations of the sirens or with the sound of waves of the sea, which carry a murmur, the reason for the name of this area. The sirens, beautiful half-woman, half-bird, are the sea counterparts of the harpies, bird-women, on earth. See Meri Lao, *Sirens: Symbols of Seduction* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1998), 1-19, for ancient iconographical sources for the sirens.

The most important sirens were Pisinoe, Aglaope and Thelxiepi, all daughters of the river god, Achelous. One plays the flute, another the lyre, and the third, sings.

The siren’s body is composed of a human head and torso combined with the legs of a bird (Virgil V, 846; Ovid XIV, 88). For images of sirens as birds or harpies, see the *Siren* from Canosa of 340 BCE, National Archaeological Museum of Canosa, Spain; *Siren* of mid-4th century BCE, form Kerameikos at the Walter Art Museum, MD; *Funerary Harpies* morning with primitive tortoise-shell lyre of mid-4th century BCE from Kerameikos at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

This hybrid formation is a result of punishment inflicted by the Goddess of harvest and fertility, Demeter (Ceres), when the Sirens failed to save her daughter, Persephone, from being kidnapped by Hades (Pluto), the God of the Underworld. Demeter provides the Sirens with special wings for their bodies to assist them in finding her daughter, Persephone (Ovi, *Met,* v. 442). But subsequently, they lose their wings. Hera tricks the Sirens into a musical contest with the Muses. They lose the contest and the Muses punish them by plucking their wings and making crowns out of the feathers for themselves (Paus, ix. 34 & 2).

In his *Odyssey*, Homer recounts the meeting of Odysseus and his companions on their journey to the island of Ithaca (Hom. *Od.* xii. 39 and 166). “Draw near ... illustrious Odysseus flower of the Achaean chivalry, and bring your ship to rest that you may hear our voices. No seaman ever sailed his black ship past this place without listening to the sweet voice that flow from our lips, and none that listened has not been delighted and gone on a wiser man. For we know all that the Achaeans and Trojans suffered on the broad plain of Troy by the will of the gods, and we have foreknowledge of all that is going to happen on this fruitful earth." See “The Sirens,” in Homer, *Odyssey*, 12.184)

Unknown to Odysseus (Ulysses), the sirens are expecting his arrival and they prepare a special melody for him. Odysseus, however, is also aware of their malignant sound. In preparation for this passage – and on the advice of Circe – he places wax in the ears of his companions, and orders them to bind him to the ship’s mast so that he can hear the melodious tune but cannot move and be lured ashore.

According to the ancient prophecy, if a ship with sailors survives unharmed, ignoring the enchanted melody of the sirens while crossing their island, the sirens are punished and die. When Odysseus' ship survives the trajectory, the sirens throw themselves into the depth of the sea and perish. The sirens' evil gift is their seductive chanting, their spellbound melody. See Lao, *Sirens*, 36-47, for a discussion on sirens and music.

Their singing lures sailors to pass by their island. Once they hear the siren's melodic murmur, they are condemned to stay forever and die on the siren's haunted island. The classical tales of Homer's *Odyssey* (Hom. *Od.* xii. 39) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ovid, *Met* v. 552) recount that all throughout the island of Faiakes there are rocks as well as bones and remains of sailors who were transformed and butchered and succumbed to the sirens' divine melody, as illustrated in the Siren Vase Painter, *Odysseus and the Sirens*, 480 BCE, from Vulci at the British Museum, London, and *Ulysses resists the song of the Sirens* of 50-75 CE, from a fresco in Pompeii, also at the British Museum, London. Undoubtedly, Burne-Jones, who frequently visited the British Museum art collection and library, examined these works.

The siren's legend is connected with two other Greek tales: one is the abduction of Persephone; hence their bodies' transformation into hybrid birds by Demeter (Ov. *Met.* v. 552) and the second is the survival of Jason and the Argonauts. They are saved from the melodious sound of the sirens because Orpheus happens to be on board of the ship with them during the sea trajectory near the island of the sirens (Strab. v. p. 252; Orph. *Arg.* 1284; Apollod. i. 9. § 25; Hygin. *Fab.* 141). When approaching the island of the sirens, Orpheus, a gifted musician, assists his companion by playing even more beautiful and seductive music for the mariners, preventing them from hearing the provocative sounds or the magical whispers of the Sirens.

In antiquity, music was associated with cosmological vibration, for example, "Plato places the sirens and their music in a Pre-Olympian system, among the feminine entities regulating the destiny of the universe and the human race." Ibid., 39.

In Mount Parnassus, Orpheus, Apollo and the muses reject the sirens, also named sea-muses, because they tended to indulge in odes of violence and destruction; their sonorous voices contrasted with Orpheus and the muses' lyrical performances. In the musical contest between the muses and the sirens on Mount Olympus, the sirens, who lured men to destruction with their seductive whispers, lost the competition to the Muses, who elevated men to highest pursuits with their poetical evocations. Ibid., 43-46, and an extraordinary sarcophagus at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,
The Sarcophagus with the contest between the Muses and the Sirens, Late Imperial, Gallienic, third quarter of the 3rd century CE, from the Roman Villa of Nero.

In Roman mythology, the sirens are beautiful sea monsters, with faces and partial bodies of women with tails of fishes, resembling mermaids as seen in *Ulysses and the Sirens*, from the 2nd-century Roman mosaic at the Bardo Museum

in Tunisia. As with Greek mythology, the sirens bewitch sailors with their melodic sounds. Roman poets recounting this myth, like Claudian, claim that the sailors once captured expired in rapture, alluding to the sirens' sensual pleasures in addition to their enchanting singing.

These ancient sources are known to Burne-Jones, as is Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (First Century CE, Book 10, 70), where Pliny says that stories of sirens should not be given any credit, though he mentions that they supposedly live in India and attack men after charming them with song. In the Middle Ages, the *Bestiaire* of Gulliaume Le Clerck or Bartholomaeus Anglicus from the thirteenth century claims that the sirens become monsters. From the waist up, they have the shape of a beautiful woman *(Siren*, Kongelige Bibliotek, Gl. kgl. S. 3466 8º, Folio 37r). The rest of body is like that of a fish or of a bird. They sing so sweetly, entrancing men to fall asleep and then they kill them.

These medieval texts using animal tales from the classics imply an allegorical and moral message. In the case of the Sirens, deadly hybrid animals and human creatures allude to the luring of human appetites or worldy pleasures, which will transform, destroy and kill their victims. Thus, sirens become symbols of sensual and cruel pleasures. Three Sirens, Pisinoe, Aglaope and Thelxiepi, in particular, allude to the triple pleasures of the sense of taste, hearing and touch, manifested in the drinking of wine, the hearing of music and the touching of love. These erotic pleasures are the most powerful means for seducing a man. The moral lesson for men relies upon their feeling of victimization when indulging in their human passions. These medieval allusions are revived and aggrandized with additional malignant connotations, namely the fear of male castration, at the end of the nineteenth century given fear of the female's role as a "new woman," a *femme fatale*. The Symbolist painters became captivated with these transformations and fantasized or sublimated the male power through the subjugation of female imagery.

[17]Cited in Ian Chilvers, *Oxford Dictionary of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), 79-80.

[18]See Alexander, *Mermaids*, 60-61.

[19]See Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 264-65.

[20]See Gabriele Uerscheln, *Edward Burne-Jones' The Flower Book* (Cologne: Taschen, 1999), 48-49, illustrations on 49.

[21]Penelope Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), 112-4, for a discussion on the life of Maria Zambaco.

[22] See *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl. 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965-67), II, 685.

[23]John Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air: Being a Study of the Greek Myths of Cloud and Storm* (New York: John Wiley & Son Publishers, 1871), 23.

[24]Fitzgerald, *Burne-Jones*, 237, for Ruskin's quotation on *The Sirens*.

[25]Algernon Charles Swinburn, *Casterlard and Mary Stuart: The two tragedies* (Leipzig: Bernahard Tauchnitz, 1908), 16.

[26]Martin Harrison and Bill Walters, *Burne-Jones* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973), 154; West, *Fin de Siècle*, 50-68; and Richard Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence: Victorian Art and the Classical Inheritance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 283-88.
[27]Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 235-33.
[28]Ibid., 265; and Philippe Jullian, *Dreamers of Decadence: Symbolist Painters of the 1890s* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 35-38;
[29]Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 265, and Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence* and *in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 46-103.
[30] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 265.
[31]Suzanne Nalbantian, *The Symbol of the Soul from Hölderlin to Yeats* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 106-07.
[32] Ibid., 107.
[33]Ibid., 108.
[34]See Carl Jung, *Jung On Alchemy*, ed. and trans. Nathan Schwartz-Salant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 196-98; Sallie Nichols, ed., *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey* (Boston, MA: Weiser Books, 1980), 295-312, for the section on water in relation to the Tarot card The Star; and 313-36, for the section on water in relation to the Tarot card The Moon. See also, Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 1088-89, for water as a symbol of unconscious energy, motivation and fecundity; and Skye Alexander, *Mermaids: The Myths, Legends, and Lore* (Avon, MA: Adamsmedia, 2012), 12.
[35]Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny*, 98, he writes: "The Depths of the Sea indicates the self-destructive nature of male narcissism. The mermaid's tail and the arm over the sailor's genitals reflect the castration fear stimulated by attitudes […] concerning female sexuality."
[36]An Old English word for a woman of the sea or a mother of the sea. See Alexander, *Mermaids,* 13.
[37]See James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers 1974), 64.
[38]See Jung, *Jung On Alchemy*, 191-93.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SOUL OF THINGS: HENRI DE BRAKELEER AS A FORERUNNER OF THE TREATMENT OF LIGHT IN BELGIAN SYMBOLISM[1]

ALISON HOKANSON

When the avant-garde Belgian journal *L'art moderne* launched its first issue in 1881, its editors included a short essay outlining their principles. They declared that theirs was the era of the artist

> who laughs at science and philosophy when they get in the way of his fantasy and freedom. . . . He lashes out at stupid vulgarity, and an entire marvelous world—surprising, colorful, and harmonious—comes into view and defines itself in the *camera obscura* of his thought. A true world, as real as any other, because it is made entirely of elements from the actual world, but permeated with the radiant emanations of sentiment and ideals.[2]

Luminosity and obscurity are key to this description of the artistic process: the "light" of emotion and abstract thought transforms reality within the darkened chamber of the mind. The motif of an illuminated interior pregnant with psychological and spiritual suggestion continued to be a significant artistic and literary trope in Belgium for the next twenty-odd years, the heyday of the Symbolist era. Like the editors of *L'art moderne*, some artists and writers conceived of evocatively lit interiors as analogues for the creative mind. Others envisioned the play of light within a room as revealing the hidden life and feelings of seemingly inanimate objects.[3]

In the late 1880s and the 1890s the latter notion—of a sentient material world made discernible through a ray of sunshine or the glow of candlelight—came to be associated with the cryptic expression "the soul of things" (in French "l'âme des choses" and in Dutch "de ziel van

dingen"). The history of the term as currently documented suggests that it was an adage with a great deal of currency but no clearly established meaning. It surfaced in a variety of contexts, taking on multiple connotations, and was aligned with several of the key artistic developments of the day.[4]

In her pivotal article on "the soul of things," Sarah Faunce traces the expression to a short story of the same name written by the Symbolist Hector Chainaye and published in *La Jeune Belgique* (the rival of *L'art moderne*) in November 1887.[5] The story concerns a grieving young widow who regains her will to live after being embraced by a celestial consciousness animating the objects in her bedroom and chateau grounds. Striking light effects signal the actions of this mystical presence as it fills the woman's surroundings and, eventually, her heart and mind.[6]

As Faunce documents, "the soul of things" took center stage in art criticism in a review written by the cutting-edge author Émile Verhaeren on February 3, 1889.[7] Verhaeren wrote that the coolly analytic pointillist style of Georges Seurat and Paul Signac distilled reality down to its essentials, "penetrating the intimacy and, as it were, the soul of things.[8] His use of the term, so markedly different from Chainaye's, is only one instance of the diverse ways in which "the soul of things" was employed. About a year later, on January 26, 1890, the art maven Octave Maus picked up the phrase for yet another purpose, to describe a "mystico-realist school" of artists including Fernand Khnopff, George Minne, and Odilon Redon. Maus found that in their work, which transformed reality in the service of imagination and the ideal, "the soul mingles with things, with its dreams, its fantasies, its flights of fancy, and its literary gyrations."[9]

"The soul of things" received explicit visual expression in early 1895, when the artist Xavier Mellery showed a set of drawings (Figs. 10-1 and 10-2) with the artists' society La Libre Esthétique under the title *Emotions of Art. The Soul of Things*.[10] The drawings associated with the series are largely interior scenes, many of them set in Mellery's home.[11] Working in chalk, charcoal, ink, and pencil in a small-scale format, Mellery created intimate yet uncanny images. Dramatic effects of light and shadow endow his rooms and furnishings with an air of mystery and even an eerie aura of life. Although Mellery wrote repeatedly about this group of works, the circumstances of their making and the meaning that the artist assigned to them remain tantalizingly opaque.[12]

Fig. 10-1. Xavier Mellery, *The Stair*

As this etymology indicates, “the soul of things” encompassed several different conceptions of reality and an artist’s relation to it.[13] This paper aims to clarify the genealogy of the term as it pertains to interior scenes like Mellery’s. What were the formal underpinnings for portraying “the soul of things” via a suggestively illuminated interior, and how might the “soul” be defined in this context?

The genesis of “the soul of things” and its identification with the spatial interior are admittedly complex.[14] One important, and largely overlooked, precedent may be found in the interior scenes of the Belgian painter Henri De Braekeleer (1840–1888). As a Realist artist, committed to straightforward representation of the observable world, De Braekeleer hardly seems a likely source of inspiration for the occult concept of objects possessing a secret spirit. Yet analysis of his work and the commentary it inspired in the 1880s and 1890s demonstrates that his paintings were

catalysts for the Symbolist view of eye-catchingly illuminated rooms as manifestations of "the soul of things."

Further, examining De Braekeleer's art and its reception points to a basis for "the soul of things" in Realist theories of the interplay between individual and milieu, which maintained that the physical properties of interiors and other sites (including, notably, the quality of the light) shaped and reflected a person's mood and character.[15] The difference between an interior that is entwined with the human psyche and an interior with a soul does not seem large, but the Realist roots of "the soul of things" have been greatly neglected. De Braekeleer's interior scenes are, in effect, missing links in the transition from the "personalized" interiors of Realism to the "personified" interiors of full-fledged Symbolism.

Although now largely forgotten, De Braekeleer was one of the foremost figures in Belgian art during the second half of the nineteenth century.[16] An early ally of Realism, he earned a name for himself with interior scenes of contemporary working-and middle-class residences and august historic landmarks in his hometown of Antwerp. Combining an unsparing eye for detail with a gentle lyricism derived from seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting and northern Romanticism, De Braekeleer's paintings soon garnered success. Beginning in the 1870s his work was widely exhibited, collected, and discussed in Belgium, particularly in progressive artistic circles. He occupied a key position in the early tastes and criticism of several future leaders of the fin-de-siècle Belgian avant-garde, including Émile Verhaeren and Octave Maus, and he was fêted in three major exhibitions during the Symbolist era, including a large showing with the groundbreaking artists' collective Les XX in Brussels in 1887.[17]

De Braekeleer's handling of light attracted admiring attention almost from the outset of his career.[18] The artist's technique was admittedly traditional—for most of his working life, he created the illusion of luminosity by building up layers of paint and glazes, relying on dark tones to suggest shadow and higher-keyed hues to evoke light.[19] However, the resulting effect was anything but conventional.

One commentator was prompted to write that De De Braekeleer's paintings superbly mimic the appearance of ambient daylight—the warm glow or cool sheen of sunshine as it emanates almost invisibly through an interior. His virtuosic naturalism, impossible to convey through reproduction, was eminently apparent to contemporary writers, who marveled at the clarity and subtlety of his light. [20]

In the mid-1870s critics began to comment on the dramatic function of light in De Braekeleer's compositions. Several writers observed that the

artist did not focus on figural action, as was then typical, but instead emphasized décor and illumination. They saw the light that filters through De Braekeleer's interiors as the true protagonist in his work, interacting dynamically with people and objects and bringing feeling and vitality to a scene. With reference to Braekeleer's paintings *The Geographer* (1871, Musées royaux des Beaux-arts de Belgique, Brussels) and *Antwerp: The Cathedral* (Fig. 10-3) one wrote:

> For him light was a new actor that played its own role, and in that yellow or golden light, in that struggle between sunshine and shadow, in the effervescent lights that glinted off the furnishings or set the attic windows aglow, in the sun's vain attempts to inundate the room of the thinker, there was a drama all the more moving in that the artist cast [the light] over the poor girl at work who opens her window to the sun like a friend, and the scholar who fears that full daylight will interrupt his thoughts.[21]

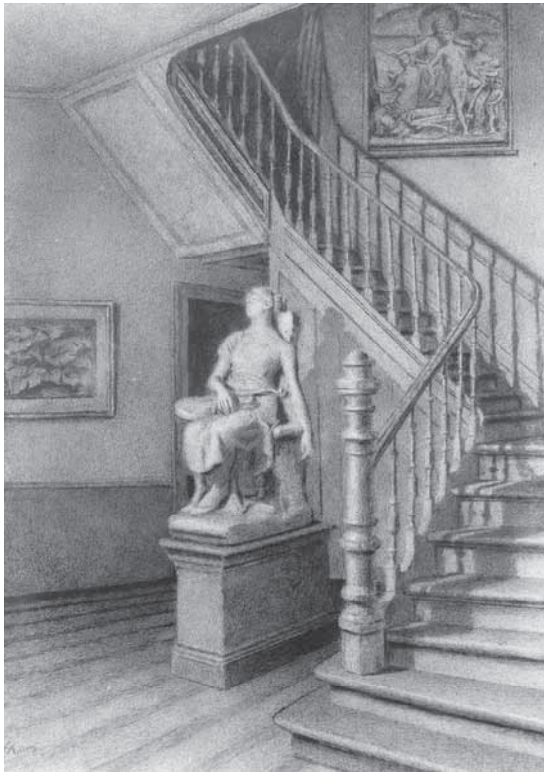

Fig. 10-2. Xavier Mellery, *The Soul of Things*

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At around the same time that De Braekeleer's evocative treatment of light piqued critics' interest, commentators also began to remark on the spiritual and emotional resonance of his settings. They did not see the artist simply as making ordinary things beautiful—a common trope in Belgian criticism—but as opening up mystical realms of experience embedded in everyday interiors.

This mode of interpretation took on particularly noteworthy form in a September 10, 1882 review in *L'art moderne*, which dwelt at some length on De Braekeleer's *The Old Inn "The Pilot House" in Antwerp* (Fig. 10-4) After describing the interior in detail, the anonymous reviewer exclaimed:

> How great is the artist who succeeds in giving life to matter and making it move us even more than the representation of human beings. As Heinrich Heine said, the house, the counter, and the door are alive, because a man has given them a part of his soul. …It is to dreamers and artists…that the mysterious interior life of all things is revealed.[22]

This passage is of considerable importance. It clearly lays out the idea of an interior with a secret life and spirit, five years before Chainaye's short story appeared, and over a decade before Mellery showed his drawings with *La Libre Esthétique*. It is perhaps paradoxical that De Braekeleer's emphatically prosaic painting of a down-at-the-heels Antwerp bar inspired this description of the interplay between the human psyche and the inanimate world—an early version of "the soul of things."De Braekeleer's handling of light attracted admiring attention almost from the outset of his career.[18] The artist's technique was admittedly traditional—for most of his working life, he created the illusion

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Fig. 10-3. Henri De Braekeleer, *Antwerp: The Cathedral*

What the *L'art moderne* article of 1882 lacks is an alignment between De Braekeleer's portrayal of objects endowed with a soul and his handling of light. This link was made in an article that ran in the Amsterdam journal *De Portefeuille* on July 28, 1888. In a tribute published a little over a week after De Braekeleer's untimely death at age forty-eight, the writer and poet Pol de Mont harkened back to seeing the artist's painting *The Dining Room of Henri Leys* (Fig. 10-5). De Mont recalled:

> a table surrounded by chairs, one or more cupboards, a chandelier… that is the whole subject. And yet, were hundred of viewers not moved, struck silent again and again before this handiwork, seemingly treated *con amore*? Why? I assure you that something more than mere *color* attracted us! Out of all that lifeless [room] a soul spoke to us, the soul of things condemned to loneliness, grieving in the darkness, yet shining in a ray of sunlight.[23]

Once again, De Braekeleer's critics were ahead of the rhetorical curve. Looking at the artist's painting of an empty interior infused with light, De Mont saw a room with an active, feeling soul. Published about eight months after Chainaye's short story, and some six months before Verhaeren's exhibition review, De Mont's article makes De Braekeleer's painting among the first artworks known to be associated with the expression "the soul of things" in a fully conceived form.In the mid-1870s critics began to comment on the dramatic function of light in De Braekeleer's compositions. Several writers observed that the artist did not focus on figural action, as was then typical, but instead emphasized décor and illumination. They saw the light that filters through De Braekeleer's interiors as the true protagonist in his work, interacting dynamically with people and objects and bringing feeling and vitality to a scene. Braekeleer's paintings *The Geographer* (1871, Musées royaux des Beaux-arts de Belgique, Brussels) and *Antwerp: The Cathedral* (Fig. 10-3):

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Fig. 10-4. Henri De Braekeleer, *The Old Inn "The Pilot House" in Antwerp*

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In subsequent decades avant-garde writers continued to attribute "the soul of things" to De Braekeleer's interior scenes.[24] But what exactly was "the soul of things" that De Mont and other commentators detected in De Braekeleer's paintings? Of all the phrase's possible meanings, which applied to his art?

An article written by Émile Verhaeren on the occasion of De Braekeleer's first retrospective in 1891–1892 provides a clue. In his review, Verhaeren reflected on how the worn-down, unfrequented sites that De Braekeleer depicted were imbued with memories of the events that had played out within their walls. Such rooms were no longer sites of human activity but were instead enlivened only by light. As the critic put it, "iIn his melancholy and sad interiors, the only rays of animation that can slip in must enter through the windows."[25] Moreover, Verhaeren mused, the artist's brilliant light effects could not disrupt the atmosphere of nostalgic reverie: "the sadness of the past envelops things so penetratingly that one continues to be supremely moved by their soul."[26]

These remarks are revelatory in so far as "the soul of things" is concerned. According to Verhaeren, the soul of an interior derived from the room's history, and specifically the intimate experiences, emotions, and physical traces of its inhabitants. The passage of light through the

interior elicited feelings and memories associated with bygone days, and so called forth the room's spirit.

It cannot be entirely coincidental that Verhaeren's image of a deserted interior invigorated solely by light echoes De Mont's description of *The Dining Room of Henri Leys*, and in fact De Mont probably had a similar notion of "the soul of things" in mind when he penned his article. The picture was completed in 1869 shortly after the death of Leys, who was De Braekeleer's uncle and mentor, and is in some sense a memorial to the deceased artist. De Mont's description of "the soul of things condemned to loneliness, grieving in the darkness" calls to mind the departed Leys, and thus associates the soul of the dining room with the life of its former inhabitant—just as Verhaeren's text does.

Fig. 10-5. Henri De Braekeleer, *The Dining Room of Henri Leys*

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It appears that both De Mont and Verhaeren understood "the soul of things" as a manifestation of the human associations that accrue to an interior over time. Until now, scholars have overlooked the fact that this conception is remarkably close to the Realist tenet of a sympathetic interrelation between individual and milieu. This tenet held that a person's character, habits, and destiny were influenced by and mirrored in their physical surroundings—including, significantly, domestic interiors. In visual art, this bond was often conveyed through a meticulous elaboration of setting (including a careful staging of pictorial illumination), which established mood and place and articulated narrative.[27] Realism strongly influenced Belgian art and literature from roughly 1860 to 1890, and the principle of "concordance" appears prominently in art criticism of the day.[28] As early as 1881, the lighting and formal arrangement of De Braekeleer's paintings, in particular, were interpreted as expressing this interplay between habitation and inhabitant.[29]

There is an unmistakable affinity between the Realist belief that an interior registers the personalities and experiences of its occupants, and the Symbolist notion that an interior bears the accumulated traces of its owners, and so comes to be graced with a kind of soul. And in fact, more than one commentary on De Braekeleer's work drew together the concepts underlying "the soul of things" with the notion of an interchange between an interior and its residents.[30] Mellery also explained *Emotion of Art. The Soul of Things* in precisely this manner in a now-forgotten passage in an *L'art moderne* article of 1909.[31]

Given the fact that many of the Belgian artists and writers who turned to Symbolism in the 1880s and 1890s had cut their eye-teeth on Realism, it should come as little surprise that one meaning of "the soul of things" derived from Realist conceptions of psychologically-charged space. De Braekeleer's paintings are plainly crucial to this neglected early history of

the term, enabling us to trace the transition from Realist interior—the room as mirror of a person's psyche—to Symbolist interior—a room with its own soul. His canvases clearly offered writers an important stimulus for the emerging vision of a sentient interior revealed by light.

However, De Braekeleer's impact on his fellow artists is more difficult to assess. Scholars have compared his interior scenes to the paintings of James Ensor, Henry Van de Velde, and Vilhelm Hammershøi, and to Mellery's drawings. But the similarities between De Braekeleer's work and the pictures of Ensor et al. are far too general to support a claim of direct inspiration, absent evidence from sketches or archival documents—evidence that is so far lacking.[32]

Still, De Braekeleer's interior scenes were some of the most prominent and recent precedents available to Symbolist artists working in Belgium. His art was so enthusiastically promoted between 1880 and 1905 that we can be assured that painters of the interior were, at the least, generally aware of his achievements. Mellery and De Braekeleer, in particular, shared friends and patrons, and their work was shown and reviewed in the same venues. Nor did the similarities between their artworks go unnoticed among contemporary critics. In Verhaeren's phrasing, the two artists "lived in kindred residences of the spirit and translated them [into art]."[33]

Moreover, it is indisputable that De Braekeleer's paintings manifest what became the formal backbone of many Symbolist interior scenes—suggestively illuminated rooms that subtly evoke an otherworldly presence. There is thus every reason to conclude that his work was vital to the development of one facet of "the soul of things." His Realist interior scenes, with their exploration of the emotional and dramatic power of light, lie at the origins of the hauntingly lit, numinous interiors found in Belgian Symbolism.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 10-1. Xavier Mellery, *The Stair*, ca. 1889. Red and black chalk, 59 x 46 cm. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp. © KIK-IRPA, Brussels.

Fig. 10-2. Xavier Mellery, *The Soul of Things*, ca. 1889–95. White and black chalk, 93 x 67 cm. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp. © KIK-IRPA, Brussels.

Fig. 10-3. Henri De Braekeleer, *Antwerp: The Cathedral*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 87.5 x 67.5 cm. Royal Collection of Belgium, Brussels, on loan to the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp. © KIK-IRPA, Brussels.

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Notes

[1] This paper is an early version of the fifth chapter of my dissertation, "The Soul of Solemn Places: The Interior Scenes of Henri De Braekeleer (1840–1888)" (PhD diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2013).

[2] "Par bonheur l'artiste et là qui se moque, lui, de la science et de la philosophie lorsqu'elles contrarient sa fantaisie et sa liberté. …Il fouaille la vulgarité bête, et tout un monde merveilleux, étonnant, coloré, harmonieux, apparait et se profile sur la chambre obscure de la pensée. Monde vrai, aussi réel que l'autre, puisqu'il n'est fait que des éléments du monde réel, mais pénétré des effluves lumineux du sentiment et de l'idée." "Notre programme," *L'art moderne* 1 (March 6, 1881): 2. All translations by the author.

[3] On the representation of interiors in later-nineteenth-century Belgian art and writing see Sarah Burns, "A Symbolist Soulscape: Fernand Khnopff's *I Lock the Door Upon Myself*," *Arts Magazine* 55 (January 1981): 80–89; Diane Lesko, *James Ensor: The Creative Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 102–12; Lynne Pudles, *Solitude, Silence, and the Inner Life: A Study of Belgian Symbolist Artists* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1988); Donald Friedman, "Belgian Symbolism and a Poetics of Place," in *Les XX and the Belgian Avant-Garde: Prints, Drawings, and Books ca. 1890*, ed. Stephen H. Goddard, 126–27, 133–36 (Lawrence, KS: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1992); Natascha Langerman, "Intérieur et intimisme dans l'oeuvre de Georges Le Brun (1873–1914). La période symboliste 1901–1914," *Annales d'Histoire de l'Art & d'Archéologie* 17 (1995): 97–111; Anne Adriaens-Pannier and Norbert Hostyn, *Léon Spilliaert* (Brussels: SABAM, 1996), 73–77; Sharon L. Hirsh, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chap. 6.

[4] For scholarship on "the soul of things" see Suzanne Houbart-Wilkin, "La maison du peintre Xavier Mellery," *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* 13 (1964): 27–42; Sarah Faunce, "Seurat and 'the Soul of Things'," in *Belgian Art 1880–1914*, 41–56 (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 1980); Lynne Pudles, "Images of the Interior Life: Xavier Mellery's *l'Ame des choses*," *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* 43–44 (1994–1995): 227–58;

Vincent Vanhamme, *Xavier Mellery. L'Ame des Choses* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2000), 27–35, 83–84; Hirsh, *Symbolism*, 226–30.

[5] Faunce, "Seurat," 50.

[6] Hector Chainaye, "L'Ame des Choses," *La Jeune Belgique* 6 (November 1887): 335–44.

[7] Faunce, "Seurat," 48–50.

[8] "La volonté de travailler sûrement et froidement fait davantage pénétrer dans l'intimité et comme dans l'âme des choses, on les analyse, on s'attache à ce qu'elles ont de permanent bien plus qu'à leurs accidents, on isole d'elles le temporaire, l'individuel, l'instable et sans le vouloir on aboutit à leur synthèse." Émile Verhaeren, "Aux *XX*," *L'art moderne* 9 (February 3, 1889), repr. in Émile Verhaeren, *Écrits sur l'art*, ed. Paul Aron (Brussels: Labor, 1997), 1: 306.

[9] "En voici d'autres, chez qui l'âme se mêle aux choses, avec ses rêves, ses fantaisies, ses envolées, ses girations littéraires." [Octave Maus], "L'exposition des *XX*," *L'art moderne* 10 (January 26, 1890): 26–27. See also Faunce, "Seurat," 50.

[10] The exhibition was held February 23–April 1, 1895 in Brussels. Mellery showed earlier iterations of the series in 1889 and 1890 as *The Life of Things* (*La Vie des Choses*). For more on the drawings see the sources given in note 4.

[11] The works that comprise *Emotions of Art. The Soul of Things* are difficult to identify and correspondingly difficult to date. See Pudles, "Images," 231–32.

[12] I explore the meanings of Mellery's drawings in Hokanson, "Soul," 303–14, 337–39.

[13] I discuss the various meanings of "the soul of things" more fully in Hokanson, "Soul," chap. 5.

[14] Among other things, one can cite the pathetic fallacy common to Romantic poetry; the Baudelairean and Swedenborgian concepts of *correspondance*, or a harmonious interconnection between the tangible and intangible; the philosophies of Schopenhauer regarding the subjective knowledge of reality; late-nineteenth-century theories regarding the psychological properties of material objects; and the alignment of the domestic interior with the self, which began in the Romantic era and increased as the nineteenth century progressed.

[15] These precepts were famously articulated by Edmond Duranty in *La nouvelle peinture* (1876; repr. In *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874–1886*, San Francisco: The Museums, 1986), 481–82.

[16] The best source on De Braekeleer's life and work is Herwig Todts, *Henri De Braekeleer (1840–1888)* (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, [1988]).

[17] De Braekeleer was given a posthumous retrospective in Antwerp and Brussels in late 1891 and early 1892 as well as a vast joint exhibition with the work of his uncle, the artist Henri Leys, in Antwerp in 1905.

[18] See, e.g., Thoré-Bürger, "Salon de 1864," in *Salons de W. Bürger 1861 à 1868* (Paris: Vve Jules Renouard, 1870), 2: 140.

[19] Camille Lemonnier wrote in 1905, "[De Braekeleer] was never satisfied [with his light effects]. He complained to a friend… that he was never able to convey the transparency of shadow without employing glazes. No painter was more preoccupied

with his métier. He wanted to depict shadow simply as a more opaque state of light—as still a kind of light. The idea of recovering the sources of daylight was like a sublime torment to him." Camille Lemonnier, *Henri De Braekeleer: Peintre de la Lumière* (Brussels: G. Van Oest, 1905), 40.

[20] Edmond Duranty, "Exposition Universelle. Les Écoles Étrangères de Peinture. Belgique et Angleterre," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* sér. 2, 18 (1878): 294; Camille Lemonnier, *Histoire des Beaux-Arts en Belgique* (Brussels: M. Weissenbruch, 1881), 210–12; and the sources cited in note 22. Duranty confused Henri with his father, the painter Ferdinand De Braekeleer, Sr., referring to him as "an artist who is today quite old, who has played a signal role in the renewal of Belgian art since 1835."

[21] "La lumière était pour lui un acteur nouveau qui jouait son rôle, et dans cette lumière jaunâtre ou dorée, dans cette lutte des rayons et des ombres, dans ces clartés pétillantes qui s'accrochaient aux meubles des appartements ou qui faisaient flamboyer les vitres de la mansarde, dans ces défaites du soleil qui s'efforçait en vain d'inonder la chambre du penseur, il y avait comme un drame d'autant plus émouvant que l'artiste y jetait la pauvre fille qui travaille et qui ouvre sa fenêtre à la lumière comme à un ami, et le savant qui craint que le grand jour ne donne des distractions à sa pensée." Ernest Vanel, "Le Salon," *L'Art universel* 3 (October 25, 1875): 171. See also J. Hoepfer, "Le Salon d'Anvers," *L'Actualité* 1 (September 10, 1876): 27; Charles Tardieu, "La peinture à l'Exposition Universelle de 1878. L'École Belge," *L'Art. Revue hebdomadaire illustrée* 15 (1878): 276.

[22] Qu'il est grande l'artiste que parvient ainsi à donner la vie à la matière et à faire qu'elle nous émeut plus même que la représentation des créatures humaines. Comme l'a dit Henri Heine, alors, maison, comptoir, porte vivent, car un homme leur a donné une partie de son âme. …C'est à des gens rêveurs et artistes que se révèle, dans le secret calme et paisible d'une existence laborieuse, la vie intérieure et mystérieuse de tous ces êtres." "Le Salon d'Anvers," *L'art moderne* 2 (September 10, 1882): 290. The poetry of Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) was a precedent for Symbolist writing in the later nineteenth century.

[23] "Eens zag ik in *het Kunstverbond* alhier een zijner stukken, eene binnenzaal uit de woning van Leys voorstellende. Geen menschelijk figuur, geen dier, geen bloem zelfs luisterde het op: eene tafel door zetels omringd, een of meer kasten, een luchter… ziedaar het geheel onderwerp. En toch werden honderden toeschouwers niet moede, voor dit gewrocht, blijkbaar *con amore* behandeld, telkens weer stil te houden! Waarom? Ik verzeker u, dat iets meer dan louter *kleuren* ons aantrok! Uit al dat levenlooze sprak eene ziel tot ons, de ziel tot eenzaamheid veroordeelde dingen, treurend in de duisternis, maar blinkend in eenen straal der zon." Pol de Mont, "Hendrik de Braekeleer," *De Portefeuille* 10 (July 28, 1888): 61. His punctuation and italics throughout.

[24] In addition to the text discussed below see, e.g., Arnold Goffin, "Salons d'Art: L'Exposition Leys-De Braekeleer," *Revue Générale* (Brussels) 82 (September 1905): 347.

[25] "Dans ses intérieurs de mélancolie et de tristesse, les seuls rayons d'animation qui se pussent glisser devaient du reste venir par les vitres." Émile Verhaeren,

"Henri de Braekeleer," *La Nation*, December 19, 1891, repr. in Émile Verhaeren, *Pages Belges*, 93–94; quote p. 94 (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1926).

[26] "Tandis que ses doigts sorciers semblent manier des miettes d'éclairs et d'arcs-en-ciel, la tristesse du passé vêt toujours si pénétrablement les choses qu'on continue à être surtout ému par leur âme." Verhaeren, "Henri de Braekeleer," 96.

[27] Duranty, *Nouvelle peinture,* 481–82; Susan Sidlauskas, "Resisting Narrative: The Problem of Edgar Degas's *Interior*," *Art Bulletin* 75 (December 1993): 684–87.

[28] On Belgian Realism in general see Gustave Vanwelkenhuyzen, *L'influence du naturalisme français en Belgique de 1875 à 1900* (Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1930), esp. chap. 2 and 3; Philippe Roberts-Jones, *Du Réalisme au Surréalisme: La Peinture en Belgique de Joseph Stevens à Paul Delvaux* (1969; new ed., Brussels: ULB, Groupe de Recherche en Art Moderne, 1994), 11–47. On "concordance" see Hokanson, "Soul," 99–103, 329–34.

[29] Lemonnier, *Histoire des Beaux-Arts*, 208–11.

[30] E.g., Émile Verhaeren, "Exposition du Cercle Artistique," *La Revue Moderne* (May 1883), repr. in Verhaeren, *Écrits sur l'art*, 1997, 1: 90.

[31] Xavier Mellery, "L'art moderne," *L'art moderne* 29 (December 19, 1909): 400.

[32] For more on this subject see Hokanson, "Soul," 343.

[33] "[De Braekeleer and Mellery] ont vécu en de pareilles résidences d'esprit et les ont traduites." Émile Verhaeren, "Hans Memling," *Le Monde moderne* (July–December 1899), repr. in Verhaeren, *Écrits sur l'art*, 1997, 2: 751. On the relation between De Braekeleer's and Mellery's work see Hokanson, "Soul," 335–37.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ISIS' FINGERTIPS: A SYMBOLIST READING OF LÉVY-DHURMER'S *SILENCE*

LIESBETH GROTENHUIS

Shush, let us be quiet and look at the effects of the night: for a couple of hours the world has no bright light and dusk transforms the world to a place of shadow. Every colour that is visible in a sun-drenched landscape is now absorbed and transformed into blue. It is a quiet blue, since even the essence of life now shimmers: "nature and nature's laws lay hid in night" wrote Alexander Pope (1688-1744).[1] Although the term "the painter's hour" is used for this specific time of day, it is still easier described in words than painted: how, we may ask, is it possible to depict darkness after nature? Yet Symbolist painters call forth new techniques in a reformulated use of pictorial elements and imagination.[2] Nocturnal scenery thus was a popular Symbolist theme, with a remarkable frequency in the year 1897. The first part of this paper explains the transformation from the illustration of nocturnal narratives to the depiction of more abstract concepts by the use of pictorial elements. The reduction of colour and the use of new material can tell the story.

The work *Silence* drawn by Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer forms the central theme throughout this paper, and raises the main question: who is this female (Fig. 11-1)? The interpretation of this night portrait reads like an overnight road movie in the second part of the article. The anonymous female turns out to possess different faces, defining her as an "idealistic portrait", in the words of Jean Delville (1867-1953).[3] Three elements distinguish her from "ordinary" allegories of falling night, drawing a more profound parallel with the wise goddess Isis: her gesture, the starry sky and the veil. These elements, when researched, result in various (potential) identities as indicated by the titles of the following paragraphs.

Fig. 11-1. Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer, *Le silence*

A Nocturnal Portrait in Context

"Silence" is one of the portraits of the night drawn by Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer (1865-1953). When it first appeared, it was already mentioned in terms of its "mystique,"[4] probably because the French painter is not

following the tradition of nocturnal iconography. In an allegorical painting the Baroque specialist Jean Marc Nattier (1685-1766) painted the goddess of dawn.[5] She wears a fine saffron dress to represent the sky of the breaking day, assured by the morning "star" of Venus hovering above her head. The coming day is signified by the peeling back of the massive blue drapery, a verbal trope to symbolize the covering darkness. One hundred and forty-two years later, William Bouguereau (1825-1905) reduced the clothing of his allegorical figure to flowing translucent drapery: her nudity is excused by her being a representation of the subject evoked in the title, "Evening Mood" (1882)(Fig. 11-2).

Fig. 11-2. William Bouguereau, *Evening Mood*

Another way of relating a scene to the night was the illustration of nocturnal narratives, like that of the mythological Selene. Academic painter Victor Florence Pollet (1811-82) portrays a diaphanous female lying in the sickle shape crescent, identifying her as the moon goddess, further confirmed by the glowing jewellery on her forehead (Fig. 11-3). The story tells us she is desperately in love. Every night she visits her beloved Endymion to gaze on him in the pale, blue light. She keeps him eternally asleep. Although his youth overcomes time, there is the cruel effect that he himself can never enjoy it.

These two examples represent the academic tradition Lévy Dhurmer wanted to overcome. By replacing the traditional material of oil paint applied in highly finished brushstrokes for pastel, the nocturnal scene gained a velvety texture that allowed the dots of chalk to sparkle like stars. The prelude of Levy-Dhurmer's interest in transparency and reflection is found in his early experiments with the metallic lustre and the iridescence glaze of ceramics, based on Middle Eastern pottery (Fig. 11-4).[6] In the period that applied craft and design became appreciated as fine art, these chargers were not just successful as objects, even higher qualities were recognized:

Fig. 11-3. Victor Florence Pollet, *Endymion and Selene*

Fig. 11-4 Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer, *Moonscape Charger*, ca. 1892

"the vases reflect magic" judged critic Jacques de Gachons (1868-1945) in 1895.[7] The reference to the magical and the passion for metallic effects must also be explained in the context of the flourishing alchemy, astrology and magic in France.[8]

Yet Lévy-Dhurmer established his name with his paintings and drawings. The exhibition in gallery "Georges Petit," early in 1896, was the specific occasion where critics specifically admired his subtle use of colour and received him warmly as: "a youth, a debutant and also a master."[9] Here a visit from an exponent of the old style could have confirmed Lévy-Dhurmer was developing in his own way. It was Bouguereau himself who not only visited the novice's exhibition; he also gave advice. Representing the Ideal alone was a very bad marketing technique, the old master preached: had a rose been added to close the female's mouth, the work would have sold immediately.[10] Indeed erotic

content is missing since dense draperies hide her body and she is even wearing long sleeves. Compared to the seductive allegories her meaning shifted to that of a chaste servant of the spirit.[11] After all she is not called “Night” or “Evening Mood”. She is Silence.

Lévy-Dhurmer expressed his disgust about the event in his diary, and avoided the grand master’s critique by continuing his Idealist approach. Yet despite the use of pastel, the form in “Silence” is massively defined. When the slick finish was described as a cliché of conformist academism,[12] Lévy-Dhurmer might have responded by changing his technique again: from 1906 he transformed it using monochromatic color and loose brush strokes, blurring the details even more.[13] Other neo-impressionist features of these works are the isolated and truncated female body parts.[14]

A Bust in Blue: The Essence of the Night

Fig. 5. Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, *Moon light*
Fig. 6. Vincent van Gogh, *Starry Night above the Rhone*

In depicting his portrait of night, Lévy-Dhurmer is more akin to the painters that fathomed the essence of the night rather than illustrating a story. Painters of the School of Barbizon like Camille Corot (1796-1875) (Fig. 11-5) and the Hague School transformed the décor itself into the main subject, in personal, un-idealized representations of the uncultivated landscape with “effets de soir” or even “effets de nuit”. Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) admired this typical “Corot mood” of intimacy and mysterious silence, and even attributed it to an underlying religious motivation.[15] And it was also Van Gogh who experimented with evoking chromatic effects: a letter about colour theories proves the inappropriate use of Prussian blue, especially in combination with lemon yellow.[16] In 1888, the same year, Van Gogh painted “A starry Night Above the Rhone”

(Fig. 11-6). The heightened, contrasting colour is typical of the French Symbolist group the Nabis. These painters, including Van Gogh, also used colour to represent the dark side of real life that they found in the night cafes with the warm light, flirting girls and potent absinth.

Indeed, nighttime offers different experiences than daytime. But Lévy-Dhurmer preferred to reduce the single colour that lasts the longest at dawn, in what I refer to as “bleuaille”. Art historian Badt defines blue as the only pigment to contain darkness from an almost-black at night time, to an almost whitish blue at the horizon of a sunny day.[17] Lévy-Dhurmer managed to combine all tints of blue in this single drawing, from the black shadow to the glowing reflection of moonlight on the water. Indeed the use of light is extremely delicate since the blue moon, in itself an indirect luminance, is placed outside the picture plane.

The Priestess of Peacefulness: Silence is Silver

Fig. 11-7. Auguste Antoine Préault, *Silence*

"Silence" is a dark bust whose silhouette is set sharply against a light background that appears thrust into the foreground: the hieratic pose is read as a "solid and immobile icon".[18] As early as 1899 critic Achille Ségard (1872-1936) imputes Silence's face with sculptural qualities,[19] identifying the medallion relief on a tomb by Auguste Préault (1809-1879) as the source (Fig. 11-7): the sculpture became an icon of Romanticism, hailed as "one of the representative works of modern art."[20] This status was assigned due to Préault's abandonment of traditional funerary imagery. The curators at the Art Institute of Chicago ask if this skeletal face is dead or alive; in other words, is it related to death, not only by virtue of function? Belgian writer Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) defines this type of silence as a passive quietness, which is the reflection of deep sleep and even death or non-existence. Georges Rodenbach (1855-1898), a major source of inspiration for Belgian and French painters, related night to the eternal sleep in the much quoted poem "The Reign of Silence", writing: "And since night approaches, I slumber into death."[21]

Maeterlinck distinguishes a second form of absolute stillness, poetically described: "When the lips sleep, the soul awakes".[22] This active silence refers to spiritual growth. Odilon Redon (1814-1916) explains his "Closed Eyes" in this context: "He sleeps, and the dream filled with sorrow that plays under this marble forehead let us dream in a world that moves and reflects".[23] But where, in this state, Redon's figure *experiences*, Lévy-Dhurmer's statuesque female *evokes* a ritual silence or "Echemitia."[24] Here the diminution of his palette creates space for introspective and metaphysical questions.[25] Lévy-Dhurmer chose the ideal colour to evoke contemplation since demure blue was associated with the soul,[26] and the idealistic meaning was interpreted in the context of a mystic tradition.[27] In 1857, for example, author Frédéric de Portal (1804-1876) relates truthful blue representing eternity to different gods: Jupiter, Krishna, Christ as well as the Egyptian Amon.[28]

Also Egyptian in origin is the gesture of the finger over the lips, widely recognized as the iconic beckoning of the Greco-Roman Harpocrates (Fig. 11-8).[29] It is actually a misinterpretation of the gesture of childhood in Egyptian art that was also used by the pharaonic god Horus, as the son of Isis.[30] In Greco-Roman times Horus evolved into Harpocrates and became the god Secrecy, and the gesture survived. In the portrait of Harpocrates by Jan Harmensz Muller (1571-1628) the god becomes an elderly keeper of wisdom that still executes the childish gesture (Fig. 11-9). The added text in the engraved version explains the work's essential meaning: "If you don't learn to keep silent, you will speak of what you don't know."[31]

Fig. 8. Greek, *Harpocrates*, bronze
Fig. 9. Jan Harmensz Muller, *Harpocrates*

Lévy-Dhurmer evoked the enigmatic through the cryptic gesture of the two fingers that he placed on either side of her mouth, rather than the traditional index finger held the middle of the lips. But what does it mean?

The Mystic Magician: A Ritualistic Gesture

The gesture Lévy-Dhurmer used is a variation on a theme: Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921) employed a "strange ritual gesture" as his female closes the mouth of another face with her thumb (Fig. 11-10).[32] This mask is attached to a column, again coloured blue.[33] Under the motto "Speech is of time, Silence is of Eternity", writer Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) invited the erection of altars for universal worship.[34] It determines Khnopff's column as an altar of silence and indicates the woman's status of priestess by her hood.

Even so, what does Lévy-Dhurmer's specific gesture mean? "Researchers" like John Bulwer (1648-1654) interpreted gestures that could also "serve for privy ciphers for any secret intimation".[35] The extended thumb, index and middle finger are used as a blessing in Christian art, but the specific open hand position is typical of the Roman amulet known as the "Hand of Power" (Fig. 11-11).[36]

Fig. 11-10. Fernand Khnopff, *Marguerite Khnopff, the artist's sister, study for "The Secret"*

Fig. 11-11. Roman, *Hand of Sabazius*, 3rd century

Appealing are the loads of symbols and zoomorphic figurines "piling-up of the symbols of those particular divinities under whose protection they placed themselves".[37] References are made to different cults and holy

figures dedicated to the Phrygian Thracian Sabazius while a nurturing female lying at the wrist represents Isis.[38] Here the opening in the wrist, shaped like a temple, had a hinged door that revealed an unknown, lost object, perhaps a reclining mother and child, as seen in other examples.[39] The attributed power of the gesture is recognized, and added to both an anonymous portrait of the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistos, and the second Lady of Theosophy Annie Besant.

Lévy-Dhurmer could have seen original Roman bronzes in the Parisian Cabinet the Medailles, examples that Bernard de Montfaucon (1655–1741) published as "votive hands" as early as 1722.[40] The motif of the hands expresses a magical content "evidently left for the priests alone", explained author Elworthy in 1895,[41] confirming Lévy-Dhurmer's female as a priestess. But what religion is she dedicated to? The Roman hand of power indicates a mystical order, referring to ancient cultures. Another element evoking this background is the use of Egyptian hieroglyphs as evidence by their reception among critics.

A Hieratic Icon: The Hieroglyphic connection

When in search for a new and secret content, why not turn to the essence of the source? Plato ascribed both the invention of hieroglyphs and astronomy to the Egyptians,[42] while Plotinus (205-270) gave a Neo-Platonic interpretation of the pharaonic monumental writing that contained the essential truth.[43] The Greek philosophers based their statements on alleged pharaonic sources, which were in fact Hellenistic texts coming from contemporary Egyptian writers. Like the Horapollo manuscript "Hieroglyphica", that informs us, that "Egyptian priests, did not use letters but whole figures when they wished to signify divine things . . . for God has knowledge of things . . . like the pure and firm shape of the thing itself."[44] This fifth-century text was rediscovered in 1419 and when translated and printed in 1505 it became popular and controversial.[45] Yet, these post-pharaonic sources contributed to speculation on the symbolic meaning of hieroglyphs.[46]

The most impressive Renaissance proponent was the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), who traced the origins of all religions back to Egypt. Kircher also praised the Hellenistic Hermes Trismegistos, the so-called writer of the Corpus Hermeticum, since he "first instituted the hieroglyphs, thus becoming the prince and parent of all Egyptian theology and philosophy".[47] Hieroglyphs formed the key to this ancient wisdom, so Kircher started to copy inscriptions from the obelisks re-erected in Rome. Incorrectly. Even more importantly, the Neo-Platonist

thinker not only claimed he decoded the secret language; he added a mystic meaning to the signs, the "voices from the gods,"[48] and designed a few himself.[49]

Artists adapted this secret knowledge, as we can see from Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) in his "Philosophia" where four famous wise men in tondos surround the allegory (Fig. 11-12): at the top is Ptolemy the astronomer representing the "Egyptian priest", which goes with the

Fig. 11-12. Albrecht Dürer, "Philosophia" 1502, woodcut from *Quator libri amorum* of Conrad celtis

pseudo-hieroglyphic writing that can be seen, not read, on the obelisk.[50] This kind of image, reminiscent of sigils, was widespread until 1822 (Fig. 11-13). Signs like these were wrongfully presented as a hieroglyphic alphabet guarded by "the symbol of symbols", a sphinx holding the rattle of Isis in front of it. In search for a universal language, Romanticism adapted the hieroglyphs as a way of thinking and speaking that psychology related to the language of dreams in their concentration on the shadowy side of life and the discovery of the unconscious.[51]

Fig. 11-13. J., Luyken, *The Syrian, Phoenician and Egyptian alphabet*, *Oudheden* (Jewish Antiquities…) Amsterdam, 1690

Fig. 11-14. Fernand Khnopff, *With Verhaeren. An angel.*

Diderot explained the direct working of a hieroglyph with the signs forming a bridge from one mind to another without the blocking language.[52] Baudelaire explains further: “We cannot but arrive at this truth that everything is a hieroglyph… well, what is a poet—I take the word in its widest sense—if not a translator, a decipherer”.[53] So the artist got the task to tell stories for which nature could serve as a dictionary from which an artist could pick symbols.

The relationship with nature alone was not good enough for the Symbolists that attempted to deepen the pantheistic effects in returning to the intellectual philosophy used in the Renaissance,[54] like Fernand Khnopff who adapted comparable signs from Dürer in “With Verhaeren. An Angel” (Fig. 11-14).[55] In the middle of the colonnade or temple that forms the pedestal for a sphinx and a standing female, we see, but cannot read, inscriptions. By this time, however, Egyptian hieroglyphs were actually deciphered by Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832).[56] Yet in the spirit of Kircher, Khnopff was more interested in evoking universal aspects of these signs.[57] Rosicrucian Sâr Péladan recommended students internalize its linear qualities, “in itself as abstract as the alphabet”, to express the character of the ideal in works of art.[58] Kircher’s theory that Osiris “permeated invisibly the whole world”[59] was coeval with the Symbolist conviction that all of nature is a hieroglyph.[60] And this applied not just to landscape.

Starry Allusions: A Celestial Décor

Lévy-Dhurmer may have presented “Silence” as a priestess, but her temple is nature. Must we read a “mysterious connection between the spirit and the stars in Silence”?[61] What do the stars mean in this context, or as astronomer Flammarion (1842–1925) poetically asks in his novel Lumen (1887): “What voice is more eloquent than the silence of a starlit night?” It sounds as though something profound is articulated, but what exactly is this voice whispering?

Lévy-Dhurmer provided modernized content in his illustration of a literary story by Pierre Loti (1850-1923) (Fig. 11-15). In “Nocturne at the Bosphorus” (1897) the leading lady Aziyadé dips her toe in the water against the skyline of Istanbul. The little lamps reflected in the Bosphorus are the shivering little souls of Aziyadé and Achmet, as explained by Lévy- Dhurmer himself.[62] The remarkable choice for the reflections of the little lamps instead of natural light might illustrate the changing world: gas lanterns were introduced in the early nineteenth-century streets.[63]

Yet more than street lanterns, stars are the heavenly bodies used to represent the soul: they are diverse mythological figures transformed into constellations. The deceased are said to become stars after their death in a

comforting but personal theory. The firmament had another unusual trait – it could be read: a star could point the way to a newborn king[64] and astrologers could register the written future. But above all, starry skies and their slow-moving constellations are interpreted as divine signs.[65] Heaven itself represents infinity and eternity in which the overwhelming power of nature can be experienced. Stars propelled the mind beyond the physical cosmos into an unseen, unchanging world of eternal truths.[66]

Charles Dupuis (1742–1809) saw stars as the source of all world religions, and related the zodiac to the myth of Isis and Osiris.[67] "As above, so below", reads the hermetic knowledge, followed by the advice: "rise higher than all heights and deeper than all depths in order to understand God."[68] Esoteric author Edouard Schuré (1841–1929) explained the origin of this concept in relation to the pseudo-Egyptian theology: after Hermes Trismegistos wrote down all his knowledge and instructed all the gods, now the world was finished and he mounted to the stars.[69] His chariot was pulled by a black and a white sphinx while he stands under a sparkling canopy.[70]

Fig. 11-15. Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer, *Nocturne on the Bosphorous* or *Aziyadé*

Kircher had already interpreted the Kingdom of heaven as a hieroglyph,[71] while his follower Thomas Browne averred: “The finger of God hath set an inscription upon all his works […]. By these Letters God calls the Starres …”[72] But whose handwriting is it? Queen of Heaven: Isis the Creator

A claim is made: “I divided the earth from heaven, I showed the path of the stars”, [73] declares Isis in her aretalogical prophecy, copied by Demetrius from a stèlae from Memphis.[74] As the Queen of Heaven, she could move the cosmos and at the touch of her fingertips, wisdom was written in the stars. For she is knowledge itself, so pseudo-hieroglyphs appear on the sash over her shoulder in a Roman statue, the stars and moon confirm her connection to the firmament while the lack of other divine emblems identifies her as a priestess (Figs. 11-16-17).

Fig. 11-16. Roman, *Isis-Demeter* 130-40 A.D., marble

Fig. 11-17. Roman, *Isis-Demeter*, *detail,* 130-40 A.D., marble

Isis as ruler over all could move the cosmos. Kircher portrays her as a giant queen walking in her starry mantle over the earth (Fig. 11-18).

Similarly, Antoine de la Rochefoucauld raised his Isis on top of a rainbow; not only indicating her heavenly status, the rainbow also represents the Rosicrucian holy mountain (Fig. 11-19).[81] Isis's presence is confirmed by the text on the banderol: "I am all that has been, all that is, all that ever shall be".[82] Representing the essence of ancient Egyptian wisdom, Isis was knowledge itself.[83] Therefore she could initiate the shepherd in his sleep, a process often explained in terms of light and darkness.

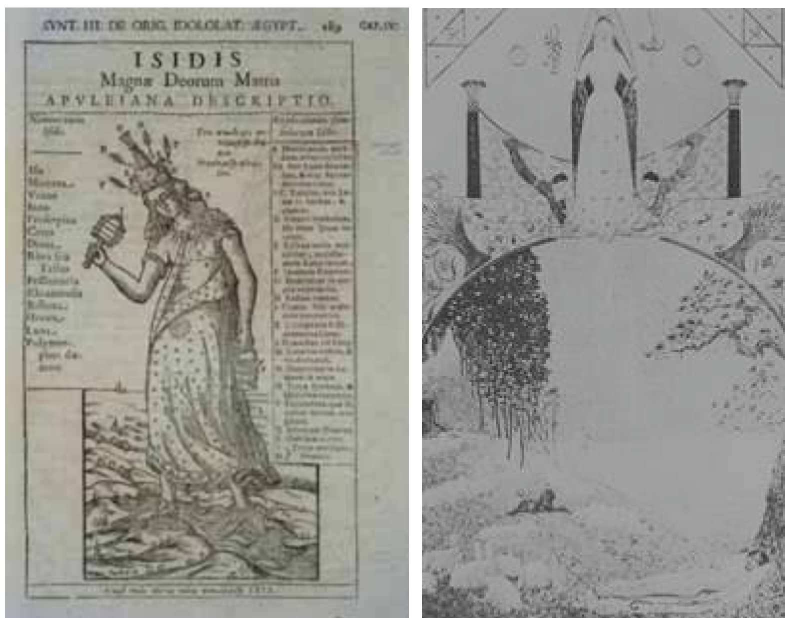

Fig. 11-18. *Mother Nature, or Syncretized Isis.* From Athanasius Kircher, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* Rome
Fig. 11-19. Antoine de la Rochefoucauld, *The good Goddess Isis intitiates the shepherd*' ca. 1892

For the interpretation of "Silence", darkness plays a crucial role. The dark night setting allows indirect light to glow and reflect; the elusive face of "Le Silence" is just visible thanks to the moonlight. The stars do twinkle in the background, yet in relation to the protagonist they function just as décor. This is remarkable, since Kircher provided the intriguing iconography of a star-studded mantle. Neither use the tradition of a starry tiara. This figure is covered in a heavy, dark veil; shadow obscuring her eyes and the expressive parts of the portrait. Now shadows are not part of

the real world,[78] instead they provide a unique possibility of representing the non-visible. What role is darkness playing here?

The Veiled Initiate: Through Darkness to Light

"Darkness that knew no bounds was in Abyss, and Water" states the Corpus Hermeticum.[79] The absence of light is paralleled to a state of ignorance, as Schuré explains "a mystic rose blooms only in the night of the sanctuary and in the secret of great religions receiving a first beam of light".[80] This beam of light is also found in Kircher's text: "all created things are nothing else but mirrors which reflect to us the rays of the divine wisdom."[81] Combined with silence it can be used as the starting point to unravel the process of initiation related to Isis as confirmed by the stars.

During an initiation darkness not only represented a dream-like state, it was actually brought to a deeper level, as the new convert had to descend and experience a ritual death. Apuleius illustrates the initiation of Lucius: "I approached the confines of death and borne through the elements I returned. At midnight I saw the sun shining in all his glory."[82] Pupils actually had to lie down in a closed coffin, for a reported number of three nights,[83] just like Osiris, whose being was repaired by the magical powers of Isis.

The female figure depicted here certainly cannot be Isis herself. In that case she would have worn her veil as a burka, as Isis's statement on De la Rochefoucauld's banderol continues: "no mortal Man hath ever me unveiled." The often used quote was supposed to be found on a temple or pyramid from Saïs, or-even more importantly-were written on the base of an ancient Isis statue. She was said to guard the entrance of the "occult sanctuary" where initiations took place.[84] By being completely covered, all mysteries and knowledge were hidden, but were revealed to the initiates. For them she lifts her veil and the initiates are to remain forever silent about what they have seen.[85] They were also advised to return to an earlier state: Philostrates explained pupils first "learned also Silence is a language."[86]

Silence now has a deeper meaning, in this context also the light has to be regarded as having profound significance. When the night shroud is peeled off the morning sun appears and analogously light appears after the veil of initiation is lifted. A comparable act of unveiling is executed by Time, as Time divulges Truth. Pompeo Girolamo Batoni (1708–1787) even places the light-giving disk on the chest of Veritas. Here knowledge rather than Truth is revealed under the robe. Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) used the shroud in a more complex way when he places the allegory of Religion near "Historia" on the title page of the "Biblia Sacra" (1642)

Fig. 11-20. Nicolas Poussin (engraving by Claude Mellan), Title page for *Biblia Sacra*, 1642, engraving on paper

(Fig. 11-20). The winged female looks over her shoulder into the past, while writing on a shadowy page.[87] The descending God brings light. The fully veiled figure "Prophecy", on the other side, holds a closed book in her hands that serves as a plinth for an Egyptian sphinx,[88] "signifying the occult mysteries of wisdom and sacred things,"[89] as the artist himself explains. This is exactly the meaning of Lévy-Dhurmer's veiled woman: the idealistic portrait may be ambiguous, but with her attributes and the way she is depicted, she must be read as a priestess of Isis.

With all his pictorial elements, Lévy Dhurmer's "Silence" also refers to the essence of religion and spiritual development, but what is she exactly doing? Is she indeed as Sorrèze states: "human sphinx shrouded in black veils" as a "work of profound symbolic thought"?[90] We can only guess at the meaning, since she definitely remains the figure of Silence. For the non-initiated it seems dark out there but Lévy-Dhurmer's priestess invites us to come to the light. She teaches the universal knowledge written in the stars, like hieroglyphs. This knowledge is available when one learns the complex symbolism associated with the Language of Silence.

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Ripa, Cesare. 1970. *Iconologia*. Rome, 1603, reprint Hildesheim.

Yates, Frances Amelia. 1964. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition.* Chicago, London: The Univ. of Chicago Press.

Van Gogh en de kleuren van de nacht. Van Gogh and the Colours of the Night. 2008. Exhibition catalogue Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum.

Notes

[1] These words are carved on Isaac Newton's tombstone, and continued: "God said, let Newton be! And all was light".

[2] Richard Thompson, *Monet to Matisse: landscape painting in France 1874-1914.* Exhibition catalogue (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1994): 109.

[3] Jean Delville, "Fernand Khnopff," in *Annuaire de l'Académie.* 87 (1921): 19; here Delville talks about Khnopff's often used model Marguerite, his sister.

[4] F. Polak, "Exposition Lévy-Dhurmer," in *L'Art et la mode.* (1896): 90; Henry Eon, "Exposition Lévy-Dhurmer à la galerie Georges Petit," in *La Plume.* (1898): 132; Boylesve uses the phrase "peintre de l'âme" (painter of the soul), René Boylesve, "Chroniques III. Les Arts," in *l'Ermitage.* (1896): 200; F. de Miomandre, "Un artiste modern–Lévy-Dhurmer," in *L'Art et les Artistes.* (1911): 263.

[5] Jean Marc Nattier, “Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle, duchesse de Châteauroux as Aurora”, 1740. Oil on canvas, 81 × 96 cm. Musée de Versailles. The emblems of the star, the torch and the dripping vase comes directly from “Crepusculo della mattina”: Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*. (Rome, 1603, reprint Hildesheim, 1970): 96.

[6] Lévy-Dhurmer won a gold medal for the metallic lustre glazes at the Exposition Universelle of 1889. In the subjects both the interest in the effects of the night as the dissolving female figure are already there.

[7] Jacques de Gachons, “L’Art decorative aux deux salons 1895,” in *l’Ermitage.* (1895): 337.

[8] Marcel Roggemans, *Geschiedenis van de occulte en mystieke broederschappen*. (History of the occult and mystique Brotherhoods)(Lulu.com, 2008): 221: “La Societé d’Alchemique de France” was founded in Paris, 1895.

[9] F. Polak, “Exposition Lévy-Dhurmer,” in *L’Art et la mode* (1896): 90.

[10] An undated memoire by Lévy Dhurmer: Geneviève Lacambre, “Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer 1865-1953,” in *La Revue du Louvre*. 1 (1973): 30.

[11] As preached by Josephin Péladan: Jeffrey Howe, “The sphinx and other Egyptian motifs in the work of Fernand Khnopff: the origins of The Caresses,” in *Arts Magazine.* 54, no. 4 (1980): 164.

[12] Thomas Crow, “Patriotism and Virtue: David to the young Ingres,” in *Nineteenth Century Art: a critical History.* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994):50.

[13] See Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer, “Sonate au clair de lune”, ca.1926. Pastel on paper, 97 x 71 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

[14] Symbolism is indeed described as “the mystical wing of Post-Impressionist generation”: Maurice Tuchman, “Hidden meanings in abstract art,” *The spiritual in art: abstract painting 1890-1985.* Exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art; The Hague: Gemeentemuseum, 1987): 37. Despite the more abstract approach in both title and colour, Lévy-Dhurmer’s subjects always stay rooted in reality.

[15] Letter 695/B3; Maite van Dijk en Jennifer Field, “Poëzie van de nacht,” (Poetry of the night) in *Van Gogh en de kleuren van de nacht.* (Van Gogh and the Colours of the Night) Exhibition catalogue (Amsterdam: Van Goghmuseum, 2008): 144; Millet painted a starry sky around 1851, and Van Gogh reveals his motivation: “he had an enormous drive to – shall I just say the word- to religion, so I go out at night to paint the stars.”

[16] Based on the theories of Eugène Delacroix; Letter 598/476; Sjraar van Heugten, “De kleuren van de nacht. Stijl en techniek in Van Goghs voorstellingen van avond en nacht,” (The colours of the night. Style and technique in Van Gogh’s representations of the Night) in *Van Gogh en de kleuren van de nacht.* 63, 80, 108.

[17] Kurt Badt, *Die Kunst Cézannes.* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1956): 43.

[18] Genevieve Lacambre, catalogue entry “Lévy-Dhurmer,” in *French Symbolist Painters: Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, Redon and their followers.* Exhibition catalogue (London: Hayward Gallery; Liverpool: Walker Art Gallery, 1972): 68.

[19] Genevieve Lacambre, catalogue entry “Lévy-Dhurmer,” 68.

[20] Also as a plaster cast in Art Institute, Chicago and the Louvre Paris. Quote without source from the caption, the Art Institute, Chicago.
[21] Georges Rodenbach, "Le règne du silence" (1891) After Lévy-Dhurmer invited Rodenbach to a dinner on June 12th 1895, a correspondence between July and December 1895 followed: Geneviève Lacambre, "Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer 1865-1953," 28-29.
[22] Maurice Maeterlinck, *Le trésor des Humbles.* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France 1896): 13; 9.
[23] Odilon Redon, "Closed Eyes", 1890. Oil on canvas on board, 44 x 36 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
[24] It was included in the Emblem Books that were popular during the Renaissance and Baroque, like "Symboicarum quaestionum de universo genere" of Achille Bocchi and "Emblematum liber" of Andreas Alciatus. Also the hermetic Bruno is portrayed with a book and a finger on his lips; see Francisco Ribalta, (1565–1628), "San Bruno" ca. 1600. Oil on canvas, 100 x 84 cm. Museo de Arte de Cataluña, Barcelona.
[25] As advice from 1886 runs: "Art must consciously re-create, by means of "signs", the total life of the universe, that is to say the soul, consist of colours […] of which we believe are external qualities, though all are inner states of mind.": Théodor de Wyzéwa, *Wagnerian painting.* 1886, in Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994): 149.
[26] Francine-Claire Legrand, *Symbolism in Belgium.* (Brussels: Laconti, 1971): 27.
[27] Here the colour blue is described in: Jeffrey Howe, "Mirror Symbolism in the work of Fernand Khnopff," in *Arts Magazine.* 53, no. 1, (1978): 115.
[28] Frédéric Portal, *Des couleurs symboliques dans l'antiquité, le moyen-age et les temps modernes.* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1837): 297.
[29] Genevieve Lacambre, catalogue entry "Lévy-Dhurmer", 68.
[30] The other two signs were nakedness and the curl of youth at the side of the head. Several literary sources mention Harpocrates's gesture: Marcus Terentius Varro, De lingua Latina of Caelum (Sky) and Terra (Earth): "Harpocrates with his finger makes a sign to me to be quiet". The same first gods in Latium were called "Saturn and Ops"; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9:688 - 9:692: "the god who holds his finger to his lips for silence sake."
[31] The twisted neck recalls the pharaonic, braided god-beard.
[32] Jeffrey Howe, "The face in the mirror: the art of Fernand Khnopff," in *Fernand Khnopff and the Belgian Avant Garde.* Exhibition catalogue (Chicago: David and Alfred Smart Gallery; New York: Barry Friedman Ltd.; Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1983): 8. The blessing with a thumb was traced back to paganism: Frederick Thomas Elworthy, *Horns of Honour and other studies in the by-ways of archaeology*. (London: John Murray, 1900): 153: "traditional from Pre-reformation usage, and easily to be traced back to so-called paganism."
[33] Cheryl Kempler, "Fernand Khnopff and Maurice Maeterlinck: the unspoken seen," in *Fernand Khnopff and the Belgian Avant-Garde.*

[34] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus.* 1832; translated to French: "Des Symboles," in *Entrétiens politique et littéraires.* 1 (1890): 1-4.
[35] John Bulwer, *Chirologia, the The Naturall* [sic] *Language of the Hand.* (London: Tho Harper, 1644 reprint Kessinger Publishing, 2003): 149.
[36] Frederick Thomas Elworthy, *Horns of Honour and other studies in the by-ways of archaeology*. 205; Silence is not showing the right, but the left hand.
[37] Ibid. 205.
[38] Frederick Thomas Elworthy, *The Evil Eye* (London: J. Murray, 1895; reprint Kindle edition, 2009): 301-08. It dates from the time that Egyptian religion was embraced in Italy, so more elements are referring to this cult as well as Serapis. In addition, the *courbash* of Osiris can be seen like the urns that are related to Isis's and Osiris as canopus. The small snake represents both the royal asp and the bust of Serapis. Egyptian references are visualized by crocodiles and scarabs.
[39] *The Hand of Sabazias* is available online at http://art.thewalters.org/detail/20966/hand-of-sabazius/ last consulted 1-9-2013
[40] Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'Antiquité expliquée.* (Paris, 1722) vol. 2, 137.
[41] Frederick Thomas Elworthy, *The Evil Eye*, 293. In this book on superstition, chapter 9 is dedicated to the Mano Panthea, 293-342. The phenomenon goes back to the 8th century B.C. Lifesize models were supposed to guard the house against all influences of magic and evil, and smaller replicas protected their wearers from every description of harm. The different parts are related to planets and the moon.
[42] Plato related to Hermes Trismegistos respectively Ptolemy.
[43] Plotinus, *Enneade.* 5, 8.
[44] George Boas, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950, reprint 1993), 93 on Ficino.
[45] K. Giehlow, "Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance," in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses.* 32 (1915): 1.
[46] "When a star is painted by the Egyptians, they mean a god, twilight, night and a time, as well as a man's soul, explains in the Horapollo manuscript, while in a different part a hawk is presented as the soul"; George Boas, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo.* Book 2,1 73, the hawk is in book 1,7. In fact the star functions as both a phonogram for the triple consonant sign (sbA, dwA) as a logogram meaning "star" or "constellation".
[47] Translated in 1471; Erik Iversen, *The myth of Egypt and its hieroglyphs in European tradition.* (Copenhagen: Gad; 1961 reprint Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 93-99.
[48] Giordano Bruno, *De Magia.* III, 411-12, quoted in: Frances Amelia Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition.* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1964): 416.
[49] Kircher was convinced of the correctness of his conception, since he used, in the Renaissance scholastic tradition, the essential sources (the classics, the Neo-Platonists, the Hermetics and the kabbalah): Erik Iversen, *The myth of Egypt and its hieroglyphs in European tradition*, 96.

[50] Inspired by Boëthius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. The other famous men are Plato representing the "Greek philosophers, Cicero or Virgil as Roman poets and orators, Albertus Magnus as a 'German wise man.'" They are also accompanied by texts from the wisdom traditions: Hebrew, Greek and Latin.
[51] Erik Hornung, *Das esoterischen Ägypten: das geheime Wissen der Ägypter und sein Einfluss auf das Abendland.* Munich 1999, translated from German by David Lorton, *The secret lore of Egypt, its impact on the west.* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2001): 166.
[52] Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres completes.* (Paris: Garnier) III, 190.
[53] Charles Baudelaire, *Art Romantique*, translated by Hendrik Roelof Rookmaaker, *Gauguin and Nineteenth Century Art Theory.* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1959, reprint 1972): 288.
[54] Jeffrey Howe, "The sphinx and other Egyptian motifs in the work of Fernand Khnopff", 161. As show the pantheist landscapes of Corot, when related to nature the enigmatic hieroglyphs became more vaguely used in Romanticism; Liselotte Dieckmann, "Renaissance Hieroglyphs," in *Comparative Literature.* 9, no. 4 (1957): 319. Yet thanks to the naturalistic forms of hieroglyphic writing, Delacroix recognized the power of it: "These figures, these objects, which seem to be the things themselves to a certain part of your intelligent being, seem a solid bridge on which the imagination leans in order to penetrate to the mysterious and profound sensations of which the forms are somehow the hieroglyph."; Eugéne Delacroix, *Journal.* Oct 17th 1823, translated by Hendrik Roelof Rookmaaker, *Gauguin and Nineteenth Century Art Theory,* 284.
[55] Khnopff added comparable signs in: "L'Art ou des Caresses ou le Sphinx" 1896. Oil on canvas, 50.5 x 150 cm. Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussel; "After Joséphin Péladan" or: "Le vice suprême" 1885. Pencil, pastel and charcoal on paper. Private collection; "Une offrande" 1891. Pastel, Private collection, New York.
[56] Jeffrey Howe, "The sphinx and other Egyptian motifs in the work of Fernand Khnopff", 160. In Antwerp a public lecture on the meaning of hieroglyphs was held in 1883.
[57] Jeffrey Howe, ibid, 160: "every one of the occult symbols in Khnopff's inscriptions which cannot be located elsewhere can be found in the obelisks illustrated by Kircher's *Oedipus Aegypticus*". Maybe Howe became a bit too enthusiastic, since he also relates "The Carresses" to the title page of Kircher, based on the sphinx's embankment, the Egyptian architecture in the background and the spear in Oedipus's hand.
[58] Josephin Péladan, *l'Art Idéaliste et Mystique: Doctrine de L'Ordre Et Du Salon Annuel Des Rose & Croix.* (Paris: Chamuel, 1894): 103: After the gallery show "Georg Petit" Lévy-Dhurmer also received an invitation of Péladan for the exclusive Salon de Rose + Croix, which he rejected.
[59] Frances Amelia Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 418.
[60] Jeffrey Howe, "The sphinx and other Egyptian motifs in the work of Fernand Khnopff", 161.

[61] Jean Clair, *Cosmos: from Goya to De Chirico, from Friedrich to Kiefer: art in pursuit of the infinite*. (Mailand: Bompiani 2000), 91.

[62] In a letter to Hendaye, 1896; quoted in: Geneviève Lacambre, 'Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer 1865-1953', 32. Stars were not just innocent, in 1896 Hauser and Laurenty premiered their play "Inceste d'âmes" (incest of the souls, Inceste blanc was the original title) in which incestuous love was not more consuming than looking together at the stars, alluded to modern sources as Péladans Ishtar. Osbert actually depicted this episode: Alphonse Osbert, "Incestuous Souls", 1896. Pastel on board, 26 x 40 cm. Private collection, Paris, reproduced in: *Painters of the Soul: Symbolism in France*, Exhibition catalogue (Tampere: Tampere Art Museum 2006): 287.

[63] Played out for example by: Petrus van Schendel (1806–1870) "Market by candlelight", 1865. Oil on panel, 46 x 33 cm. Lot 30 auction 19923 (11 July 2012) Bonhams London. Vincent van Gogh accentuated the difference in his "The Night Cafe" where the central, stronger lamp, surrounded by three smoother lights, is identified as a gas light: Vincent van Gogh, "The Night Cafe" 1888. Oil on canvas, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; in: Sjraar van Heugten, "De kleuren van de nacht", 78-79. Gaslight not only replaced the rare royal oil lamps, but became a symbol during the French Revolution. Andreas Blühm, "Paul Gauguin en het motief van het gaslicht," (Paul Gauguin and the theme of gas light) in *Groninger Museum Magazine.* 25, no. 2/3, (2012): 49. The article discusses Gauguin's use of colour in which the centrally placed gas lantern is the protagonist. Not only were the church and a modern light combined, the sparkling red in the street and the building contrasts with the deep blue sky the at the same height as the gaslight shows a light corner: Paul Gauguin, 'L'Église de Vaugirard' Vaugirard Church by Night, 1881. Oil on canvas, 50 x 34,5 cm. Groninger Museum.

[64] The constellation is used as a map by both sailors as Van Gogh compared the black dots representing cities and villages to the sparkling points at the firmament, "why would those be less accessible to us?" Like a train to Rouen, Death was the vehicle to the stars: Letter 144/123 in Joachim Pissarro, "Avond- en nachtthema's in de vroege geschriften van Vincent van Gogh," ("Evening and night theme's in the early writings of Vincent van Gogh") in *Van Gogh en de kleuren van de nacht,* 59.

[65] Plato, *Timaeus.* 37d, translation by Francis M. Cornford in *Plato's Timaeus.* (Indianapolis": Liberal Arts Press) 1959, 29. Plato states that time is the moving likeness of eternity.

[66] Dan Burton and David Grandy, *Magic, Mystery, and Science: the Occult in Western Civilization.* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 90.

[67] Charles F. Dupuis, *Origine de tous les cultes ou religion universelle.* (Paris: Agasse, 1794): 99; Dupuis recognized a mystical iconography while an occult reality was denied, a fact Madame Blavatsky condemned. Still the "Origine" served as "a veritable treasure house for true Theosophy", and the Egyptian elements were embedded. Robert P. Welsh, "Sacred Geometry: French Symbolism and early abstraction," in *The spiritual in art: abstract painting 1890-1985*, 64.

[68] *The Corpus Hermeticum*, translated by G.R.S. Mead, 4:1.
[69] Edouard Schuré, *Hermes and the mysteries of Egypt*, 13.
[70] To propound an enigma to the neophyte, and to show attraction, is set up by contraries. The word of the white sphinx is Jachin (love) and guided by Samael; the word of the Black Sphinx is Boaz (power) and guided by Anael: Éliphas Lévi, *Magical Ritual of the Sanctum Regnum.* (New York: S. Weiser,1971*,* reprint 1992): 38. This drawing by influential magician Eliphas Lévi (1810-1875) equaled the Tarot with the Book of Hermes.
[71] Athanasius Kircher, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus.* (Rome: V. Mascardi, 1652-54) II., 206: it shows a zodiac and the northern constellations. To the twelve segments, Egyptian emblems are added.
[72] Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*. (London: Macmillan, 1643) II, 2:79, in Jeffrey Howe, "The sphinx and other Egyptian motifs in the work of Fernand Khnopff", 161.
[73] Frederick C. Grant, *Hellenistic Religions: the age of syncretism.* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953): 131.
[74] Frederick C. Grant, *ibid*, 131: regarded in a broader way nature was regarded as a grand cosmic system in Renaissance; celestial imagery and the planets and stars were familiar subjects in Western art since antiquity.
[75] *Rosicrucian Digest*. 14 (1936): 96-97: "the Holy Mountain wherein dwell the seven Spirits of Lights, the Elohim of the Godhead. … the micro cosmos of all man is alluded to all the time." Darkness became a veil on which the colours of the inner world could be reflected.
[76] It should originate from the Isis temple in Saïs, where according to Herodotus nightly rituals at a tomb of Osiris took place History, LXII. Plutarch wrote about a shrine with the inscription in *De Iside*, (c9). Stavros Frangoulidis, *Witches, Isis and Narrative: Approaches to Magic in Apuleius' "Metamorphoses"* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008): 173-74.
[77] According to Plato. Edouard Schuré also states in "Hermes" that she learned the writing from Hermes Trismegistos.
[78] E. H. Gombrich, *Shadows: the depiction of cast shadows in western art.* Exhibition catalogue (London: The National Gallery, 1995): 17; Gombrich points out that Greeks believed that after their death they lived as shades among shades.
[79] *The Corpus Hermeticum.* translated by G.R.S. Mead, III. The Sacred Sermon, 1.
[80] Edouard Schuré, *Hermes and the mysteries of Egypt*, 11.
[81] Frances Amelia Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 263.
[82] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses,* Book 11.23; Isis and Osiris are protagonists.
[83] Erik Hornung, *The secret lore of Egypt, its impact on the west*, 184.
[84] Edouard Schuré, *The Great Initiates* Part 1, 24, Schuré speaks about a transparent veil.
[85] Rosemary Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy.* (New York: Facts On File, 2006), 148.
[86] Phylostratus, *Appolonius of Tryana.* Book I,1
[87] Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia.* Venetië 1645; Oskar Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting.* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1990): 58.

[88] Herbert J Kessler and David Nirenberg, *Judaism and Christian art: aesthetic anxieties from the catacombs to colonialism.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011): 336; following the text of the Old Testament, Corinthians 3:13-16.
[89] Giovan Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de pittori, scultori et architetti moderni.* Rome 1672, translated from Italian by Alice Sedgwick Wohl, Hellmut Wohl and Tommaso Montanari, *The Lives of Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 320.
[90] J. Sorrèze, “Artistes contemporains, L. Lévy-Dhurmer,” in *La revue de l’Art Ancien et Moderne.* 10 (1900): 128.

CHAPTER TWELVE

APOLLO'S TRIUMPH
THE NOTION OF ART FOR ART'S SAKE AT THE CENTER OF NIETZSCHE AND REDON'S PARALLEL SHIFTS FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

FRANÇOIS LACHANCE-PROVENÇAL

From its very inception, art for art's sake, a notion valuing the artwork according to its uselessness, appears as a negative, reactionary approach to aesthetics. According to its most vocal proponent, Théophile Gautier, the tautology of art for art's sake aimed to achieve formal purity by eliminating interferences from such things as morals, politics and personal sensibility. Gautier's followers, the Parnassians, naming themselves after Mount Parnassus, home of the Muses and one of Apollo's sacred sites, maintained this inflexible idealism that came to weigh heavily on the first phase of Symbolism, imprinting it with its pessimistic and resolutely metaphysical undertones. This intellectual climate, often referred as post-romanticism, also left its mark on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote extensively on aesthetics from the early 1870's to the late 1880's. While he did not tackle the notion of art for art's sake until a very late point in his life, Nietzsche's oft-remarked shift from a pessimistic and metaphysical approach to art to a physiological conception of aesthetics gives us invaluable insight about the critical reception of Parnassian idealism in the context of Symbolism.

Clarifying the outline of this shift will be my first aim; I will argue that the apparent alteration[1] in Nietzsche's perspective on art can be traced to the semantic displacement from the metaphysical, and pessimistic, *intoxication* of Dionysian depths to the strictly immanent *intoxication* of Apollonian heights. This revaluation of art, not so much an evolution as an *elevation*, follows a vertical axis[2]: the heavy becoming light. Such an

escalation, and here lies my second claim, is also found in the work of a symbolist painter, Odilon Redon[3], whose early pessimistic approach to drawing appears to blossom, through the leitmotiv of flight, into a luminous cult of optimism. After outlining Nietzsche's surreptitious subordination of Dionysian aesthetics to the Apollonian paradigm, I will discuss Redon's analogous revolution from a fantasy of death, coercion and tragic pessimism to an unqualified embrace of flight and light through the iconographic displacement from Phaeton to Apollo. Once the dialog between painter and philosopher is set in motion, I will draw a comparative analysis of their respective understandings of the notion of art for art's sake. Finally, as a third and last point, I will claim that despite ostensible antagonism, both Nietzsche and Redon agree that art should not be weighted down by philosophical content, implicit or explicit, and that the circular, tautological notion of art for art's sake denies the artwork's uplifting quality.

At its core, the main premise of Nietzsche's first work, the *Birth of Tragedy* is quite clear: that art can manifest itself in two manners, tangibly, as is the case of the visual arts, or intangibly, with the performing arts, and that only the Attic tragedy was able to harness their respective energies. In order to accentuate the differentiation, and potential reconciliation, of these two primordial forces, Nietzsche associates each of them to figures of the Greek pantheon. An art that manifests itself by means of shapes ordered and structured as to produce meaning will be Apollonian while an art dissolving the structures already at play in human society will be called Dionysian. Apollonian art, the visual arts as well as poetry, function in a way analogous to dream, an organized and necessary illusion, while Dionysian arts, dance and music, are closer to, and might be fuelled by, intoxication, a disorganized and painful insight into existential truth. While Nietzsche's thesis is structured in such a way as to indicate the necessity of reciprocity between the two artistic agents[4], it might appear, as Nietzsche gets carried away by his polemic, that Dionysus is favoured over Apollo.

While there are many reasons for this tilting of the balance of power, the main cause is that Nietzsche's argument is still very much ingrained in the pessimist metaphysics of Schopenhauer. According to Schopenhauer, essence is veiled by appearances; hence the "Truth," is always to be found *behind* things. In this scheme, this world of "Truth" is given implicit superiority over the phenomenal world, which is deceiving and misguiding. Still infatuated with Schopenhauer's system, Nietzsche instils its idealist undertones in the polarity of Apollonian and Dionysian: only the latter, in its intoxicated embrace of ethylic, vernal or musical

exhilaration, can escape the artificiality of appearances and access what lies behind the phenomenal world. It is the Dionysian aspect of tragedy that plunges the spectator in the abyss of "Truth," that awakes him to the root of existence: eternal suffering.

Part homage to Schopenhauer and defence of Wagner's *gesamtkunstwerk*, the aesthetic programs of the *Birth of Tragedy* had to be completely revised when Nietzsche, for both ideological and health-related reasons, distanced himself from Wagner. In this new context, Nietzsche was hard-pressed to find a justification to Dionysian intoxication: art, instead of pushing the individual into the abyss of endless suffering, had to become a stimulant that would allow the individual to give or find meaning to existence. While temporarily casting aside Dionysus and Apollo, Nietzsche retained a form of dualism: to the feminine, passive, shapeless and sick romantic art, he opposed classical art, the paradigm of the masculine, active, structured and healthy. This polarity has for roots a deeper critique of Schopenhauer's metaphysics (and of Western metaphysics as such); there is no transcendent and eternal "Truth," nothing lying behind appearances. The artist, like Wagner, who abuses the metaphysical capacities of formless intoxication, is now fooling the spectator in making him believe that there is something superior to the strictly material world. He lures the spectator out of life and tricks him into mistaking formlessness for depth. "Those who know they are deep," writes Nietzsche, "strive for clarity" while "those who would like to seem deep to the crowd strive for obscurity.[5]"

To the once valued chasm of Dionysian intoxication – now, metaphorically, a narcotic subjugation - is opposed a new form of art, ". . . a mocking, light, fleeting, divinely untroubled, divinely artificial art that, like a bright flame, blazes into an unclouded sky.[6]" Profundity is no longer found within the abyss of formless suffering, but rather at the top of a cold and luminous summit where the artist stands alone. This reversal, indicative of an emphasis on the artist rather than the spectator, favours the appearances over the invisible. As Nietzsche puts it, the classical Greeks were "superficial – *out of profundity*[7]*!*" They had the courage to stick to the surface as the "flying fish" emerging in the daylight to "play on the outermost crests of waves[8] . . ." The artist is now the one transmuting the heavy into light, the dark into light, the abyss into apex. In a surprising semantic displacement, in Nietzsche's final writings on art, intoxication becomes the name of this eminently physical energy that allows the transfiguration, or elevation, of meaningless nature into art.

This aesthetic shift, as drastic as it may seem, is also found in the work of a painter whose practice is more or less contemporary to Nietzsche's

philosophical undertaking. Recalling being drawn, as a child, to the obscure or dimly lit corners of the family house, Odilon Redon has made darkness, both formal and psychological, a driving force of his early works.[9] This stage of his career is now remembered chiefly for its "Noirs," or "Blacks," a series of eerie charcoal drawings which contributed to Redon's renown as a major artist within the emerging Symbolist movement. Albert Aurier, leading critic of the French symbolist art scene, gave these "Noirs" their most striking description:

> A terrible work of vertigo, a poet's work, a philosopher's work, a work of anguish, not only of drama and terror, but also of metaphysical negation and despair . . . , the artist's finger seems to tear up the veil of all mysteries that surround and imprison us, but only to show us, deep within the rift, gloomy terrors, shadows, even more shadows swarming with grim and black enigmas, shapeless, invisible; its mouth seems to shout . . . that the results of the science of man, of every thought, is a shiver of fear in the infinity of night.[10]

Aurier fully expresses what had been Redon's intention all along, which was for the viewer to be pulled into the work, to be swallowed in an "indefinite world"[11] by means of shadow and obscurity. As Joris-Karl Huysmans puts it in *À Rebours* [1884], a novel in which the protagonist, Des Esseintes, describes his collection of Redon's works: "These drawings were outside everything; they jumped, most of them, out the bounds of painting, creating a very special kind of fantastic, one made of sickness and delirium.[12]" Redon's grim outlook shows even the most traditional figures of flight, like Pegasus, hopelessly confined to the ground. It is precisely this kind of tragic pessimism that made the "Noirs" emblems of decadence, this fin-de-siècle cultural nihilism.

Towards the turn of the 20th century, as Redon became increasingly interested in color, he began to depict scenes of upward flight. In 1896, illustrating Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, Redon rendered the myth of Phaeton, the son of Helios who lost the control of the sun chariot and got blasted by Zeus to prevent the destruction of earth. The iconography of Redon's picture is to be traced to Delacroix's *Apollo Slaying Python*, a monumental painting from 1850-1 that Redon had the chance to see at the Louvre in 1878. He wrote in his journal:

> Here is the work he [Delacroix] accomplished in the fullness of his talent and of his strengths. What is its great expression, its main trait? It's the triumph of light over darkness. It's the joy of broad daylight against the sadness of night and shadows, just like anguish giving place to a better feeling.[13]

Furthermore, he added that ". . . the defining attribute of each god is rendered useless by the expressive quality of colors[14] . . . ," a remark that helps explain the imperceptible iconographical shift from representations of Phaeton, a tragic figure evoking death and destruction, and most of all, the retribution of elevation, to representations of Apollo, god of light, healing and poetry.[15] The chariot of Apollo in Redon's oeuvre thus stands for the combined triumph of light and flight over darkness and heaviness, the overcoming of a death-drive that haunted his "Noirs." Opposing Python, the earth-dragon of Delphi, Apollo becomes a personification of art as Nietzsche understood it in the *Gay Science*: a bright flame that blazes into an unclouded sky mocking anything that is stuck to the ground.

More than any other symbolist painter, Redon became the advocate of art for art's sake, that is an art form not considered as a means to anything but itself: "No, one must not chain art to a political nor to a moral view," Redon writes, "on the contrary, art must give to the philosopher, the thinker, the scientist, . . . food for thought and for love.[16]" Redon further warns the painter that "a thought can never become a work of art, except in literature. Art doesn't borrow anything from philosophy.[17]" In order for an interdisciplinary communication to happen, painting has to keep its specificity. This is why in 1894,[18] Redon reacted to the over-cerebral symbolist group by presenting himself as being devoid of any *intention*, as being a simple *maker of art*.

At the same time he is clamoring for an "art for artists, only for artists,[19]" Nietzsche wildly opposes the notion of art for art's sake branded by his contemporaries, "abandoned frogs," he calls them, "despairing in their swamp.[20]" Reading further into the few statements he has left us on the matter, it appears, however, that Nietzsche does not disagree with what lies at the core of the notion; in a paragraph of the *Twilight of the Idols* devoted to this issue, Nietzsche states that art for art's sake essentially means the freeing of art from morals, a movement of liberation obviously not unfamiliar to Nietzsche's own philosophical project. However, he notes that art for art's sake was born of a negative and altogether excessive reaction: "Better no purpose at all than a moral purpose,[21]" he has these poets and artists say.

It becomes apparent that what Nietzsche sees in art for art's sake is another iteration of nihilism; in this line of thought, art must be devoid of finality in the same way existence is rendered meaningless by the desertion of God. An art conceived and developed according exclusively to its own internal logic would be, Nietzsche pictures, analogous to the Ouroboros, the mythical snake biting its own tail. Art for art's sake would then designate a decadent art, sterile and useless: a true waste of forces.

What irks Nietzsche the most, though, is that the notion itself acts as an antinomy, an inaccurate way to set a division between art and life; a means, he writes, of "slandering reality.[22]" For art, as morals, as philosophy, as knowledge, can never be ends in themselves—they will always be, in Nietzsche's perspective, means to life, a better and stronger life.

In the end, Nietzsche's understanding of art as a relay to life allows us to reconcile his with Redon's approach to the false problem of art for art's sake. Redon writes that "a painting doesn't teach anything; it attracts, it surprises, it exalts, it leads imperceptibly and lovingly to the need to live with beauty; it lifts and raises the spirit, that's all.[23]" This is a very brief definition to which Nietzsche would only have agreed, an art that doesn't deflect the individual from himself, but rather leads him to a lighter, clearer, more *humane* life.[24] Two decades apart, Nietzsche and Redon sided with Apollo in order to slay the snake, Python or Ouroboros, of pessimist aesthetics.

This attempt at a comparative study of a philosopher and a painter[25] was meant, in a way, to illustrate the difficulty, even the impossibility, of using Nietzsche's aesthetics as a tool in pictorial analysis. Despite the qualitative and quantitative importance of his reflections on art, Nietzsche at no point offers keys towards understanding how a specific painting functions. Instead, the philosopher gives us cues on the artist, what prods him to creation, and the positive or negative effects of what he created. Nietzsche can only discuss painting in an absolutely generic way. Unlike Redon, who lived in Paris, the cultural heart of nineteenth-century Europe, Nietzsche willingly chose to stay clear of big city centers. In the sum of all his works, actual painting consists of a few mentions of Raphael, Delacroix, whose link to Baudelaire gives him a distinctive Wagnerian ascendant[26], Dürer, of whom he owned a lithographic reproduction, and Claude Lorrain, master of light and his favorite painter.

For Nietzsche, Lorrain is diametrically opposed to those "abandoned frogs despairing in their swamp[27]"; his work constitutes a pictorial rebuttal of the notion of art for art's sake which, by evacuating life from the artistic equation, makes it a sterile receptacle for the artist's virtuosity. Unlike Wagner, Claude Lorrain did not conceive the artwork as a means to glorify himself by fooling and stupefying the spectator; like Redon during his luminous phase, Lorrain produced works that soothe as well as stimulate. These works were not meant to exhaust the energies of the spectator, but to make them swell so that, in turn, he shall strive to become an artist himself. Both Lorrain and Redon forwent philosophical and literary pretenses to create works of painters; generous paintings irradiating

contagious fullness and love of life. Doing that, they demonstrated the transfiguring power of Apollonian intoxication, the *intoxication of light*.

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Notes

[1] On the surface, the shift seems much more drastic than it actually is. Discounting some obvious references to Schopenhauer and Wagner, both of whom Nietzsche violently condemned later on, the *Birth of Tragedy* is not too removed from the philosopher's "mature" works of the 1880's.
[2] I am following Gaston Bachelard's intuition on the nature of the Nietzschean poetic imagination. Bachelard's demonstration, limiting itself to the field of semantics, nevertheless clarifies an aspect of Nietzsche's philosophical project: that of the verticality of overcoming. See Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams : An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, translated by Edith R. Farrell and C. Frederick Farrell, 1988.
[3] The 1908 French edition of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was found in the painter's bookcase (Levaillant, 177). This fact should not come as a surprise: not only was Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* the most widely read of his works in the years preceding World War I, it was also a book straying from the conventional structure of philosophical treaties which Redon disliked: "I read abstract things with weariness, translations with difficulty and indifference", (June 1903), Redon 2000, 104.
[4] It is pointed out, in the very first paragraph of the *Birth of Tragedy*, that the reconciliation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian is akin to the fusion of opposites in the sexual act.
[5] Nietzsche 2001, 136.
[6] Nietzsche 2001, 7-8.
[7] Nietzsche 2001, 9.
[8] Nietzsche 2001, 150.
[9] Hauptmann, 27.
[10] Aurier, 107.
[11] Hauptmann, p. 27.
[12] Huysmans, 99.
[13] Redon 2000, 175.
[14] Redon 2000, 175.
[15] Furthermore, Redon, like Nietzsche, considers visual arts to be associated with Apollo, sun god, whereas music is akin to the dispersing forces of Dionysus. Redon states that music is "the nocturnal art, the art of dream, but painting comes from the sun. It is born out of daylight . . . , " Redon 2000, 67.
[16] Redon 2000, 113.
[17] Redon 2000, 93.
[18] Redon 1994, 36.
[19] Nietzsche 2001, 8.
[20] Nietzsche 2003, 256
[21] Nietzsche 2005, 204.
[22] Nietzsche 2003, 206.
[23] Redon 2000, 113.
[24] Criticizing romanticism (and its implied aesthetics),Nietzsche writes that "now one uses artworks to lure poor, exhausted, and sick human beings to the side of

humanity's road of suffering for a short lascivious moment; one offers them a little intoxication and madness," Nietzsche 2001, 89.

[25] A similar comparative study could have been structured around Nietzsche and Munch. The latter's career arc, not unlike Redon's, offers a stark contrast between the early and the late works, where we witness a lighter palette and a more positive outlook on life (*Sun*, a fresco painted between 1911 and 1912, would have acted as *Apollo's Chariot* did in our essay). In addition, Munch was an avid reader of Nietzsche: "After his death, it has been discovered, while surveying his bookcase, that, in terms of complete works, it contained only those of Bjørnson, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. These tomes were next to Nietzsche's biography written by her sister", Hodin 1991, 107.

[26] Nietzsche 2005, 93.

[27] Nietzsche 2003, 256.

Chapter Thirteen

The Androgyne, the Transvestite and the Herm: Aubrey Beardsley's Hybrid Forms for The Yellow Book, Volume III

Britten Larue

> Look out for No 3 of the *Y.B.* By general consent my best things are in it, particularly one called *The Wagnerites*.[1]
>
> Aubrey Beardsley

The third volume of the quarterly periodical the *Yellow Book* was published in October of 1894. For this installment, the art editor and lead artist Aubrey Beardsley created a suite of four illustrations (Figs. 13-1-4). Presumably Beardsley refers to his circle of colleagues and friends in the quote above because "by general consent" the illustrations were judged with the same degrees of amused condescension and horrified disgust as his previous work. It was not the technique or the form of his designs which bothered critics, then and now. The problem was in the content, though it proved difficult to pinpoint what exactly Beardsley meant with his creations. The critic Gleeson White, in his review of the third volume, neatly summarizes the situation:

> That they are clever, strong, and even splendid in technique, goes without saying. We are constrained to admire, even though we are at the same time possessed of a sense of unutterable disappointment. We make no pretense of looking beneath the surface to discover hidden and unpleasant mysteries… But the condition of his work which provokes the severest criticism is its degradation. Mr. Beardsley's figures are not men and women; they are but monkeys aping humanity. The ideal of manly and womanly beauty is discarded by him as an old glove, and physical deformity is welcomed as the latest fashion.[2]

Rather than attempt to "discover" the obscure, "hidden" "mysteries" in Beardsley's set of illustrations, White dismisses them on grounds of degeneracy. This is quite typical. Yet he points to something about Beardsley's figures which we can examine more critically: their hybridity, somehow neither human nor animal, neither man nor woman.

I find the four illustrations from the *Yellow Book*'s third volume to be particularly rich in the way they articulate Beardsley's complicated interest in hybridity and transformation. Titled *Portrait of Himself*, *Lady Gold's Escort*, *The Wagnerites*, and *La Dame aux Camélias*, these four images are rarely discussed together, yet they are remarkable for their connections.

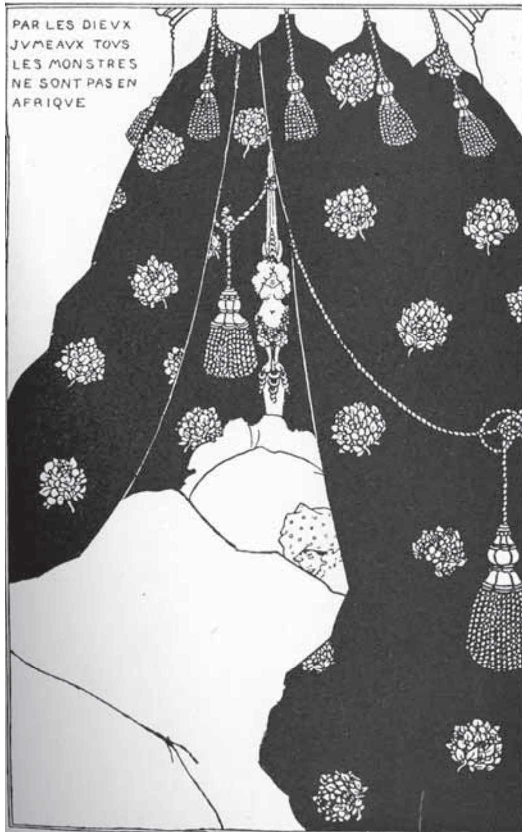

Fig. 13-1. Aubrey Beardsley, *Portrait of Himself*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. III, Oct. 1894

First, there is their marked insistence on theatricality. A large bed curtain recalling the curtains of a stage or opera box, a group of people entering a theater, a Wagnerian audience, and a woman engaged in the ritual of the toilette – each illustrates a kind of performance.[3] Second, the images share a common blackness. Although black-and-white was clearly Beardsley's medium, there seems to be an unusual insistence on one or the other here, notable most in the absence of any shading. These decisions consciously augment the artificiality of the designs; there is no pretense of depicting reality.[4] These are two obvious connections between the illustrations which can be apprehended upon close looking at the suite. Below, I will argue for less obvious associations: the emphatic embrace of threshold themes, the use of hybrid forms, and the manifestation of more than one subject position on the part of the artist.

Fig. 13-2. Aubrey Beardsley, *Lady Gold's Escort*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. III, Oct. 1894

The best known of these four illustrations, and the most important for this study, is *The Wagnerites* (Fig. 13-3). One of his night scenes, or "noirs," the work has received attention for its three most immediate peculiarities: its extensive use of black, its focus on the audience as spectacle, and for its congregation composed almost entirely of large, fleshy women, with the strange exception of the racially stereotyped Jewish man. Then there is the title and the dropped program identifying the group as part of a well-known nineteenth-century culture of Wagnerites gathered specifically to witness a production of *Tristan und Isolde*. Why are the women presented as masculine, even bestial, and the one male as a caricature? How does the identification of the *Tristan* production complicate or clarify such an odd gathering? What are the connections between the concerns in this work and those of the other three illustrations of its group?

Fig. 13-3. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Wagnerites*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. III, Oct. 1894

The composition of *The Wagnerites* is indeed peculiar. We enter the scene at the bottom of the picture, following the white highlighting of the dresses of the figures closest to us. Nearly the entire lower half is blocked out in black, which both invites the viewer to fill that position and distances us from the scene. As we will see, this dialectic of temptation and repulsion is crucial to these Wagnerites, who spill out from the middle section of the image. Furthermore, Beardsley continuously upsets our will to comprehend rows of parallel seats by collapsing space and confusing distance: the woman on the lower right appears too low, the fourth woman on the right has turned almost completely to the viewer, and the positioning of the woman on the left who is turning towards us is implausible. The upper quarter of the image is the zone most logically articulated by the artist and understood by the viewer: two boxes marked out by double columns face the viewer square on and provide a kind of seal pushing us back into the middle zone of the scene. This emphatic disruption of linearity results in a new kind of space: one defined by relationships. While the subject matter was incredibly modern (to depict a theater audience was to align oneself with such artistic precedents as Honoré Daumier, Edgar Degas and Walter Sickert),[5] to clarify that audience as Wagnerian was a loaded gesture, all the more depending on the kind of Wagnerism one intended.[6] In Max Nordau's 1895 book *Degeneration*, in a chapter entitled "The Richard Wagner Cult," Nordau describes Wagnerism as "the most momentous aberration of the present time."[7] He accuses Wagner's "unending melody" of causing "that dreamy state in which Reason is lulled to sleep, and crazy Imagination alone rules as mistress of the house."[8] I will explore what secrets and dreams Beardsley knew could be inspired by a musical performance such as *Tristan und Isolde*. In doing so, I will propose for an alternate reading of *The Wagnerites* which situates it in the context of the Suite of Four Illustrations with which it was published in Volume III of the *Yellow Book*.

What is most startling about *The Wagnerites* is the gender composition of the audience. Why this particular gathering at this particular show? Scholars have struggled with this question since 1894. The most common (and unconvincing) reading of the work considers it a satirical criticism of the commercialization of culture.[9] We can grasp the difficulty of discerning meaning from the work from D.J. Gordon, who wrote in 1966:

> The plain answer, that this is what a London audience for *Tristan and Isolde* actually was, will not do; the exaggeration of the women and the treatment of the one man makes it plain that some comment is intended. 'This is the sort of audience you will find at *Tristan and Isolde*'. It leaves us with the word 'sort', and this is just the problem I cannot get any further

with because I cannot read what these women express, although I have used some adjectives that suggest I can.[10]

We cannot discuss Beardsley's Wagnerites without considering the presentation of "the Jew."[11] Emma Sutton offers three possible ideas for his insertion in *The Wagnerites*: he represents an allusion to a) contemporary theatrical and musical audiences, b) the perception that Jews were especially accomplished musicians, or c) the "worldly commercialism of this audience, and to Wagner's commercial success."[12] Interestingly, critics in Beardsley's day ignored the male figure. Called a "swarm of horrible women" associated with "disease," Beardsley's Wagnerites seem to have elicited the same charges as previous Beardsley women.[13] One

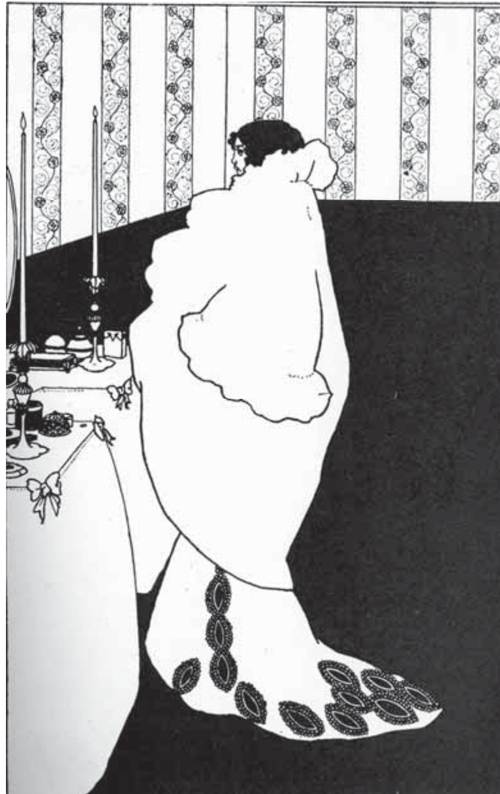

Fig. 13-4. Aubrey Beardsley, *La Dame aux Camélias*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. III, Oct. 1894

contemporary critic recognized the unstable qualities of the work and its figures and argued[14]: "He might just as well have labeled it anything else – Bedlamites would have been more appropriate."[14] Adjectives to describe Beardsley's women throughout 1894 included "ugly," "bestial," "repulsive," "unclean," "immoral," and "morbid," just to name the most commonly repeated.[15] These are terms conspicuously employed in other contemporary discourses concerning urban ills and cultural degeneration, especially against Jews, women, prostitutes, non-whites, criminals, and the mentally insane. Therefore, when I consider the male figure in relation to the representation of the women in the picture and throughout Beardsley's oeuvre, and especially when I study *The Wagnerites* in connection with the other three illustrations in the suite, I find an approach which considers sociological and sexological studies of the period appropriate to help us understand what to make of this audience.

Returning to the male figure in the illustration, we must understand that the Jew in this period was often associated with what was known as "the third sex."[16] In the second half of the nineteenth century, the "third" or "intermediate" sex was advocated as a third biological category with equal validity to the male and the female as doctors and writers examined examples of "inverts" who experienced desire for members of the same sex.[17] At this time, manifestation of the gender qualities of one's biological opposite sex unmistakably led to suspicion of sexual attraction to one's own. Furthermore, Sander Gilman has shown how "the perverted discourse of the Jew, no matter what the ideological identity of the individual, was inexorably linked with the polluted language of the homosexual."[18] The third sex, neither this nor that, challenges the stability and logic of binary thinking. Consequently, the Jew's presence near the center of *The Wagnerites* is our cue that this is a representation of an unstable space. Indeed, to me the woman behind the male figure and to his right is not a woman at all but a male transvestite. Once we understand that any character in Beardsley's world might not represent the gender we think it does, which I will argue here, we open up room for a kind of interpretation, which embraces instability. Turning to the other images in the suite, we will recognize how each of them introduces a kind of crises, which is altogether the disruptive role of the third sex. If the concept of the "third" is, as Marjorie Garber proposes, "a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility," then the Suite of Four from *The Yellow Book* Volume III represents Beardsley's intimate knowledge of the anxiety and pleasure provoked by that liminal space.[19]

My work rose from the observation that, for over a hundred years, our own sense of unease and even disgust with Beardsley' work, caused by

our inability to contain and recognize clear boundaries demarcating gender or acceptable desire, has obscured readings that might bring us closer to understanding them. In general, scholars do not approach the issue of gender ambiguity or gender fusion in *The Wagnerites* and its accompanying illustrations with the force I think they demand.[20] A frank push-pull between the thrilling and the shameful qualities of transvestite fantasy and forbidden desire pulse through the suite as I will show. My work is indebted to both Garber, who encourages us to look directly at the transvestite,[21] and to Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, who is the first scholar to critically examine Beardsley's fascination with cross-dressing as a way to challenge binary thinking.[22] Kooistra has argued for dialogic readings, what she calls "bitextual" readings, of his illustrations that contextualize them with the verbal and illustrated works with which they were published. We cannot divorce the *Yellow Book* illustrations from one another. He was not only the creator of these images, but also the art editor of the publication. Looking at the images together allows us to understand them each better individually.

The first of the suite is titled *Portrait of Himself* (Fig. 13-1). Beardsley has pictured himself utterly dwarfed by an eighteenth-century bed's cavernous baldacchino, itself suggestive of an opera box and matching the curtains from *The Wagnerites*. His tiny, turbaned head is depicted as fragile and ambiguously gendered. The artist's sense of himself is made more problematic by the female satyress under whom he sleeps. This is not the only time Beardsley has pictured himself tied to a herm. In a drawing from two years later, the artist shows himself quite plainly tethered to one (Fig. 13-5). The figure of the herm, in fact, is omnipresent in Beardsley's work. This illustration depicts a single-sex satyr while others depict quite literal hermaphrodites. Compared to illustrations from contemporary English books of design, the decorative composition of his herms is representative of architectural varieties from the late nineteenth century.[23] The difference is that Beardsley's herms seem to be coming alive: they have personalities, whether comical or terrifying, and appear to represent the artist's own psychic landscape. In his title-page for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, Beardsley's self-identification with hermaphrodites is underlined by its central placement as part of his graphic signature. Beardsley introduced his graphic signature in 1893 and employed it often in that year and 1894. It depicts three parallel vertical lines, the middle one slightly higher than the two on either side. The form purportedly represents the artist's figure at work between two candlesticks but it also suggests sexual penetration. In the *Salome* title-page, a horned herm with breasts and male genitalia smiles at the viewer. It is positioned between

two large flaming candlesticks. At the bottom of the right-hand candle, an angel with a penis and the face and hair of a women bends in prayer to the herm. The apotropaic function of herms in Ancient Greece as boundary markers and border protectors is especially interesting for this study since this suite of images, and most of Beardsley's entire oeuvre, is essentially concerned with border-crossing: transvestitism and transgressive desire. Beardsley is most interested in sites, states, venues, and events which allow these borders to be passed. One such state is in sleep.

In *Portrait of Himself*, the enclosing darkness of the bed curtain and engulfing bed sheets combined with the figure's small size suggest the artist anticipates becoming overpowered and helpless before the dreams awaiting him in the night. The bedframe appears to tip towards the viewer and the figure seems to be perilously in danger of slipping into the opaque void of the bed curtain. The mysterious inscription translates: "By the twin gods, not all monsters are in Africa." Africa, a continent loaded with contemporary political significance, was a realm that for centuries had represented that which was outside the center, the Beyond, inhabited by the Other, and another kind of "third" space.[24] In the European imaginary, it was a place full of actual monsters and monstrous humans. But "not all monsters live in Africa," Beardsley tells us.

In order to understand what Beardsley meant by "twin gods" in the inscription, we need to more fully discuss the conceit of the androgyne. Dr. A.J.L. Busst has shown in his seminal essay "The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century" how important the mythical ideal of the Androgyne was to both earlier nineteenth century Romantics as well as the Decadents, Symbolists, and mystical groups of the later part of the century.[25] Busst distinguishes between the terms "hermaphrodite" and "androgyne" and argues that although the term "hermaphrodite" generally refers to a biological designation and "androgyne" is more often a mental construct:

> ...it is preferable to consider the two terms exactly synonymous by accepting their broadest possible meaning: a person who unites certain of the essential characteristics of both sexes and who, consequently, may be considered as both a man and a woman or as neither a man nor a woman, as bisexual or asexual.[26]

Busst examines the myriad sources for the conceit since Plato, including Christian conceptions of Jesus as representing the idealized union of both sexes. Moreover, Busst demonstrates that nineteenth-century poets, artists and mystics widely disseminated the image of the androgyne, especially fin de siècle Symbolists and Decadents. The andryogyne represented for

many different groups of thinkers the symbol of an ideal re-integration of dualities: mind and body, spirit and matter, man and woman. Often, these dualities have also been represented by doubling or *twin* figures. In this same period, Beardsley created several drawings with twins, often designating one a devil and the other an angel, which indicate his interest in exploring the dualities of our nature. For example, his illustrations for Oscar

Fig. 13-5. Aubrey Beardsley, *A Footnote*, from *The Savoy*, No. 2, April 1896

Wilde's *Salome*, which Beardsley created just months before his illustrations for the *Yellow Book's* third volume, contain three discrete pairs of twins: the young Syrian Narraboth and the homosexual page who loves him and then mourns his suicide (frontispiece and *A Platonic Lament*), Salome and John the Baptist (*The Peacock Skirt* and *John and Salome*) and the twin children carrying a large candelabra in *The Eyes of Herod*, one with implied horns and the other with an implied halo. Ewa Kuryluk has studied Beardsley's iconography in depth.[27] She discusses Beardsley's invocation of both the androgyne and the twin in his *The Kiss of Judas* for *Pall Mall Magazine* from July 1893. She writes:

> Beardsley's representation of Jesus as a beautiful sleeping hermaphrodite fits into [the nineteenth-century hermaphroditic] tradition and perhaps also alludes to the fact that while it was worshipped in religion, art, and poetry, in real life the hermaphrodite was regarded as either a freak of nature or as a passive and impotent, sleep 'saint,' predestined to become the victim of violence and cruelty. Unaware of any thirst for the opposite sex, the androgyne incarnated total innocence and thus attracted passionate, sadistic lovers who, like the nymph Salamis, the princess Salome, and the Apostle Judas, desired to consume the hermaphrodite with a kiss.[28]

Thus Beardsley's inscription in *Portrait of Himself*, "By the twin gods, not all monsters are in Africa," can be untangled to mean: "I am a monster; I am not one or the other but a third." Or perhaps we should give Beardsley the words of Mademoiselle de Maupin (the heroine of one of his favorite novels which he would illustrate with six exquisite designs): "In truth, neither sex is really mine… I belong to a third sex, a sex apart, which has as yet no name."[29]

There is much evidence to suggest that Beardsley struggled to contain his own sense of gender. Self-portraits exist which demonstrate how he imagined his morphology as a woman, the most startling of which is an 1896 profile drawing in which Beardsley has softened his facial features and given his form a pronounced breast.[30] Moreover, contemporary critics consistently used his purported effeminacy to make fun of both his work and his persona.[31] Setting aside our own judgment or alarm in the face of Beardsley's border-crossing, we must take seriously the fact that his work shares with us his sense of being a kind of monster. Invoking artist Francisco Goya's famous print *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, Beardsley's struggle, he shows us, can occur under the veil of sleep.

Returning to the *Wagnerites*, I want to consider how music, like sleep, can also activate a kind of uncontrollable response; a reaction which might be shameful, redemptive, or thrilling or all three. Decadent aesthetes turned to Wagner for the affective qualities of his music. We know that

Beardsley went to every performance of Wagner's work in London and attended performances in Paris when he was in town during the season. His letters speak rhapsodically of Katarina Klafsky and Max Alvery, the actors who most regularly played the parts of his favorite characters, and he was even witnessed at a performance clutching the back of the chair in front of him until his knuckles turned white.[32]

For Beardsley, the music of Tristan in particular seemed to have provoked an acute affective response. When Max Nordau called Wagner's Bayreuth festival theater the "lasting monument by which posterity will be able to measure the whole breadth and depth of the degeneration and hysteria of the age,"[33] he was not referencing the various cultural, social,

Fig. 13-6. Aubrey Beardsley, *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink*, from *Le Morte Darthur*, 1893-94

or political movements which shared the name, but what Wagner scholar Elliot Zuckerman calls Tristanism.[34] Tristanism is distinguished from Wagnerism as the intensely private, transcendental experience that Wagner's music dramas evoked in many people.[35] This experience has been most consistently identified with the music drama *Tristan und Isolde*. Even Nietzsche, after his polemical break with Wagner, wrote, "to this day I am still looking for a work of equally dangerous fascination, of an equally shivery and sweet infinity, as *Tristan* – and I look in all arts, in vain."[36] Ellis Hanson has shown how Wagner's decadence was recognized by Nietzsche and other contemporaries as having much in common with penitent Catholicism. Hanson argues:

> Wagner is a touchstone for the peculiar dialectic of shame and grace that is the foundation for decadent Catholicism... For the decadents, the opposition between the depths of shame and the heights of grace was a tenuous one, always in danger of collapse within a discourse of mystical intensity… The perennial theme appears to be the duality of the soul, the interminable struggle of good and evil, and we are always aware of this alternation between shame and grace as an intense sensation, highly wrought, highly artificial, eminently repeatable as one might reread a book or listen again to a favorite aria.[37]

Portrait of Himself and *The Wagnerites* are connected in the way they both aestheticize shame, guilt, and suffering, which I will analyze further below.

Wagner's source for the legend of Tristan und Isolde was the thirteenth-century text by Gottfried von Strassburg. Considering Beardsley's specificity in identifying the *Tristan* program in *The Wagnerites*, a brief discussion of the legend is required here. Gottfried's Tristan, a wandering foreigner, uses music and trickery to gain access to and win the heart of King Mark of Cornwall. Judith Peraino has shown how Gottfried's language unambiguously implies "homosocial" relations between Tristan and Mark, and how Tristan's musical prowess, seductive power, and courtliness align him more with the feminine than the masculine.[38] After slaying Mark's enemy, the Irish knight Morold, Tristan must seek the healing powers of Irish princess Isolde to recover from a wound in battle. Isolde, who had been betrothed to Morold, discovers Tristan's identity as his slayer, but is unable to seek her revenge. Upon Tristan's return to the court, Mark, a childless widower, names him his heir to the throne. When the courtiers of King Mark's court accuse Tristan of sorcery, Tristan placates them by promising to procure for Mark a bride, Isolde. Wagner's version simplifies the narrative by beginning at this point with Tristan returning to the kingdom of Cornwall with Isolde in tow. In Act I, Isolde, in anger that she loves the man who killed her betrothed,

asks her maid to prepare poison for them both to drink. Tristan accepts the drink, understanding her intention. Yet the maid substitutes a love-potion instead of poison, and so as the ship arrives, Tristan and Isolde find that their love for each other has been released by the potion and that, instead of death together, they are condemned to life with an irresistible and inadmissible love.[39] The lovers pray for the coming of Night, when they can share their love, and mourn the Day for its forced secrecy and shame. Yet the implication is that they really wish for the infinite Night of Death, so that they can finally be together uninhibited. They cry together, "oh, sink around us/ night of loving/ let me know/ forget I'm living/ bear me softly/ unto thee/ from the world/ oh set me free."[40] In an ending that inspired *Romeo & Juliet*, the lovers' wish is granted in a death scene that in effect consummates their love. Wagner emphasizes the bond between love and death for the couple by repeating the same leitmotifs for both moments. He insists on the concepts of frustrated desire and prolonging of suffering by refusing to resolve movements of the music.[41]

Fig. 13-7. Aubrey Beardsley, No. I of *The Comedy Ballet of Marionettes*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. II, July 1894

Beardsley's many 1893 illustrations for Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* version indicate his mastery of both the text and subtext of the medieval legend. "How King Mark Found Sir Tristram" depicts the wandering Tristan in a pose usually reserved for female objects of lust. Vulnerable yet unashamed in his nudity, his deeply set eyes, pouting lips and small jaw recall the features of many of Beardsley's women.[42] Although fully clothed, Mark's features and hair closely resemble those of a female as well. Both the direction of his line of sight and motion of his outstretched hand naughtily suggest his interest in Tristran's displayed penis. These qualities of gender ambiguity and blatant eroticism are equally evident in "How La Beale Ysoud Nursed Sir Tristram." Here Isolde crouches before the reclining Tristan. The position of her head in front of Tristan's groin unambiguously implies her method of healing, further emphasized by the enormous phallic candle in the left foreground. Their equal size and similar facial features are repeated in "How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink" (Fig. 13-6), to which I will return later.

Both the homosocial remnants of Gottfried's legend as well as Wagner's musical and thematic emphasis on prohibited love, aestheticized suffering, and unconsummated love and unreleased orgasm are vital to understanding the interest in Wagner and his *Tristan* for homosexual Wagnerites. In Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing's influential *Psychopathia Sexualis*, translated into English in 1893, among the case studies for what Krafft-Ebing calls "contrary sexual instinct," or homosexuality, two specifically describe Wagner among their interests. For example, one patient, under the heading "Psychical Hermaphroditism," states that:

> among poets and writers of fiction, I prefer those who describe refined feelings, peculiar passions, and far-fetched impressions; an artificial or hyper-artificial style pleases me. Likewise in music, a Wagner is in most perfect harmony with me. Everything in art that is not only original, but *bizarre*, attracts me.[43]

Again, another case, under the heading "Effemination," notes:

> Toward the man I love I feel completely like a woman…my whole sensibility and feeling are feminine…while I have but little interest in politics, I am passionately fond of music and an inspired follower of Richard Wagner. I have noticed this preference in the majority of us; I find that this music is perfectly in accord with our nature.[44]

Thus we must examine other examples in Beardsley's oeuvre, which prove that his interest in Wagner and Wagnerites relates to the Tristanism studied by Krafft-Ebing and outlined by Zuckerman.

In Beardsley's *Les Revenants de Musique*, published in *The Studio* in 1893, a male figure on the left slumps in his seat across from three figures on the right, who represent the ghosts of the memory of a recent performance of Tristan, specifically Max Alvary as Tristan, Katarina Klafsky as Isolde, and the servant Bragane. With his Pierrot costume and thin body, the male figure most likely represents a kind of self-portrait, and therefore underlines Beardsley's sense of losing physiological control in the face of Wagner's *Tristan*.[45] Notably, the figure appears to possess the same qualities as those employed by contemporary sexologists to describe the symptoms of masturbation: he is exhausted, pale, depressed, prematurely aged and worn out. For Krafft-Ebing there is a direct causal relationship between masturbation and homosexuality. He quotes from other doctors who confirm this, and then consistently in the biographical case studies the patients themselves, both male and female, acknowledge masturbation as the primary reason why a person becomes a homosexual. Just as the music of *Tristan* purportedly triggers the imagination and refuses a desired climax, masturbation is consistently associated with an erotic drive that cannot be satiated or resolved.

Dr. Oskar Panizza's 1895 essay "Bayreuth and Homosexuality" examines the rising subculture of homosexual Wagnerites, characterizing the Wagner festivals as recognized homosexual rendezvous. In it he describes homosexuals in a relatively sympathetic light, making the following description all the more frightening:

> There is no doubt but that, for all their intellectual enthusiasms, their ideality and their sublimity, the men who display this tendency have something weak and vague about them, a streak of sentimentality, an inclination to avoid coarse sensuality and shun public life, and a sense of coyness and cowardice. Nor is there any doubt that the whole of their psychic disposition is concealed in many cases beneath what we call the Jewish character, including both the latter's merits and defects. And there is no doubt, finally, that members or half-breeds of older nations, including Semites, Latins, and Orientals, form the bulk of those who make up this psychic class.[46]

Just as Jews were connected with homosexual Wagnerites, likewise Jewish men were commonly described in the same language as those who suffered the symptoms of masturbation.[47] Moreover, Sander Gilman has shown how the nineteenth-century Jew was also associated with sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis.[48] He represented the "deviant genitalia, the genitalia not under control of the moral, rational conscience."[49] Therefore, Beardsley's inclusion of the stereotypical effete

Jewish man implicates the gathering for its sexual perversity and labels them members of this well-known subculture of homosexual Wagnerites.

Just as death came as the ultimate redemption at the end of every performance of *Tristan und Isolde*, the possibility of the ultimate sleep, Death, is always lurking in Beardsley's work. Beardsley was confined to his bed for most of the period he was famous, and death came as he always knew it would just four years after these *Yellow Book* drawings were published.[50] Likewise, death appears to be around the corner for the elderly woman in the center of Beardsley's second image in this suite (Fig. 13-2). Titled *Lady Gold's Escort*, the work has been read as a light-hearted provocation to Victorian audiences, with its proposal that an upper class elderly woman might be as bold as to bring in an entourage of foppish foreign gigolos to the Lyceum Theatre. Possibly, this may be true, but given the direction of the bodies of the gentleman, who seem to turn perpendicular to Lady Gold in order to create a path for her opposite the male-female couple on the right, it seems to me that Lady Gold only has *one* escort… the female transvestite behind her. Notably, Beardsley gives her a beauty mark and places her hand muff intentionally to ensure her real gender can be read unequivocally. Maybe the men are depicted laughing because these are men who get it; they too enjoy the disruptive pleasure of questioning binary thinking. So again, Beardsley locates transgressive desire, transvestitism, death and the theater along the same axis.

Beardsley created a number of illustrations which demonstrate his interest in lesbian erotic desire, and almost all of these are set in a theatrical or musical venue. For the previous volume of the *Yellow Book*, he presented a group of three illustrations titled *A Comedy Ballet of Marionettes* (Figs. 13-7-9). In the first illustration we see a young woman who is invited by a dwarf to cross a threshold. In the second, she is encouraged to dance with a figure whose phrenology, notably her receding forehead and chin, denoted to 19th-century audiences that she was a degenerate, or more specifically, a lesbian.[51] By the third image, the young woman has willingly accepted the dance with pleasure; she smiles, holding a mask, as she moves to the music surrounded by multiple hybrid characters.[52] Sharon Gillerman studies the transgressive possibilities of the theater in the case of the Jewish strongman Breitbart in 1923 Vienna. She argues, "Because performance is by its very nature symbolic and representational, the stage can also function to de-essentialize social categories otherwise considered 'fixed' in normal life. Performance gives both spectators and performers the opportunity to transcend the constraints of the everyday and provide a new, if temporary, lens through which to view such naturalized concepts of gender and race."[53]

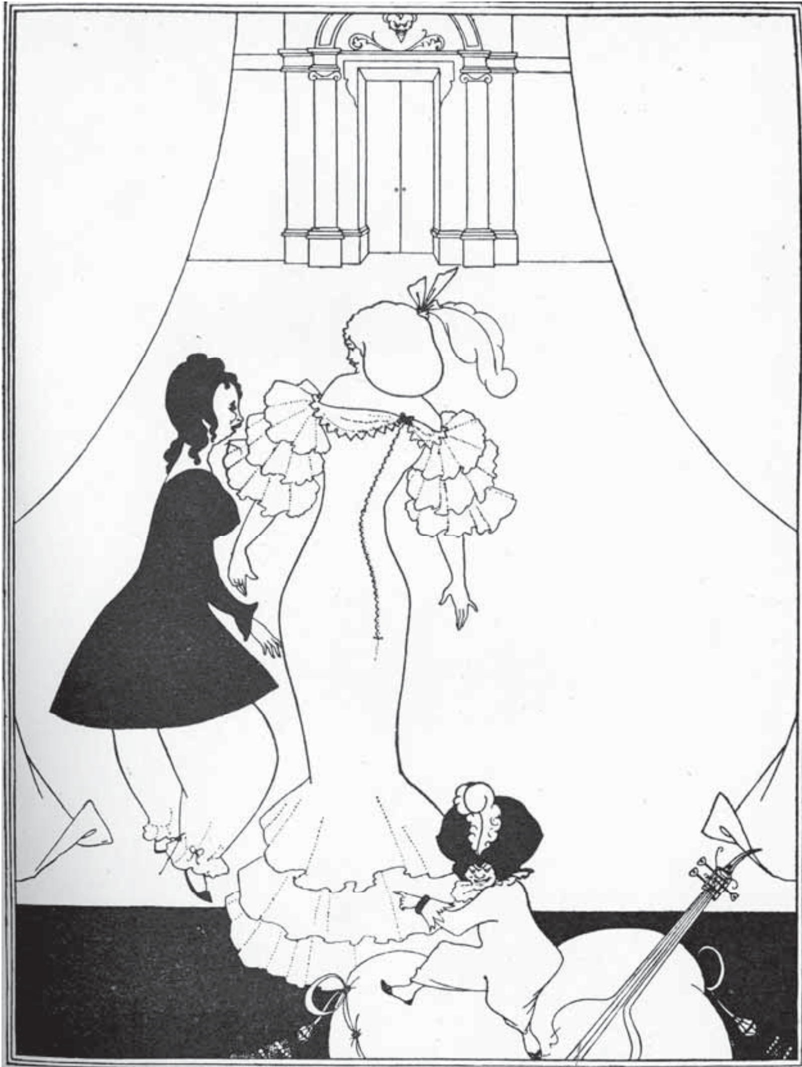

Fig. 13-8. Aubrey Beardsley, No. II of *The Comedy Ballet of Marionettes*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. II, July 1894

Beardsley's heroine (and by extension Beardsley's Wagnerites) accepts and enjoys the transgressive possibility of this liminal space, which is accessed through the theater.

Fig. 13-9. Aubrey Beardsley, No. III of *The Comedy Ballet of Marionettes*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. II, July 1894

Throughout his career, Beardsley included the figure of a dwarf, who sneers and gestures to the audience to communicate the shocking sub-text

of a picture. In this way, Beardsley manifested a clear subject position, which the audience can understand immediately. Notably, when Beardsley identifies with the figure of the dwarf, he is aligning himself with yet another "third" type. Encountering the Beardsley-as-dwarf character, we can

Fig. 13-10. *Caprice. Verso: Masked Woman with a White Mouse*, c. 1894

either laugh with or scoff at the artist. We do not have as much certainty about Beardsley's subject position when a sneering character is missing, as in the four illustrations we are examining for Volume III of the *Yellow Book*. Beardsley's only extant oil painting represents the same subject as the first of the *Marionette* illustrations, and allows the opportunity to grasp how

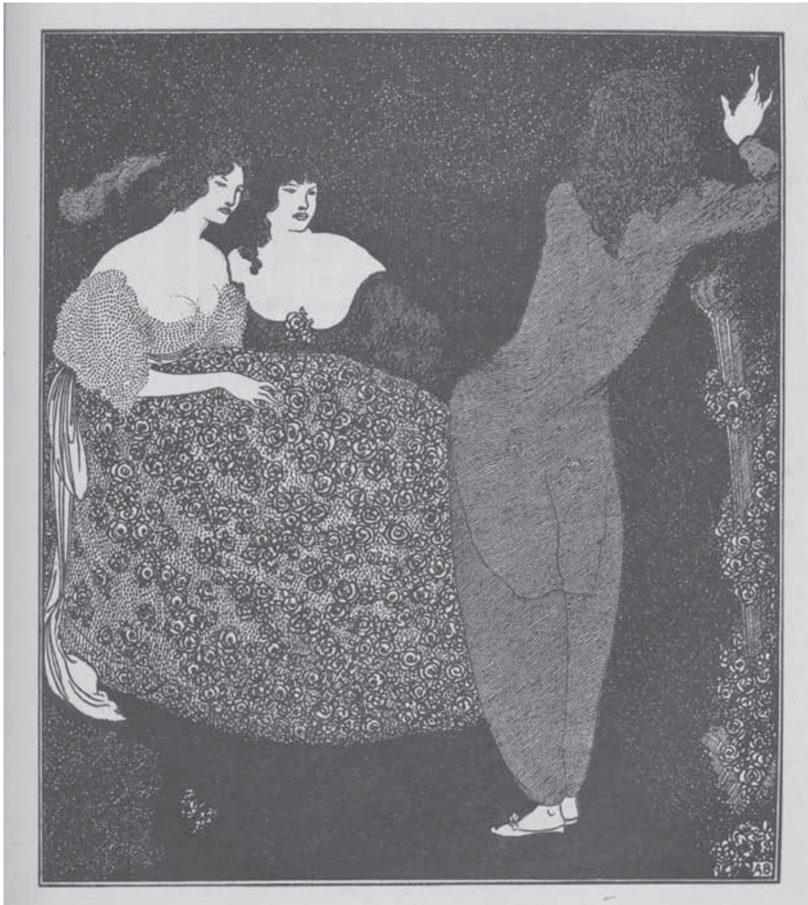

Fig. 13-11. Aubrey Beardsley, *A Repetition of Tristan und Isolde*, from *The Savoy*, No. 8, December 1896

much of the tone of his work is a result of the severe effects of black and white (Fig. 13-10). Working primarily with the complementary colors

green and red, Beardsley painted a scene with diffuse forms and a suggestive atmosphere starkly unlike his illustrated works. Perhaps Beardsley stopped short when it came to finishing the face for the glowing figure of the dwarf when he recognized that oil dissolved the hard clarity of his intended expression. Indeed, I believe Beardsley chose his medium because it allowed him to distance himself from the poetic mood and the more tangible, evocative nature of contemporary non-realist oil painting. His spiritual connection to his characters was easily obscured by the severity and flatness of ink.

Beardsley's subject position is also uncertain in his other picture of female Wagnerites. *A Repetition of 'Tristan und Isolde'* depicts two female listeners and a third, androgynous figure whose back is turned toward us (Fig 13-11). Beardsley overlaps the bodies of the women in such a way as to suggest an erotic connection, perhaps initiated by the hidden hand of the female on the left. With music, the third figure brings forth their emotional response. Beardsley's many images of lesbian eroticism might suggest the artist's sublimated yearning for the same sex. Yet they also allow him to *be* a woman.[54] These two urges are connected in that contemporary discourses conceived of homosexuality as a kind of external cross-dressing or internal hermaphroditism. I argue that the confused folding of space in the stalls of *The Wagnerites* is meant to suggest a dreamed and/or desired erotic interchange between the figures, whose transgressive desire is prompted by the music of *Tristan und Isolde*.

As previously discussed, Beardsley's 1893 illustrations for Malory's *Morte Darthur* offer an opportunity for us to comprehend how he understood the text and subtext of the legend of Tristan. In the most well known illustration from Beardsley's *Morte Darthur*, "How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink," Beardsley represents this important scene with details directly from Wagner's version (Fig. 13-6). Tristan, the male, toasts Isolde, the female. Behind them grow identical flowering branches, echoing their twin, mirroring profiles. Indeed, were it not for the conventions of dress, the gender of the figures would be nearly impossible to guess, for Isolde stands slightly taller than her lover and they both share thick and unruly hair. Tristan toasts to Isolde and is determined for them to drink the poison that will end their suffering and bind them in death.
Wagner's lyrics demonstrate his own interest in the androgynous ideal.[55] Tristan sings, "Tristan you, I Isolde, no longer Tristan!" Isolde answers, "You Isolde, Tristan I, no longer Isolde!" And together they cry, "Nameless, nevermore parted, newly perceiving, newly kindled, endlessly infinitely aware of our oneness, love's supreme delight ardently glowing in our breast!" The hermaphroditic ideal could only be embodied in death.

In 1893, Beardsley drew an illustration on his personal copy of the vocal notes to *Tristan und Isolde*. This completely ignored design reveals much about Beardsley's conception of the legend. The bottom two-thirds of the image is given over to empty space with the exception of the large bisected flower seed. Beardsley plays with the dual gender of the flower by representing the male closed bud on the left and female open bud on the right. Likewise, in the *Morte Darthur* image, the diagonal lines created by the garments of the lovers invite us to imagine their fusion into one body. The connection shows how the androgynous "third sex" was central to Beardsley's private interpretation of the opera. The turn-of-the-century French Satanist Sâr Joséphin Péladin wrote extensively about the androgyne. According to A.J.L. Busst, "In his treatise *La Science de l'amour* (1911), Péladin observes that a 'troisième sexe,' the category of the androgyne, is made up by those whose souls are of a different sex from their bodies. Finding an example of this androgyny in Wagner's treatment of the Tristan and Isolde legend, where: 'Yseult est'homme et Tristan la femme,' he wonders if Wagner knew that he was portraying 'le mythe très secret de l'androgyne.'"[56] Though the transvestite and the androgyne are not equivalent terms, androgyny is the transvestite's constructed effect and aspiration.

The final image in Beardsley's Suite of Four Illustrations is titled *La Dame aux Camélias* (Fig. 13-4). Presumably, the woman in the picture is Marguerite Gautier, heroine of Dumas fils' great drama and Verdi's opera, which tells of love, impropriety and death. I consider this figure to be another self-portrait, bookending the suite. Once again, we have a figure dwarfed by fabric, with a tiny, melancholic head popping out. Elsewhere, Beardsley had indicated the hidden phallus by the same well-placed turn of the fabric. As mentioned, letters and biographical accounts indicate that Beardsley was a cross-dresser, and his illustrations and writing are proof that his primary obsession was *not* pornography or obscenity, but dressing up. Perhaps his most magnificent self-portrait was that which he created for *Under the Hill* (Fig. 13-12), a self-penned version of the legend of Tannhäuser whose principal concern is artifice, setting, and costume.[57] In this highly stylized, profusely decorated illustration, the Abbé (which phonetically spells Beardsley's initials in French) stands proud and tall dressed with a hand muff, cape, wig, and a stringed instrument strapped to his back. The folds in his trousers clearly indicate that the Abbé just might be a she after all. I would argue, however, that it would be *more* appropriate to embrace the Abbé as neither one nor the other but a third sex.[58] Mixed-breed creatures, such as the butterfly with human legs in the upper left, surround the figure in a kind of apotheosis of the hybrid form.

Returning to *La Dame aux Camélias*, let us remember that Marguerite was maligned by conservative critics, suffered from unsanctioned desire, and then died of tuberculosis. Therefore, Beardsley could have recognized ample parallels to justify a self-portrait as *la dame aux camélias*. Given the liminal status of the figure on the far right in *The Wagnerites*, this figure could represent Beardsley's self-portrait in the audience, with the figure's small head surrounded again by copious fabric.

Furthermore, I argue that the mass of women in *The Wagnerites* represents rather a gathering of the third sex. Throughout Beardsley's oeuvre, he has represented male figures with the same facial features as the "women" in *The Wagnerites*. For example, many of the faces in *The Wagnerites* have the same physiognomy as the male knights, ephebes, and angels in his myriad illustrations for the *Morte Darthur* project of 1893-94 published by J.M. Dent. Another example is the extraordinary title-page for his dear friend Andre Raffalovich's book of poems about gay love.[59] Titled *The Mirror of Love*, the design features a heart between the two symmetrical branches of an elaborate candelabrum, similar to the ABA rhythm of Beardsley's graphic signature mentioned above. Within the heart is a human figure with gigantic twin angel's wings. The figure has male genitalia with a face closely resembling many of Beardsley's "women," including the figure just beyond and to the left of the male Jew in *The Wagnerites* and the heroine in the first of the *Comedy Ballet of the Marionettes*. Therefore, it seems logical that we cannot assume the gender of the figures in *The Wagnerites* based on facial features or even costume, and when situated in context with the other images in the suite, it seems more likely a contemplative study of a space that activates transgressive desire.

I would like to imagine Beardsley's Tristan and Isolde as performers before his Wagnerites. Rather than reacting to the audience members as strange, perverse, or degenerate, as Beardsley knew his audience would, we can reconsider them as part of the existing subculture of Wagnerites whose own sense of gender was very much shunned and condemned, and who, like Wagner's heroes, suffered from unspeakable desire and prohibited passion.

Fig. 13-12. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Abbé,* for *Under the Hill*, and reproduced in *The Savoy*, No. 1, Jan. 1896

These Wagnerites could project their fantasies on the ambiguously gendered bodies of Tristan and Isolde, and find comfort in the darkness of the theater where their secrets and imagination might find free rein and where "reason is lulled to sleep," in Nordaus' words.

The reason it can be so difficult to pin down a definitive reading of so many of his works is that Beardsley prefers to take on more than one subject position. In each of these four illustrations, Beardsley destabilizes meaning through the liberating possibility of the third sex: the androgyne, the transvestite and the herm. These hybrid figures are not false identities, but empowering forms. Their presence in his illustrations marks the field of the image as a redeeming space which permits independence, autonomy and freedom from the constraints of the world outside the frame. In each of the illustrations, identity is transformed, respectively, through sleep, through transgressive desire, through music, death, and the androgyne, and finally through the cross-dresser's mirror.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 13-1. Aubrey Beardsley, *Portrait of Himself*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. III, Oct. 1894, published by John Lane, London, and Copeland and Day, Boston. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Eugene McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas.

Fig. 13-2. Aubrey Beardsley, *Lady Gold's Escort*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. III, Oct. 1894, published by John Lane, London, and Copeland and Day, Boston. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Eugene McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas.

Fig. 13-3. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Wagnerites*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. III, Oct. 1894, published by John Lane, London, and Copeland and Day, Boston. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Eugene McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas.

Fig. 13-4. Aubrey Beardsley, *La Dame aux Camélias*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. III, Oct. 1894, published by John Lane, London, and Copeland and Day, Boston. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Eugene McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas.

Fig. 13-5. Aubrey Beardsley, *A Footnote*, from *The Savoy*, No. 2, April 1896, published by Leonard Smithers. Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, on loan to the University of Delaware Library. Photo courtesy of Mark Samuels Lasner.

Fig. 13-6. Aubrey Beardsley, *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink*, from *Le Morte Darthur*, 1893-94, published by J.M. Dent and Company, London. Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, on loan to the

University of Delaware Library. Photo courtesy of Mark Samuels Lasner.

Fig. 13-7. Aubrey Beardsley, No. I of *The Comedy Ballet of Marionettes*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. II, July 1894, published by Elkin Matthews and John Lane, London, and Copeland and Day, Boston. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Eugene McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas.

Fig. 13-8. Aubrey Beardsley, No. II of *The Comedy Ballet of Marionettes*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. II, July 1894, published by Elkin Matthews and John Lane, London, and Copeland and Day, Boston. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Eugene McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas.

Fig. 13-9. Aubrey Beardsley, No. III of *The Comedy Ballet of Marionettes*, from *The Yellow Book*, Vol. II, July 1894, published by Elkin Matthews and John Lane, London, and Copeland and Day, Boston. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Eugene McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas.

Fig. 13-10. *Caprice. Verso: Masked Woman with a White Mouse*, c. 1894, Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898). © Tate, London 2013.

Fig. 13-11. Aubrey Beardsley, *A Repetition of Tristan und Isolde*, from *The Savoy*, No. 8, December 1896, published by Leonard Smithers, London. Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, on loan to the University of Delaware Library. Photo courtesy of Mark Samuels Lasner.

Fig. 13-12. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Abbé,* for *Under the Hill*, and reproduced in *The Savoy*, No. 1, Jan. 1896, published by Leonard Smithers. Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, on loan to the University of Delaware Library. Photo courtesy of Mark Samuels Lasner.

Notes

I wrote an early version of this essay while I was earning my M.A. in Art History from Southern Methodist University. I have to thank Dr. Janis Bergman-Carton for her guidance and encouragement back in the spring of 2005 and ever since. The essay published here is part of a larger study that will be expanded and amended.

[1] Aubrey Beardsley to Frederick H. Evans from early October 1894. Reprinted in Henry Maas, J. L. Duncan, and W. G. Good, eds., *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley* (London: Cassell, 1970): 75.

[2] (Gleeson White), "The Editor's Room," *The Studio* 4 (1894): ix.

[3] This quality is also evident in the cover and title-page Beardsley designed for this volume. The cover page depicts another toilette scene, this time the figure actively applying cosmetics. The title-page portrays an odd pair – a woman with a large plumed hat and an androgynous male in an oversize Pierrot costume, standing

before a drawn-back curtain. These figures further connect with the suite of four illustrations in the way their forms are always dwarfed by the fabrics surrounding them. This assertion of costume is part of a larger interest in performance, artificiality and constructed identity, which I will explore here.
[4]Moreover, various outlines in white within the blackness, such as in the shaping of the seats in *The Wagnerites* and around the carriage in *Lady Gold's Escort*, seem to suggest the effects of artificial light in the theater and in the street. This is another example of Beardsley's obsession with the synthetic. Beardsley's assertion of artificiality and performance in the suite of images here relates to Max Beerbohm's controversial essay from the first volume of *The Yellow Book* titled "A Defense of Cosmetics," championing the beauty of the synthetic and the joy of costume.
[5] The images engage in a conversation with the reproduction of Walter Sickert's painting *The Lion Comique* (1887; private collection) of the same volume of *The Yellow Book*. In addition, Sickert had published two other music-hall images in Volume II – *Ada Lumberg* (1887; private collection) and *The Bedford Music Hall* (1888-89; Geoffrey Verdon-Rice). Like Beardsley's image, each uses the line of sight and scale to upset an easy reading of the composition. Yet they are quite different. Sickert depicts both his audience and his performer in a way that much more clearly relies on precedents like Edgar Degas. I think Beardsley's image has more in common with Honoré Daumier's depictions of audiences, such as *They say that Parisians are difficult to please, on these four benches there is not one discontent – it is true that all these Frenchmen are Romans* (1864; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and *The Interval at the Théâtre Français* (1860-65; Oskar Reinhart Collection). Each depicts an undifferentiated mass of male audience members on the floor of a theater, and the point-of-view comes from the foot of the stage turned away from the performance. However, Daumier's crowd is male, evenly distributed, and contained in a way that is more linear than Beardsley's. Furthermore, Daumier's work does not present the same problems with sexual imagery.
[6] By 1894, depending on one's personal agenda, Wagner as a man, composer or writer could represent a myriad of ideologies. For a variety of primary sources, see George Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on 'The Ring of the Niblungs'* (London: Grant Richards, 1898); Edmund Gurney, "Wagner and Wagnerism," *Nineteenth Century* 13 (March 1883): 434-52; the French periodical *La revue wagnérienne* published in Paris from 1885-1888; and Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *'The Birth of Tragedy' and 'The Case of Wagner'*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967). For a survey of European Wagnerism, see David C. Large and William Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984). For British Wagnerism in particular, see the chapter titled "Perfect and Imperfect Wagnerites" in Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1992); Anna Dzamba Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press,

1979); and Emma Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[7] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. anonymous (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1895): 213.
[8] Ibid., 211. Nordau uses Nietzsche's term "unending melody" for Wagner's musical dissonance.
[9] The first to call *The Wagnerites* "satirical" was Herbert Small in a review of the third volume. Herbert Small, "Book Illustrators, Aubrey Beardsley," *The Bookbuyer*12 (1895): 26-29. In more recent criticism, Chris Snodgrass calls the *Wagnerites* "Beardsley's commentary on Victorian bourgeois cultural sensibilities that a moving performance of tragic love, which should transport and ennoble its audience, has instead the effect of exposing that audience's true venality – reinforced, by the picture's permeating darkness…*The Wagnerites* exposes the hypocrisy and shallowness of Victorian Society." Chris Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley: Dandy of the Grotesque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 263-264. I absolutely do not think that Beardsley is accusing his Wagnerites of such superficiality. First of all, his representations are in no way typical of Victorian bourgeois. Second, as I have discussed, there is much evidence to support that he knew these women to be attending Wagner for just such a transformative, ennobling experience. Finally, I would argue that the audience whose "venality" he is exposing exists outside the frame of the readership. Another more recent example comes from Linda Zatlin, who writes, "The collection of thick-lipped and hard-looking women in *The Wagnerites* is the artist's ironic comment on those affected women whose emotional involvement with the composer's *Tristan und Isolde* appears to be on the same limited plane as would be their involvement with their fellow human beings. Beardsley mocks them by placing in their midst, and so contrasting them with, an effete man." Linda Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990): 87. I think Zatlin's analysis of gender would have been much more interesting if she had not polarized notions of masculine and feminine but had rather looked to where they overlapped. And besides, I do not see Beardsley's Wagnerites as "affected" at all; "thick-lipped and hard-looking" they may be, but most of them appear, on the contrary, to be quite dignified, in connection with their neighbors and focused on the performance.
[10] D.J. Gordon, "Aubrey Beardsley at the V & A," *Encounter* (Oct: 1966): 186.
[11] Milly Heyd, *Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986): 174. Heyd makes this point but her reading is different than my own.
[12] Sutton, 113. Sutton's chapter "Wagnerites *en masse*: The Audience as Spectacle" is the only attempt I have found that tries to search for alternative readings in the piece. She divides her discussion into two parts: first she examines women and their participation in the theater and how Wagnerism became feminine. She associates this idea with contemporary crowd theory linking crowds, mass culture, and women. Second, she addresses Wagner's exoticism and his anti-Semitism. She recognizes the quality of "Otherness" that I want to explore, but she

does not approach the issue of gender ambiguity and hybridity with the force I think it demands.

[13] Small, 28.

[14] “The Yellow Diaster,” *The World* (Nov. 1894): 26.

[14] “The Yellow Disaster,” *The World* (Nov. 1894): 26. Susanna Barrows has shown how late nineteenth-century crowds were consistently framed as violent, bestial, and insane, and shared characteristics resembling the mentally ill, women, alcoholics, or savages. Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). Since the small figures of the opera boxes are more conventionally gendered, or contained, and because they face us, the viewer feels alarmingly allied with the 7undifferentiated mass of Otherness extending in either direction. In fact, the large open space in the lower half of the composition suggests our occupied placement in the audience. Sitting amongst the “not-self”, our own gender definition threatens to become compromised, and we feel implicated of the same degeneracy as the crowd.

[15] See the impressive annotated bibliography published in *Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. Robert Langenfeld (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989). I avoid the judgmental language which usually accompanies discussions of Beardsley’s work. Hence I also self-consciously steer clear of the terms “perverse,” “grotesque,” and “dandy,” which are ultimately too vague for critical analysis.

[16] See Sander L. Gilman, *Sexuality: An Illustrated History: Representing the Sexual in Medicine and Culture from the Middle Ages to the Age of AIDS* (New York: Wiley, 1989): 255-261. Gilman discusses how the Jew’s circumcision was seen as a kind of castration, or an un-manning.

[17] For example, see Edward Carpenter, “The Intermediate Sex,” in *Love’s Coming-of-Age* (London: Methuen, 1914).

[18] Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988): 165. Drawing on a variety of contemporary legal and medical discourses, Gilman examines how the accepted stereotypes of Jews were linked with the perceived sexual deviance ascribed to homosexuals.

[19] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 11. She adds, “Three puts into question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge… This interruption, this disruptive act of putting into question, is…precisely the place, and the role, of the transvestite.” Garber, 11, 13. For more on the dissolving boundaries between the sexes in the 1890s, see also Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990).

[20] My interests grow from a demand made by Anna Gruetzner Robins in her review titled “Demystifying Aubrey Beardsley” for more work to be done on the way “Beardsley’s images of the body flaunt and test the boundaries of the permissible and acceptable and serve as a palimpsest for changing sexual and cultural mores.” I accept her challenge to study the way Beardsley’s “images of

lustful, masculine female bodies, and soft, effeminate male bodies with their hint of 'deviant' sexualities" reflect the "unease and unexpressed fears" of English fin-de-siècle culture. Anna Gruetzner Robins, "Demystifying Aubrey Beardsley," *Art History* 22, 3 (Sept. 1999): 440-444. I am also inspired by Bridget J. Elliot's assertion that "the pervasive art-historical notion of Beardsley as a purveyor of formally beautiful but quasi-pornographic images merits serious reconsideration in the case of the *Yellow Book* illustrations." Bridget J. Elliot, "Covent Garden Follies: Beardsley's Masquerade Images of Posers and Voyeurs," *The Oxford Art Journal,* 9, 1 (1986): 46.

[21] For example, she writes, "The appeal of cross-dressing is clearly related to its status as a sign of the constructedness of gender categories. But the tendency on the part of many critics has been to look *through* rather than *at* the cross-dresser, to turn away from a close encounter with the transvestite, and to want instead to subsume that figure within one of the two traditional genders… This tendency to erase the third term, to appropriate the cross-dresser 'as' one of the two sexes, is emblematic of a fairly consistent critical desire to look away from the transvestite as transvestite, not to see the cross-dressing except as male or female manqué, whether motivated by social, cultural, or aesthetic designs." Garber, 9-10. The italics are Garber's.

[22] Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (Brookfield, VA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995). Leaning on W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of "imagetext" and M.M. Baktin's theory of dialogism, Kooistra's term "bitextuality" refers to a theoretical approach which she argues can be helpful to studying the "meanings generated by the contiguity – and conjugality – of picture and word within a specific social setting… Bitextual studies incorporate the strategies of both visual and verbal interpretation in order to understand how the dialogue between picture and word produces meaning within a network of cultural discourses." Kooistra, 4, 5. Kooistra examines the relationship between Beardsley's text and illustrations for *Under the Hill, or the Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* published in *The Savoy* in January and April 1896. She argues, "At the very least, one can posit that Beardsley's central concerns included a private interest in cross-dressing and a public art form which provocatively challenged contemporary notions of conventional sexuality with figures of ambiguous gender and diffuse desire." Kooistra, 228.

[23] See for example Franz Sales Meyer, *Handbook of Ornament* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1894).

[24] See for example Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[25] A.J.L. Busst, "The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century," in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. Ian Fletcher (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1967): 1-96.

[26] Ibid., 1.

[27] Ewa Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1987). This book has been little cited in the literature and it is extremely helpful to Beardsley enthusiasts.

[28] Ibid., 270.
[29] Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, trans. Joanna Richardson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981): 329-330.
[30] First published in the *Sun* (March 28,1895). Reprinted in Brian Reade, *Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1967). See also a self-portrait published in the *Sketch* (April 11,1894), where he again softens his facial features and gives his suit puffed sleeves. In a letter to John Lane, Beardsley confesses that he intends to go to the St. James restaurant dressed as a woman. The letter was accompanied by a drawing showing him in feminine clothes. J.L. May, *The Path through the Wind* (London: G. Bles, 1931): 49.
[31] See for example "Baudry Weirdsley: An Illustration to the Gospel of To-Day," *To-Day (*Sept. 22, 1894): 198 and "The Yellow Book," *Punch* (Feb. 2, 1895): 58. In both, Beardsley is pictured in women's clothes. See also Max Beerbohm's portrait of Beardsley with limp wrists and bows on his shoes, which was published in the *Pall Mall Budget* (June 7, 1894).
[32] In particular, see the following in Maas, Duncan, and Good: letter to F. H. Evans on June 27, 1894, letter to André Raffolovich on May 28, 1895, letter to Leonard Smithers on July 2, 1896, to Raffolovich on July 15, 1896, and Smithers on June 11, 1897. These letters are notably from the summer because productions of Wagner's music dramas took place in that season. Also, it is interesting that Raffolovich received two letters in reference to Tristan, because he was a flamboyant homosexual.
[33] Nordau, 213.
[34] Elliott Zuckerman is the key source for detailed discussions of the musical effects of Wagner's work, *Tristan und Isolde* in particular. Elliott Zuckerman, *The First Hundred Years of Wagner's 'Tristan'* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964). Zuckerman introduces the term Tristanism on page 30.
[35] Vernon Lee, a fin de siècle writer of fiction and essays on music aesthetics who was also a lesbian, describes Wagner's music in an illuminating passage: "It is astonishing, when one realizes it, that the charm of music, the good renown it has gained in more healthful and more decorous days, can make us sit out what we do sit out under its influence: violations of our innermost secrets, revelations of the hidden possibilities of our own nature and the nature of others; stripping away of all the soul's veils; nay, so to speak, melting away the soul's outward forms, its bone and muscle, till there is revealed only the shapeless primeval nudity of confused instincts, the soul's vague viscera. Vernon Lee [Violet Paget], "Beauty and Sanity," *Laurus Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life* (London: Bodley Head, 1909): 140-141. Quoted in Carlo Caballero, "'A Wicked Voice': On Vernon Lee, Wagner, and the Effects of Music," *Victorian Studies* 35 (Spring 1992): 385-408. Sutton cites Caballero's essay in her chapter "The Pathology of Pleasure: Decadent Sensibility and Affective Art."
[36] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *Werke*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Manser, 1956): ii, 6. Translated and quoted in Zuckerman, 63.
[37] Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997): 29, 45. Hanson reproduces Beardsley's *The Wagnerites* at the

beginning of his first chapter titled "The Dialectic of Shame and Grace" but he does not discuss it at any length. Hanson approaches our discussion of the androgyne when he analyzes J.-K. Huysmans's Christian Venus in his book *A Rebours*, and argues, "What Huysmans accomplishes is not an opposition between decadent hedonism and Christian redemption, but rather two distinct spiritual moods locked by decadent style in a strange embrace." Hanson, 43. I should also note that Beardsley, like many Decadents, converted to Catholicism.

[38] Judith Peraino, "Courtly Obsessions: Music and Masculine Identity in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*," *repercussions* 4 (Fall 1995): 59-85.

[39] Wagner's legend differs here from the medieval. In the old text, Isolde hates Tristan but does not plan to murder him, and there is no sense that she subconsciously loves him either. When Tristan and Isolde casually drink the love drink by mistake because they are thirsty, there is no implication that they wish to die for each other. Consequently, the "suicidal attraction" they feel in the Wagner version is his own addition. Zuckerman, 15.

[40] Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* (New York: Riverrun Press Inc., 1993): 71.

[41] In *Tristan und Isolde*, in particular, Wagner uses the musical devices of suspension and anticipation, described by Schopenhauer as "a dissonance delaying the final consonance that is with certainty awaited: in this way the longing for it is strengthened, and its appearance affords the greater satisfaction." Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Indian Hills, CO: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1958). Yet Wagner here does not allow that satisfaction, he continuously extends the longing.

[42] Effeminacy in men and masculinity in women does not automatically implicate one of homosexuality, but they do challenge traditional gender constructs and lead to suspicion of sexual attraction to one's own sex. See Randolph Trumbach, "London's Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991): 112-141.

[43] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Pychopathia Sexualis: with especial reference to contrary sexual instinct: a medico-legal study*, trans. Charles G. Chaddock (Philadelphia and London: The F.A. Davis Co., 1893): 249. The italics are Krafft-Ebing's.

[44] Ibid., 291.

[45] The figure of Pierrot has a long art history for his melancholy and for his alienation from others. Beardsley returned to the figure throughout his career. It is notable for our purposes that androgyny is one of Pierrot's defining characteristics as well. Beardsley's self-identification with Pierrot was discussed early on in Christian Brinton, "Aubrey Beardsley Revivictus," *Critic* 38 (1901): 128-135.

[46] Oskar Panizza, "Bayreuth and Homosexuality," trans. Isolde Vetter, *Wagner* 9 (April 1988): 73.

[47] See Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), particularly 320-327.

[48] Sander L. Gilman, *Sexuality: An Illustrated History: Representing the Sexual in Medicine and Culture from the Middle Ages to the Age of AIDS*: 258-260.

[49] Ibid. 259.
[50] Beardsley created one other self-portrait in bed but this time he is no longer sleeping. Titled *The Death of Pierrot*, the illustration was published two years later in the October 1896 issue of *The Savoy*.
[51] See Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, chapter 3: "The Hottentot and the Prostitute: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality."
[52] Kooistra discusses the ways in which cross-dressing signifies a Bakhtinian mask: "According to Bakhtin's concepts of masks, disguise is both liberating and legitimizing. Indeed, the mask confers 'the right to be the other': the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize, to parody, to be theatrical, to expose, to betray personal details – and, perhaps most importantly, 'the right not to be taken literally, not to be oneself.'" Kooistra: 208-209. Kooistra quotes from M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 36, 159.
[53] Sharon Gillerman, "Samson in Vienna: The Theatrics of Jewish Masculinity," *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 67-68.
[54] Richard Dellamora has studied how in literary history the male writers' "wish to be a woman" is complicated by the sexual desires men feel for each other. Richard Dellmora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990): 80.
[55] See Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne: A Study in Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Nattiez examines Wagner's prose and the lyrics of his operas to analyze the composer's investment in the conceit of the androgyne.
[56] Busst, 57. Péladin also wrote a book called *L'Androgyne* in 1891.
[57] See Kooistra, 226-235.
[58] At the October 2011 conference for the Victorian Interdisciplinary Studies Association of the Western United States (VISAWS), where I discussed *The Abbé*, listeners pointed out the instance of "Victorian camel toe" in the picture, a description about which I am still giggling. Ian Fletcher noted the "allusions to female genitals" in *The Abbé* as well: "The dandy hero has spavine legs, while the folds in his trousers about the crotch suggest the feminine pudenda." Ian Fletcher, "Inventions for the Left Hand: Beardsley in Verse and Prose," in *Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. Robert Langenfeld (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989): 248.
[59] *The Mirror of Love* was designed for the frontispiece of Andre Raffalovich's book of poems titled *The Thread and the Path*, published by David Nutt in 1895. The illustration was not used. It is reproduced in Reade, plate 385. The original design is in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

REFLECTIONS OF MALLARME: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MANET'S *A BAR AT THE FOLLIES-BERGERE*

MARGUERITE LI BASSI

"Vous étiez réellement son meilleur ami, aussi il vous aimait tendrement."
(Mme Manet à Mallarmé)[1]

Madame Manet's poignant words attest to the strong bond of friendship between the "illegible" artist and the "unreadable" poet who saw each other daily, sharing ten years of conversation, collaboration and mutual admiration until Manet's untimely death in April, 1883. This paper is devoted to the idea that the ambiguous realism in Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (Fig. 14-1) is linked to a pair of celebrated poems by Stéphane Mallarmé: *Herodiade* and *The Afternoon of a Faun.*[2] It is not difficult to imagine a virtual reification of visual and verbal forms fused into one art-object if we recall that, from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, the sister arts—painting and poetry—were considered almost identical in nature, content and purpose. Horace's famous *ut pictura poesis* suggests that poetry *is* or *should be* "descriptive like a painting"—that is to say, "like speaking pictures."[3] Near the end of the sixteenth century, aesthetic differences between the two disciplines became blurred permitting the terms painter and poet to become interchangeable, inverting Horace's simile to read *ut poesis pictura*—"painting is like mute poetry."[4] If we apply this latter notion to Manet's *Bar*, we have an entirely new paradigm for expanding the understanding of the painting.

Through theoretical juxtapositions, hermeneutical analyses and thematic interpretations of Mallarmé's best-known poems, I will argue the uncanny relevance of these Symbolist poems to Manet's provocative masterpiece. There is absolutely nothing to verify or even hint to my

interpretation. But the odds seem favorable if my reader agrees to collaborate by suspending disbelief and is willing to experience the painting as a hypothetical evocation of Mallarmé's dream-based aesthetic and codified use of language. In the scope of this study, I will pinpoint junctures of conceptual similarities within the painting itself, intersections where the artist's enigmatic iconography corresponds to the poet's pendant poems. I believe that Manet's modern beholder is open to the idea of a synthesized engagement in which one revels in the dazzling virtuosity of the *Bar*, looks into its subsumed poet's world and ultimately sees it "out loud."[5] This is not to suggest that the painting is a mere pastiche of Mallarméan poesis—such a shallow assessment of Manet's accomplishment is not the goal of this investigation. My ambition is to intensify the visual appreciation of the *Bar* by adding a discriminating literary dimension to his last masterpiece. In the early 1860s, Manet's seminal development of flatness announced modernity and, a generation later, the *Bar*'s aura of unreality and inaccessible character anticipates abstraction in art. Now that the obscuring fog of the nineteenth century has lifted with time, we are predisposed to learning new ways of looking at the *Bar* as we do in this essay which, by extension, helps us better understand Mallarmé's hermetic style and elliptical semantics, occasionally glimpsing the poet himself.[6]

Against the background of politico-social turmoil during Napoleon III's authoritarian Second Empire (1852-70), the radical shift from sclerotic academic art to the revolutionary formation of modern painting took place in Paris. The new movement grew, not in the elite salons or drawing rooms of the conservative bourgeoisie, but in professional and ideological discussions in neighborhood cafés where left-leaning French artists and writers joined forces in the drive towards artistic independence.[7] A *Parisien* of immense culture, Manet moved in a sophisticated circle of composers, writers, artists, and poets in particular, two of whom figured prominently in his life. When the symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire called for a "painter of modern life" in his classic essay on modern art which gave heroic significance to the poetry of daily life, sometimes glorifying the sordid side of Parisian streets and brothels, Manet more than answered his friend's call with *Olympia* (1863)[8], an idealized, demi-mondaine scandalizing the public not for the painting's nudity and immoral implications but for its "crude, unfinished facture" that flaunts *naked paint* itself.[9] Indeed, most of his paintings that capture contemporary life and contemporary scenes, "such as that which is embraced by one glance," either were rejected by the jury of official Salon exhibitions or earned unwelcome notoriety even in his private showings.[10]

Yet he never compromised his artistic integrity; while a student in Thomas Couture's atelier (1850-56), he argued "we must be of our own time and paint what we see without worrying about what's fashionable," a manifesto-like statement that prophesized the visionary independence of his mature period that begins with the emotive, puzzling *The Gare Saint-Lazare* (1872) and culminates with the sibylline conundrum of the *Bar* (1880-82).[11]

Fig. 14-1. Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*

Brilliant art critic and stimulating conversationalist, Baudelaire had become the artist's constant companion by 1859 despite the ten-year difference in age. Known for passionate extremes in both lifestyle and avant-garde poetry, it is not surprising that his collection of *Fleurs du Mal* poems inspired horror in 1857 with defiantly erotic subject matter for which he was officially denounced, censored and fined. The originality and individualism of his notions lauding the poetic nature of *notre époque* inspired the subject matter in at least two of Manet's earliest paintings: *Le Buveur d'absinthe* (1859) and *La Musique aux Tuileries* (1863).[12] When Baudelaire fell mortally ill, the fledgling novelist Émile Zola—himself

un poète manqué—gained recognition for his defense of Manet's controversial portrait of a young musician, *The Fifer* (1866), derided for its *image d'Épinal* flatness. When Manet turned forty-one in 1873, the thirty-year old Mallarmé (who adored Baudelaire) entered his life as if on cue - an intense young poet to whom he quickly bonded. But, as Charles Rosen tells us, "no poet of the past two centuries" aroused the bitter tirade of hatred as did Mallarmé; his work incited "linguistic scandals" which precipitated "a lifetime of fierce attacks from frustrated critics, who had no idea of the subject matter of most of his poems largely because they had not been able to figure it out."[13] Mallarmé lived near Manet's studio and developed the habit of dropping by each afternoon after his teaching duties were over to enjoy a chat with the artist who considered conversation to be an art in itself.[14] These encounters provided each artist with ample opportunity to become informed about each other's aims and practices. Given that the custom lasted throughout the following decade, we can be certain that these daily meetings would have quickly stagnated if based on mere social platitudes; they must have discussed art and poetry.[15]

"How well matched in temperament and character were those two when they at last met and how much each had accomplished to further the thinking of the other," writes Harry Rand.[16] By the end of 1876, they had partnered to publish two major book projects that would enhance Mallarmé's reputation as a poet to be reckoned with. That his hermetic methodology had meaning for the well-read Manet resonates in the four Japanese-influenced woodcuts he produced for an elegant, silk-bound edition of *The Afternoon of a Faun* as well as in the six gestural black and white lithographs created for the poet's translation of Edgar Poe's *Raven*. Both projects were interdisciplinary occasions that gave Manet privileged access to Mallarmé's lexicon of arcane words, symbols, double metaphors, unorthodox syntax and elliptical rhetoric encapsulated in these works, applied and interpreted by the poet himself who had a remarkable sense of graphic visualization. Commenting upon the concinnity of these co-productions, Anne Coffin Hanson writes: "Undoubtedly their relationship was mutually enriching."[17] Her remark not only invites questions but demands further investigation over and beyond the two artistic collaborations that she references. In what ways do the complex structure and ambiguous formalism in Manet's *Bar* allude to Mallarmé's "enriching" presence? Where do their individual ideologies coincide or imbricate in the *Bar*'s iconography? Is the *Bar*'s conceptual pattern related to Manet's insider understanding of the circular structure of the poet's dream-dominated poems? These are questions that require further attention

since, to my knowledge, no one has thus far associated Mallarmé with Manet in the way suggested in this essay.

As far as we know, neither Manet nor Mallarmé ever wrote complete explications of professional goals or intentions but their mutual search for an art and a literature true to itself gives us license to believe that their work presaged modernist aesthetics. With Manet, painting became harder to read at first glance even for the educated academic beholder, while Mallarmé modernized poetry through partial erasure of a poem's idea which temporarily delays closure, an *avant la lettre* process essential for generations of modernist American poets that include T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens and John Ashbery.[18] Since neither artist believed that a work of art has to convey information, the equivocal aspect of Manet's *Bar* is not surprising. The picture presents a virtuosic panoply of textured surfaces, breathtaking colors and meticulous details into which Manet imbeds his attractive barmaid—a strange, specular *jeu de miroir*, an orchestrated trope which recalls one of Mallarmé's solipsistic maneuvers, that of transcending the phenomenal world enabled by the chimerical *glace de Venise* that hung over his writing desk.[19]

We cannot know what Manet confided to Mallarmé concerning the confusing mirror image taking shape during their daily meetings in 1880-82 when they most assuredly discussed the *Bar*, the imposing work-in-progress sitting on Manet's easel. On the other hand, we do know that both men shared a taste for the popular Folies-Bergère nightclub that had opened in 1869, the first spectacle-cum-concert theater in Paris. Its vast interior brought the outdoors indoors by replicating one of Baron Haussmann's[20] new urban parks replete with fountains, gardens, small trees, and promenades bordered with mirrored bars selling refreshments, one of which Manet made his own.[21] With only his model and her still-life refreshments *but without any mirror* in the studio, he intentionally placed a magnificent one at the beholder's eye level, where its panoramic eye displays the Folies horseshoe-shaped theater teeming with spectators. [22] Mallarmé delighted in writing eye-witness accounts of exotic spectacles like the circus act watched by Manet's mirrored audience, gossipy critiques which were published anonymously in his own light-hearted venture, *La Dernière Mode,* a bi-monthly magazine for women (1874-75).[23] Both men admired Léona Dare, America's "queen of the trapeze," whose green-booted feet may be those referenced on the trapeze bar in the top left corner of the picture.[24] Fascinated by Dare's *danseuse-gymnaste* aerial routine, Mallarmé wrote his London publisher that he planned to star her in his Wagner-inspired "dream-theater," a multi-arts event planned to take place simultaneously in "three corners of Paris."[25]

The critic Jane Mayo Roos notes that "like Mallarmé's poems, Manet's paintings are steeped in ambiguity, indeterminacy and elusiveness."[26] Her observation epitomizes the paradoxical character of the *Bar*'s notorious ambiguities that contribute to the hypnotic effect of the mirror, an eye that explores the visible world in a realistic fashion but not limited to surface realism. Vexed by Manet's theme of ambivalence in the *Bar*, Salon juries and conservative critics alike re-floated a tiresome bias: was he simply up to his old trick of scoffing at Bourgeois fixation on *readable* art and baiting those could not tolerate his habit of *illegibility*? We have only to recall his cryptic retort to similar animus directed at him by a venomous writer in 1870:[27] "*J'ai fait ce que j'ai vu*"[28] (I painted what I saw). Evasive? Of course. After all, his is an unpredictable approach, described by Mallarmé as an "attack on his canvas," suggesting not only the creative delirium of Plato's *fureur* but also the sexual impetuosity of the poet's Faun energized by a burst of potent creativity, of which we shall hear more later.[29]

Ironically, never were Manet's pictorial signs so culturally informative on the one hand and yet so obscure on the other, so masterfully handled as pure paint yet so narratively problematic for Parisian gallery-goers, most of whom were accustomed to reading a work of art rather than contemplate its meaning. That the artist did not spend the latter part of his life in discussion with the poet without having this dialogue nuance his art becomes clear to the viewer who agrees to experience *poesis* as the context for the *Bar*'s *pictura* as I suggested earlier. Several compositional mechanisms for withholding narrative clarity are innately shared by artist and poet, two of which will be examined side-by-side due to the self-styled "elitism" of Mallarmé's poetry. When he was twenty-two years old, he dreamed of *literary elitism* in which the ordinary speech of the masses would be replaced with a "purified" language[30] that demanded active decoding by the reader in order to reach a so-called "elitist few"—a cultish notion first introduced in *Hérodiade*.[31] The misalignments orchestrated in Manet's mirror that deliberately disorient the eye analogously suggest *painterly elitism* in which the viewer's engagement with the legibility of the painting is disrupted, a device sure to offend those mired in the narrative tradition. Both artists believed that a work of art should invite its audience to fully and actively participate in the experience of it. Notice how Manet's beholder is momentarily slowed down by his modernist *fa presto* style of paint application but is rewarded with tactile lusciousness of color and sensuous texture before engaging with the canvas's subject matter, a tactic that artistically parallels Mallarmé's calculated strategy in which he obliges the reader to take time to admire

the constructive ambiguity of his verse, musical patterns of rhyme and syntactical acrobatics before partially revealing the poem's idea. Mallarmé also habitually uses syntactic confusions to subtly veil meaning, thus effectively erasing external relationships of a poem's object, a practice that seems allied to the confusing contents of Manet's bizarre *glace*.

In divesting its outward appearance of logical mirror reversal, he effectively denies the three-dimensionality of the *Bar*'s specular plane through arbitrary, disjunctive reflections. Demanding our attention is the diagonal fragmentation of space created by the still-life cluster of bottles placed in front of the barmaid's right hand that does not entirely fill the front space of the counter yet, in the mirror-reflection, one (or more) bottle(s) appear(s) to teeter on the very edge of the marble slab which itself seems to be levitating over the bustling ground floor crowd. In superimposing the salient image of the incoherent couple on the far right of the mirror, Manet further exacerbates the illegible character of the painting. Why does the artist eclipse the top-hatted man who should be blocking our view of the barmaid, if he indeed is facing her? Does he exist only as a fleeting mnemonic idea held by the psychic mirror of her mind? Manet's silence is absolute, inviting the bold conjecture that the dandy's partial presence in the *Bar* tangentially conjures up Mallarmé's canonical credo: "it is not the object that speaks but its virtual uncreated essence: the *idea*."

Optically we discern that Manet paints just one woman and her reflection on two planes, but viscerally we feel that each planarity projects a veiled, contradictory sense due to the barmaid's two conflicting images: one emotionally opaque and a figure who engages a depicted man's attention. The question is how to handle this information and my reaction is to focus on the binary character of the *Bar*'s art and its imputed poetry, suspecting that the dualistic organization of his painting into alternative zones of reality and illusion is of symbolic significance. The picture's dual planes treat of two separate worlds, one inside and the other outside the mirror. That binarism is a site of shared Symbolist aesthetics is posited by Rosemary Lloyd who writes that Mallarmé "invited a double reading of his poems," an insight that directs attention to the simultaneity of the second image of the barmaid conversing with the male figure while facing him and the noisy crowd back of him as well.[32] Could Manet's surrealistic image-doubling obliquely suggest Mallarmé's linguistic scission that separates the diverse functions of language into *secular* and *sacred* categories, an extrapolation from the *Bar*'s planar *division en deux*? Commonplace jargon, associated both with the barmaid's shadowy after-image of a discussion and with the banal conversations among the

spectators, symbolizes speech patterns equivalent to ordinary secular reportage[33] whereas the solitary dreamer in the *Bar*'s foreground emblemizes the poet's sacred, paradoxically *indicible* (inexpressible) Idea of Beauty solipsistically in love with its own reflection.[34]

But the *Bar* is no simple matter of poetic cause and its pictorial effect. Speculation on the barmaid's visual and virtual dualism is a contagion that quickly takes over the imagination. The more you gaze mindfully, the more is revealed to you. Manet's melancholic barmaid exudes a majestic presence, that of a fashionable young Venus presiding over her ravishingly painted still-lifes, while T. J. Clark downgrades her status to just another "for sale" commodity.[35] Indeed we may wonder: why does Manet isolate his pretty barmaid in the shallow "actual" space closest to the viewer? Is its apparent realism meant to be understood as a *class*-ified zone evoking bourgeois prejudice that socially judges a barmaid to be the marginalized other, thus a patterned archetype which would brand his young *grisette* (working girl) as a *fille* (amateur prostitute)?

Manet's manifestly feminine frontal zone is absolutely crucial to my theme of picture-poem conflation: the glacial stillness, forlorn air and riveted gaze of Manet's haughty young woman coalesce to reenact the dramatic scene of moral struggle in Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* which conveys an extreme Symbolist mood of despair.[36] The strongly absorptive and mesmerized facial expression of Manet's *serveuse* captures the paralyzing, depressed character of this dark "night" poem.[37] Alone, embodying the tension of fire and ice, a cold narcissistic young princess (a.k.a. *Salome*) stares morbidly into her baleful mirror, declaiming: "*Oh mirror!...I appeared in you like a distant shadow,*" prophesying the barmaid's strange, shadowy reflection in her own forbidding mirror.[38] Incarnating Mallarmé's exalted notion of poetic Purity, his anguished virgin chooses *non-being* (trope for death) by refusing her pre-ordained existence in an *im*pure world of blood and incest.[39] Thus insulated and incorruptible—as is all ideal Beauty—she mystically self-destructs, escaping into the poem itself by morphing into her mirror-*tombeau* (poem-tomb), a rhetorical Mallarméan object that in itself symbolizes absence.[40] In both poem and painting, static foregrounds imply mundane *mises en scene* while mirrored backgrounds reflect agitation, recalling the Mallarméan paradox in which stasis and action are in perpetual interaction. Like her poetic twin, Manet's barmaid stands alone, wholly absorbed in the Folies' frustrating but inviting mirror, hovering between past and present, between motion and rest—pictorially frozen in time and space, psychologically trapped in her own existential dilemma, unable to escape the imminent moral corruption

represented by the mirror's wolfish dandy who gazes down hungrily at the object of his desire.

Comparing the oppositive imagery used in Manet's carefully planned bivalence in the *Bar* to that of the elliptical dualism prized by Mallarmé, Michael Paul Driskle asks: "Could it be…that Manet shared the irrational desire of Mallarmé to place his work within a matrix of opposites and to conflate them…?[41]" Regarding the ambivalent opposition of absence-versus-presence *chez* Mallarmé, Julia Kristeva offers her experienced perception that *absence* is polyvalent for him—a meaningful paradox *par excellence*, a code word that reveals the existence of the subject.[42]" Viewed within the context of these remarks, the *Bar*'s imagery indeed argues for an antithetical conflict between absence/presence in its depicted plexus of thought-versus-action. Struck by the barmaid's physical stasis and physiognomic air of profound interiority, even the most casual beholder is startled to see the trickster-mirror's lost-profile that pictures her engaged in *exterior* activity! How is it possible for the young woman to calmly face us while interacting with the *client in absentia*? Like Janus, Manet's barmaid has two faces shown back to back but does she see the same thing whether she faces the present or the past? Just as the poet does not compress his implied "pictures" into a single moment—which, in terms of a painting, would require a separate work for each variation of a poet's scene—the *Bar* is more than a single moment in time. When art and/or literature venture into the subconscious world of dream, subjective time can move backward or forward or stand still while simultaneously embracing an observable world of images. A case in point: what better dialectical equivalent for the *Bar*'s duplicitous mirror than the juxtaposed reflections of the Folies crowd (in veridical time) and a lone, top-hatted genie summoned out of Mallarmé's Hegelian ether?

Manet's gift for rendering the internal quality of thought with sensuous form appears throughout his oeuvre, reaching its apogee in this final portrait.[43] Superficially the *Bar* appears to be a beautifully painted scene about Manet's favorite subject: a woman, alone or in a crowd dominated by men; inexplicably he chooses to conflate both situations in this mystifying picture. No one portrayed women, regardless of social origin, with more affection than did Manet, a frequent aesthetic in his oeuvre that culminates in the *Bar*'s conundrum. Three double portraits—*Argenteuil*, 1874, *In the Conservatory*, 1879, and *At Père Lathuille*, 1879—inspire gender-coded readings germane to the ambiguous couple portrayed in the *Bar*'s mirror. Relentless *boulevardier* and *flâneur* (probing observer), Manet is acutely aware that a woman's social status is dialectically linked to male power which generates the clearly visible tensions between these

couples. In each of the above paintings, a lone woman is shown seated near a self-assured man who not only invades her space but is psychologically and/or physically in control whereas she is literally marginalized. A clear reading of any of these uneasy relationships is difficult. A similar dis-ease is apparent in the illogical *tête à tête* miraged by the *Bar*'s unreliable mirror that piques the beholder's curiosity: is the middle-aged dandy flirting, ordering champagne or proposing a sexual rendez-vous? Notice, too, that the barmaid's vacant stare strongly conveys psychic withdrawal yet she leans forward – according to the mirror's rightward warp –to passively endure the brazen scrutiny of the looming male figure, emotional complexities plastically expressed by Manet in which the eye is led to "feel" as well as "see."

Reality is not the aesthetic goal sought by either artist. Refuting Horace's dictum that poetry should be "descriptive" like painting, Mallarmé argues that *suggesting* an object allows the poet to paint – *not* the object –but create the *effect* (impression) of it; essentially it is the *experience* of the object that matters, a notion that Wallace Fowlie sees as the major assumption of his aesthetics.[44] Mallarmé's desire to paint not the object, but the effect the object produces, is similar to the manner in which Manet's depiction of the *Bar*'s mirror is less concerned with precision than with evocation. At first, Manet's mirror adds to the illusion of real space but quickly breaks with his habitual "silence" (non-anecdotal content) by distorting its reflection: now we must look *into* it as well as at it, penetrating into the underlying world of poetry. Pascal Durand considers Mallarmé predisposed to be the theorist of Impressionism in that he tried to "paint" and "give impressions" in his early masterpieces: *Hérodiade* and *Faune*.[45] Hanson believes that "in using the operative verb *to paint*, Mallarmé demonstrates how closely he relates the methods of the two arts.[46]" In a newspaper interview with Jules Huret who asked why poetic obscurity was necessary, he replied: "*Naming* the object suppresses three-quarters of the pleasure of the poem …to *suggest* it, there's the dream..."[47] (italics in the original text). The poet's remarkable article in defense of Manet's art and that of his friends, "*The Impressionists and Edouard Manet*," appeared in 1876, translated into English by his London publisher. Undoubtedly informed by their conversations on art, Mallarmé writes in terms that sketch the close links between his art and Impressionism: he points out "*l'esprit de simplification chez Manet*," praising this "new art" because there are points of similarity between avant-garde painting and his own reductive style of poetry.[48] Indeed, Manet's expressive "shorthand" style consists of loose brushstrokes, flattened shadow-less volumes and polar contrasts between light and dark

tones that visually create an adumbrated *effect* of what he sees rather than a slavish copy of the subject.[49]

The *Bar*'s partially sensed meaning resonates with Mallarmé's *procédé poétique*. If one were as accustomed to the poet's trove of polyvalent symbols as was Manet, the whitish smears on the *Bar*'s mirror would conjure up the *hazy* quality associated with smoke with all of its Mallarméan connotations: by extension, both the blurred back view of the woman and the customer's smoke-smeared reflection belong to his lexicon of symbolically weighted images such as cigar-smoke, fogs, and mists. "What is poetry?" asks Mallarmé; he replies: "A puff of smoke into which the soul entirely withdraws." He is quoting himself from "*All the soul summed up/ When we slowly expel it/ In many rings of smoke/ Till other rings annul it*," a sonnet in which a series of fleeting, dissolving images evoke vanishing rings of cigar smoke that symbolize poetic dreaming, a metaphoric concept identified with concentrated thought so intense that one loses track of time.

That Manet understood Mallarmé's zen-like persona is undeniable given his expressionistic portrait of the dreamy, cigar-smoking poet, an ethereal presence that George Bataille sees as the "sublime essence of poetry" where "*literature and art are fused forever*…(an image) *signifying that which Mallarmé signifies*"[50] (emphasis added). Manet's insinuated swirls of tobacco smoke on the mirror's surface not only echo the barmaid's air of reverie but in themselves constitute an affective link to the cigar-smoking poet. Painted with delicious spontaneity in 1876, we see the poet lounging, holding a lighted cigar instead of a pen, its smoke spiraling upwards as one hand rests on an open book of poetry, his averted gaze distanced in self-absorption.[51] A "ravishing painting whose real subject may be the painter's bliss in the poet's company," writes Peter Schjeldahl.[52] Painted just six years later, the Folies' barmaid unmistakably re-presents Mallarmé's ethereal presence—portrayed alone in her own smoke-filled alcove, deeply immersed in reverie, her eyes dense with thought, focused towards the right as are Mallarmé's.

In that same year, Manet and Mallarmé had co-created the luxurious edition of "*The Afternoon of a Faun*." Keep in mind that before they met the well-read Manet would have been acquainted with the *Faun* and his poetic cousin, *Herodiade*, dramatic poems with lofty and sensual attractions in which mirrors and reflective surfaces of calm water and frozen fountains function as liberating portals for the poet's favorite paradoxes: inside-outside, dream-reality, secrecy-disclosure. He begins the faun's afternoon with the young satyr's sudden awakening from a sexual dream world under the impression that something wonderful, dreamy and

salubrious has happened—befuddled, he wonders aloud: "Did I love a dream?"[53] In the exquisite monologue that follows, he recounts his clumsy violation of one of two water nymphs caught sleeping nearby in a bank of reeds.[54] Quickly eluding the faun's clutches, both disappear into their calm water-world, a "liquefied mirror" par excellence. *D'après le romanticisme*, he unfolds in the denouement as a poet-faun who, looking down at the now empty bed of reeds, pensively bids adieu to the absent pair: "Couple, farewell. I shall see *the shadow* you became" (italics added), eerily predicting the *Bar*'s shadowy image of its own elusive "couple." The *Bar*'s iconography does indeed concentrate on two female figures but both are presumed to be reflections of the same woman, albeit the looking glass's smoke-smeared lost profile barely resembles the elegant young woman who is facing us because—reflected from the back––she is almost unrecognizable as the rumpled, plumper figure without pearl drop earrings who appears to shrink under the domineering gaze of the goateed customer clutching his cane. (Are we invited to imagine his cane to be a metaphorical phallus?) His lust is almost palpable, conveyed by an avid stare which reprises the frustrated desire of the priapic faun who himself tried in vain to seize Venus the diva herself: "*Etna!…I take hold of the queen!*" Despite the metonymic apostrophe, "*Etna!*," the goddess fails to appear, leaving the rutting satyr thwarted, a scene graphically recaptured in the *Bar*'s mirror where a fully clothed, modern young Venus eludes the grasp of the civilized version of Mallarmé's anthropomorphic faun.

In spite of the above ideational affinities, Manet and Mallarmé are not to be viewed as twin mirrors of the mind in this study. Nevertheless, there is a perceived network of relationships whereby reading the one helps decode the iconology of the other. Like a poem by Mallarmé, the *Bar* expresses more than one thing at a time – it takes time for the eye to linger over its glowing colors, dazzling virtuosity and numerous forms. Standing before the imposing painting that hangs today in London's Courtauld Institute Galleries, we feel the same psychological need for a resolution of its incoherencies as did the 1883 Salon beholder.[55] Aware of the impossible juxtaposition of the mirrored couple, our mesmerized gaze moves back and forth, trying to gauge the slippage between the customer's reflection and his disappearance from the frontal plane. In other words, we become visually and emotionally involved in the *Bar*'s oscillation of interest between thing and thought, eager to lose ourselves in the hypnotic experience of contemplating the jarring discontinuities of its mirror and looking back again at *nothing*, just *emptiness*.[56] Thus the *Bar*'s topography concomitantly recreates Mallarmé's favorite paradoxes: reality/dream,

absence/presence, exterior/interior, sacred/profane, allusion/description. Manet, working closely with him as his illustrator, had to have discussed ideological concepts with the poet during those ten years of conversation, thereby glossing his symbolist imaginings and complex theories. The poet, for his part, developed a critical understanding of modern painting from Manet's conviction that reality is what the painter sees *à travers ses yeux*. "The eye should forget all else it has seen, and learn anew from the lesson before it."[57]

Whether an ambiguous formal element or classical locus of vanitas, mirrors figure regularly in Manet's oeuvre. The *Bar*'s eloquent mirror offers us his final version: an elegant synthesis of art and poetry intensified by his genius for penetrating the world of thought, superbly illustrated by the deeply engrossed barmaid, so absorbed in what she is thinking and feeling that she is unaware of all else. As the picture's enigmatic imagery took shape in 1881-82, *locomotor ataxia* began to gradually immobilize the artist's movements until he was no longer able to paint while standing due to his painful leg. In 1882, the poet again asked the ailing Manet to illustrate a poem for his newest collection, but his friend was far too ill. Two years after Manet's untimely death, Mallarmé wrote to Paul Verlaine lamenting the loss of "my dear Manet, whom, for ten years, I saw every day and whose absence today strikes me as impossible!"[58] (exclamatory stress in the original). Thus informed by the poet himself, we can safely surmise that the constant presence of Mallarmé, "genius of mirrors," encouraged Manet's Velásquez-like exploration of the disorienting power of mirrors, gently distracting as well as comforting his pain-racked friend. [59] If we flash back to his 1876 article on Manet's art, we are reminded that he had quoted Manet's words: "Each work should be a *new creation of the mind*[60]" (emphasis added). While undoubtedly applauding Manet's highly innovative creation, Mallarmé could not have been blind to the *Bar*'s subjacent realm of fantasy, dream, and mystery that visually reprises his own oneiric concepts, labyrinthine processes and morbid obsession with mirrors.

Given the ten-year span of their interactive relationship, it is not surprising that Manet's *Bar* is an art-object which conflates painting and poetry. Liberating forces, these two men of genius created works unlike anything that had come before them. Manet's premature death at the age of fifty-one, on April 30, 1883, abruptly ended the artistic synergism that flowed between them.[61] Today, released by the beholder's own imagination, Manet's magisterial painting may be viewed as a transcription of *ut poesis pictura*—from one medium by another—one that "paints, not the object, but the effect" of *Herodiade* and the *Faun*, poems

which compass Mallarmé's most cherished ideations: Dream, Beauty, and Ideal. That diaphanous allusions to these thematics subtly permeate the splendid, recondite imagery concocted by Manet for his last Salon entry, is the crux of the argument posited throughout this study. Ultimately, the entire truth concerning Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is beyond our knowledge—it is a painting that transcends time and place—it is universal.

List of Illustrations

Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881-82, Oil on canvas, 96 x 130 cm, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, P.1934.SC.234.

Notes

[1] "*You were his best friend and he loved you tenderly*." Michael Pakenham. "Mallarmé/Manet: A Cult of Friendship and Admiration" *magazine littéraire* 368 (1998) 37-40.

[2] The painting was exhibited at the Paris Salon in May, 1882.

[3] Rennselaer W. Lee, "*Ut pictura poesis*: the Humanistic Theory of Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 22 (1940): 196.

[4] Ibid, 196.

[5] A phrase suggested by the title of Jerry Salzer's art criticisms published in 2003. *Seeing Out Loud* (Lennox, Massachusetts, 2003).

[6] In 1957, Marcel Duchamp's reliance on the beholder anticipated this essay: "All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator (deciphers and interprets) its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act." Jonathan Keats, "The Winnerless Game," *Art&Antiques* (Summer 2009): 72-76.

[7] Manet preferred his neighborhood *Café Guerbois* where he attracted a group of ardent young admirers—artists, poets, writers, engravers—who saw him as the non-conformist leader that would lead to artistic freedom for all of them.

[8] Françoise Cachin notes that the title is taken from a stanza of Zacharie Astruc's poem dedicated to the painting, "*Olympia, la fille des Isles*," which Manet attached to the canvas. Cachin, *Manet* (Paris: Découvertes Gallimard, 1983), 56-58.

[9] In *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Charles Baudelaire urges his model artist to be "of the moment," to extract "the ephemeral and transitory, the poetic and eternal" qualities of his own age from everyday life. *Écrits sur l'art,* Francis Moulinat, ed. (La Flèche: Le Livre de Poche, 1992-99), 507.

[10] In his 1876 essay, Mallarmé thus perfectly defines Manet's early non-academic pictures. Jean Harris. "A Little-known Essay on Manet by Mallarmé" *The Art Bulletin* (1964): 559-563.

[11] Cachin 15. "*Il faut être de son temps*" was Manet's aesthetic mantra: he refused to compromise in spite of his yearning for Salon approval.

[12] Ibid. 33-36. Baudelaire's symbolist poems and prose had a significant impact on Manet's early work, e. g., *La Musique aux Tuileries*, 1860, a collective portrait of Manet's own elegant bourgeois milieu illustrating Baudelaires's idealized "*héroisme de la vie moderne*." The outdoor setting illustrates Manet's elliptical technique of painting a crowd with splotches of colors while retaining the character of an *esquisse* that announced the Impressionist movement.
[13] Charles Rosen. "Mallarmé the Magnificent" *The New York Times Review of Books* (May 20, 1999), 42-47.
[14] Mallarmé taught English in Paris at the lycée Fontanes for boys (today the lycée Condorcet.)
[15] Eric Darragon, Manet's most recent biographer, writes at length about the importance of their conversations on art. "One can well imagine their talks," he muses, which "must have been directed towards new forms of representation." (My translation.) *Manet* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1989), 247.
[16] Harry Rand. *Manet's Contemplation at the Gare Saint-Lazare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 93.
[17] Anne Coffin Hanson. *Manet and the Modern Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 171.
[18] Rosen, 42.
[19] Mirrors are a recurrent theme in Mallarmé's poetry, perfect symbols for his contemplation of the metaphysical universe, often inducing hallucinations—*Hérodiade*'s Medusizing mirror is pivotal in this essay.
[20] Napoleon III's *Préfet de la Seine* between 1853 and 1870, "Baron" Georges Haussmann directed work that indiscriminately razed the oldest and poorest neighborhoods to make way for large apartment buildings designed to house the well-to-do bourgeoisie, transforming narrow Paris streets into wide boulevards, e. g. *Champs-Élysées*, and landscaped spacious as well as small public parks popular with all social classes.
[21] Manet chose to show, not the Folies crowd, but one of the three bars in the circular promenade described by Guy de Maupassant in his novel *Bel Ami*. T. J. Clark, *Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 240.
[22] Indeed, there was "*no mirror in the studio*" writes Jacques-Émile Blanche who visited Manet's atelier and saw his model posed "behind a table full of liqueurs, champagne and '*victuailles.*' " He admired the artist's "masterful simplifications, condensed format, vivid colors and close values" developed imaginatively in the *Bar* solely from prototype sketches of a typical bar made previously at the Folies. (My translation.) Durand, 380.
[23] Hoping to supplement his meager teacher's income, Mallarmé nursed his one-man publication through eight editions until its demise at the end of 1875.
[24] Linda Nochlin believes that Manet's provocative habit of physical fragmentation (for example: the cut off mid-leg of the female trapezist in the *Bar*) compares with poetry's "synecdoche," or substitution of a part for the whole. "A Thoroughly Modern Masked Ball" *Art in America* (1983): 188-201.
[25] In a letter to his London publisher Arthur O'Shaughnessy, Mallarmé discussed his plan for a great poetry, music and dance festival hoping to include Dare whom

he greatly admired. Stéphane Mallarmé. *Correspondence, 1871-1885* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 159.
[26] Jane Mayo Roos. *The Painter's Poet and His Impressionist Circle* (New York: The Studley Press, 1999), 58.
[27] Cachin 61. Jules Claretie attacked his *Olympia* seven years after its "scandalous" début.
[28] Ibid., 2. "Je *rends aussi simplement que possible les choses que je vois.* (…) *J'ai fait ce que j'ai vu*." Manet's artistic quotations are few and far between, lacking coherence when applied to a particular painting as Rand observes in his *Manet's Meditation,* 2.
[29] Alluding to Manet as a blond *chêvre-pied*, Mallarmé compares the painter's impulsive nature to that of his impetuous satyr symbolizing the philosopher-poet who chases elusive dreams. Stéphane Mallarmé. *L'Écrits sur l'art*, Michel Draguet, ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 325.
[30] He defined "purified" language as a language worthy of Poetry alone, one cleansed of the ordinary, slipshod meanings it has in daily life. Rosen, 42.
[31]Mallarmé was not a snob but felt that his Tuesday night audience of poets and friends (*les mardiste*s), an eclectic group of admiring disciples, was far more likely to understand his linguistic strategies.
[32] Rosemary Lloyd stresses Mallarmé's "tight braiding of inner and outer worlds" and "his juxtaposition of an image with some aspect or other of nature," in her book *Mallarmé: The Poet and His Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 172.
[33] Mallarmé "denied… that his poems were difficult." He felt that "his poetry gave at least a satisfactory surface meaning at once" if he were read properly instead of by "one who scans a poem as if he were reading a newspaper." Rosen, 43. Mallarmé writes: "I use the same words that the Bourgeois read every morning (in the newspaper). But *voilà*…if he comes upon them again in my poem, he does not understand them any more. It is because they have been rewritten by a poet" (my translation). Durand, 16.
[34] Mallarmé has an extraordinary belief in poetry which for him takes the place of love because he sees it as beauty in love with itself. Fowlie, 108.
[35] T. J. Clark, 244. "If the woman is selling herself, she is the modern fille."
[36] The frontal zone is quiet, stable and filled with feminine-gendered objects in the French language: woman, roses, bottles, and mandarins while the rear zone is dominated by male-gendered nouns: flâneur, dandy, spectacle and *chapeaux de haute forme*.
[37] While teaching in Tournon during 1864 and later in Besançon, Mallarmé created the cold *Hérodiade* who embodies her wintry origins, written at night, and her poetic cousin, the sun-drenched *Faune*, was "born" when Théodore de Banville requested a dramatic piece for the *Comédie-Française* which refused it for lack of "anecdotal interest demanded by the public."
[38] The nineteenth century's incendiary subject of *Hérodiade* inspired Flaubert's *Salammbo*, Moreau's famed symbolist watercolor, Massenet's opera *Hérodiade*,

Wilde's *Salome* (written in French), Strauss's opera, *Salome* and Mallarmé's own unfinished poem: "*Les Noces d'Hérodiade."*
[39] Guy Michaud describes *Hérodiade* as a "long-cherished theme" of "the heroine whose thirst for purity makes her reject life, the perfect symbol of Mallarmé's poetry." Thus, she poses the essential problem on the nature of life and death; in writing Hérodiade, "Mallarmé caught a glimpse of a terrible truth: Beauty is death, or at least something analogous…" *Mallarmé,* Trans. Marie Collins and Bertha Humez. (New York: New York University Press, 1965) 33-37.
[40] Mallarmé wrote metaphorical *tombeau* sonnets dedicated to Baudelaire, Poe, Verlaine and his deceased son, Anatole, based upon a lofty if conventional poetic structure, that of achieving immortality through poetry, known as *exegi monumentum.*
[41] Michael Paul Driskel's probing insight is from his essay in *12 Views of Manet's Bar.* Bradford R. Collins, ed. (Princetion, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 159.
[42] Multiple implications linked to Mallarméan absence are highly significant for Julia Kristeva in her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Trans. M. Wallear. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 214.
[43] Moodiness, conflicted thought, and intellectual intensity are patently visible in the three double portraits discussed above, as well as in the striking portraits of Berthe Morisot: *Le Balcon, Le Repos, Le Portrait de Berthe Morisot étendué, and Berthe Morisot aux bouquet de violettes* among others. Rand writes in his *Manet's Contemplation* that "…Manet's art strives to penetrate to a world of thought that is perfectly immaterial, replete with emotions and ideas." 8.
[44] Wallace Fowlie. *Mallarmé* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962), 17.
[45] Pascal Durand. *Poésies de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Saint Armand (Cher): Gallimard, 1998), 179.
[46] Anne Coffin Hanson. *Édouard Manet, 1832-1883* (Philadelphia: Falcon Press, 1966),19, n. 6.
[47] *Oeuvres Complètes de Stephane Mallarmé*, Henri Chamard and G. Jean-Aubry, eds. (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1945), 869.
[48] Darragon, 247-250.
[49] Although a few contemporary critics mentioned his light-filled canvases and daubed applications of color, Manet was not an adherent of *plein aire* painting,
[50] George Bataille. *Oeuvres Complètes: Manet* (Mayenne: Imprimerie Floch, 1993), 161.
[51] André Gide wrote that "near him…you touched the reality of thought." "It is this invisible consciousness, the very reality of thought, that Manet's portrait conveys," writes Roos in *A Painter's Poet,* 53, n. 25.
[52] Peter Schjeldahl. *Let's See: writings on art from the New Yorker* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 98.
[53] The Faun made his début in 1865 as a mere adolescent full of sensual desire that metaphorically links him to poet's eroticism in his creative life as a practicing poet.
[54] The "older" sprite "gives in" but the younger, less "experienced" sprite resists.

[55] Such was my unforgettable experience of the *Bar* as I stood before it in London, August 2002.
[56] Michaud 54. "To live (in accordance with the Hegelian ideal) is to empty oneself into *nothingness*…One must be the place where the Mind discovers and becomes conscious of itself, *as in a mirror*" (italics added).
[57] Mallarmé's *Écrits sur l'art*, 308. Hanson, *Manet and the Modern Tradition,* 208, n. 15.
[58] Ibid., 40. Mallarmé's letter to Verlaine was dated November 16, 1885.
[59] Referring to Mallarmé, Walter Benjamin scribbled this provocative remark on one of the file cards he compiled for his vast study of mirrored arcades. *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, England: Harvard University Press, 1971) 538.
[60] "*Les Impressionnistes et Édouard Manet*," is an insightful argument written 1876 in defense of *la nouvelle peinture*. Mallarmé's *Écrits sur l'art*, Durand, 308.
[61] Manet was interred in Paris's Passy cemetery on May 3, 1883. On February 4, 1884, eight of Manet's Salon paintings were auctioned; the *Bar* was bought for 5,850 francs by Émmanuel Chabrier, composer and friend.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FROM "FUOCO" TO "NOTTURNO" THE INTERPRETATION OF LIGHT AND SHADE IN D'ANNUNZIO'S WORK BY HIS FRIENDS AMONG ITALIAN SYMBOLIST ILLUSTRATORS

ANNA MAZZANTI

Illustrations appear as the faithful accompaniment to the poetry and prose of Gabriele D'Annunzio, Italy's most celebrated decadent writer. With the help of a few significant examples, I shall try to offer a preliminary key for deciphering the meaning of light (*fuoco*) and shade (*notturno*) in the illustrations to D'Annunzio's literary work. In his promotion of the arts, "the Poet" (only one of his many pseudonyms) gave pride of place to the lavish publication of his work and called the art book the product of a "*forgiatore decadente*" (decadent craftsman).

The art book provides a rare example of the organic contamination between image and word during the resurgence of literary illustration that occurred from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Therefore we have chosen examples of *gesamtkunstwerk*, for their combination, or better yet, for their unification, of poetry, words and fonts, materials (paper and colour), and the use of various techniques for the design and printing of the illustrations, as most representative of the Symbolist dichotomy of light and shade. These books represent the best of the most cultivated and enlightened in Italian publishing – from Danesi to Paggi and from Treves to Zanichelli—and offer some of the finest examples of Italian graphic art from the period.[1]

It seems best to start with a discussion of a French contributor, Odilon Redon, recognized as the undisputed Symbolist master of black and white. His *noirs,* as charcoal drawings, heighten the expressive potential of the designs, enriching them with sfumato and evanescent effects that resonated with the largely Francophone idealist and aristocratic circles in

Rome and elsewhere in Italy.[2] Meditating on his inspirational motives in *Á soi-mēme*, Redon outlined the fundamentals of Symbolist drawing, which I will compare with the Italian modernist approach.

In this period drawing was no longer identified with the academic practice of "objectively formulating the representation of things".[3] Nearly all the Symbolist artists started with an objective and naturalistic enquiry and then went beyond positivist objectivism, to surrender to "the fascination of chiaroscuro and of the indeterminate."[4] It is no accident that this is the same period in which the myth of Leonardo was growing because "he owes the lines and shadows his mystery and the fecundity of charm that rouses the soul"[5] to his artistry, as did Rembrandt whom Redon also valued highly. In his appreciation of the drawing of the seventeenth-century Dutch master, Redon contends that Rembrandt has understood "the vision of the mysterious world of shadows."[6] Therefore "black is a more powerful spiritual agent than beautiful colour" as Redon maintained in his *Confidances d'artiste*. He learned from Rembrandt[7] as was made apparent in the first Exposition International de Blanc et Noir, held at the Louvre in April 1885. The drawings at the Exposition were presented as "le travail intime et caché de chaque artiste" ("the intimate and hidden work of each artist").[8]

The same year in Rome, they conceived of the idea of an *edictio picta* of D'Annunzio's poetry, *Isaotta Guttadàuro*, the most elegant example of *ut pictura poesis* ever realized in Italy. It was published in time for Christmas 1886 by La Tribuna with monochromatic heliogravures, that were selected "in a competition in burin and quill feather on linen paper,"[9] by the Danesi brothers. Eight marginal artists competed, all members of the group *In Arte Libertas*, proposing alternative styles to the predominant positivism of the official exhibitions. While they were largely xenophobic, the organizers were nevertheless interested in eclectic trends explored among the foreign artists living in Rome: from Alma Tadema to Leighton, from Burne-Jones to Böcklin. They were also attentive to the literary opinions of those who moved between Via Margutta and the Caffè Greco, from the *trattorias* of Rome to the most fashionable salons, as described in "Cronache del Caffè Greco": the diary published by Diego Angelione, one of the group.[10] The *literati* of this *circolo/cenacolo* were Enrico Nencioni, Carlo Placci, Gegè Primoli, Angelo Conti, Adolfo De Bosis, and D'Annunzio himself. In the early 1880s they were the first to introduce Rome and Italy to the Pre-Raphaelite movement (while the painter Nino Costa provided contact with it through his direct relationship with English painters and critics such as Olivia Rossetti Agresti, the niece of Dante Gabriel, Elihu Vedder, William Blake Richmond, Edith and Matthew

Ridley Corbett, George Howard, and the Stillmans[11]) and to evocative French poetry, another vehicle by which knowledge of Anglo-Saxon Pre-Raphaelitism spread.[12] Art and literature were deeply intertwined. One of the dissident artists, the Roman Giuseppe Cellini, like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, was both an artist and poet.

Fig. 15-1. Giuseppe Cellini, "Donna Francesca, XII," illustration for *Isaotta Guattadauro*, 1886

They shared with Redon a certain tension in their attitude toward "evocative art" that "irradiates things towards dreams" aspiring to a "freer and more radiant" form of expression, music, referring "to the mysterious play of shadows and the rhythm of lines conceived in the mind"[13] while they were, at the same time, aware of tradition. "I have said nothing that has not already been largely put forward by Albrecht Dürer,"[14] wrote Redon.

The poems of D'Annunzio, as illustrated throughout the *Isaotta,* also recall the work of earlier master engravers, both in the use of chiaroscuro and in the Neoplatonic and Renaissance clarity that characterizes both text and illustrations. Two approaches appear in the illustrated *Isaotta*, both faces of Italian Symbolist sensibility with international parallels: one apparent in the illustrations by Sartorio, Cellini, and Ricci (Figs. 15-1-2), steeped in light, with white and pale Renaissance beauty in the style of Botticelli and Poliziano; the other, followed by Cabianca, De Maria, and partly by the eclectic Sartorio (Fig. 15-3), is distinctive for chiaroscuro drawn from nature and for the expressive line in the manner of Dürer, Rembrandt and Goya. In Rembrandt especially Redon glimpses "the great human element of the infinity of our ecstasy. He has given a moral life to shadow."[15]

But unlike Redon, the illustrators of D'Annunzio did not aspire to his "metaphorical" goals; their evocative art, while reflecting a sophisticated visionary sensibility, is firmly bound to the text even when this describes

Fig.15-2. Alfredo Ricci, "Il dolce grappolo," illustration for *Isaotta Guattadauro*, 1886

mysterious forces inherent in the landscape and the monstrously vivid, such as the "limo escon lagni" and "all'aria forme truci assume"[16] (*Alunna*) (Fig. 15-4); or when the bodies in the flight of the silent peacocks (*Eliana*) or of "taciturn" (*taciti*) swans (*Romanza*) are enclosed/ trapped by mysterious and potent charms, sexual ferment and human trembling[17](Fig. 15-5). They never go beyond the spiritual naturalism that characterizes Symbolism in Italy.[18] The "abstract line" in "chiaroscuro" in Redon "sacrifices visible logic" giving visibility to the indeterminate world evoked by Baudelaire and Flaubert, from *Les Fleurs du Male* (1890) to *La tentation de saint Antoine.*[19]

However, D'Annunzio cannot be compared to Flaubert or Baudelaire, or even to Huysmans. *Isaotta* is an organic work of text and image whose

Fig.15-3. Vicenzo Cabianca, "Morgana," illustration for *Isaotta Guttadauro*, 1886

illustrators indulge the Poet's imagination in its exuberant character which aspires to surprise, to dominate with its "prehensile and voracious capacity for re-elaboration"[20] in frenetic motion between the Pre-Raphaelite and Byzantine luminosity on one hand and the obscure, Ossianic visions on the other. The most visionary artists of *Isaotta*, from Mario De Maria to

Fig.15-4. Mario de Maria, *Eliana,* illustration for *Isaotta Guttadauro*, 1886

Vincenzo Cabianca, stay very close to the text, symbolic and descriptive at the same time. Thus the illustration is still dependent on the text and does

not reach the symbiotic function that will take place in D'Annunzio's later work. The model for *Isaotta* was not the neo-medieval book of the Art and Crafts movement,[21] despite the fact that the poem is populated with numerous Lady Liliths, such as "Viviana," a "frigid pre-Raphaelite virgin." The book was rather modeled after elegant Parisian editions of contemporary works for example of the Quantin Press or Calamann Levy. It is difficult to discern how much the style of the poet was influenced by the artists who illustrated his verses. Likewise illustrators could have drawn inspiration from D'Annunzio's poems published separately in Roman journals between 1882 and 1885. For example as early as 1885, Alfredo Ricci painted maidens stricken with the "Quattrocento fever" (*delirio quattrocentista*), as described by Angelo Conti,[22] the critic and aesthete friend of D'Annunzio who will later become the promoter of the illustrated *Isaotta.* The maidens are shown praying, dressed in white, [their "eyes with long, dark lashes" ("con gli occhi dalle lunghe ciglia, chini"), features that anticipate those in *Isaotta* and were pervaded with mysticism and eclectic references from Byzantium and from Jewish rituals that were mixed with allusions to the art of Donatello and Botticelli. Conti describes the women of Ricci as being under the influence of music from a harmonium. This instrument makes a sound similar to "the sacred and mysterious voice of the organ, which seems to be the language of infinity," with which the "white and taciturn" harpist of Sartoria also seems to harmonize with the poem "Vas spirituale". To this rhythm the bishop in front of her moves his "silver incense burner where the myrrh and benzoin smoulder."[23]

Thus, according to critics Tamassia Marzarotto, Gianni Oliva,[24] and more recently Giuliana Pieri, D'Annunzio's allusion to the Renaissance derives from an "approximative" (Ugo Ojetti in *La Bibbia*, 1913) understanding of pre-Raphaelitism, and it was quite different from the original, deriving from the languid interpretative sensibility of the literary figures of Carlo Placci and Enrico Nencioni.[25] Placci in 1882 and Nencioni in 1884, had written pioneering studies in Italy, respectively on Rossetti the poet and on Burne-Jones's style as received in Rome through *Le peinture anglaise* by Ernest Chesneau (1882).[26] Enrico Nencioni describes the *House of Life* by Rossetti as it looks like an *Isaotta* with "beautiful images and delightful ghosts,"[27] a "magical house where an enchanting succession of fragrant flowering gardens and silent shaded rooms, bubbling fountains and the music of violas and lutes alternate." The same sfumato atmosphere and indeterminate settings characterize the *Isaotta*'s illustrations: "bianche nudità," "pallori d'alabastro" and "biondi capi" stand out from the shade in combination with hybrids of Rossetti's red-

heads and modern "attitudes and expressions"—as D'Annunzio noted—of Greek priestesses with the alabaster faces from Alma Tadema.[28] Certainly the *artifex additus artifici* D'Annunzio forged images in complicity with the artists. Also the adoption of the recently invented polychrome and monochromatic heliogravure (invented in 1879 in Austria) emphasized the visionary and symbolic nature of the writing. The sfumato, as Gianni Oliva has observed, stands out in the coloured monochrome, stressing the importance of depicting a faded world, projected in a quasi-metaphysical and a temporal dimension and sending out muted images and sounds. This together with the expressive potentiality of the line, which "sorge, s'interrompe, s'avviluppa, s'inchina, si svolge, s'avanza, si profonda" was described by Giuseppe Cellini in his essay "Per la Bellezza."[29] It is not by chance that the scenes giving birth to parasites and strange beings are all in black and white in the wake of international visionary graphic masters from Rops to Redon. While settings for pale female beauties, sensual bodies and evanescent backgrounds are in shades of brown and red, recalling Rossetti's women, or rust, "one of those colours," as D'Annunzio described in "Piacere," "considered beautiful, found in the paintings of the Primitives and in those of Dante Gabriel Rossetti."[30]

Sartorio, by contrast, chose a delicate blue pattern to unite the "crowding of stars" in "Ballata VI" with the nature of the Pre-Raphaelite beauty. In short, the illustrations of the *Isaotta* "enrich and increase the fascination of the text:" it is in itself an *artifex additus artifici* that springs forth from the interweaving of art and life, often at the foundation of the contaminations on which this symbolism feeds. The illustrations also share many similarities in the bichrome graphics with the dilettante photography produced at the time in Rome by figures ranging from Gegè Primoli to Gabrielle Hebert.

Huysmans, for example, includes art criticism in his novel and draws inspiration from his contemporaries, including the then unknown Redon, while D'Annunzio adopts more exaggerated contaminations, in his interchange between fiction and *action de présence*. He, like Huysmans, is not only inspired by art, he promotes it, as does Andrea Sperelli. Sperelli, D'Annunzio's alter ego and the main character in "Piacere" (1889), wrote poems such as *Isaotta* and gained possession of the engraving *Zodiaco* signed "Sperelli calcographus" whereas in reality it was an engraving by Sartorio (Fig. 15-5). This engraving was deliberately displayed in Via del Babuino Gallery before the publication of the novel. Elena Muti is depicted so as to be almost interchangeable with the *Donna Clara* (Fig. 15-12) in *Isaotta.* She is represented with chiaroscuro leaving "luminous the face, shoulders and arms," like the Pre-Raphaelite greyhound Famulus

"on slender paws." The result was a hybrid between original and counterfeit, as it was probably a retouched photoengraving showing again how far D'Annunzio aimed for 'fidelity' in visual artistic interpretations, in which he recognized his second calling.

From the time of *Isaotta* D'Annunzio advanced his elitist and artificial 'promotion of the arts' with no concern for the general public (and indeed the *edictio picta* was a commercial failure, even though the subscribers of the journal, *The Tribune,* were offered a special price). Light and shade were therefore also reflected in the positive and negative aspects of its reception.

There are substantial differences in *Isaotta* and other repertories of contemporary illustration, such as the Amsterdam Bible (printed with intagliotipia in Italy in the early 1900s, though the project dated back to the early 1880s and was the fruit of "very different temperaments and tendencies" as Vittorio Pica observed,)[31] or even the Arts and Crafts volumes of William Morris, who favored the layout of the medieval codex. Not even in the Pre-Raphaelite incunabula of the Amsterdam Bible are we able to see such variety of tonality as in the monochromes of *Isaotta*, suggesting there was symbolic value in the chromatic choices, as has already been discussed.[32]

Only Sartorio showed an interest in calligraphy in relation to the overall design, although the calligraphy remained rigidly distinct until its organic integration in his written and illustrated poem *Sibilla* (Fig. 15-7). It appeared between 1912 and 1922 when lithography and xylography made such advances in Italy, for example in the periodical *L'Eroica* (from Genova), which followed models of exquisite geometric Art Deco.[33] Due in part to the woodcut technique, the late Pre-Raphaelite style is distilled in synthetic contour marks which also connote the typographic characters while the echoes of the precious D'Annunzianian hendecasyllables are expressed in a less emphatic inferior metric measure like the *novenario* and *ottonario*.

Pre-Raphaelite motifs are evident in the cover of the *Isaotta* by the Anglophile Giuseppe Cellini. Decorated in black and red; it mimics the refined English style, while also reworking Italian Renaissance models. Cellini persevered in this neo-renaissance vein in *Convito*, the Roman magazine that championed Symbolist aestheticism in the 1890s in Italy. The magazine was a bulwark of the new renaissance and was pitted against the barbarism of the crepuscular maudit, the insistent and atmospheric chiaroscuro that had pervaded the *Isaotta* with its "mysterious

Fig. 15-5. Giulio Aristide Sartorio*, Zodiaco,* 1889

vapours of incense," or in a Goncourt-style *Maison d'un artiste*, or in Flaubert's *Salammbò* and Edgar Alan Poe's "The Philosophy of Furniture*"*. It was D'Annunzio himself who discouraged covers "in colour, with figures reminiscent of Burne-Jones," in favour of animated emblems such as the mountain cockerel and the stag in the title-page of "alle Pleiadi e ai Fati" and in the poems *Maia* from the *Laudi*. In fact it was noted all figures were to be discouraged because too much symbolism "is tiresome." Indeed Cellini's contribution to the *Allegoria dell'autunno*, published in 1895 by Paggi in Florence was limited to the depiction of a

Fig.15-6. Aldolfo De Carolis, illustration for Francesca da Rimini

tree stump accompanying the motto, "Multa Renascentur*",* as a prelude to D'Annunzio's neo-Renaissance enthusiasm and to the parallel interest in graphics founded on a renewed thickness of the woodcut line, freed of chiaroscuro. The interactive and concrete relationship was being built with the decorator leading to the creation of the real art object, the "completely ornate" book which appeared in 1902 with the *Laudi:* "our old dream of the *Edictio Picta* crowned," as D'Annunzio wrote to Cellini.[34]

However, credit for the revival of woodcuts in Italy is due to another of D'Annunzio's collaborators, Adolfo De Carolis. The artist produced a powerful and innovative graphic language, in an allegorical and Michelangelesque vein, in which D'Annunzio discerned his own classicist and vitalist rebirth so that he commissioned De Carolis to illustrate the popular and better known editions of the *Laudi* between 1906 and 1912. Having met in Florence in 1901, they followed the same 'new renaissance' route in the *Francesca da Rimini* (Fig. 15-6), a scenic drama that De Carolis illustrated as his first commission from the poet. This appeared after the De Carolis's illustrations still made in the Pre-Raphaelite style for the Concorso Alinari of the *Divina Commedia* (1900-1901), a vademecum of Italian Symbolist graphic design, modeled after the Amsterdam Bible though more restricted to Italian artists.[35]

Fig.15-7. Giulio Aristide Sartorio*, Sibilla*, 1912-22

The stylistic novelties developed for the *Francesca* were based on a renewed synthetic linearity (somewhat in the Modern style) with which the artist reinterpreted the architectural layout of the neo-renaissance and Pre-Raphaelite page in the ordinary dialogue between text and image as seen in a repertory of cornices, initials and finials in the sixteenth-century manner of Ugo da Carpi.[36] D'Annunzio's request for "linear drawings, in outline" as opposed to the previous ambiguous *sfumatura* of the Symbolists, was influenced by Sartorio's re-reading of English Pre-Raphaelitism after his visit to the London studios of Burne-Jones and Morris in 1893, which inspired his famous articles for the *Convito*.[37] The formal purity of De Carolis's woodcuts is evident in this 'paleotype' book as D'Annunzio called the illustrated *Francesca*, which resembled the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499. In his house in Fiesole, the poet owned a rare copy of the celebrated Venetian incunabulum of 1499, and was fascinated by its mysterious antiquarian allure. However, there was a large difference between the formal purity of the woodcuts technique in the *Laudi* illustrated by De Carolis of 1906-1912 and the first edition illustrated by Cellini[38]. During this time De Carolis also illustrated Giovanni Pascoli's poems, and was influenced by his passage from naïve and aulic styles, towards the classical past. Thus, an intense collaboration began, despite the overbearing D'Annunzio. But their similarity was built on rounded modulations of light, underlying the sophisticated complexity of an elegantly crafted work and regarded as a sign of beauty. De Carolis spoke of this "new light" with his sister: "several factors have created it around me. A certain grace [probably born of the direct vision of Donatello, of Luca della Robbia, from whom he took his graphic characters], great books and the knowledge of two souls…Angelo Conti [who disseminated Schopenhauer's idealism in Italy] and Giovanni

Fig.15-8. Adolfo De Carolis, cover for Notturno, 1916-1921

Pascoli."[39] After all, even Pascoli, in his *Poemi Conviviali* published in *Il Convito,* emphasized ancient heroes as emblems of modernity, along with writings dedicated to the inimitable life of D'Annunzio and Adolfo De Bosis, the Italian translator of Shelley who spoke of refinement and Titanism.

In De Carolis's *Laudi* (Maia 1906, Elettra 1907, Alcione 1908, Merope 1912), the classicist style gradually asserts itself: the dark passages

Fig.15-9. Adolfo De Carolis, frontispiece for *Notturno,* 1916-1921

intensify, while the white, bright and luminous ones become more free thanks to the deep and accurate incisions of the engraving tool, precisely echoing the "Ellade scolpita/ove la pietra è figlia della luce/e sostanza

dell'aere il pensiero." Therefore the four books decorated with a vortex of sinuous lines contain their own energetic strength, parallel to the emphasis of the verse composed by D'Annunzio on the breezy Tyrrhenian Hellas, the Tuscan coast.

The *Laus vitae*, which inaugurates the Michelangelesque phase, with its long digression on the Sistine Chapel, is exemplary. Meanwhile the Poet's companion and muse, the actress Eleonara Duse sent to Capponcina from Paris a cast of the *Prisoner* by Michelangelo, which still graces the D'Annunzio residence of the Vittoriale on Lake Garda. All the poems are permeated with a rare lexical register, even reflected in the cover with a twisted and rhythmically conceived Gorgon, perhaps modeled on either Loie Fuller or Isadora Duncan, examplars of innovative vitalistic dance. The black ground in the images alludes to some mythical mystery, increasing the ever more potent symbolic transfiguration. In *Elettra,* the references to Michelangelo are fully evident and to Polykleitos' *quadratio* accentuated in distortions that give rise to a more sustained engraved tension, suggestive of the vitalism of Nietzsche. It also gives birth to the prevalence of black and the limited calligraphy such as in *La resurrezione del centauro* of 1907 and in *Fedra*, created shortly afterwards in 1909 and which "takes off the Luigi XVI finery of Racine"—according to Gianni Oliva—"to put on the incestuous peplos of Euripedes," the first of the great tragedies and the beginning of the 'inimitable' life of the Vate, D'Annunzio. The coloured cover reveals the brilliant horseman that diffused the legend he had composed many of the *Laudi* while in the saddle. The brown ground and the frontispiece with the labyrinthine title covering the whole page, enriched with red letters, as well as the concise linearity of the front plates to the acts, represent D'Annunzio as the worldly *ubermensch* (superman).

In the second decade of the 1900's, De Carolis's revival of Michelangelo informs the subtle lines made by the engraving tool, creating a thick, often repeated mark, generating large areas of dark ink as in the illustrations for the *Notturno* (1916) (Fig. 15-8), a further proof of consonance with the Poet who perhaps drew some literary inspiration from the stylistic inventions of the artist. "Your drawing has gained an *intensità espressiva* that I have not even experienced in the great masters,"[40] D'Annunzio wrote to him on the publication of Pascoli's *Carmina* in 1914. For his own book on blindness (written as he experienced blindness as a temporary disability resulting from a flying accident), he encouraged De Carolis to engrave figures, "sisters to Pascoli's Phidyle," "symbols of the night, emblems of darkness." He continued by giving precise iconographic suggestions to the artist: "The wings of night should be

folded from the temples to cover the eyes. It should have an intense look, a spiritual look, from underneath the shadow of feathers" and still "blindness, or blindfolded or with the face within the hands or traversed by a wing." Everything was to be printed on precious paper with a "thick" ink capable of generating the density of shade as the "sense of pathos" and "mystery."[41] The artist does not repeat the patron's requests verbatim but rather interprets the patron's spirit as a consummate "draftsman friend of the pen."[42] Thus the "nocturnal" illustrations corresponded perfectly to the

Fig.15-10. Adolfo De Carolis, frontispiece for *Notturno,* 1916-1921

visionary nature of D'Annunzio's text written on roughly ten thousand strips of paper, each containing just one line. His blindness increased his perceptive sensibility, as he himself described: "flussi e riflussi primaverili mi attraversano come una vicenda di maree cariche di orrori e di tesori, innaturalmente accelerata."[43] In keeping with the musical fluidity of the *Notturno*, De Carolis's style embraces the phenomena and compresses them to give a form beyond the Renaissance perspective. He creates the many recumbent and reversed figures, the wing that blinds, and that is spread through the text. He makes the funerary genii Hypnos and Thanatos, children of night (similar to D'Annunzio himself), adorn the frontispiece (Figs. 15-9-10).

In an unpublished note D'Annunzio records the reasons for this bond to Adolfo De Carolis, "ornatore de'miei libri di poesie più belli." Their alliance was grounded in the "character of the artist writer, of the designer, friend to the pen, of the passionate engraver of syntax, which is an art allied to the precious distribution of light and dark, to the contrasts of light, to the balance of space, to the solid unity of groups between intervals as indefinable as the pauses in music and eloquence."[44] This is followed by an outpouring of D'Annunzio's indomitable spirit of appropriation in the words he puts into De Carolis's mouth: "you are perhaps the only writer who understands painting as though you have always held, and continue to hold, a brush in your hand."

In effect, D'Annunzio used words like a brush or a pen. He even translated sounds into images as in the second finale, which is prefigured in the *Notturno*: a winged harp "passes and passes again on my forehead, which seems to me light and transparent like a glass visor, the prelude is a dark, purplish color similar to a moiré fabric which struggles against the evening wind," where Orsa is seen in the black night. The repeated, meticulous motif in De Carolis supported this emphasis so much that soon it was considered "mannerist" in the young environments of Italian graphic design. Instead of the heroic markings of De Carolis accused of "mannerism," the new woodcutters preferred a greater clarity of light and shade, abandoning the "school which gropes in the darkness and clings desperately to dying idols."[45] This is clearly aligned with Futurist disdain for the past and the international Expressionism gaining ascendency.

Perhaps even D'Annunzio understood in his later *Libro Segreto* that there is no transcendent xylographic ornament, only lists of grievances, inscribed on a bare, square facade shaped like a tombstone.

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Notes

[1]Among the numerous sources that concern D’Annunzio and turn of the century Italian graphic production more generally, see: Rossana Bossaglia, Mario Quesada, *Gabriele d’Annunzio e la promozione delle arti* (Milano: A Mondadori; Roma: De Luca edizioni d’arte, 1988); Vito Salierno, *Gli illlustratori di D’Annunzio* (Chieti: M. Sofanelli, 1989); *Gabriele D’Annunzio: dalla Roma bizantina alla Roma del “Nuovo Rinascimento”,* edited by Annamaria Andreoli and Gianna Piantoni (Torino: U. Allemandi, 2000); among the most recent and updated contributions are Giuliana Pieri, “D’Annunzio, his Illustrators and Italian Pre-Raphaelitism” in *Image and word: reflections of art and Literature from the Middle Ages to the present*, edited by Antonella Braida and Giuliana Pieri (Oxford: Legenda, 2003), 114-132, and from the same author “D’Annunzio e il Preraffaellismo inglese”, *Letteratura & Arte*, Pisa-Roma, 2 (2004): 203-215. A fine scholar of Italian and international graphic design at the turn of the century is Emanuele Bardazzi whose publications will be referred to often in this study.
[2]Marie-Pierre Salé, *Odilon Redon*, (Milan: 5 continents; Paris: Musée D’Orsay, 2007), 13. The first to write about Redon for *Emporium* is Vittorio Pica in 1896 in

his celebrated "Attraverso gli albi e le cartelle" vol. III, n. 14 (1896): 122-127. No other study has yet been produced on the critical reception of Odion Redon in Italy. It is noteworthy that in the 1880s Gaston Redon, Odilon's brother, was one of the pensioniers of the Villa Medici in Rome and with his companions frequented the same places as the young dissident Italian artists, many of whom were illustrators for D'Annunzio. Anna Mazzanti, *Simbolismo italiano fra arte e critica: Mario de Maria e Angelo Conti* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007), 40-44.

[3]Odilon Redon, *Á soi-mēme, journal (1867-1915). Notes sur la vie, l'art et les artistes* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1961), consulted in the Italian edition *A se stesso*, edited by Stefano Chiodi (Milan: Abscodita, 2004), 26.

[4]Idem.

[5]Ibid., 28.

[6]Ibid., 33.

[7]In his writings and letters Redon reaffirmed several times that black and white put into play the meaning of light and dark. He interprets shadow and light in Rembrandt's drawings as an impression, a trace of the immaterial and spiritual. Odilon Redon, "Confidences d'artiste,"1913. See also Alessandro Nigro, "L'anima, l'occhio e la mano: il Simbolismo e le ragioni della grafica fra Francia e Germania", in *Scritti in onore di Gianna Piantoni* (Rome: De Luca, 2007), 166, and Marie-Pierre Salé, *Odilon Redon*, 13.

[8]The independent value of graphic production and of white and black in a broad sense, which includes "dessins au crayon, à la plume, fusains, gravures au burin, eaux-fortes, gravures sur bois, lithographies", was redeemed and celebrated for the first time in 1885 at the *Paris Exposition Internationale de Blanc et Noir*, where work was organized in spaces in the Louvre upon the initiative of the journal *Le Dessin*. See: C. Méneux, "Les Salons en Noir et Blanc (1876-1892)", *Histoire de l'art* , 52 (2003): 29-44, Alessandro Nigro, "L'anima, l'occhio e la mano: il Simbolismo e le ragioni della grafica fra Francia e Germania", in *Scritti in onore di Gianna Piantoni,* (Rome: De Luca, 2007), 163; and Emanuele Bardazzi, *Bianco e nero alle esposizioni degli amatori e cultori: 1902-1929*, (Roma: Nuova Galleria Campo dei Fiori 2001).

[9]Pietro Gibellini, "La stagione romana e il gusto figurativo di D'Annunzio" in *D'Annunzio a Roma*, (Rome: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani, 1990), 71-88.

[10]Diego Angeli, *Le cronache del "Caffè Greco",* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1930).

[11]For a closer study regarding the role of Costa in the diffusion of Pre-Raphaelite and Anglo-Saxon culture in Rome see, Arnika Schmidt, "Giovanni 'Nino' Costa (1826–1903): The national and international context of a Roman landscape painter," PhD dissertation at University of Dresden, 2012, especially in the section, "The Dissemination of English Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism in *fin de siècle* in Italy". Still an important primary source is the monograph of Olivia Rossetti Agresti, *Govanni Costa: his life, work and times* (London: Gay and Bird, 1907).

[12]It spread especially through the volume *Le peinture anglaise* by Ernest Chesneau (Paris: A. Quantin, 1882). This book was read in the Francophone salon of the Primoli counts.

[13]Odilon Redon, *Á soi-mēme,* 28-29.
[14]Ibid., 29.
[15]Ibid., 39.
[16]"From the silt complaints come out" and "in the air it assumes threatening forms", Gabriele D'Annunzio, "Alunna" in *Isaotta Guttadàuro ed altre poesie Con disegni di Vincenzo Cabianca* (Rome: Tribuna, 1886), 95.
[17]Gabriele D'Annunzio, "Eliana" and "Romanza", in *Isaotta,* 49,108.
[18]See Anna Mazzanti, *Simbolismo italiano fra arte e critica. Mario De Maria e Angelo Conti* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007), and "Angelo Conti, such as Ruskin and Pater in the English heritage, mentor and adviser of Italian Symbolism" in *Symbolism, Its Origins and Its Consequences* edited by Rosina Neginsky (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 481-530.
[19]Remy de Gourmont, "Les Funérailles du Style" in *Mercure de France*, 43 (1902): 354-355.
[20]Stefano Fugazza, "Giulio Aristide Sartorio e Gabriele D'Annunzio" in *Giulio Aristide Sartorio 1860-1932,* catalog of the exhibition edited by Renato Miracco, (Florence: Maschietto 2006), 60; see Patrizia Rosazza Ferraris, "D'Annunzio e la rinascita dell'*edictio picta*" in *Gabriele d'Annunzio e la promozione delle arti,* 61-64.
[21]The edition of *Isaotta* indeed ended up devoid of decorative elements on the page; it does not have the graphic page layout in the style of miniature codexes modeled on those from the Kelmscott Press.
[22]Angelo Conti, "L'arte a Roma. Novissimum agmen", *La Tribuna*, (October 4, 1885).
[23]Gabriele D'Annunzio, "Vas spirituale", in *Isaotta Guttadàuro*, 94.
[24]Bianca Tamassia Mazzarotto, *Le arti figurative nell'arte di Gabriele D'Annunzio,* (Milan: Bocca, 1949); as well as Susanna Scotoni, *D'Annunzio e l'arte contemporanea,* (Florence: Spes, 1981), Gianni Oliva, "La cultura dell'estetismo romano e A. Conti" in *D'Annunzio a Roma* (Roma: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Roma, 1990), 118-131.
[25]On the eclectic and Symbolist character of Italian Pre-Raphaelitism, the critics are in agreement from Tamassia Marzarotto and Gianni Oliva to the recent writings of Giuliana Pieri.
[26]Ernest Chesneau, *Le peinture anglaise* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1882).
[27]See: Carlo Placci, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti", *La Rassegna Nazionale*, I (April 1882): 427-226; Enrico Nencioni, "Le poesie e le pitture di Dante Gabriel Rossetti", *Fanfulla della Domenica*, (February 17, 1884): n.p.
[28]Gabriele D'Annunzio, "Alma Tadema", *Fanfulla della Domenica*, (April 1, 1883): n.p. As an art critic D'Annunzio was among the first in Italy to praise the jewel-like paintings of the Dutch artist. He said they were characterized "by the exquisite sense of poetry" with old finishing touches made real by "behaviors and expressions" truly from modern life.
[29]Giuseppe Cellini, "Per la Bellezza", *Cronaca Bizantina* (1884): n.p.
[30]This is how D'Annunzio describes Maria Ferres, one of the protagonists of "Piacere": "She wore a dress of a strange rust colour, a saffron colour, worn out,

undefinable; of one those so-called esthetic colors found in the paintings of divine Autumn, in those of the Primitives, and in those of Dante Gabriele Rossetti", Roma 1889 (Bossaglia, et al., *Gabriele d'Annunzio e la promozione delle arti* Milan: Mondadori, 1988), 83.

[31]Vittorio Pica, "Cronachetta artistica: tre concorsi", *Emporium*, n. 80, vol. XIV, (1901): 149-150. *La Bibbia nell'arte: cento intagliotipie dai disegni originali di grandi maestri contemporanei,* prefazione di Ugo Ojetti (Bergamo: Istituto ataliano d'arti grafiche, 1913) exhibited in 1901 in London and in 1903 at the Stedelijk of Amsterdam. The catalog is organized with distinct pages for text and images just as *Isaotta* presents a very eclectic illustrative apparatus used by artists from Segantini and Crane to Burne-Jones.

[32]Fabio Fiorani, "Le incisioni di Sartorio per la Campagna romana," in *Giulio Arstide Sartorio / Chiostro del Bramante…* Catalog e mostra a cura di Renato Miracco (Firenze, 2006), 153-158.

[33]*L'eroica*: *rassegna italiana*, s.n., La Spezia, Direttori Ettore Cozzani e Franco Oliva (quest'ultimo fino al 1913), 1911-1921; 1924-1944. See also *L'Eroica: una rivista italiana del Novecento,* edited by Guido Giubbini, (Genova: Comune di Genova, Assessorato alla Cultura, 1983). The first excerpts from Sartorio's short poem appear in *L'Eroica* between 1913 and 1914. Emanuele Bardazzi, "Le sezioni di Bianco e Nero alla Secessione Romana e altre vicende delle grafica primo-novecentesca" in *Secessione Romana 1913-2013* edited by Manuel Carrera and Jolanda Nigro Covre (Rome: Bagatto Libri, 2014). While in Rome Duilio Cambellotti also demonstrated a refined xylographic style on the page: the harmonious integration of text and image in willowy lines that still resembled the Liberty Style, even though they were simpler and more synthetic.

[34]See Valerio Cianfarani, "Giuseppe Cellini pittore romano e l'opera sua per G. D'Annunzio", *L'Urbe*, XI n. 4 (1949): 2-29.

[35]See Emanuele Bardazzi, "La Divina Commedia novamente illustrata da artisti italiani a cura di Vittorio Alinari. La partecipazione di Alberto Martini e l'osservatorio di Vittorio Pica" in *La Commedia dipinta: i concorsi Alinari e il simbolismo in Toscana,* (Florene: Alinari, 2002).

[36]De Carolis references Ugo da Carpi for his innovation in pictorial engraving on multiple types of wood in the book *Xilografia* published in 1924 (Rome: La Fiamma) before he died the next year. For the engraving activity of Adolfo De Carolis see the extensive bibliography, including Paola Frandini, "Adolfo De Carolis tra '800 e '900", *Il Veltro*, 3 (Giugno 1969): 435-453; Rossana Bossaglia, *Adolfo De Carolis : xilografo e illustrator* (Bologna: Sintesi, 1992); Emilio Mariano, "Per una storicizzazione dell'impegno xilografico di Adolfo de Carolis" 1994 in Dalla traccia al segno*: incisori del Novecento dalle Marche* edited by Silvia Cuppini, (Rome: De Luca, 1994), 219-220; and Silvia Zanini, *Adolfo De Carolis e la xilografia* (Rome: Giroal, 2003).

[37]Giulio Aristide Sartorio, "Edward Burne-Jones", *La Nuova Rassegna* II, 33 (September 3, 1893): 304-309; "Nota su D. G. Rossetti pittore, *Il Convito*, II, (1895): 121-150.

[38]Emanuele Bardazzi, "La Primavera di Adolfo De Carolis. Da Roma a Firenze

all'alba del Novecento" in *Adolfo De Carolis, 1874-1928: un capolavoro ritrovato un carteggio inedito,* edited by E. Bardazzi, C. F. Carli, L. Djokic, catalogue of the exhibition held at Nuova Galleria Campo dei fiori Rome, (Roma: Campo dei fiori, 2001).

[39]La lettera è citata in Simonetta Di Pino Giambi, *Adolfo De Carolis*, (Florence: Pitti, 1992), 149.

[40]Cited by Fernando Coletti, "Il Notturno e Fiume nel carteggio D'Annunzio-De Carolis", *Quaderni del Vittoriale* n. 2 (Aprile 1977): 16.

[41]Ibidem.

[42]Raffaele Calzini, "Artisti contemporanei. Adolfo De Carolis", in *Emporium*, XLVIII, 284 (August 1918): 59-72; Michele Biancale, "I decoratori del libro: Adolfo De Karolis", *L'Italia che scrive*, II (1919): 105-6; Antonio Maraini, "Adolfo De Carolis silografo", *Dedalo*, II, fasc. I (1921): 332-351.

[43]Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Notturno* (Milan: Treves, 1921), 224. The passage translates: "spungless waves and breakers wash over me like a series of tides full of horrors and treasures, unnaturally accelerated".

[44]Fernando Coletti, "Il Notturno e Fiume nel carteggio D'Annunzio-De Carolis," 17.

[45]Curt Seidel, "La xilografia italiana", *L'Artista Moderno* (1913), n.p.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE DOUBLE MEANING OF BEHEADINGS: MOREAU AND REDON

ROSINA NEGINSKY

The theme of the severed head was a widely spread topic in the second part of the nineteenth century, especially among Symbolist artists,[1] and in particular in works by Odilon Redon. This theme often derived from the Biblical story of Saint John the Baptist and his beheading as a result of the dance of the unnamed girl, mentioned as a daughter of Herodias in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark,[2] from the myth of Orpheus, and sometimes was a symbol of the disturbing French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870.

In earlier times, the works of Goya, Rubens and Géricault depicted the severed head as a symbol of horror, a capital punishment, of cruelty and terror.[3] The Renaissance self-portraits and portraits in *décapité* liked to toy with the idea of a suffering artist, or a tormented lover.[4] Late nineteenth century works of decapitated heads, mainly works of the Symbolists, although sometimes following the ideas of the period—évolution,[5] degeneration, wars[6] —as well as the Renaissance traditions, endowed the severed head with new, more personal and complex meanings.

In this article, I will examine a number of cases of severed heads in works of Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon, which could be interepreted as embodiments of their personal history and personal views. We will see how these artists endowed the severed head not only with the dark meaning of horror, punishment, vengence, suffering and dissatisfaction, but also with the meaning of light, of spiritual elevation, liberation, freedom, and uniqueness.

Gustave Moreau, *The Apparition*

Moreau's watercolor *The Apparition* (Fig. 16-1) is of particular interest for the present study. It depicts the head of John the Baptist floating in mid-air, having risen from its platter. The haloed head looks at Salome with eyes that are kind and innocent. It does not seem to accuse Salome of anything, yet she is portrayed as filled with rage, and she points at the head as though hurling an accusation at the Baptist. The setting of this painting is similar to that of Moreau's other painting of Salome, although here the center of attention is not Salome dancing before Herod. Instead, the focus is now Salome dancing before the head of the Baptist and the striking exchange of glances between the two. Is John's "floating" head a suggestion that it is only present in Salome's imagination? Is she so shocked by it that she interrupts her dance and enters into communication with her vision?

Fig. 16-1. Gustave Moreau, *The Apparition*

If we look closely at John's face and compare it with Moreau's self-portraits or photographs, we can see that the face in *The Apparition* is that of the artist. Moreau lived for four years in Italy and studied Italian art. He was therefore familiar with the use of self-portraits by Renaissance artists. In *The Apparition* he follows the tradition of Renaissance artists who painted themselves as victims and in *decapité*, even while endowing this self-portrait with his own personal and particular meaning.

Although Moreau received a level of appreciation by some collectors, such as Charles Hayem, he remained an independent painter throughout his life, never belonging to any of the schools of his time, such as Naturalism, Impressionism, or Realism. Those movements were largely preoccupied with the representation of the external world, whether nature or society. Moreau, in contrast, did not believe that the role of the artist was to imitate or record any kind of physical reality. For him, the role of the artist was to create his own imaginary reality. "Art inspired by nature cannot be reduced to exact and servile imitation, because, in this case, it is not an art, and nature is preferable."[7] As a result, he was recognized neither by the artists of the major schools nor by the public at large, and he returned the compliment.

Moreau believed that art has a spiritual mission, *un sacerdoce*.[8] He was seeking, through his art, to give individual expression to universal meanings and to represent a reality more perfect than that which is merely physical. He saw himself as a messenger of truth through art. Thus, it will not be surprising if Moreau easily identifies himself with John the Baptist, the first lonely preacher of a future universal faith. Like John, Moreau felt himself a prophet, rejected by society and "executed" for his message. At the same time, the halo around John's head, the sign of the importance of his ideas, of the posthumous fame and recognition, may be a symbol of Moreau's conviction in his own artistic ideas, his belief in his posthumous success, that recognition and acceptance which would eventually come to him after death, as it came to John.

In Moreau's works, women are usually incarnations of nature, which Moreau perceived as mortal and chaotic, and therefore destructive. Women destroyed everything heroic and spiritual.[9] Works such as *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (*Oedipe et le Sphinx)*, *Les Chimères* and *Dalila* reflect this view of women.[10] Describing to his deaf mother the image of a beautiful feminine Sphinx in his *Oedipe et le Sphinx*, Moreau wrote:

> This is the earthly Chimera, vile and attractive as matter. She is represented by this charming head of a woman who has wings that are promising of an ideal, but her body is the body of a monster. She is a vamp who tears to pieces and destroys.[11]

He expressed similar sentiments about his Salome, writing:

> This woman [Salome] who represents the eternal woman, a light bird, often fatal, crossing life with a flower in her hand, in search of her vague ideal, often horrible. She always walks trampling on everyone, even the genius and the saints. That dance executed, this mysterious walk demonstrated in front of death that endlessly looks at her, yawning and attentive, and in front of the executioner who carries the sword that kills. This is the emblem of that horrible future reserved to those who search for an ideal. . . . One saint, one severed head are at the end of her journey.[12]

For Moreau, Salome in *The Apparition* is a symbol of society and its passing fashions and tastes. Since Salome—through her dance—is herself an artist, for Moreau she might be an embodiment of the artistic trends that were fashionable at his time, such as Realism, Naturalism and Impressionism. This was the kind of art that was contrary to his art since it focused on the physical world, either society (Naturalism and Realism) or nature (Impressionism). Moreau referred to Realism and Naturalism as "ras de caniveau" (the brim of the gutter), Impressionism as "bas de plafond" (the bottom of the ceiling) and academic art as "art without any ideas."[13] Describing his attitude toward fashionable art and artists and the way they are perceived by society and his own place within it, Moreau writes:

> Now there is a false daring and there is a false artistic ardor, when there are all these disinherited jesters searching to attract by all means the attention and support of the crowd and of stupid connoisseurs; there is . . . a reproach [a stone] that they throw endlessly at the head of the true artist, who is a modest conscientious worker, saying that such and such doctrine, such and such school, such and such genre must be followed because they are the future of art.[14]

Thus, Salome in *The Apparition* is a symbol of the artists that Moreau calls "disinherited jesters," as well as the art critics, whom he names "the stupid imbeciles of art connoisseurs," and the public that follows whatever the critics say. Such a society is unable to recognize "true" art, i.e., his art, and therefore rejects him. Since Moreau was convinced that true art and the true artist-prophet would eventually triumph over society, Salome has a vision of a John who will eventually rise over her. The head of the Baptist, a symbol of unrecognized art, will vanquish the art and the society Salome embodies, and in doing so it will be triumphant over her (and the critics') falsehoods.[15]

Salome was Moreau's favorite subject.[16] His interest in this subject

started after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and France's subsequent defeat. From a historical perspective, Salome might be a symbol of the German barbarism that aspired to destroy France, itself embodied in the noble figure of John the Baptist, whose beheading would bring him glory. Geneviève Lacambre and Peter Cooke suggest that in one version of the Salome theme, King Herod "has the mien of a feeble sovereign and features reminiscent of those of Napoléon III. . . . Indeed, the king's empty gaze echoes that of the 1863 portrait of Napoléon by Hippolyte Flandrin."[17] This weak leader was the reason for France's defeat, for letting Salome (the Germans) behead John the Baptist (France).[18]

Odilon Redon, *Primitive Being*

Odilon Redon was an artist who painted many decapitated heads. Partially his heads are related to the results of France's defeat to Prussia in the war of 1870 and to Darwin's new evolutionary theories. Another influence comes from Japanese art, especially after the Universal Exposition of 1867. This infuses Redon's works with themes resulting from the Japanese civil war and the images that appear in relation to it: *Le Supplicié Muamija-Hasime, Assasin d'Européens devant le Temple de Kamoukara, Japon, mai 1867.*[19] However, some of Redon's images of severed heads are directly related to his inner life and in some ways are the interpretations of his unconscious mind.

His first representation of the severed head appears right after the death of his father, Bertrand Redon, on 9 March 1874. Douglas W. Druik and Peter Kort Zegers state:

> The immediate effect of Bertrand Redon's death on Odilon was to clear the way for the resolution of a lifetime of feelings about him. Critical to this process was Odilon's revision of his father's nature: "... I believe we badly misunderstood him. I don't know why between him and me nature placed... an obstacle that prevented our reaching out to each other."[20]

They continue by explaining that "in his autobiographical statement published in 1894, Redon would note simply that around 1875, after many years of study, 'Everything came to me through my pencil.'. . . He found himself in control of his art."

Redon experienced a liberation with his father's death. This liberation began to manifest itself in Redon's art, which he discusses in his *Ecrits*, in 1898. Redon wrote:

> Originality comes in its own time, not ours; it produces fruit that has no season. . . . After much torment and uncertainty, mine appeared around

> 1875, some time after the death of my father. The phenomenon is curious. Up to that moment, I was constrained by conscientiousness. I went after what was not natural to me. I tended to [concentrate on] formal realization and a … fantastic fusion of dream and [immediate reality]. Also I was held back by my perfectionism. My drawings seemed to me to be scarcely more than sketches; I only kept them in order to realize them differently and more objectively. However I comprehended that it wasn't wise to let the source run dry. I then made lots of drawings, abundantly, for myself, for myself only, for the sole joy that their happening gave me.[21]

One of the first works of a head without a body that appeared in 1875, after Redon's father's death, was *Primitive Being*, in charcoal. In this drawing Redon creates a symbolic representation of David and Goliath.[22] Goliath is represented as a huge head lying on the ground and David as a young boy, whose back is turned to the spectator, and who with tenderness, curiosity and cautiousness touches the hair of the huge head of Goliath. This representation is very different from a traditional representation, especially from the one which was popular during the Renaissance, such as the one by Guido Reni, for example, in which David is represented proudly holding the hair of the Giant as a triumph over him. That triumph makes him, little David, enter a new stage of his life, the stage of maturity and adulthood.

The difference in Redon's representation of the head of Goliath and of the young boy David, the victor, could also allude to Redon's passage from childhood to the adulthood. But this representation leaves us with many questions. Is the head of the Giant a symbol of Redon's father defeated by his son, who simply outlived him? Do the boy's tenderness, caution and curiosity embody Odilon Redon's love, fear and curiosity that he feels and is able to express, because his father, the Giant, is no more? Is the huge size of the head in comparison with the size of the boy the symbol of the power of the father over the son even after his death? Is the boy's cautious approach of the Giant's head, after all, a symbol of a boy who, though victorious, still can hardly believe in his victory and in the death of the Giant, the father? Or is his cautious approach of the Giant's head a desire to verify that the Giant is truly dead and he, the boy, is after all a victor?

Odilon Redon, *Angel Executioner*

The head deprived of body is a violent representation and for Redon sometimes a symbol of a mental murder that he commits in order to free himself from those who, he believes, do not allow him to grow as an artist

and to express himself as he wishes through his art. One work, Redon's *Angel Executioner* (1876),[23] also created almost immediately after the death of his father, is strikingly representative of this attitude. This work uses a traditional representation of Salome with the head of John the Baptist on the platter, but instead of Salome, Redon represents the young man as an Angel Executioner with a phallic sward, and instead of the head of John the Baptist on the platter, he paints as a head a portrait of his teacher and friend, Rudolph Bresdin. This work, as Druik and Zegers pointed out, “may well express Redon's growing ambivalence toward his 'dear master.'”[24] It seemed that at this time, Redon felt that Bresdin did not understand and did not appreciate the direction that Redon's work was taking. Redon felt that time came for him to take his own independent path and free himself from his master and his master's influence. In *Angel Executioner*, as in *Primitive Being,* Redon kills his master, his spiritual father in order to free himself from his influence to be able to fly with his own wings.

Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon, *Orpheus*

One of the most famous heads, the head of Orpheus, was represented by Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon. The head of Orpheus, like the head of John the Baptist and the head of Goliath, was the part of the nineteenth century fascination with decapitated heads. Orpheus—musician, poet, and an ever-present idealized figure—according to the legend, like John the Baptist, has been decapitated by women. Although the Gospels do not contain an account of what happened to the head of the Baptist, legend has it that the head of Orpheus lived on and continued to prophesy. Orpheus refused to participate in the madness of the Bacchantes and became their victim, a symbol of an artist who rejects so-called love in order to dedicate himself to his work, to his art. Early Christian artists used this image for representations of Christ as a shepherd, youthful and beardless, seated among his flock and holding a lyre.

Moreau painted an ambivalent image of a head of Orpheus, eyes closed, retrieved by a Thracian girl. His head, the symbol of an artist, despite his physical death, gained an eternal life on earth through his art, a recognition, which represents the hope that Moreau had for himself.

As Peter Cooke asserts

> Orpheus, dismembered, remains beautiful even in death while his ornate lyre has survived intact. The lyre – ‘the eternal instrument of human thought,’ . . . remains. . . . The tortoises at bottom right can be read as allusions to the mythical origins of the lyre, created by Hermes out of a

tortoise shell, but also as symbols of eternity.[25]

In 1881, Redon in a charcoal, *Fallen Glory* (*Head of Orpheus on the Water*),[26] identified the protagonist with Orpheus. It is also one of Redon's self-portraits as a martyr. This work, contrary to Moreau's closed-eyed image held by a beautiful woman, depicts the head with eyes wide open, staring into a dark sky, while floating on the water.

This work could be associated with Redon's fears and hopes. Although he tried to ignore his original lack of fame and adhered to Blaise Pascal's slogan "the greatest baseness of man is the pursuit of glory,"[27] he wanted success and was afraid of a failure. He even wrote a short story "Le Raté" ("A Loser").

Similar to Moreau's Orpheus, Redon's Orpheus is also his identification with the subject. But contrary to Moreau's Orpheus, the head of Redon's Orpheus is not collected by a beautiful woman and it is not floating on a lyre. Is he meditating on his potential failure with the eyes wide open? Is he ready to accept his physical death and perhaps his artistic death, the loss of his lyre? Or is he hoping that the destiny will smile to him, and although his body is dead, his spirit, which lives in his art and is embodied in his wide open eyes, full of life, the mirrors of his soul, is alive and will always remain? Is Redon like Moreau convinced that his art will remain forever and, even if it is not sufficiently appreciated during his lifetime, one day he will gain recognition?

As a matter of fact, Redon's 1903-1910 colorful pastel *Orpheus*,[28] which represents the head of closed eyed Orpheus lying on his lyre, gives an answer to Redon's earlier fears and questions. With bright colors and the head lying on the lyre, a symbol of ever living art, peaceful closed eyes embody Redon's success, his recognition and his assurance in the survival of his art.

As I have mentioned earlier, Redon painted a great number of severed heads, but those discussed here have mainly personal connotations. In Redon and Moreau's cases the severed heads embody the artists' convictions in their future recognition; they are statements of their independence, artistic freedom and pride, but they also demonstrate their fears and pain, and are reflections of their struggles in search of independence and acceptance.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 16-1. Gustave Moreau, *The Apparition*, 1876, Watercolor on paper, 106 x 72 cm, Cabinet des dessins, Louvre, Paris.

Notes

[1] See Jean de Palacio's article "Motif privilégié au jardin des supplices: Le mythe de la décollation et le décadentisme," *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 153 (Aspects du décadentisme européen), (January-March 1974).
[2] See Rosina Neginsky, "Chapter One," *Salome: The Image of a Woman Who Never Was*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: CSP, 2013), 8-22.
[3] See Jean-Pierre Reverseau, "Pour une étude du thème de la tête coupée dans la littérature et la peinture dans la second partie du XVXe siècle" in *Gazette des Beaux Arts,* v. 80, July-December, 1972.
[4] See Neginsky, "Chapter Five," *Salome: The Image of a Woman Who Never Was*, 92-124.
[5] Barbara Larson, "Chapter Three," *The Dark Side of Nature. Science, Society, and the Fantastic in the Work of Odilon Redon,* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).
[6] See Ibid., "Chapter Three."
[7] "L'art s'appuyant sur la nature ne peut être réduit à en être l'imitation exacte et servile car, a ce compte, il n'est pas l'art, et la nature est préférable." Peter Cooke, ed., *Ecrits sur l'art par Gustave Moreau*, 2 volumes (Paris: Fata Morgana, 2002), 252.
[8] As with Michelangelo, art for Moreau was both a struggle and a spiritual mission. For Michelangelo, the pain of the artist was similar to the flaying of St. Bartholomew. For Moreau, the pain of the artist was similar to the decapitated head of John the Baptist, the head that, despite its painful separation from the body, remains alive and eventually attains a halo, the symbol of glory and recognition.
[9] In contrast, the images of men, especially of heroes and prophets, symbolize artists and poets. Usually his ideal men, his poets and artists, are androgynous, because the ideal individual is above any kind of gender. He is both a man and a woman. An example of it is the painting entitled *Dead Poet Borne by a Centaur.*
[10]The book to consult is Peter Cooke's *Moreau: History Painting, Spirituality, and Symbolism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); also see Cooke's article «The Ideal and Matter: Gustave Moreau's Ambiguous Dualities," Chapter Eight in this volume, and Pierre-Louis Mathieu, "Femmes damnées: Sphinx, Chimères, Sirènes, Pasiphaé, Dalila, Messaline, Salomé" in *Monographie et Nouveau Catalogue de l'oeuvre achevé* (Paris: ACR Edition Internationale, 1998).
[11] "C'est la chimère terrestre, vile comme la matière, attractive comme elle, représentée par cette tête charmante de la femme, avec ces ailes prometteuses de l'idéal, mais le corps du monstre, du carnassier qui déchire et anéantit," Cooke, *Ecrits*, vol. I, 73.
[12] Ibid., 97-98. Of his image of Salome, he writes that "Cette femme [Salome] qui représente la femme éternelle, oiseau léger, souvent funeste, traversant la vie une fleur à la main, à la recherche de son idéal vague, souvent terrible, et marchant toujours, foulant tous aux pieds, même des génies et des saints. Cette danse s'exécute, cette promenade mystérieuse s'accomplit davant la mort qui la regarde incessamment, béante et attentive, et devant le bourreau à l'épée qui frappe. C'est l'emblème de cet avenir terrible réservé aux chercheurs d'idéal sans nom de

sensualité et de curiosité malsaine."

[13] Elizabeth Lièvre-Crosson, *Du Réalisme au symbolisme*, (Milan: Les Essentiels), 36.

[14] Cooke, *Ecrits,* vol. I, 224-225.

[15] See note 8.

[16] For more on this topic, see Neginsky, *Salome: The Image of a Woman Who Never Was*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

[17] Geneviève Lacambre, *Gustave Moreau: Magic and Symbols* (New York : Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 57.

[18] For more on this topic and the interpretations of Moreau's *Salome Dancing Before Herod*, see Peter Cooke, "Gustave Moreau's 'Salome': the poetic and politics of history painting," *The Burlington Magazine,* 149 (August 2007): 528-536.

[19] For more information see Suzy Lévy, *Odilon Redon et le Messie féminin* (Diagonales, Editions Cercle d'Art), Partie IV.

[20] Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, "Taking Wings, 1870-1878" in the catalog *Odilon Redon 1840-1916*, (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1995), 85.

[21] Ibid., 85, and note 26, 390.

[22] For the image visit http://www.wikiart.org/en/odilon-redon/david-and-goliath-1875

[23] For the image visit http://www.globalgallery.com/detail/374003/redon-angel-executioner

[24] Ibid., 86.

[25] See Peter Cooke's article «The Ideal and Matter: Gustave Moreau's Ambiguous Dualities," Chapter Eight in this volume.

[26] For the image see the catalog, *Odilon Redon 1840-1916* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1995), 162.

[27] Druik, Zeger, 161.

[28] For the image visit http://www.wikiart.org/en/odilon-redon/orpheus

Part Four:

Sculpture

Chapter Seventeen

Art Between Luminous Fluidity and Expressionist Shading: Defining Symbolist Sculpture using Modelling

Dominque Jarrassé

An attempt was made by Antoinette Le Normand-Romain[1] in the 1980s to formulate a definition of Symbolist sculpture, which, despite its pioneering approach, was nonetheless incomplete. This approach could not, in fact, be fully adopted because Symbolist sculpture was assessed in terms of style and then in terms of iconography. Subject matter was the surest way of comparing sculpture with the other arts and with literature, so that it was impossible to guarantee the applicability of Le Normand-Romain's comments to sculpture. The author went as far as to say that "Symbolism is therefore not a style, since it can assume a wide diversity of forms but is, rather, a way of expressing things through privileged themes. . . ." Nonetheless it is undeniable that to be a Symbolist — to be fascinated with death, to be attracted to dreams, to yearn to express the essence of being, and even to be interested in esoteric options — is not all that can be expressed in three-dimensional, plastic media.

To confront the difficulty of defining Symbolism in sculpture and to avoid the temptation of reducing it to mere content or an idea (even if it is emphasized with a capital letter), I will refer to the plastic language of Symbolism, in the way sculptors practiced it. Not much attention seems to have been paid to form even though it is central to all definitions of pictorial Symbolism since the time when Gustave Moreau[2] and Albert Aurier (who disagreed with the theories of Péladan that gave preference to idea over form) instead insisted on giving priority to expression achieved through plastic means. It shall be seen that in the case of sculptors, it is not the famous arabesque or sinuous line that largely determines their

language, as the way they model the contours to create light and shade on a surface.

We therefore come directly face to face with the very essence of sculpture as material. What might only have been a binary theme, parallel to that of life and death, good and evil, and dual Baudelairean postulations between melancholy and the ideal, turns out to be a privileged access to the Symbolist modality of sculpture because even though it must be "idealistic and mystical", and should move away from "the eyesores of reality," it is first and foremost "art. As Aurier explained,[3] Symbolism becomes the "sole criterion that makes it possible to affirm the quality of *art* in a *work."* The subtlety created by a play on light and shade is due to the fact that it participates in the imaginary repertory of Symbolism as well as in its technical modes of expression. We constantly waver between these two inseparable poles that reflect superbly the French word "matière," describing both the subject of a work and its material, an "elusive" material according to Maurice Pujo, one of the theorists of the "artists of the soul," who classified several sculptors in this group as Symbolists. Can a definition be developed along this path?

Sculptors of the Soul?

To describe idealistic symbolism, Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond effortlessly constructed the notion of "painters of the soul"[4] based on the exhibition "Artists of the Soul" organized by the journal *L'Art et la Vie*[5] in 1894. Jumeau-Lafond did not hesitate in also including a number of sculptors such as Charlotte Besnard, Biegas, Carriès, Camille Claudel, Dampt, Rodo, Soudbinine and even Bourdelle and Pompon[6] . . . Is it possible to identify a category of "sculptors of the soul" by referring to these theorists?

The article by Gustave Soulier,[7] which might have had some programmatic value, avoids the plastic question and omits to discuss sculpture with specificity. In any event, he would have been unable to do this because he gave absolute preference "to the soul that must be touched" without asking how it would be affected, and he did not see any evolution in technique other than in painting! Although he investigated expression in art[8] and the necessary communion between two souls to understand the idea conveyed by a work, he did not take the material processes into consideration. The latter are also neglected by Fernand Weyl,[9] the author of monographs on sculptors in the series on *Artistes de l'âme,* such as Bartholomé, Dampt, Vibert and Vallgren. Weyl accumulated metaphors in an attempt to describe the spirituality of works,

seeing Vibert as a “lover of mysterious fragrances”[10] and Dampt as a “tamer of matter”[11] but he wrote very little about their technique. Discussing Bartholomé (Fig. 17-1), he sketched some thoughts about light but not the kind of light that brings a sculpted surface to life, the one he organized in an architectural structure:

> “Bartholomé does not restrict himself to endowing his statues with an expressive attitude, he also wants to illuminate them with a particular light appropriate to their meaning. Such research is only possible in the case of a monument because it is difficult for an isolated statue to receive a given light that completes and constantly enhances it. For the tomb, however, Bartholomé was able to arrange the architecture in such a way as to give a different light for the various groups of statues. While the procession of the dying takes place in a relief bathed in an equal and calm light, the husband and wife, walking towards the Unknown, stand out vividly at the edge of the shadow. Thanks to the door at the threshold of which he has placed the couple, Bartholomé has successfully achieved a splendid display of light and shade. Similarly, by stretching out the dead couple under a vault, he creates a light from the bottom to the top, which mysteriously illuminates the group, as well as the angel of the resurrection.”

Here the light enhances the message and it helps to focus on the threshold, the transition between life and death; it does not emanate from the relief of the forms but from the architecture. Only Maurice Pujo, founder of the journal, outlined a deeper analysis of the value of light. In the conclusion of his reply to Mirbeau, who had unsparingly poked fun at “these confounded artists of the soul,” their “sphinxes from Batignolles” (a popular district), “the mystery of curves”[12] and “haloes of light that served as hats”, Pujo pleaded against realism:

> Diffuse light would not exist without the human eyes that receive it; it would not acquire harmony through the relief of objects without the human mind that disposes it; it would not move us without the human heart that animates it. Light does not allow itself to be caught either by the hand or by the brush. A soul is needed, a genius is needed, Rembrandt, that great idealist, is needed to create it. [13]

What he evoked is the all-powerful light of the ideal, the kind that emanates from the interior and which all Symbolists pursue. It is the light of “closed eyes” but also the light that embraces the soul of those who contemplate the work. Without lingering over the plastic question, he nonetheless introduced a new value of light, in a kind of aesthetics of reception. Symbolist sculpture is suggestive—this is a feature identified by the exegetes of Mallarmé or Rodin—and it can only operate in a

relationship of communion with the view of the spectator, guided by the light and shade of the surfaces.

Fig. 17-1. Albert Bartholomé, *L'esprit de vie et de Lumière*

The Unforgettable Rodin

In reality, as all the classics on modern sculpture have noted, it was Rodin who set in motion the genuine transformation of sculpture; it was he who invented a "new skin for sculpture," to borrow the expression of Albert Elsen.[14] This also applies to the definition of sculptural Symbolism. Even though it is pertinent to refer to sculptors of the same generation having aspirations that can be described as Symbolist, such as René de Saint-Marceaux and Anatole Marquet de Vasseolot, or even Albert Bartholomé, it is impossible to "forget Rodin" in any attempt to identify the expressive value conveyed by modelling because the awareness of sculptors of the nature of their own methods is based on his work and the ensuing analyses by critics of his work. In reality, the Symbolism of Rodin is due more to the way his works are interpreted than to the artist's explicit intentions. Furthermore, the variety of the modelled contours suggests a dual approach encompassing an idealistic tendency characteristic of the smooth surface of some of his marbles, and an expressionist tendency, before the term even existed, in his dynamic

modelling technique, dramatized by the use of intense contrasts, as in the *Burghers of Calais* or his *Balzac*.

The observations of the poet Rilke open up a broad viewpoint through the role he assigns to the question of surfaces. In an essay he wrote in 1903, he demonstrated how Rodin developed the surface of his sculptures towards relief, filling the interstices between the figures: "These strips prevent the development of worthless perspectives that lead from the thing into empty space; they have the effect that the edges of forms, which otherwise appear sharp and ground-off before such gaps, retain their curvature. They gather light like shells, perpetually overflowing." [15]

The stone dissolves and "the light that approaches this stone has no will of its own. It doesn't pass beyond it to other things; it nestles against it, hesitates and lingers; and then dwells in it."

Rodin had captured the fluidity of light in his admirable figure of the *Danaid* (Fig. 17-2) rendered "into her flowing hair,"[16] and in the "limpid stone" of *The Eternal Idol.* He reverts to this aspect in a lecture he gave in 1907, in which he defined a fundamental theory on modelling. He noted that more than capturing movement in form, Rodin also introduced "the movement of light." Rilke, who clearly discerned his "conquests of movement, space and light," knew his subject so well that he remains the definitive critic. To express this movement of light in Rodin's sculpture, he again resorted to the metaphor of fluidity:[17]

> What is new is the kind of movement, movement to which the light is compelled by the particular quality of these surfaces, whose inclines are so variously modulated that the form flows slowly here and plunges there, appearing now shallow and now deep, now lustrous and now matt. The light that comes in contact with the forms is no longer ordinary light; it suffers no further chance alterations. The thing takes possession of it, and uses it as its own property.
>
> This acquisition and appropriation of light as a consequence of defining a surface with perfect clarity was recognized by Rodin to be an essential characteristic of sculpted things. Both antique and gothic art had sought solutions to this problem, each in its own fashion; and he places himself within the ancient tradition by making the mastery of light a part of his development.
>
> Within his work there are actually stones with their own light, like the face called *Thought*, bowed over the block in the Luxembourg Museum, which has the figure inclining forward into shadow. The figure hovers above the white shimmering stone, in whose reflection all shadows are dispersed and muted to a transparent chiaroscuro. And who can recall without delight that small group in which two bodies create a twilight so that they might softly

> meet there with a subdued radiance? And isn't it remarkable to see the light pass over the recumbent back of the *Danaid*, so slowly that it scarcely seems to have made any progress in hours? Was there anyone still acquainted with the scale of shadows extending upward into that thin area of darkness, which sometimes occurs around the navels of small antique figures, and which we now largely know from curving rose petals and in the recessed areas of roses?

The poet captured with his eyes the ethereal, blurred forms that were as fleeting as waves. He was able to detect the intangible dimension of this art, which an uninformed person would consider only as being deeply anchored in matter. His experience of reading forms in space and seeing movement and the play of light rendered him sensitive to what most critics, even Mirbeau, failed to see. He shows how the sculptor gives a new meaning to the shapes that had appeared worn out.

Backed by this effective interpretation of Symbolist sculpture based on modelling, we can deal with the second phase of our analysis of a few original works that reveal two profound trends in sculpture, depending on whether preference is given to the luminous fluidity associated with idealism or to the shadows of expressionism.

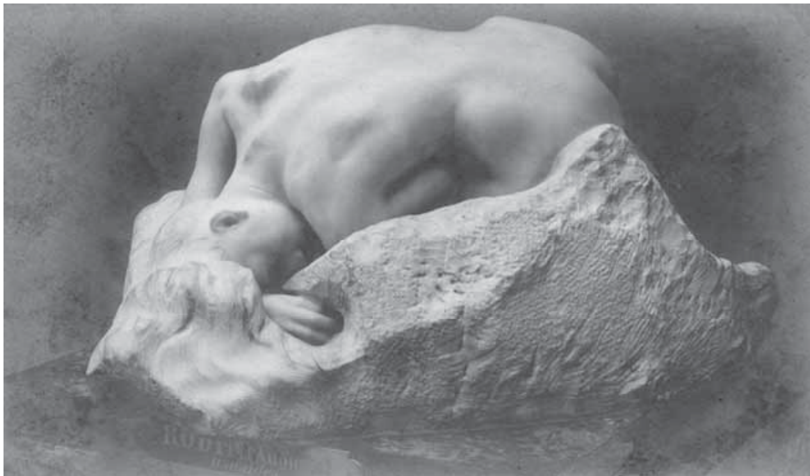

Fig. 17-2. Auguste Rodin, *Danaid*

Images of the Mystical Fluidity of Naoum Aronson

Here we immediately encounter the dual Baudelairean postulation inherent in Symbolism, the ambivalent nature – profoundly mystical and human – of the Symbolist aesthetic, an aspiration towards the Ideal and the distress caused by a confrontation with the real and with society. Through the life and work of the Russian sculptor Naoum Aronson (1872-1943), it is possible to identify these two modalities of sculpture in one and the same production.

At first sight, the modelling technique favoured by Symbolist sculptors would be the one that blurs forms and dissolves them into a kind of fluidity similar in painting to hazy impressions, halos, and the shady atmospheres in which certain painters like to place their objects. Since this enveloping effect is not feasible in sculpture, it is reproduced through the treatment of the surface. Hair, veils draping bodies and wave effects are the most commonly adopted practices. They are to be found in association with eminently Symbolist themes, such as those referring to music, those referring to silence or female figures incarnating spiritual values. Similar themes can be seen in *Silence* by Jean Dampt (Fig. 17-3) and *Wisdom* (1905) by Boleslas Biegas. The lines are accompanied by a sense of drama obtained through torsions and gaps, as in *Chopin* (1902) by Biegas or *The Wave* by Vallgren. Some critics unquestionably link this treatment of the surface and these sinuous lines to the simplification of volumes that is supposed to express innocence or purity. These could be major features of idealism, the surfaces receiving the light without accentuating the shadows, and therefore avoiding undulations. It may also explain the pronounced taste of Symbolists for certain hard or precious stones, like alabaster, lapis lazuli, opal or coloured marble, the nature of which is unsuitable for textured surfaces. However, although sculptures like *Silence* or *Immortality* by Georges-Henri Lemaire offer a play on materials — lapis lazuli, jasper, agate, opal and copper — they only have Symbolist titles.

Fig. 17-3. Jean Dampt, *Silence*

It is significant that George Simmel, a sociologist who became an admirer of Rodin thanks to Rilke, describes in terms of fluidity, a feature already noted by the poet, the "psychological" change incarnated by the sculptor who considered every part of the body as being just as expressive as the face. He wrote:[18]

> What characterizes the modern era is the tendency to experience and interpret the world according to the reactions of our inner life, it is the dissolving of solid contents in the fluid element of the soul …
>
> He understood the relationship between this sociological phenomenon and the surfaces of Rodin, evoking also the "infinite mobility of life", the "flow of inner life."

A critic of Polish origin, Casimir de Danilowicz, proposed an idealistic interpretation of the work by Aronson with its highly visible effects of fluidity. Following an article published in *L'Art décoratif*[19] in 1908, he devoted a book to the young sculptor, illustrated by photographic plates. In a long doctrinaire introduction, Danilowicz violently attacked the art of his time so as to give higher praise to the idealism of Aronson. Feeling nostalgic for the age of Fra Angelico, he declared solemnly:[20]

> Art is like love, it lives off the ideal.
> There where ideal dies, art lies mortally wounded.
> And art no longer has a form of worship.
> It is a career, a means like any other to succeed in earning a fortune.

In his view,[21] "Aronson was a fervent mystic from the very start of his career, as he himself admitted. The elusive world beyond attracted him like an obsession." This fascination is expressed in two ways: through traditional idealist subjects like *Beyond,* a bas-relief dated 1897, *Mystical Silence* (1912), a nude young girl, and *Contemplation,* or through Rodin-inspired processes, as illustrated in his *Dawn,* a face emerging from a block. As for his *Ophelia* (Fig. 17-4)*,* Danilowicz relates the fascination it aroused in him when he saw it in the studio of the artist:[22]

> There used to be in Aronson's studio a statue that I liked to observe at the close of the day, when the grey shadows of twilight invaded the jumble in the studio and the marbles started to live an unreal and strange life. It was the head of a sleeping woman, with ideally beautiful lines, of a calm and soothing poetry, in which the chisel of the sculptor seemed to have enclosed a disturbing and indecisive feeling within the rhythm of this marble with its superbly refined contours. Someone called it "Ophelia" and this charming marble has retained this name . . .

Fig. 17-4. Naoum Aronson, *Ophelia*

A significant group entitled *Adolescents,* presented at the Salon of 1909, inspired the following remarks to Danilowic:

> When Aronson sculpts the Nude, especially a female nude, his creation attains the highest summit of the art. It is like a perfect synthesis between nature and the classical concept, the most refined of lines; only the purity and fullness of these lines and the forms merge in a poem of life, and this is what predominates.

The role of idealization is considerable: it is indeed significant that the female figure (Fig. 17-5) entitled *Thought* in his book is merely a *Bather* in the view of Paul Vitry, who was less concerned by this type of interpretation and who looked upon Aronson solely as "an ardent and slightly mystical spirit."[23]

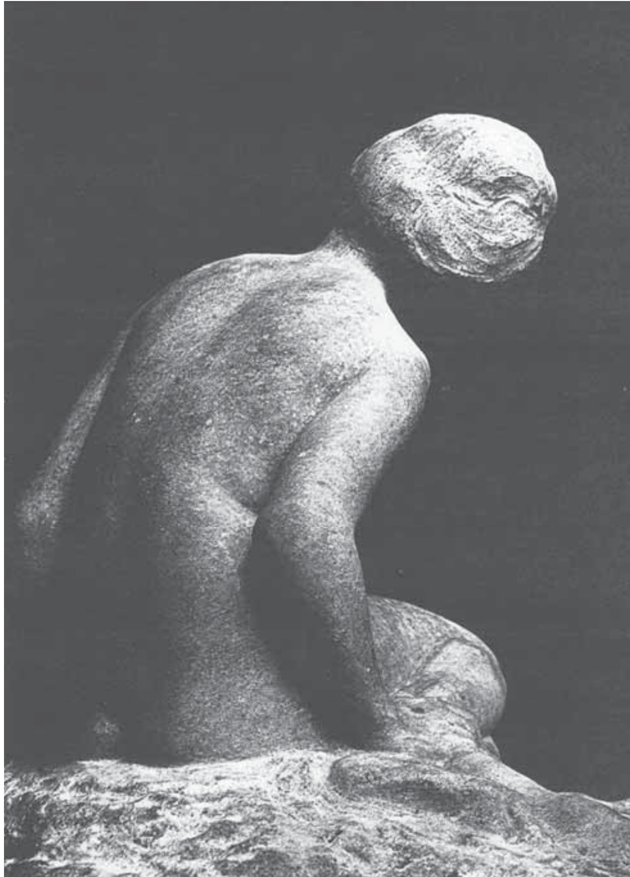

Fig. 17-5. Naoum Aronson, *Bather*

The Cradle of Love

Aronson created a notable idealistic image with his *Cradle of Love* (Figs. 17-6-8). The two lovers, Hero and Leander, forming the mythical and eternal couple in the *Cradle of Love,* are lying next to each other on the ground, which looks like a beach lashed by waves. Lifeless, they merge into this ground as if it were a natural bed made of foam and seaweed. The couple, separated in death, have their limbs entwined. The legs of the young woman cover the legs of the young man, while the arm of the lover still clutches her shoulder. The sensuality of their bodies contrasts strikingly with the contractions of their hands and faces upon death.

Fig. 17-6. Naoum Aronson, *Cradle of Love*

From the plastic point of view, the group is audacious in that it dramatically covers a broad surface but never exceeds a height of about fifty centimetres. This is a far cry from the pyramid-shaped academic compositions that used to give a heroic aspect to sculpted figures. Here, on the contrary, in a composition favoured by Rodin, the accent is placed on both a natural arrangement and a break from the outlines dictated by

classical sculpture. The result is a plunging or lateral view that does not emphasize any particular dominant viewpoint.

Another remarkable feature is the torsion of the two bodies giving the group a spiral movement worthy of the couples Rodin sculpted for his *Gates of Hell,* such as *Fugit Amor.* It reflects also the Gothic tradition of recumbent tomb statues, as reinterpreted by the sculptors of that period, starting from Rude, within the context of funerary sculpture. But at the same time, it is also an example of the modern and bold approach set in motion by Rodin, including his rejection of pedestals, which influenced Aronson's choice of a horizontal composition.

Certain details of the *Cradle of Love* combine the plastic refinement of the way the marble is treated with its idealistic meaning, as noted by C. de Danilowicz, who wrote,[24] "Art is the materialisation of a dream, a longing for the world beyond that each person feels palpitating within himself. It is the ideal one tries to capture through meagre human means, the blue bird imprisoned in a cage." Thus, the hair of Hero merging into the waves, which is reminiscent of a shroud, is a theme he repeats in *Ophelia,* one of his most symbolic figures. This theme of despair had already been treated by Rodin in his *Danaid.*

If the sculpture has brilliantly succeeded in suggesting elusive shapes and adding chromaticism, it is because the artist resorted to creating a contrast between the superb polish of the bodies, smooth and sensual, and the effect of rougher, streaked surfaces representing the ground and the flowing hair of the heroine mingling with the waves. In this work, Aronson shares the same aesthetics as Rodin, Camille Claudel and Art Nouveau sculptors.

Fig. 17-7. Naoum Aronson, *Cradle of Love*, detail

In 1898, for instance, Aronson presented the plaster version of the *Cradle of Love*. This was the year when a fierce scandal broke out over the statue of *Balzac* by Rodin, who also presented his larger version of *The Kiss*. In terms of Symbolism, a work that was close to the one by Aronson was the sculpture by Saint-Marceaux, entitled *Towards the Unknown* (Fig. 17-9); Bourdelle presented a fragment, which was already Expressionist, of his *Monument to the War of 1870-1871,* as well as an *Immortal Hellas* in marble from Paros. Vallgren, Nierderhausen-Rodo, Camille Claudel, Dampt, Jeff Lambeaux and other artists also submitted Symbolist works.

The following year, Aronson created the marble version of the *Cradle of Love.* The same year it was possible to view works by Georges Lacombe and Anna Goloubkina (1864-1927), who was also from Russia and who was a student of Rodin. The latter exhibited *Old Age,* a work echoing the pathos Aronson also adopted for his Symbolist subjects, such as *The Martyr* (1898) and *The Silesian Woman* (1901). These works clearly indicate the artistic circles – dominated by Rodin – that Aronson was part of. The master had encouraged Aronson but without making him either his student or his *praticien* (sculptor's assistant).[25] The aspiration to incorporate sculpture that had expression, movement and new plastic solutions in the prevailing Symbolist movement was the ambition of this Société National des Beaux-Arts (SNBA), of which Aronson became a member.

Fig. 17-8. Naoum Aronson, *Cradle of Love*, detail

Fig. 17-9. René de Saint-Marceaux, *Towards the Unknown*

Expressive Shades

Because of his interest in a mystical fervour, Aronson followed the principles of Rodin's Balzac and frequently resorted to representing the heroes of art, those inhabited by the Idea, like Beethoven, Chopin and Tolstoy. As Danilowicz remarked:

> The ideal contained in what they have produced transfuses into their features, and we often want them not as they actually were but how we imagine them to be through what is imperishable in their soul. [26]

But to succeed, Aronson had to use a much more complex model and add drama to the way the figures were arranged: his portrayal of Beethoven is a portrayal that could almost be attributed to Bourdelle! Some of his portraits are similar to the ones by his fellow countrywoman Anna Goloubkina *(Portrait of Andrei Biely,* 1907). The surfaces are shaped, dented, hollowed and covered in contrasting zones, pushed to the extreme limits to express, according to Simmel, the "flow of inner life" which, in the case of these creative artists, takes on the appearance of a storm!

Fig. 17-10. Naoum Aronson, *The Exiles*

But there is another theme that prompted Aronson to move from idealistic symbolism to expressionistic symbolism: the suffering he shared with his co-religionists. His Jewish identity, which made him vulnerable to

pogroms, aroused a compassion that changed his vision. *The Martyr* of 1907 is still treated with the smooth modelling that characterized his *Adolescents*, a purity that is particularly moving since he was the victim of racial hatred in 1904. *The Abandoned,* presented at the SNBA, had the plastic language Aronson developed as a result of certain events and an identity crisis. The pogrom of Kichinev occurred on 6 April 1903; it inspired the famous poem by Haïm Nahman Bialik (1873-1934), *The Town of the Massacre.* Aronson responded with the *Kiddush ha-Shem.*[27] *The Exiles* (Fig. 17-10), simple silhouettes of wanderers, *Pogrom,* a stone sculpture in which the faces of an old man and child are portrayed, and *Exodus* which develop the themes of exile and massacre in a vision close to that of the Polish painter Samuel Hirszenberg (1865-1905) and which Danilowicz had discerned: "And it is the man who sees his race hated and dragged to execution, who vibrates with all of his generous heart in unison with sufferings."

Fig. 17-11. Naoum Aronson, *To the Innocents*

However, in this case too, the interpretation should be broadened, since Aronson was also sensitive to the misfortunes of the entire Russian people: *To the Innocents* (Fig. 17-11), exhibited at the SNBA of 1907, is a monument crowned by two children, which one Jewish journal praised in the following terms:[28] "This is a tribute paid by the young master, with his fiery talent and ardent piety of his Israelite heart, to the widows and orphans of the Russian pogroms inflicted on the Jews." However, thanks to Danilowicz, we know that the group that Danilowicz discussed as *Memory of 9 January 1905,* referred to that terrible "red Sunday" when the Tsar's army fired on the people of St. Petersburg, led by an Orthodox priest who wanted to submit a petition to the Tsar.

Aronson's sketches in clay or plaster, with energetic contours, visible surface irregularities, and an unfinished aspect (not all these works have survived as a matter of fact) introduce also a modality of sculptural Symbolism that was to flourish under the description of Expressionism. Aronson was at that time close to Bourdelle, Minne, and even Lehmbruck. He moved from a fascination with spirituality incarnated by female or adolescent forms towards an expression of human suffering, a theme that was not absent in his early works since he had already produced *Thirst* and *Pain* in 1901. He would revert to it again in his *Salome,* also entitled *Despair.*

The next generation forgot the Symbolist nature of the work of Aronson, and only emphasized this humanistic dimension. Paul Léon, for instance, in his preface for the retrospective at the Galerie Decour in 1926, wrote: "it is, in these lively contrasts and in all the nuances of his infinite richness, the bible of humanity." [29] However, by using the double potential of modelling, and by mastering the language of light and shade, Aronson was able, at the same time as Rodin, to produce a profoundly Symbolist work by combining the two idealistic and expressionistic tendencies.

Thus, Symbolist sculpture offers not only the usual subjects of Symbolism but also a specific practice of modelling surfaces as an artistic language that gives a double use – thematic and plastic – of light and shade in keeping, therefore, with the demands of artists who were suspicious of an approach that was too literary. Among all the processes launched by Rodin, this concentration on the treatment of surfaces, this "movement of light," occupies a central position. In a paradoxical approach, although sculpture is considered to be almost inseparable from the material used, it succeeds in participating in its spiritualization, and even dematerialization. This is achieved by coming close to a blurred relief, which might seem like a regression in relation to the actual nature of

sculpture, but which tends to create effects of mass, fluidity and movement that reach a kind of dissolution of forms, and the dissolution of the stone or bronze. Or on the contrary, the abstraction could be achieved by accentuating the effects of the modelled surfaces in order to dramatize the contours, in an approach that is just as anti-naturalist, and soon to become expressionist. It seems to me that these are the two faces of Symbolist sculpture, brilliantly illustrated by the work of Naoum Aronson, and synthesised by these two complementary uses of modelling, which at the same time are the quintessence of his plastic and technical language, itself suggestive of meaning. Thus, the most specific way of defining Symbolist sculpture is to say that it makes use of the full expressive potential of modelling, understood as the French "modelé."

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Notes

[1] « Le symbolisme », *La Sculpture française au XIXe siècle*, dir. Anne Pingeot, exhibition, (Paris, R.M.N., 1986), 380-392.

[2] "Evoking thoughts through lines, arabesques and plastic means, such is my goal", *L'Assembleur de rêves. Écrits complets de Gustave Moreau,* (Fontfroide: Bibliothèque artistique et literature, 1984), 184.

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[3] A. Aurier, « Les Peintres symbolistes », *Textes critiques 1889-1892*, *Textes critiques, 1889-1892* ; *de l'impressionnisme au symbolisme* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1995), 97.
[4] *Les Peintres de l'âme. Le symbolisme idéaliste en France*, (Gent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon; Antwerpen: Pandora, 1999).
[5] A journal founded by Maurice Pujo in 1892 to defend idealistic art; it contained a series of monographic articles establishing the notion of "artists of the soul" at the same time as the use of "Painters of the Soul" to describe an exhibition at La Bodinière in February-March 1896.
[6] An artist rarely associated with symbolism, which is why J.D. justifies himself by pointing to the "lyricism of the light and perfection of the polished surface that is not due only to a formalism dear to the avant-gardes", while detecting in it a "spiritualized view of forms",136. It is difficult not to be sensitive to the emphasis on the criterion of the modelled surface.
[7] "Les Artistes de l'âme", *L'Art et la Vie,* vol. 5, (January 1895): 22-34, which reproduced a lecture delivered during the first exhibition of "Peintres de l'âme" at La Bodinière in December 1894. This article was preceded by some of the monographic articles published in 1893 and 1894, and continued until 1898. The journal *L'Ermitage* also printed a few articles by Fernand Weyl.
[8] Ibidem. 28-29.
[9] Fernand Weyl (1874-1931) is probably better known by his pseudonym as a playwright, Nozière.
[10] F. Weyl, « Les Artistes de l'âme. James Vibert », *L'Ermitage*, 7e année, vol. 12, (February 1896): 97.
[11] F. Weyl, « Les Artistes de l'âme. Dampt », *L'Ermitage*, 6e année, vol. 10, (March 1895): 129.
[12] Octave Mirbeau, *Le Journal*, February 23, 1896, in *Combats esthétiques*, tome 2, (Paris: Séguier, 1993): 132-134.
[13] « Les Artistes de l'Âme. Réponse à M. Octave Mirbeau », *L'Art et la Vie*, tome 6, n° 47, (March 1896): 189. I think, because the text is rare, it must be given in the original language : « Bartholomé ne se contente pas de donner à ses statues l'attitude expressive, il veut encore les éclairer d'une lumière qui convienne à leur signification. Cette recherche n'est possible que dans un monument ; une statue isolée reçoit difficilement un éclairage déterminé qui la complète et le mette toujours en valeur. Mais dans le tombeau, Bartholomé a pu disposer l'architecture de façon à donner un jour différent aux différents groupes de statues. Tandis que le cortège des mourants se déroule en relief baigné d'une lumière égale et calme, le mari et la femme, qui marchent vers l'Inconnu, se détachent avec éclat, au bord de l'ombre ; grâce à la porte, au seuil de laquelle il a placé les époux, Bartholomé est arrivé à cet heureux montrer de lumière et d'obscurité. De même, en étendant sous une voûte les époux morts, il assuré une lumière de bas en haut qui éclaire mystérieusement le groupe, ainsi que l'ange de la résurrection.»
[14] Albert H. Elsen, *Origins of Modern Sculpture: Pioneers and Premises* (1974 New York: George Braziller, 2001), 87.

[15] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, translated by Robert Firmage, (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1982), 68.
[16] Idem, 46.
[17] Idem, 82.
[18] Georg Simmel, “Rodin,” *Philosophische Kultur*, *gesammelte Essais* (Leipzig: W. Klinkhardt, 1911).
[19] C. de Danilowicz, « Naoum Aronson », *L'Art décoratif*, (February 1908): 61-67. It’s the base for the book *Naoum Aronson, sculpteur,* published by Fontemoing in 1911.
[20] *Naoum Aronson, sculpteur*, 6. “ L’art est comme l’amour, il vit d’idéal. Là où l’idéal se meurt, l’art agonise.
Et l’art n’a plus de culte.
C’est une carrière, un moyen comme un autre d’arriver à faire fortune.*”*
[21] Idem, 25.
[22] Idem, 56-59. “Il y avait jadis chez Aronson une statue que j’aimais voir au déclin du jour, quand les ombres grises du crépuscule envahissent le fouillis de l’atelier et que les marbres commencent à vivre d’une vie irréelle, étrange.
C’était une tête de femme assoupie, aux lignes idéalement belles, d’une poésie calme et reposante où le ciseau du sculpteur semblait enfermer dans le rythme de ce marbre aux contours merveilleusement affinés un sentiment troublant et indécis. Quelqu’un l’appela "Ophélie" et ce nom est resté à ce marbre charmant…”
[23] P. Vitry, « Naoum Aronson », *Art et Décoration*, t. XXXI, (January 1912): 27-28
[24] Danilowicz, 53.
[25] Contrary to what is frequently written, no mention of Aronson as a student appears in the Rodin Museum archives, whereas the presence of Goloubkina is clearly confirmed.
[26] Danilowicz, 37.
[27] A Hebrew expression meaning “sanctification of the Name (of God),” for which pious Jews, in particular, prefer death to abjuration.
[28] Bezalel*,* « Les Salons israélites de 1907 », *Les Archives israélites*, 222.
[29] *Catalogue de l’exposition des œuvres de Naoum Aronson, statuaire*, Galerie Decour, (10 mai-30 juin 1926): 5.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LIGHT, OBSCURITY AND SYMBOLIST THEMES IN AMERICAN SCULPTURE, 1890-1920

SUSAN MARTIS

The American sculptors George Grey Barnard and Lorado Taft moved to Paris in the 1880s to study at the *École des Beaux Arts*, but they made departures from the Academic style when aesthetic characteristics associated with the Symbolist movement and with the French sculptor Auguste Rodin infused their work. Their adaptations of these experiences initiated a transformation in the style and content of American sculpture with works featuring technical experimentation, ambiguous meaning, and endeavors to portray subconscious stimuli. French art critics probably expanded their exposure to Symbolism and Rodin, for throughout the 1880s, when Rodin's career began to achieve success, critical reviews of his sculptures contained more Symbolist language and recognized his innovations with tactile contrasts, sensations of movement and emotion, as well as sensuality and allusions to spirituality.[1] These characteristics appear in the Americans' work, even though Barnard had very little known contact with Rodin except for opportunities to see his works exhibited in Paris and shared personal acquaintances. Taft gradually succumbed to the French sculptor's ideas after he returned to the United States in 1886 and began writing art criticism in which he acknowledged the intangible qualities of Rodin's sculptures, even when they were still controversial in this country. When he traveled to France in later years, he sought out Rodin's work, and eventually met the sculptor. Malvina Hoffman intentionally traveled to France in 1910, seeking and attaining Rodin's tutelage.

Sculptors are particularly sensitive to the effects of light and shadow, but these artists manipulated them by leaving portions of their works unfinished, which did not adhere to conventional practice and drew attention to the creative process of carving figures from stone. They obscured portions of their work and eliminated precise details tied to specific narratives, thus requiring more imagination from viewers as they contemplated these

sculptures. This study examines how Barnard, Taft and Hoffman utilized these aesthetic properties and portrayed themes suggesting abstract concepts related to the destiny of humankind that are difficult to interpret and challenged how the American public perceived art. Eventually this audience responded with enthusiasm as its conservative taste expanded beyond traditional historic subjects like Daniel Chester French's *The Minuteman* of 1874, who steps away from his plow, armed for battle.

George Grey Barnard is among the earliest American sculptors to represent embracing figures, a common subject in Rodin's *oeuvre*. He first designed *Brotherly Love* in 1886 (Fig. 18-1) as the nearly life-size marble grave marker of Lorentz Severin Skougaard, a friend of the sculptor's patron, the American Alfred Corning Clark, who commissioned a second sculpture for his art collection in 1894. In the Skougaard memorial, the rock

Fig. 18-1. George Grey Barnard, *Brotherly Love*

surrounding the back of each man was carved away to define the sides of the tombstone with the bodies. The stone in between them was flattened for an inscription. In this monument, it is clear that the figures touch each other with their arms and hands. The later version, which now marks the burial site of Clark's son Edward, retains greater obscurity, as more stone surrounds the two half life-size people; it is a design similar to the bronze cast illustrated in this essay.[2] The Clark monument in marble most effectively illustrates how rough surfaces heighten the appearance of the figures' smooth contours and tense muscles.[3] Where the concave bodies meet convex outcroppings of stone, shadows further shroud these men, deepening the mystery of their expression.[4] They seem more entrapped than sensual, struggling with an unbreakable force. In 1894, when this sculpture was exhibited in Paris, the French critic Ghil interpreted the rock as the earth, writing: "Is not this a splendid interpretation of Death—'This life reclaimed by relentless matter—Earth.'"[5] Thus, one allusion is that these bodies cannot escape their destiny; death is stronger. Their hands try to meet, but physical contact slips away. The introverted and strong emotional content breaks from the Beaux Arts aesthetic and aligns it with broader psychological interests emerging in the arts.

Brotherly Love requires viewers to reflect about forms and feelings that are subjective and intangible, provoked in part by portions of the anatomy that are not visible. The nude was a rare subject in nineteenth-century American art. Barnard's statements convey that he wanted the public to accept the nude figure because of the beauty of the human form, in accordance with Ancient Greek traditions, rather than with American viewers' preconceived notion that nakedness was equivalent to profanity. A negative response to Frederick MacMonnies' *Bacchante and Infant Faun* in 1893 exemplifies this attitude. Despite ancient classical precedents for the subject matter, members of the Boston public rejected the statue for its intended location in front of the Boston Public Library. The liveliness of a nude female, standing on the toes of her right foot and holding aloft a bunch of grapes in her right hand, that in turn captivate an infant supported in her left arm, offended them. Barnard's statues also received some censure because they expressed so much vigor and he often avoided common mythological or historical themes.

However, the New York art critic J.N. Laurvik proclaimed Barnard's ability to see beauty unobserved by ordinary people, beauty combined with "power and the inexpressible tragedy of life."[6] He continued: "Others strive to produce art, Barnard is only concerned with reproducing life. Barnard is a great visionary who sees with the eyes of a mystic . . . Every manifestation of life, however fleeting, is to him fraught with a hidden

meaning."[7] Laurvik's references to mysticism and hidden meanings show his awareness of the invisible forces of nature that Barnard professed to emulate in his work. This critic also perceived that Barnard's understanding of light was essential to his craft, providing the means to illuminate the expressive potential of surfaces by means of highlight and shadow.

Lorado Taft recognized in Barnard's images elements "without tradition or precedent" as well as a degree of mysticism.[8] Taft is known as a conservative sculptor, but his conception of beauty extended to some technical experimentation, representations of the nude body, and subjective evocations in sculpture, which he admired in George Grey Barnard's work as well.[9] As a writer and lecturer who developed an appreciation for Rodin, Taft encouraged his audiences to observe the beautiful surfaces of the French sculptor's work and his ability to employ contrasts of light and shadow to create atmosphere for his figures. He also suggested that Rodin's ability to express with minimal detail required sensitive consideration to discern which elements were most important. Taft's interpretations of Rodin's subjects emphasize the essence of character, thought and destiny, rather than criticize their lack of allegorical content, revealing his inclination for Symbolist concepts.

Taft's critics recognized the similarities between his sculptures and those by Rodin, acknowledging a similar aesthetic of figures emerging from the stone as well as Symbolist content that superseded the literal subject portrayed. For example, the American painter and critic Charles Francis Browne observed that Taft's images changed from a style that was literal and objective, as he learned in Paris, to one representing "'a more suggestive, synthetical, subconscious mental activity and expression.'"[10] The fate of the individual is a recurring Symbolist theme for Taft, often portrayed in association with the process of metamorphosis.

Taft's *Solitude of the Soul*, c. 1901 (Fig. 18-2) has approximately life-size men and women with more naturalistic, less taut anatomy in comparison to Barnard's *Brotherly Love*. Their convex poses attract light to the most exposed surfaces, so appendages create shadows enhancing their forms. These people appear caught in and oppressed by the material that extends overhead, whose texture differs at the top and bottom yet still serves to enhance its difference from the bodies. The extended mass dramatizes shadows on the faces. Each person points in a slightly different direction; some connect with touching hands or heads. These slight points of physical contact enhance the ambiguity of a group whose setting and title emphasize the individual. They are preoccupied with their own concerns, for they do not react to each other emotionally. Taft claimed a

Fig. 18-2. Lorado Taft, *The Solitude of the Soul*

unified goal for the figures, however, stating that the sculpture represents "the great beyond . . . veiled from humanity, and man and woman lean upon one another groping through life, seeking to solve its mystery."[11] Taft depicted physical and spiritual distinctions that inspired his audience to consider these factors in their own lives.

In 1908, Charles Francis Browne interpreted Taft's intent for this sculpture to express the realization that regardless of how many forms of support a person has, eventually each one fulfills their destiny alone**.** Both the universality of this concept and its evocative nature are reflected in at least ten poems about this sculpture, many of them published in journals. Significantly, these multivalent responses do not focus on the body. These bodies have sensual appeal but the distant expressions of their faces draw attention to the mind, spirit, and subconscious forces. As a result, Taft's sculpture encouraged viewers to meditate on the intangible concepts of psychological and spiritual existence.

These sculptures by Barnard and Taft exemplify Symbolist expression with vague form and meaning and with exposing technique by leaving parts of figures undeveloped or some material in a rough state. However, both Taft and Malvina Hoffman made sculptures in which clarity seems to prevail, with some groups, inspired by Symbolist texts, more literally portrayed. For example, Taft's *The Blind,* 1908 (Fig. 18-3) derives from Maurice Maeterlinck's play with the same title. Taft's wife recorded that the mysticism and suggestiveness of Maeterlinck's work fascinated him.[12] The play includes fifteen characters, four of whom contribute to the story directly by their presence, for one is a dog, another is dead, and two never speak. The words and setting connote both hope and despair. The plot revolves around helpless blind people, whose leader dies, leaving them stranded outside of their home. They express fear of the unknown and a desire for protection. They have not fully developed other senses that could lead them to safety, so they remain vulnerable. At the end of the play, a blind girl holds a crying baby who seems to respond to approaching footsteps. The fate of this group is left unresolved, for as the footsteps advance the baby cries louder, but whether at friend or foe is unknown.

While the source for the subject matter is certainly Symbolist, the life-size representation of *The Blind* appears, superficially, more traditional, particularly since Taft did not contrast finished and unfinished forms. Yet, Taft presented a design unique in comparison to his earlier multiple figure compositions. The people in *The Blind* do not have the sense of careful arrangement found in his previous group projects, but instead capture the atmosphere of a moving, jostling crowd. Moreover, their simple forms mirror the simple prose of Maeterlinck's text. They seek some protection

amid the group, with ears or faces seemingly aimed toward the sound of footsteps, but their condition means that no one can protect them if needed. Each person is self-reliant, in this situation age and gender have little consequence. Taft emphasized their state of mind, conveyed through

Fig. 18-3. Lorado Taft, *The Blind*

exaggerated gesture, which is enhanced by the uniformity of their garments.[13]

Taft believed that the play's "symbolism expressed the great longing of all humanity for light in life," and tried to convey this feeling in his sculpture by inducing a sense of hope and anticipation among the confused individuals huddled together in uncertainty.[14] An unidentified author from the journal *Current Literature* concurred, interpreting *The Blind* as an image embodying "the whole spiritual travail of humanity" as well as " a great spiritual symbol" and complimenting Taft's and the public's desire for art that enlightened the soul.[15] Such references to spirituality indicate that artists, critics and the American public were now more receptive to implied meanings in works of art, rather than seeing them only as instructive representations.

Taft's Symbolist sculptures expanded the representation of nudity, sensory response, and ambiguity in American sculpture. Few sculptors from this country represented the concepts of metamorphosis and the creative process. However, Taft remained an idealist, for the form and content of his sculptures and opinions repeatedly enforce the belief that art can transform society, and need not be decadent. His optimism was characteristically American and his Symbolist themes universal: creation, human destiny, and their infinite mysteries. His subjects included specifically American subjects, such as the plight of Native Americans and alluded to broader concerns, including the literal and spiritual affects of displacement and change, and individual responses to subliminal stimuli, all of which were part of the modern experience.

By the time Malvina Hoffman emerged as a sculptor, the innovations of the Symbolists, Rodin, Barnard and Taft were well known and more widely accepted. Hoffman illustrated related themes, but did not simply imitate any of these artists and favored vigorous representations of the body responding to music, passion and spirituality during this early period of her career. In her autobiography, she described her personal response to music, an art form significant to the Symbolist movement, writing, "Language is a clumsy medium to express the pounding surge of intense feelings. Our senses build up a world of our own—beyond words. Music could drive my blood and suffuse my entire being with its mysterious magic."[16] Her book *Sculpture Inside and Out* (1939) illuminates her artistic aims, advising "You must add yourself to what you see, and infuse the object with the passionate essence of your own thought; then the result will be not merely realistic, but it will be the merging of matter and spirit."[17] She worked in a more diminutive scale when creating sculptures that employ unfinished qualities, or express sensual, ambiguous or personal subjects; the sculptures presented here measure between 17 and 25 inches.

Hoffman also read authors associated with the Symbolist movement, such as Émile Verhaeren and Paul Verlaine, identifying the latter's *Offrande* (Fig. 18-4) as the inspiration for her sculpture with the same title.[18] This group exemplifies how she employed line and illumination to enhance atmospheric tension, which, in this case, is crucial in its ability to engage the viewer. The backward stretch of the woman's arms indicates a slight resistance or uncertainty as her partner reaches towards her. These positions heighten the subtle sensations of movement, enhanced by the reflection of light on the surface. Consequently, viewers empathize with the conflicts of innocence and knowledge, and hesitation and yearning that pervade numerous circumstances. Hoffman described the process of sculpting

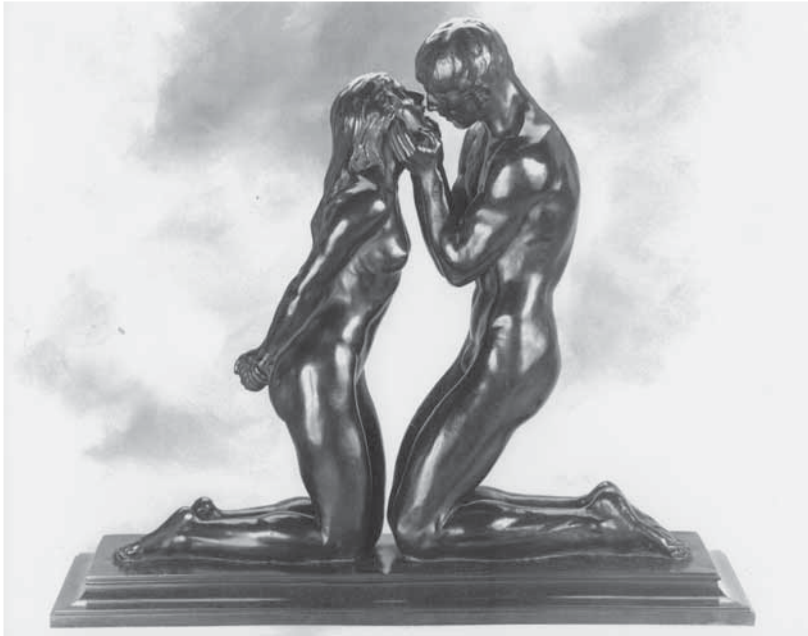

Fig. 18-4. Malvina Hoffman, *L'Offrande*

the marble version of this group as a solace during World War I, during which time she worked for the Red Cross.

In this untitled sculpture from 1926 (Fig. 18-5), idealized human forms sink into matter, exemplifying Hoffman's appreciation for the contrast of smooth and rough surfaces. As a result, the unseen parts of these bodies force the viewer to imagine them, and by extension the feelings and potential meaning represented by their reclining position. This sculpture resembles a photograph of Hoffman's *Lover's Prayer* (1923) that shows a woman and man, nude, kneeling over a rough mass. Hair, or possibly a veil adorning the woman, blows over their lowered heads and they extend their arms downward. The scantily clad bodies are prostrate before an invisible force and attached to the unformed matter beneath them. They appear united to each other, to nature, and to a desire for spiritual communion. Notably, the sensual connotations of Hoffman's images show greater restraint than those of Rodin. Whereas his figures emanate transitional movement that made his amorous couples seem actively engaged, Hoffman's couples are either in the act of dancing, show one member on the verge of expiration, or are separated by a physical or psychological barrier.

Fig. 18-5. Malvina Hoffman, *Untitled*

In the first monograph written about Hoffman's work in 1930, the French art critic Arsène Alexandre mentioned *Offrande* and the *Lover's Prayer*, among other sculptures, when he claimed that the strongest component of Hoffman's *oeuvre* was its mysterious connotations and he emphasized the force of its suggestive qualities, which captivated him. His description begins by explaining that mystery imbues great art, that it cannot be explained completely and that Hoffman's work was no exception. Alexandre believed her exposure to music, especially in light of her father's career as a pianist, inspired her imagination, which he considered "the primary quality of her work," and contributed to its mystical manifestations.[19] He continued by asserting that, "In most, if not in all of the works we shall study, we clearly see that they are the outcome of a potent and sudden suggestion."[20] This last phrase implies that Hoffman's immediate emotive and creative response to subjects is strongly felt when in the presence of her images, although it cannot be easily articulated. Hoffman sought to capture naturalistic form in a way that conveyed its organic power; using the exterior to reflect the activity inside, the physical superseded by the spiritual.

A limited number of studies examine manifestations of Symbolism in American art and most feature the medium of painting, but Barnard, Taft and Hoffman integrated aspects of this movement in sculpture. Images like these represent a small and distinctive part of each artist's career. They succeeded in engaging the viewer's imagination and physical and emotional sensations more directly than their predecessors did. Sculptures portraying indistinct meaning, sensual expression and incomplete qualities were new to the American public. Barnard and Taft decried the lack of art appreciation in the United States, asserting that the predominance of manufactured goods degraded aesthetic taste in general. They strove to correct this deficiency and disinterest, in part by making audiences aware of the intellectual and emotive content of art by creating thematically provocative figures and leaving their works in a traditionally incomplete state to help viewers appreciate how sculptures are made and to undermine particular narrative recognition. By the time Hoffman established her career, audiences were more open-minded about sculptures that were timeless in appearance and interpretation and that piqued spiritual and subconscious awareness. These artists challenged the American public to contemplate the meaning of sculptures that had no clear source, an aspect of their work that differentiated them from many of their American contemporaries, and viewers' increasingly positive responses to the work of these artists promoted their fame at the turn of the last century.

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Fig. 18-1. George Grey Barnard, *Brotherly Love*, modeled 1886-87. Bronze, 41 ½ x 15 x 28 in. (105.4 x 38.1 x 71.1 cm). Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 2007.9.

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Notes

[1] Ruth Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius* (New Haven, and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 224.
[2] The Skougaard monument is 53" tall. The smaller marble version is 41" tall.
[3] Notably, this contrast is less apparent in bronze casts of the composition, whose metal surfaces are more reflective and detract from textural variations and expression.
[4] The similarity of this sculpture to some of Michelangelo's unfinished works is often noted. Both Barnard and Rodin admired the Italian Renaissance artist.
[5] Ghil, *La Republicain de l'Ouest*, France, May 12, 1894; quoted in "Opinions of the Sculpture of George Grey Barnard By French and American Critics" found in the George Grey Barnard Papers in the Archives of the Kankakee County Historical Society, unpaginated.
[6] J. N. Laurvik, "George Grey Barnard," *The International Studio*, Dec. 1908, vol. 36 (XXXVI, no. 142), 39.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Lorado Taft, *The History of American Sculpture* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903, repr. 1924), 7.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Anonymous, "Lorado Taft: "The Leading Sculptor of the West," *Current Literature*, v. 44 (May 1908): 516. Clipping found in the Lorado Taft Papers, Archives, University of Illinois.
[11] Anonymous, "Lorado Taft and the Western School of Sculptors," *The Craftsman*, vol. XIV no. 1 (April 1908), 13.
[12] Ada Bartlett Taft, *Lorado Taft. Sculptor and Citizen* (Greensboro, NC: Mary Taft Smith, 1946), 48.
[13] He developed the character of each individual figure in *The Blind*, and used exaggerated gesture as a means of expression, but you must walk around the sculpture and peer among the figures to appreciate their poses.
[14] Anonymous, "Lorado Taft and the Western School of Sculptors," 13.
[15] "The Leading Sculptor of the West," 515.
[16] Malvina Hoffman, *Yesterday is Tomorrow: A Personal History* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965), 49.
[17] Malvina Hoffman, *Sculpture Inside and Out* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1939), 83.
[18] Hoffman, *Yesterday is Tomorrow*, 158.
[19] Arsène Alexandre, *Malvina Hoffman* (Paris: J.E. Pouterman, Publisher, 1930), 9.
[20] Ibid.

Part Five:

Literature

CHAPTER NINETEEN

LIGHT AND DARKNESS IN DOSTOEVSKY'S *WHITE NIGHTS* AND KAFKA'S "HUNGER ARTIST"

BRENT R. JUDD

Dostoevsky's 1848 novella entitled *White Nights* (*Belye nochi*) has a paradox in its title. Night is black. Black absorbs all light and conceals physical presence. White, on the other hand, is the essence of light, reflecting its full intensity to the viewer. Night cannot be white. Yet the phrase “white nights” is commonly used to denote those nights in far northern latitudes that never really darken once late spring has arrived. These white nights exist in places like St. Petersburg, a place that Dostoevsky’s underground man describes as “the most abstract and premeditated city on the whole earth," a paradox unto itself (Dostoevsky [1864] 2003b, 236). The city presents a reality that belies the truth of its existence.

“A Hunger Artist” (“*Ein Hungerkünstler*”), Kafka’s short story from 1922, seems to draw upon another paradox of no less significance for its title. Most people would recognize the meaning of a "starving artist,” but such is not the sense invoked by Kafka. Kafka’s artist practices starvation as the art itself. His art derives from an absence whose presence only comes from his audience who is not starving. The opposition of the artist and audience produces an intersection of opposites, creating a gap in which the unknown is experienced.

These two works by Dostoevsky and Kafka form a commentary on the meaning and nature of art. Although neither Dostoevsky nor Kafka would be considered Symbolists in the formal sense, each evokes the sense of Symbolism. Each story underscores the gaps (or Lacan’s *coupure*) in existence, those places where the physical world splits open to reveal its inadequacy. Each work exposes that which is hidden through the experience of shame. In *White Nights,* Dostoevsky’s Dreamer is ashamed of his solipsistic life, but such shame leads to self-knowledge, knowledge

that could never have been realized without his late night encounters with Nastenka, that is, without contact with the real world. Only when the imaginary world of the Dreamer collides with the real world, truth is exposed. Kafka's hunger artist succeeds in breaking the forty day limit on fasting that his impresario had placed upon him, but by this time he has lost his audience. Surpassing his goal only reveals its inadequacy. His imaginary world is shattered by the real world when his shame is exposed to the circus overseer before his death. Through an examination of both *White Nights* and "A Hunger Artist," I intend to argue that contrasting opposites, whether they be light and darkness, body and soul, or real and imaginary, are the privileged points of access to the truth that the artist seeks to uncover.

In her book *Surprised by Shame*, Deborah A. Martinsen (2003b, 4) observes an important point from Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer* (1873) in which he explains, as she summarizes, that all Russians lie "because they sense a discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves." Shame originates in this discrepancy. Shame always points to a failure to understand one's own identity and/or represent that identity to others. As Martinsen points out, shame is "[p]ositioned on the boundary between self and others" (4). It forms the gap between the ideal and the real. More fundamentally, "shame is experienced when people or things are exposed, which literally means that they are out of place" (11). The hidden identity of self is thrust before another's eyes. This gaze of the other brings into the social world that which before was only a part of one's private world. The private world is out of place in the external world, and this being "out of place" is always the subject of Symbolism.

Of all Dostoevsky's early St. Petersburg stories, *White Nights* is generally regarded as his most charming. Its tone is light and sincere, far from the satirical and biting irony of his other works. In *Dostoevsky's Secrets,* Carol Apollonio (2009, 28) observes that *White Night*'s acclaim comes from its lyricism that "tells of a love so pure it cannot be realized." The unassuming, unnamed twenty-six-year-old narrator of the story has lived in St. Petersburg for eight years without having made a single friend. Rather, he has become acquainted with the buildings and places of the city in such a way that he speaks to them. When one of his favorite houses is repainted yellow, a color he finds to be decidedly unsuited for it, he feels so embarrassed for this house that he refuses to walk by it anymore. He senses its shame or perhaps his own.

The story unfolds when the narrator happens to meet Nastenka, a young woman who is standing by the canal embankment late one night in May. She is alone, crying as she stares into the water. When she notices

the presence of the narrator, she runs to the other side of the street, only to encounter a drunk who aggressively approaches her. The narrator seizes upon this opportunity to save this defenseless young woman from what seems to be an obvious attack. He counsels her to take his hand, and the two briskly travel in the opposite direction from the would-be attacker.

What follows is a series of nightly encounters in which the two reveal their lives to one another. It is on the second evening that Nastenka asks the narrator for an account of his "history." His response is revealing:

> "My history!" I cried in alarm. "My history! But who has told you I have a history? I have no history…"
>
> "Then how have you lived, if you have no history?" she interrupted, laughing.
>
> "Absolutely without any history! I have lived, as they say, keeping myself to myself, that is utterly alone – alone, entirely alone. Do you know what it means to be alone?" (Dostoevsky [1848] 2003a, 186-7)

The narrator insists that he is a "type," a "dreamer," and a "ridiculous man." Though he has dreamed of this real encounter with a woman, he now must expose the shameful emptiness that his life has been up to this point. The "history" that he will give has no correspondence to ordinary reality; it is pure dream.

Such a history is too painful for him to directly express, so he instantly hides behind his erudite nature. Before he begins his explanation, he takes on "a pedantically serious attitude" and begins "as though reading from a manuscript." He explains:

> There are, Nastenka, though you may not know it, strange nooks in Petersburg. It seems as though the same sun as shines for all Petersburg people does not peep into those spots, but some other different new one … In these corners, dear Nastenka, quite a different life is lived, quite unlike the life that is surging round us, but such as perhaps exists in some unknown realm … (Dostoevsky [1848] 2003a, 188)

So separated is the narrator from all others that not even the same sun shines upon his little corner of the world where his "different life is lived, quite unlike the life that is surging round" him.

As his story continues, he must further protect his fragile ego by speaking of himself in the third person. He begins to refer to himself as "our hero," allowing him to reveal the intensity of his isolation without

any attempt to conceal it. The narrator ends by contrasting his existence with that of others:

> To his [the hero's] corrupted eyes we live, you and I, Nastenka, so torpidly, slowly, insipidly; in his eyes we are all so dissatisfied with our fate, so exhausted by our life! (193)

Here the split between the "I" and the "he" is even more pronounced, for he refers to himself in both first and third person within the same sentence. Martinsen (2003a, xxii) observes that the narrator's use of the third person to refer to himself "reveals his poetic proclivity for fashioning life into art". He is thus able to distance himself from his own life.

Even though the narrator would have viewed his life as ideal in the past, Nastenka has now forced open his closed life to reveal its inadequacies. He is now the object of another's gaze, and in so finding himself, he becomes disillusioned with his past. He confesses to Nastenka that at least he has known real life in his past nights with her. He explains that he shall no longer mourn over the "crime and sin" of his life because of this one moment of reality (Dostoevsky [1848] 2003a, 197).

After Nastenka's fiancé eventually returns to take her in marriage, she writes the narrator to express her eternal gratitude for his presence during those nights that she waited in fear and doubt for her fiancé to arrive. Now the narrator is left alone again, concluding his story with a question about the happiness he found during the four nights with Nastenka: "My God, a whole moment of happiness! Is that too little for the whole of a man's life?" (228). The question hangs in the air without an easy answer. The narrator's return to complete isolation and his loathing for his empty future seem to indicate that the answer is yes – this one real experience would be too little. His one moment of happiness serves only to intensify the inadequacies of his dreams. On the morning after the fourth night, the narrator is stunned by his future vision: "I saw myself just as I was now, fifteen years hence, older, in the same room, just as solitary, with the same Martryona grown no cleverer for those fifteen years" (227).

As this comment attests, the story that is recorded is the product of the reminiscing narrator whose vantage point is fifteen years in the future. His work of art, the sentimental story that is called *White Nights*, is the only work of art that he has produced to share with others. The rest of his dreams have remained only his own vague fantasies. The Dreamer's encounter with Nastenka, however, has taken shape for others because it was not a dream. Gary Rosenshield (1977, 200) points out the implications this fact has for the production of art when he observes that the narrator's dreams cannot become art:

> …without the fertile and sustaining soil of the real world. The significant work that he [the narrator] creates from his experience with Nasten'ka may mark the birth of his life in art … Even the most refined sentimental art draws its strength from the poignancy and implications of the real life situation that it sentimentalizes.

In the intersection of the Dreamer's imagination and Nastenka's reality, art is produced.

Kafka's "Hunger Artist" is no less enigmatic than the dreamer's tale, yet it involves the same basic paradox. There are three key elements for the interpretation of Kafka's story. First, the narrator begins by asserting that recent decades have seen a decline in the popularity of the hunger artist. At one time, people in villages throughout Europe would come to see the hunger artist fast in his cage. They would even supply "watchmen" whose duty it was to ensure that the hunger artist did not eat some food that was cleverly tucked away in some corner. The hunger artist most liked the watchmen who took their duties quite seriously, careful to observe him at every moment. These would be rewarded with "a lavish breakfast" that the hunger artist provided "at his own expense." He would watch as they ate "with the keen appetite of healthy men" (Kafka [1922] 2003, 138). Now, however, this widespread interest had evaporated. His impresario gave up on the profitability of these performances and released the hunger artist who is now only able to find work with a circus.

The second key to the story's meaning lies with the hunger artist's lack of satisfaction with his work. His past popularity and success was always overshadowed by his dark mood. As the narrator points out, the hunger artist "alone knew what no other initiate knew: How easy it was to fast" (139). He never ended his fast voluntarily; he always wanted to go on further. He wanted to fast beyond the forty day limit that had been imposed by the impresario who had insisted that public interest could not be maintained for a longer period of time. At the end of forty days, though, he was forced to leave his cage and was placed before a table "laden with a carefully prepared invalid's meal" (139). His "invalid's meal" stood in sharp contrast to the meal he supplied for the healthy appetite of his watchmen during the fasts of former days.

Thirdly, he resented the commonly held belief that his irritable demeanor had been caused by his fasting. Such was a "perversion of the truth" (141). The narrator observes that "what was a consequence of the premature termination of his fast was presented here as its cause" (141). The crowd, unfamiliar with the demands of fasting, could not understand him. And the hunger artist, never being satisfied with food, could not understand them.

During the current unpopularity of hunger artists that exists at the beginning of Kafka's tale, the hunger artist takes on the role of a circus side show. His cage is placed on the way to the animals outside the big top tent. But his cage becomes an obstacle to the steady stream of people who want to visit the spectacular creatures that are living just beyond. He is ignored by the crowd.

The circus, nonetheless, leaves him to fast as long as he wants, and he does so until one of the overseers notices his empty cage. Thinking that the cage is being wasted, he enters to search for its purpose, only to find the dazed artist cowering underneath the straw. The dialogue here is critical:

> "Are you still fasting?" asked the overseer. "When on earth do you plan on stopping?"
>
> "Forgive me, everyone," rasped the hunger artist; only the overseer with his ear pressed against the bars could understand him.
>
> "By all means," said the overseer, tapping his finger at the side of his forehead to indicate the hunger artist's condition to the others, "we forgive you."
>
> "I always wanted you to admire my fasting," said the hunger artist.
>
> "And so we do admire it," said the overseer accommodatingly.
>
> "But you shouldn't admire it," said the hunger artist.
>
> "So then we don't admire it," said the overseer, "but why should we not admire it?"
>
> "Because I must fast, I cannot do otherwise," answered the hunger artist.
>
> "What a character you are," said the overseer, "and why can't you do otherwise?"
>
> "Because," said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and puckering his lips as if for a kiss, and he spoke directly into the overseer's ear so that nothing would be missed, "because I could never find food I liked." (Kafka [1922] 2003, 145)

There is a moment of shame here. In revealing to the overseer that he never had an appetite for food, he renders the feat of his accomplishment

less heroic. He is simply following his natural inclination as others follow their inclination to eat.

At this point, the overseer has the cage emptied and replaces the hunger artist with a panther. This new attraction is far from an obstacle for the audience on its path to the other animals. Crowds flock to the cage to see this creature of raw animal vitality. In fact, the narrator explains that the crowd "steeled themselves, surged around the cage, and wanted never to leave it" (145).

The hunger artist's lack of satisfaction points to his desire to reach the inconceivable. In fact the artist himself is an absence. Brenda Machosky (2005, 288) observes that the hunger artist "arises from an absence. . . . which reveals itself as a trope for the groundless ground of the world in which he hungers, a literary world". She further points out that the German language has two words for fasting: *fasten* and *hungern*. Kafka consistently uses *hungern*. The artist is not fasting. He is hungering. One fasts from that which is abundant. One hungers for that which is absent, a something that is not here, a something that is wholly other.

Yet the story is not just about the hunger artist but also about the people who watch him, society itself. It is only in the contradiction of these two groups, hunger artist and ordinary people, that the two can appreciate the other. In the former days, the crowd had some appreciation for the hunger artist. The crowd at the circus, however, represents a degeneration of the status of society. It no longer has any interest in a hunger artist. Its attraction to the panther's vitality would seem to suggest, using the logic that opposites attract, that the audience now has no vitality. It can appreciate the vitality of the panther only because it has none, just as the hunger artist could appreciate the appetite of the watchmen only because he had none. It was only the audience's appetite that could give his lack of appetite meaning. It was only the panther's raw life that could in some way give the crowd's lack of life meaning.

The hunger artist and society, the Dreamer and Nastenka, both pairs represent the meeting of opposites. Both pairs illustrate the insufficiency of the imagination alone to produce art. The imagination must be exposed to the real world also. The private world of the *White Nights* narrator only yields the written work of art when his imagination is opened up to the real presence of Nastenka. Her gentle presence allows the narrator to reveal himself, a revelation that is confirmed by his sense of shame. The hunger artist has no meaning without a well-fed audience. Yet his imagination opens itself to truth only when he exposes his lack of ordinary hunger to the overseer. The overseer becomes the audience to whom the hunger artist reveals the intersection of his life and death at the end of his endless

hungering. Both Dostoevsky and Kafka insist that art must reveal the gaps in our world in order to point beyond this physical life to a life that has greater meaning. Meaning is encountered only in the absence that opposites expose. Light has no meaning without darkness. Art must continually renew and develop these intersection points to expose the world to the truth that it otherwise hides.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

COLORED LIGHTING IN THE POETRY OF INNOKENTIJ ANNENSKIJ

NATALIA GAMALOVA

Scholars of Russian literature readily and justly acknowledge that Innokentij Annenskij (1855-1909) participated in the Symbolist movement, while at the same time noting that he was isolated from the group. How did this isolation manifest itself? While it is possible to compare Annenskij's poetics to the theories of the French writers Mallarmé and Verlaine (rather than to the discourse of the Russian writers Vjačeslav Ivanov or Valerij Brjusov), it should be noted that until the end of his life Anneskij did not contribute to Symbolist publishing projects or to Symbolist theoretical formulations. Moreover, as we will clearly see, Annenskij regarded the idea of "symbolic poetry" as tautological. At the same time he expressed his reservations about symbolic poetry, his own poetry evolved within the parameters set out by the French Decadents and Russian Symbolists.

In our research we intend to compare the palette of colors in Annenskij's poetry with his definitions of symbol and Symbolism formulated in his *Books of Reflections* (1906 and 1909) and in critical essays that were published after his death.[1] While there has been no study specifically dedicated to colors and light in Annenskij's poetry, such motives have often been the subject of studies and papers on Symbolism and these elements have been discussed as part of the poet's legacy.[2] Light and color are interrelated in Annenskij's works. On the one hand, subtleties of light are reflected in the variety of colors he used to describe landscape and on the other hand, his treatment of color as phenomena implies that he was interested in the intensity of light.

In poetry, as much as in icon painting, "the approach to Light is carried out through color" ("l'approche de la Lumière se fait à travers la couleur[3]"). The colors result from different interactions between light and shadow.

The symbolic meaning of light has universal significance, especially in Slavic languages since the word *light* (*svet*) could mean both "all the world" and "all humankind.[4]" Such connotations assert the superiority of visual perceptions over other ways of perceiving the world. This concern with the visual was sustained, for example, by Vladimir Il (1891-1974), a philosopher, literary critic and theologist, who states:

> It appears that one can not say a single meaningful phrase bearing philosophical-metaphysical or immanent-positivist ideas avoiding sight and light symbolics.[5]

Language places at our disposal words and phrases with a visual component serving to advance abstract notions such as *point of view*, *lucid moment*, *visualization*, *clearness*, etc. Light conceived not as a thing in itself but as something needed for the perception of the external world appears in fiction and in philosophy texts. The first lines of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (980 a)exemplify this conception of light. [6]

Ubiquitous symbols of light and visual impressions allow one to achieve Horace's principle, "to speak of what is common in a way of your own" ("proprie communia dicere, " *Ars poetica*, II, 128). The subject of light is also important for an understanding of Annenskij's poetics. For Annenskij, colored light and changing colors of light were essential.

During the mid-nineteenth century, representatives of German Idealism and of Natural Philosophy (Naturphilosophy) built upon Newton's physical investigations of the refraction and properties of light and colors[7] and wrote important works on natural colors. Because of these treatises, light and color were not only explored within the fields of physics and mathematics but also in other disciplines. German Romanticism and other artistic schools used chromatology as a method to explore reality.[8]

What was Annenskij's view of the role of light and what was his view of Symbolism? In his survey of the early twentieth-century poetry, Annenskij asserts:

> We should first agree about major terms such as Symbolism and Decadence.
>
> These fine words apply to the pioneers in poetry —and they quite recently appeared in France.

According to Robert de Souza, it was Paul Bourde, in his "Le Temps" article of August 6, 1885, who first used the term decadents to refer to poets. A few days later he received a rejoinder from Jean Moréas

published in the "XIXe siècle" newspaper that if a label was needed, Symbolists would be better:

> I am sure that this historical reference leaves us in no doubt about the relative utility of using these two terms—they are polemical nicknames rather than terms—to classify the names of poets or to categorize verses in the sphere of Russian poetry. Symbolist—is a great name, Decadent … another term that can be used by all means. *Etymologically*, no doubt, any of our poets display the features of both. . . .
>
> Poetic Decadence (*Byzantinism*—as the French would now call it) is defined as the *introduction into general literary usage of various technical subtleties not immediately related to the goals of poetry;* it is rooted in the desire to inspire others with one's own world outlook and philosophy through verbal, though close to musical, influence. . . .
>
> That our literature now displays vigorous inclinations to Byzantinism—the French seem to have stopped discriminating between Decadentism and Byzantinism altogether—most strongly felt in poetry, is an open secret. … Words are open, lucid; words both flow and glow. Words only offer a shimmering glimpse of an image.[9] . . .
>
> Poetry operates with ambiguities, with approximations—for this reason it never was and can never be anything but symbolic. . . .
>
> Heroic legend, romantic self-adoration, love for a woman, for god, stage and idols—such are the forces that have always drawn word and image together, making poets forget about the exceptional and true power of their material, *words*, and their noblest of purposes—linking *Me* and *Not-Me* in a shimmering network of symbols, proudly and mournfully feeling an intermediary—the only one—between those two worlds. Symbolist is a term most appropriate in reference to poets who not so much care about the expression of *Me* or the depiction of *Not-Me* as they strive to catch and reflect the ever changing relative positions of the two.[10]

In this extensive discourse, Annenskij offers his definition of symbol, Symbolism and Decadence, drawing on events connected with this literary movement in France. The poet reveals his sources quoting them almost verbatim. Among them is *That is where we are* [*Où nous en sommes*][11] by Robert de Souza (1864-1946), which was his response to the declaration of the death of Symbolism made by authors including Camille Mauclair (*Art in silence* [*L'art en silence*], 1901), Gaston Deschamps (" La vie littéraire. La littérature française et les universités d'Amérique " [" Literary Life. French Literature and American Universities "] published in the journal *Le Temps*, 31 March 1901, n° 14538) and Sully-Prudhomme (*A Poetic*

Testament [*Le Testament poétique*], 1901). Arguing the fortuity and conventionality of the polemical nickname of 'décadent,' Robert de Souza quotes from *The Decadent School* (*L'école décadente*, 1887) by Anatole Baju as well as *An Inquiry into literary evolution* (*Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, 1891) by Jules Huret[12]. According to Annenskij :

> It is useful to remember that "decadent poets" came into being thanks to Mr. Paul Bourde's chronicle in *Le Temps* of 6 August 1885. A few days later Jean Moréas objected to him in *Le XIXe Siècle* so as to defend the "so-called decadent poetry", that in order to fulfill the "obsessional labeling would be called more rightly *symbolist*". . . .
>
> It goes without saying that the term "decadentism" entails another one—"byzantinism" intelligently applied to poets who are more scrupulous about the means of their art. There is byzantinism when worries and discussions dwell on subjects that have no significance for the life of an object.[13]

Annenskij does more than simply describe the circumstances under which the terms or names appeared. First, he reminds the reader of the polemic related to the origin of schools and groups in art and he also describes the accidental nature of their naming. Secondly, he shifts the focus of discussion from polemics, declarations (chiefly targeting academism), from slogans and striking theories to poetic experience, to the specific method of processing the verbal material. Thirdly, the concept of Symbolism as treated by Annenskij, borders on the synthesis of real and ideal described by French poets and critics. For instance, in *The contemporary literary movement* (*Le mouvement littéraire contemporain*, 1901), Georges Pellissier opposes Parnassian poet and Symbolist poet comparing *perfection* and *incompleteness*, and *sharp key lines* and *fuzziness*.[14] In his comparaison Pellissier refers to the poets' treatment of landscape. Annenskij made similar points in his statement about Symbolism (*infra*). As Francis Vielé-Griffin noted in 1895:

> ...Symbolism is really characterized by the passion for the *motion of everlasting gesture* of Life itself . . . beautiful thanks to all the aspects of its transformations; nimble and protean passion that merges with day and night hours...[15]

We referred to a metaphorical explanation of Symbolism by Vielé-Griffin cited by Robert de Souza. Their allusion to ambiguity and instability reminds us of "shimmering glimpses of an image" mentioned by Annenskij. This reference to the ambiguity of verbal material makes for

the great value of Anneskij's vision of art as external to trends and movements, as *artistic practice* (*poiesis* of Aristotle) that would not let him believe in a Symbolist "revolution" (poetry can be "nothing else but symbolic"). Finally, Annenskij emphasizes that poetry not only blends the forms of the outer world and the subjective perceptions of a poet but that it offers a chance and an imperative to catch something agile and evasive—the ever changing *relation* between *Me* and *Not-Me*, between subjectivity and the world.

Annenskij refers to Blok's *He is sleeping while the sunset glows* (*Он спит, пока закат румян*, 1904) as an example of an "elementary symbolic piece:"

> … In Blok I see a rare example of an innate Symbolist. His perceptions are vague as words are flexible, and his verses seem destined for being symbolic.[16]

In Blok's poem, *He is sleeping while the sunset glows,* the night falls upon the Copper horseman square—cf. "розовеют латы"—"the armor turning pink", "блеснут витрины"—"the shop-windows flashing up", "мерцаньи тусклых площадей"—"in the glimmering of dull squares", etc. -- Annenskij writes: "All these changes . . . in Petersburg lighting," these are poetic manifestations of the interchangeability of solid reality and "vague perceptions." Thus, Symbolism is illustrated by "descriptions" of shady outlines and changing lighting and the purely speculative design of the poet.

Between the atmospheric phenomena correlating with reality and the poet's intended meaning, Annenskij finds the third reality—the reality of language. Language mediates between the outer world—conventionally if simplistically understood as visible and memorable phenomena, forms and events; the *not-Me* in the poet's idiom—and the inner world. The poet perceives the inner world as an arbitrary non-chronological and non-linear relations and links established by himself, or, as he states by *Me*.

Following the ideas expressed in a short essay by Wilhelm Humboldt *Latium and Hellas, or Observations on Classical Antiquity* (*Latium und Hellas, oder Betrachtungen über das klassische Altertum*, 1806),[17] which was propagated by Aleksandr Potebnja in Russia, Annenskij regarded words as symbols which allow for "telling the untold."[18] Annenskij especially was interested in words of color, those that could convey fleeting changing atmospheric phenomena, the phenomena that he called "in-between." He believed that descriptions of color that refer to nature are the result of culture. Culture explores the way that nature is perceived;

similarly, the aesthetic manifestation of nature is a result of cultural perception. As Annenskij wrote:

> It is scientifically proved that the aesthetic vision of nature is nowhere close to innate: it is subject of cultivation all together with other features of human soul. The Hindu of "Rigveda" or the Greek of Homer undoubtedly perceived blue and violet as spectral colors; at the same time, in Hindu hymns the sky, while ornamented with dozens of epithets of colors is never simply blue; likewise in Homer the violet becomes black,[19] while the sea turns purple. It looks like the perception was far from fixed. This is where art, and poetry in particular, come to the rescue. For example, the English came to boast the richest color vocabulary under their foggy northern skies; while some African tribes under the brightest equator sun can only distinguish the colors of their cattle, or rather coat-colors. Obviously, nature is not to blame, it is all about perception and culture. Who of the contemporaries can now withstand the charm of Alps when they have a chance to see them: silver colors, tassels of streams; pink flaky mists; whereas Titus Livius did not hesitate to call them "repulsive" (fœditas Alpium[20]) and it was probably not before Rousseau[21] that the world learned about the deposits of pure aesthetic delight waiting in the very heart of Europe.[22]

Here Annenskij failed to avoid psychological phraseology (speaking about "fixation of impression"), psychology enjoying great popularity in late 19th century. But more importantly, he emphasizes: 1) the evolution of aesthetic sensibility and 2) the role of language as a repository of cultural values and artistic "achievements." "Coat-colors" ("масти") and "pink flaky mist" ("розовый слоистый туман") are here opposed as a *terminology* to refer to one particular color of animal coat ("coat-colors"), and a *word-image* referring to both physical and psychological worlds ("pink flaky mist") but dependent on epoch and national culture, while also evoking a number of associations with fine arts, literature, and language.

Let us now explore the color of the sea in Homer discussed by Annenskij. Describing the sea and the rivers, Homer indeed sometimes resorts to an epithet derived from either πορφύρα—the purple (*Iliad*, I, 482 ; XVI, 391[23] ; *Odyssey*, II, 428 ; XI, 243), or from οἶνος—wine, wine of date (*Iliad*, I, 349-350 ; II, 612-613 ; XXIII, 143 ; *Odyssey*, I, 182 ; II, 420 ; III, 285 ; V, 348[24]).

The purple sea in Homer, Pliny and other Ancient poets was discussed by Winckelmann in his *History of the Art of Antiquity* (*Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, 1764). In that same work this early historian of art dwells upon the *colore cangiante*, the iridescent colors or colors releasing

a display of luster if the surface is polished.[25] Winckelmann discovers two shades of purple in the Greek: the first is *violet* or ἰάνφινος, it is a Greek word meaning “color of sea” and the second is the purple color in its proper meaning, the precious “Tyrian purple.” Winckelmann quotes several bibliographic sources offering detailed descriptions of purple shades in Antiquity, such as the Italian antiquarian Pasquale Amati (1716-1796), who claimed in *De Restitutione Purpurarum* that only the tumultuous sea is referred to as purple by the Greeks, or Achille Tatius, who believed that the shallow waters at the sea shore were tainted with red by sea shells. The latter are mentioned in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Tauris* as molluscs (*monotocardes*,—N. G.) as secreting purple liquid.[26] Euripides: “...κοιλωπὸς ἀγμός, πορφυρευτικαὶ στέγαι[27]” (263); in Annenskij's translation: “The harvesting of purple mollusks starts as soon as the sea ebbs...” (“Сбор пурпуровых улиток происходит, / Едва отхлынут волны...[28]”), Marie Delcourt-Curves translates the passage in French: “...où viennent s'abriter ceux qui pêchent la pourpre,[29]” and Gilbert Murray refers to: “the verge / Where purple-fishers camp.[30]”

The purple sea appears in Annenskij's translation of the chorus in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* (ἔνθα πορφύρεον σταλάσσουσ' ἐς οἶδμα τάλαιναι κόραι Φαέθοντος οἴκτῳ δακρύωντὰς ἠλεκτροφαεῖς αὐγάς, 737-740). In Annenskij’s Russian translation it is stated as follows: “...Где в волны пурпурные, блеском / Отцовским горящие волны, / Несчастные девы не слезы / В печали по брате погибшем, / Янтарное точат сиянье” (“...Where unfortunate maids, mourning over their perished brother, don’t leave to cry tears into the purple waves burning with luster of her father, but they shed amber light”). Artaud’s French version of 1842 reads: “où les trois sœurs infortunées de Phaéton, pleurant son imprudence, versent des larmes d'ambre transparent, dans les ondes pourprées de leur père!”; the English version reads: “Could I wing me to my rest amid the roar / Of the deep Adriatic on the shore, / Where the waters of Eridanus are clear, / And Phaëthon’s sad sisters by his grave / Weep into the river, and each tear / Gleams, a drop of amber, in the wave.[31]” We clearly see that only Annenskij’s translation includes a direct reference to *luster* as both transparent and multicolored: “tears burning with luster” (“блеском горящие слёзы”) and “amber brilliance” (“янтарное сияние”).

Annenskij also alludes to Hannibal's crossing of the Alps in Titus Livius' *The History of Rome* (*fœditas* means “ugly, hideous, repulsive”): “ Transeuntem Appenninum adeo atrox adorta tempestas est, ut Alpium prope foeditatem superauerit” (XXI, 58) . Here is Foster’s translation: “In attempting to cross the Apennines he was assailed by a storm so terrible as almost to surpass the horrors of the Alps.[32]” It was only with the birth of

sentimental and Romantic literature that the mountain landscape and the glaciers acquired its appeal to the travelers. A similar idea is expressed in Annenskij's letter to his kinswoman Anna Borodina:

> They (words,—N. G.) behave as the mountain guide adding nothing to the beauty of the sunset or the glacier but without them you loose the chance to admire either.[33]

Perception is defined by knowledge and language. Admiration of a natural landscape is made possible through its "cultivation" by the use of linear perspective and light in fifteenth-century painting, and in the landscape painting of Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), or in Milton's (1608-1674) descriptions of the Garden of Eden.[34]

In speaking of color and Symbolism, Annenskij intentionally refers to texts in Ancient Greek. As a teacher of Classical Greek and translator of Euripides, the poet was used to rendering into Russian words, concepts and world-outlooks of the most ancient of civilizations. The "telling of the untold" and the description of light are fully dependent on Ancient culture. Hellenism not only provides the context for Annenskij's creative works but informs his own original symbolism.

According to Parmenides, color alteration is one of the features of being (visible, full of contradictions, changeable) differentiating it from the Truth (immovable and whole):

> ὅσσα βροτοὶ κατέθεντο πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ, [40] γίγνεσθαί τε καὶ ὄλλυσθαι, εἶναί τε καὶ οὐχί, καὶ τόπον ἀλλάσσειν διά τε χρόα φανὸν ἀμείβειν.[35]

> Wherefore all these things are but the names which mortals have given, believing them, to be true—coming into being and passing away, being and not being, change of place and alteration of bright color.[36]

> ...In so far as men leave it out of the question, having convinced it to be truth, being born and being destroyed, to be and to be not, and to change place, and through bodies light to be exchanged.[37]

> Ainsi donc toutes ces choses ne sont que des noms donnés par les mortels dans leur crédulité: naissance et mort, être et non-être, changement de lieu et de brillantes couleurs.[38]

> Поэтому [пустым] именем будет все,
> Что смертные установили [в языке], убежденные в истинности этого :
> "Рождаться и гибнуть", "быть и не быть",
> "Менять место" и "изменять яркий цвет[39]."

In the poem by Parmenides the colors combine with luster: χρόα φανὸν ἀμείβειν, the word φανός and its derivatives have the meaning of "clear, bright, lustrous, luminous" as well as "light, clarity, luster, lamp, torch, lampad"; χρόα is a more sophisticated word (hence, the great difference in translations) meaning "some coating applied to the surface of bodies" and sometimes meaning "shade of complexion." In this latter sense it appears in Euripides' *Medea*: χροιὰν [...] ἀλλάξασα (1168). In the translation by Annenskij it reads: "с её ланит сбежала краска[40]" "the color left her cheek." Speaking more precisely if less poetically of the dying king Creonte's daughter, he describes "as she changed her color."

Deceptive luster and changing colors of surfaces represent transformation in the visibility of bodies and things. The genetic affinity of Parmenides and a regular application of such attributes as *luster* and *brilliance* to define colors by Annenskij appear more than likely. The surface image of the world is visible and changeable. Obviously, the dubious and incompatible phenomena of this world have found expression in people's languages!

Annenskij's partiality to color (and the combination of color with luster and glimmer) is demonstrated in the comparison of his translations with the French originals. Here are some examples of *luster* and *brilliance* from the original verses by Annenskij:

Истомлена сверканием напрасным (*Ледяная тюрьма*)
Exhausted by the wasted brilliance (*Ice prison*)

То сверкающе белый. / То сиреневый снег ... (*Снег*)
Snow the color of brilliant white or lilac (*Snow*)

Серебряным блеском туман / К полудню ещё не развеян... (*Серебряный полдень*)
The silver brilliance still has failed to disperse the mist by midday (*Silvery midday*)

Средь мерцаний золотых... (*Перебой ритма*)
Among the golden glimmerings (*Irregularity of rhythm*)

Мне нужен талый снег под желтизной огня (*Мучительный сонет*)
I need the melting snow under the yellowing fire (*Agonizing sonnet*)

Brilliance, glimmerings, iridescence and the brightness of colors are interconnected and produce the ambivalence typical of Annenskij. Allusions to color without shadow, such as an achromatic brilliant white are less ambivalent; as we have mentioned such colors are also used by

Annenskij but seem less valuable for his symbolism. It is the ambivalently brilliant colors that are formative for Annenskij's poetics. They can be found in the Divine Light (cf. "From the luster of truth in the prophetic word" in translation of Mallarmé's " Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu " ("To grant a purer sense to the words of the tribe") from his version of *The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe*); or in a sly temptation: "And the insanity and joy became more lustrous in the eyes, and gold and the rosy goblet" as translation of Verlaine's *Crimen Amoris* "En vain la fête autour se faisait plus folle, / En vain les satans, ses frères et ses sœurs. . ." ("In vain the feast around was getting wilder, / In vain the Satans, his brothers and sisters. . .").

Apart from luster, the transitional and borderline states[41] can be rendered by the mixture of rose and blue (wisteria) or blue and grey (glaucous) shades. Such colors as lilac, mauve, and glaucous evoke the color we call "gorge-de-pigeon"—varying with the change in perspective. The colors of lilac and mauve are related to the half-light, to the light-and-shade as reflected by the Ancient Greek in the term of σκιερός, ά, όν[42] meaning "casting shadow, covered in shadows, shadowy, connected with shadow."[43] These states are visible at dawn and dusk, before and after rain. In four six-line stanzas from *Anguish of calmed downed storm* (*Тоска отшумевшей грозы*) we find six names of colors related with some kind of thingness and dynamism: white-scarlet, turquoise, azure, gold, all dull colors, green (бело-алый, бирюза, лазурность, златошвейный, безбурый, зеленовейный).

There is another good example of the application of the ancient σκιερός. The fiery sun is tainted with particular tinges of red and copper by haze or mist.

> И багровый над долиной / Загорелся поздно глаз (*Конец осенней сказки*)
> And over the valley the sanguine eye flamed out late at night (*End of autumn fairytale*)
>
> Но в тумане все нежней /Пламя пурпурного диска / Без лучей и без теней... (*Хризантемы*)
> And in the mist the flame of purple disc becomes more tender, rayless and shadowless... (*Chrysanthemums*)
>
> Как тускло пурпурное пламя, / Как мертвы желтые утра! (*Ноябрь. Сонет*)
> How dull is the purple flame, how livid the yellow mornings! (*November. Sonnet*)

Осенены с небес сияющим потиром. (*Маки*)
Overshadowed by the celestial brilliance of the chalice. (*Poppies*)

Солнце за гарью тумана / Желто, как вставший больной (*Пробуждение*)
The sun behind the fumes of mist is sallow as the convalescing patient (*Awakening*)

We come across a similar confluence of sun and mist producing different colors in Aristotle's *Meteorology*: "καὶ δι᾽ ἀχλύος καὶ καπνοῦ ὁ ἥλιος φαίνεται φοινικοῦς" (Book III, ch. IV, 374a)[44] (". . . so, too, the sun appears red through smoke and mist.")

Annenskij's interpretation of Lermontov incorporates aspects of his own poetics and idiom:

Glorifying the mountains, Lermontov was fond of colors. White and light blue were his favorites. He uses several shades of white—pearl and pearly, silvery, snow-white, lily-white; although I have never come across either milky-white or chalk-white, probably because the poet is attracted to colors that are airy, sunny. The light blue often appears as enamel, turquoise, azure; blue and dark-blue are also not infrequent. The poet is fond of rosy sunset, white cloud, blue sky, lilac steppes, light-blue eyes and golden hair. . . . Still, Lermontov's colors are unique for their combinations. . . . The poet experienced a particular aesthetic pleasure combining brilliance with motion—in descriptions of clouds, lightning, eyes; his poetry is "full of snakes"; the narrator often suspends his story to admire a graceful and brilliant snake.[45]"

Annenskij is not a master of coloration. First, because his landscape admits, as we have already witnessed, several levels of interpretation. Second, his most ekphrastic verses are those exposing the optative reality (cf. In his translation of color-abundant *Crimen Amoris* of Verlaine he uses the verb "to dream", "мнится"), it is the *desired* picture that is painted through the notions of color and lighting.

Of winter morning *I love* when above
I see the lilac flood of semi-darkness,
And where the sun used to flame of spring,
Now the rosy gleam of winter is visible.

I love when the paling vastness
plays with the melting light ...
I love

Зимним утром *люблю* надо мною

Я лиловый разлив полутьмы,
И, где солнце горело весною,
Только розовый отблеск зимы.

Я люблю на бледнеющей шири
В переливах растаявший цвет…
Я люблю

… Rejecting the seduction of beauty,
I will fall in love with its fly-away smoky image...
And the imperishable flowers of fires
I will alone see as blue...
To me the odor of lily feels too heavy

...Оттолкнув соблазны красоты,
Я влюблюсь в её миражи в дыме…
И огней нетленные цветы
Я один увижу голубыми…
Аромат лилеи мне тяжёл

I wish I could love their evening,
When the reddening sunrays decline,
But the sacrifice of their rosy bodies
Only comes in my dreams as the cinders.
Thirteen lines

Я любить бы их вечер *хотел*,
Когда, рдея, там гаснут лучи,
Но от жертвы их розовых тел
Только пепел мне снится в ночи.
Тринадцать строк

The multicolored lighting exposes and allows one to see the immaterial things: ideas, dreams, and reminiscences, something that exists and something that does not or will soon fade away, or else, something that used to be but disappeared leaving barely visible traces. Even where the color scale is permanent (in optics or physics) the shade is always accidental, the point of unstable equilibrium, the moment in the passing time. The chromaticism of nature is the attempt to connect nature with time. The poem of *May* can be cited entirely as best revealing the role of colors, lighting and lighted surface in Annenskij's poetry. *May* not only represents the transient states but also shows the transparency of borders between multivalent things and phenomena. Examples prove that the alteration of lighting captures both colors and time, combining color and temporality. Change of lighting arises from the physical motion of

celestial bodies in Nature but to reflect and sustain the changeability of the world in poetry the colors (along with their names) should acquire a cultural status. Here is the illustration of the poetic Symbolist vision as described by Annenskij: interdependent balance of visible landscape, its individual perception and the cultural values of words and color designations.

Май	*May*
Так нежно небо зацвело, А майский день уж тихо тает, И только тусклое стекло Пожаром запада блистает.	Sky has begun to bloom tenderly, And May day is already melting away quietly, And only a tarnished glass is lit By a sunset fire.
К нему прильнув из полутьмы, В минутном млеет позлащеньи Тот мир, которым были мы... Иль будем, в вечном превращеньи?	Leaving shadows, those world what we were, Is clinging to it during An instance of golden swooning, Or is this the world that might become with eternal change?
И разлучить не можешь глаз Ты с пыльно-зыбкой позолотой, Но в гамму вечера влилась Она тоскующею нотой	And you cannot separate your eye From the dusty and unsteady gilding, But into the range of evening It (gilding) flowed like a dreary note.
Над миром, что, златим огнем, Сейчас умрет, не понимая, Что счастье искрилось не в нем, А в золотом обмане мая,	Above the world that fire makes golden Evening will now die, without understanding, That happiness was not sparkling in it, But in the golden deceit of May,
Что безвозвратно синева, Его златившая, поблекла... Что только зарево едва Коробит розовые стекла.	That this dark-blue sky that made it golden Withered irrevocably, That only afterglow is just Scratching pink glasses.

Each line of the poem to some extent seems to speak of color and alterations of lighting. It complicates visuality. Quasi-oxymorons, contrary to traditional associations, emphasize the idea of mobility and evasiveness: *the dull glass shines, the blue paints gold.* The synesthetic references (in which the color palette is equivalent to a musical range) emphasize a vast number of evanescent nuances (the evanescence is also in the verb

"млеть" "to swoon" and the expression "сейчас умрет" "it (the day) will die soon") and the ubiquity of colors, because one would say they are dissolved or resonant in the air like the sounds (*пыльно-зыбкая позолота влилась в гамму вечера тоскующею нотой, dusty and unstable gild flowed into the range of evening colors like a dreary note*). The article of daily use—glass (*Glass*—was the draft name of the poem)—not only reflects but imbibes the sunset (that is to say the fading day, the day that will not be here soon), while also implying the constant transformation of the world in general. The color gold traditionally serves to convey the brightness of light. In many poems by Annenskij gold plays this role. The singularity of this poem rests in its supersaturation, all manner of interplay of golden iridescence and gilding.

The Platonism of Annenskij finds expression in many of his works. There exists not only the world of substantial ideas and the world of material forms but also several stages of the visible world, several phases of ascension. The work of art can reproduce the visible world but it can also make visible this interaction of transitory states, shadows and mutual reflections. In the afterword to his own translation of Euripides' *Helen*, Annenskij writes:

> From the position of art, Homer does not show either gods, or people, but a singular idealized world of beings and phenomena where the world of celestial substances invariably reveals through the mist of alterations and semblances as if emphasizing its transparency and making it beautiful. What T. Berk perceives as the ennobling art of Homer, reveals to me through the aesthetic similarity of his art to the creative devices of another Ionian, Polygnotus: on his white boards the stones hidden at the bottom of a spring were visible through the clear waters, and the garments of women did not conceal the gentle female forms; but the spectator admired both, the beauty embedded not in the concealed nor in the manifestly beautiful but in their harmonious unity.[46]

For Annenskij the words of color do not serve the mimetic reflection of the motley world but rather shape his own intellectual structures into the forms and resemblances of this world, of Nature as Proteus (a comparison of the Nature with Proteus that seems to have first appeared in Schelling).

The symbolism of Annenskij is full of paradox: through the mediation of seemingly physical phenomenon (color and lighting) he relates the phenomenon of the physical world (the everlasting metamorphosis of the world view). In terms of means and goals, process and result, these two elements are quite transposable, metaphorically—they seem to show through each other. The transferability and overlaying are also characteristic of the relations between nature and art. As M. Élie

summarizes, " Les ombres colorés ont une portée et une signification esthétique, dans la nature et dans l'art[47] " ("Coloured shadows have an aesthetic impact and significance, in nature and in art"). This statement made by a specialist in optical theories and a translator of Goethe into French, for whom colors in nature and in art belong to one and the same aesthetic field, can be rephrased as: colored shadows aestheticize the evasiveness of the world view.

While Symbolists generally find some mysterious meaning behind the external world, Annenskij perceives the world as multivalent and mysterious. The physical visual world and words describing it offer him inexhaustible sources for creativity.

Notes

[1]This paper does not include dramatic works by Annenskij into the corpus of research. I do not discuss his musical and visual satirical play, *Tamyris Citharoedus*, because the study of stage lighting indicated by the poet in the didascalia involves the stage-aesthetics of the early twentieth century. It should also be noted that this paper makes no reference to allegorical, associative or mystical theories of color. I do not explore this topic with regard to synaesthesia either, or the "multi-genre texts in which verbal, musical and visual texts were integrated in ways directly inspired by Wagner's theories of *Gesamtkunst*, or total art..." (*Russian Literature. Modernism and the visual arts*. Edited by Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

[2]For more about the sun and moon, about day and night, and sunrise and sunset in the poetry of Russian symbolism, with extensive examples from Annenskij, see: Аге А. Ханзен-Лёве [Hanzen-Leve, Age A.], *Русский символизм. Система поэтических мотивов. Мифопоэтический символизм начала века. Космическая символика* [*Russian symbolism. System of poetic motifs, Mythopoetic symbolism of century's beginning. Cosmic symbolism*]. Пер. с нем. М. Ю. Некрасова [Translated from German by M. Nekrasov]. Санкт-Петербург, Академический проект, (2003), 136-450. For information about the color yellow in poetry by Annenskij see: М. В. Тростников [M. Trostnikov], "Я люблю из бледнеющей шири в переливах растаявший свет... " Символика желтого цвета в лирике И. Анненского. ["I love when the paling vastness plays with the melting lighting..." Symbolism of color yellow in lyrics by I. Annenskij]. / *Русская речь*, n° 4, (1991): 15-178. For more about the symbolism of whiteness, colors and synaesthesia see N. Gamalova, *La littérature comme lieu de rencontre: I. Annenski, poète et critique*. (Lyon: Université Lyon 3, 2005), 209-212, 269-272 ; М. Н. Эпштейт [M. N. Epstein], *Природа, мир, тайник вселенной* [*Nature, world, secret recesses of universe*]. (Москва: Высшая школа, 1990), 236-237.

[3]Philippe Sers, *Icônes et Saintes Images. La représentation de la transcendance*. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002), 228.

[4]The Gospel interpretation of light occurs in: *Genesis*, I:14-18, *Psalms*, 42-3, 111-4, *Matthew*, 13:43, *Luke*, 11:33-36, *Ephesians*, 1:18 etc.; the Transfiguration of Jesus is reported as a shining bright light on the mountain Tabor, in *Matthew*, 17:2 "There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light" etc. Such imagery is less typical of Annenskij. Firstly, because even allowing for poems on religious themes or with religious terms such as the s*orrow of return* or *the week culminating in Palm Sunday,* he was the least religious among Russian poets of Symbolism. Secondly, Theophany of Mount Tabor and other biblical connotations of light bear a *definite* positive meaning while the theme of luciferous righteousness or *truth-as-light* is an obvious *locus communis*. This dichotomy finds its way into works by Annenskij, for example in his essay about Gogol's *Portrait* but it is by no means formative for his poetics: "... where the shining beauty of good should have aesthetic superiority over the blackness of vice... […]. Has Gogol composed his 'Madonna of the Star'?.. He might have but not here rather in a different and more luminous abode..." (Annenskij, "Портрет" [Portrait]. In : *Книги отражений* [*Books of reflections*] (Москва: Наука, 1979), 16). It is of course impossible to delineate the Christian and non-Christian origins of light as the visible substance of invisible celestial and spiritual phenomena. Thus, in Annenskij's essay *Klara Milič* and in his poems *A candle is brought in* and *To the Poet,* the eyes streaming light are clearly derived from Plato's motif of eye-contact as a form of communion (Plato, *Phaedrus,* 255a-d), that is, feelings and thoughts are interpreted as the visible substance related to streaming light. Dimmer lights, like that of candles and stars, so frequent in the work of this poet, allow him to join together light and visible rays. At the same time, the Christian ideas of "effluence" and "enlightenment" can not be discounted. Annenskij saw the multiplicity of meanings as a distinguishing feature of verbal art.

[5]«Кажется, нельзя произнести ни одной значительной фразы с философско-метафизическим или имманентно-позитивистическим высказыванием, чтобы в ней можно было избежать зрительно-световой символики.» В. Ильин [V. Il'in], "Статика и динамика чистой формы, или Очерк общей морфологии" ["Statics and dynamics of pure form or Outline of general morphology"]. / *Вопросы философии*, (1996), n° 11: 103.

[6]«All men by nature are actuated with the desire of knowledge, and an indication of this is the love of the senses; for even, irrespective of their utility, they are loved for their own sakes; and preeminently above the rest, the sense of sight. For not only practical purposes, but also when not intent on doing anything, we choose the power of vision in preference, so to speak, of all the rest of the senses. And a cause of this is the following, — that this sense enables of, and that it makes many distinctive qualities manifest.» Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*. Translated from Greek by the rev. John H. M'Mahon (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1857), 1.

[7]*Opticks or a treatise of the reflections, refractions, inflections and colours of light* of Isaak Newton was publiched in 1704.

[8] We must indicate the fragmentary criticism of Newton in Schelling's *Ideas Concerning a Philosophy of Nature* (*Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*, 1797),

the very known *Theory of Colours* (*Zur Farbenlehre*, 1810) of Goethe and *On Vision and Colors* (*Über das Sehn und die Farben*, 1816) of Schopenhauer.

[9]Incidentally, we see that the words denoting light are used here to indicate the ambiguity of a symbol: "words are lucid," "words glow," they provide a "shimmering glimpse of an image," etc.

[10]«Надо только условиться сначала насчет основных терминов. Символисты? Декаденты?

Прекрасные слова, но оба в применении к новаторам поэзии—сравнительно еще очень недавние, даже во Франции.

В первый раз, как пишет Робер де Суза, поэтов назвал декадентами Поль Бурд в газете "Le Temps" от 6 августа 1885 г. А спустя несколько дней Жан Мореас отпарировал ему в газете же "XIX siecle" говоря, что если уж так необходима этикетка, то справедливее всего будет назвать новых стихотворцев *символистами*.

Я не думаю, чтобы после данной исторической справки было целесообразно разграничивать в сфере русской поэзии имена или стихотворения по этим двум менее терминам—как видите,—чем полемическим кличкам. Символист—отлично, декадент... сделайте одолжение. *Этимологически*, конечно, в каждом из наших стихотворцев есть и то, и другое. . . .

Поэтическим декадентством (*византинизм*—как лучше любят говорить теперь французы) можно называть *введение в общий литературный обиход разнообразных изощрений в технике стихотворства*, которые не имеют ближайшего отношения к целям поэзии, т. е. намерению внушить другим через влияние словесное, но близкое к музыкальному, свое мировосприятие и миропонимание. . . .

Что в нашей литературе проходит струя византийства (французы и не разделяют теперь слов décadentisme и byzantinisme), в поэзии особенно чувствительная,—для кого же это, впрочем, тайна? . . .

Слова открыты, прозрачны; слова не только текут, но и светятся. В словах есть только мелькающая возможность образа. . . .

В *поэзии* есть только *относительности*, только *приближения*—потому никакой другой, кроме символической, она не была, да и быть не может. . . . Героическая легенда, романтическое самообожание, любовь к женщине, к богу, сцена, кумиры—все эти силы, в свою очередь, властно сближали и сближают слово с образом, заставляя поэта забывать об исключительной и истинной силе своего материала, *слов*, и их благороднейшем назначении—связывать переливной сетью символов *я* и *не-я*, гордо и скорбно сознавая себя средним—и притом единственным средним, между этими двумя мирами. Символистами справедливее всего называть, по-моему, тех поэтов, которые не столько заботятся о выражении *я* или изображении *не-я*, как стараются усвоить и отразить их вечно сменяющиеся взаимоположения.» И. Ф. Анненский [I. F. Annenskij], " О современном лиризме " (1891) ["On contemporary lyricism "]. In : Анненский [Annenskij], *Книги отражений* [*Books of reflections*]. (Москва: Наука, 1979), 336-338.

[11]Robert de Souza, *Où nous en sommes. La victoire du silence*. Paris, H. Floury, 1906. There probably exist sources that were not openly referred to by him. A similar history of naming was established by Remy de Gourmont who considered the two names to be ambiguous and nonequivalent (Annenskij did not miss reading a single work by the French polygraph): “Was it indeed him (Jean Moréas,—N. G.) who created the word *Symbolism*, was it him, I want to say, who introduced it into new literature? The question is obscure as well as the meaning of the word itself which seems hasn’t been looked after very much. I think it appeared for the first time in an article in which Moréas (*Le XIXe Siècle*, 11 August 1885) responding to Ms. Paul Bourde’s chronicle, was trying to explain tendencies in poetry written by young poets. Until then few people were interested in those “turns and twists” by writers they called ‘Decadents,’ and they didn’t seem to be very offended by the term, they even took pride in it. In spite of the fact that the term appeared in a small ‘ephemeral’ newspaper, *Symbolism*, created by Moréas himself in cooperation with Paul Adam and Gustave Kahn in those times, the epithet *decadent* prevailed for a long time and had even its hour of glory with *La Décadence* and especially with *Le Décadent* which seemed to be the centre of the new literary movement for some time. Depending on whether we give this movement one name or another, its importance grows or decreases radically. *Decadent*, it is only a distraction for young people who spin out, till to feel faint, Baudelaire’s state of mind and instead of following their own genius they persist in laborious imitations, they mistake darkness for beauty, the unknown for innovation, peculiarity for originality. *Symbolist*, the same movement takes a very different look. So it shows off high aesthetical and even philosophical claims. Perhaps literary forms will be renovated.” [“Est-ce lui (Jean Moréas,—N.G.) qui créa le mot *symbolisme*, est-ce lui, veux-je dire, qui l'imposa à la littérature nouvelle ? La question est obscure, comme la signification même du mot dont il semble que l'on se soit peu soucié dans les premiers jours. Il apparaît, je crois, pour la première fois, dans un article où Moréas (*Le XIXe Siècle*, 11 août 1885) répondant à la chronique de M. Paul Bourde, essaie d'expliquer les tendances des jeunes poètes. Jusque-là le rare public qui s'intéressait à ces ébats les qualifiait de *Décadents* et ils ne semblaient pas autrement froissés du terme, dont même ils se montraient assez fiers. Malgré un petit journal éphémère, *le Symbolisme*, lancé à cette époque par Moréas lui-même, avec Paul Adam et Gustave Kahn, l'épithète de *décadent* prévalut longtemps et eut même son heure de gloire avec l*a Décadence*, et avec *le Décadent*, surtout, qui semble un instant avoir centralisé le nouveau mouvement littéraire. Selon que l'on donne à ce mouvement tel ou tel nom, son importance croît ou décroît singulièrement. *Décadent*, il n'est que l'amusement de jeunes gens qui prolongent jusqu'au malaise l'état d'esprit de Baudelaire et, au lieu de suivre leur propre génie, s'acharnent à de laborieuses imitations, confondent l'obscur avec le beau, l'inconnu avec le nouveau, le singulier avec l'original. *Symboliste*, ce même mouvement va prendre une tout autre apparence. Il exhibe du coup de hautes prétentions esthétiques et même philosophiques. Les formes littéraires vont peut-être se trouver renouvelées ”] (Remy de Gourmont,

" Souvenirs du symbolisme. Jean Moréas " in *Promenades littéraires*, 4e série, Mercure de France, (1912): 32-43).

[12]Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*. Paris, Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1891. In the chapter " Symbolists and décadents " (the author even writes of the "mouvement symbolo-décadent"), J. Huret questions Verlaine about the epithet "décadent." Verlaine answers : " It is very plain. This epithet has been put in as an insult to us; I picked it up like a war-cry; but it had no special meaning, as far as I know. Decadent! Twilight of a beautiful day is better than all sunrises, isn't it! And then, the setting sun will rise tomorrow, won't it?" [" C'est bien simple. On nous l'avait jetée comme une insulte, cette épithète; je l'ai ramassée comme cri de guerre; mais elle ne signifiait rien de spécial, que je sache. Décadent! Est-ce que le crépuscule d'un beau jour ne vaut pas toutes les aurores! Et puis, le soleil qui a l'air de se coucher, ne se lèvera-t-il pas demain?"] (*Ibid*., 70).

[13]" Les poètes décadents ", il est bon de ne pas l'oublier, sont nés d'une chronique de M. Paul Bourde[13] dans *Le Temps* du 6 août 1885. Quelques jours après, Jean Moréas protestait dans *Le XIXe Siècle* pour défendre la poésie " soi-disant décadente " qui, afin de satisfaire " la manie de l'étiquetage, pourrait être appelée plus justement symboliste ". [...]
Il va sans dire que le terme de " décadentisme " entraîne celui de " byzantinisme " intelligemment appliqué à des poètes qui prennent un souci plus scrupuleux des moyens de leur art. Il y a byzantinisme lorsque les préoccupations et les discussions s'arrêtent sur des points qui n'importent pas à la vie de l'objet Robert de Souza, *Où nous en sommes. La victoire du silence* (Paris: H. Floury, 1906), 75-77.

[14] [Как певец гор, Лермонтов любил краски. Особенно любил он белую и голубую. У него встречаются разные оттенки белого—жемчужный и перловый, серебряный, снеговой, лилейный; я не встретил, впрочем, ни молочного и мелового, может быть, оттого, что поэт любит отмечать краски воздушные, солнечные. Для голубого у него является эмаль, бирюза, лазурь; часто встречаются синий, темно-синий цвет. Поэт любит розовый закат, белое облако, синее небо, лиловые степи, голубые глаза и золотистые волосы. [...] Но главная прелесть лермонтовских красок в их сочетаниях. [...] Поэту доставляло особенное эстетическое наслаждение соединение блеска с движением—в тучах, в молнии, в глазах; поэзия его "полна змей"; чтоб полюбоваться грациозной и блестящей змейкой, как часто прерывает он рассказ.

> «Looking towards some landscape, each Parnassian will convey with exact and clear words, anything his eyes are seeing; each Symbolist, discovering under perceptible appearances the mystery that is concealed, will render the 'correspondence' between landscape and his soul... »

> «Devant un paysage, le parnassien rendra en termes aussi exacts, aussi nets que possible, tout ce que perçoit son œil; le symboliste, découvrant sous les apparences sensibles ce qu'elles cachent de mystérieux, traduira la « correspondance » de ce paysage avec son âme..»

Georges Pellissier, “ L’évolution de la poésie dans ce dernier quart du siècle ”, / *Revue des Revues*, (15 mars 1901).

[15]«...ce qui, en fait, caractérise le Symbolisme, c’est la passion du *mouvement au geste infini*, de la Vie même [...] belle de toute la multiplicité de ses métamorphoses; passion agile et protéenne qui se confond avec les heures du jour et de la nuit... » Francis Vielé-Griffin, “ La poétique nouvelle. À propos d’un article récent de la *Revue des Deux Mondes* ”. / *Mercure de France*, (10 octobre 1895), t. 16, n° 70: 6.

[16]«...Блок, редкий, по-моему, пример прирожденного символиста. Восприятия Блока зыбки, слова эластичны, и его стихи, кажется, прямо-таки не могут не быть символическими» Annenskij, “On contemporary lyricism ”. *Op. cit.*, 339.

[17] Wilhelm Humboldt (1767-1835), *Latium and Hellas, or Observations on Classical Antiquity* (*Latium und Hellas, oder Betrachtungen über das klassische Altertum*, 1806). After 1800 Wilhelm Humboldt, German man of letters and philosopher, leaves the concept of the linguistic sign taking the opposing view of his theses on *Thinking and Speaking* (*Ueber Denken und Sprechen*, 1795) and speaks about the world signification as a content shaped subjectively (Jürgen Trabant, *Humboldt, ou le sens du langage* (Mardage, 1995), 67.

[18]“Das Wort ist freilich insofern ein Zeichen, als es für eine Sache oder einen Begriff gebraucht wird, aber nach der Art seiner Bildung und seiner Wirkung ist es ein eignes und selbstständiges Wesen, ein Individuum, die Summe aller Wörter, die Sprache, ist eine Welt, die zwischen der erscheinenden ausser, und der wirkenden in uns in der Mitte liegt.”

> The word is certainly a sign insofar as it is needed for a cause or an idea, but after the manner of its formation and its effects, it is a peculiar and independent being, an individual, the sum of all words, the language is a world that is in the middle, between the appearing phenomena and the acting in us . . .

W. von Humboldts *Gesammelte Schriften*. Band III (1799-11818). Albert Leitzmann (ed). (Berlin: B. Behr’s Verlag, 1904), 167.

[19]We didn’t find any *black violet* in *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey* or the *Homeric hymns*, but during the nineteenth century certain translators render, for instance, “ ἰοδνεφὲς εἶρος ” (*Odyssey*, IV, 135 and IX, 426) as “ laine violette ” (Leconte de Lisle, 1866-1968) or “ laine noire ” (Eugène Bareste, 1843), “ фиалково-темная шерсть ” (Gnedič) — “ violet-dark wool ” and “ wool dark as the violet ” as at Augustus Taber Murray (1924) (ἰοδνεφής, ές means *dark violet*, in French *d’un violet foncé, sombre*).

[20]The misprint (**roedus*) in the cited edition is here corrected.

[21]The annotations of the 1979 edition of *Books of reflections* reference Rousseau: *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (*Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire,* 1776-1778). The traveler in Rousseau is rather unenthusiastic about the Alps which also do not inspire his awe.

[22]Наука доказала, что эстетическое отношение к природе вовсе не есть нечто исконное : оно развивается с другими душевными свойствами человека.

Индусы времен “Ригведы” или греки в эпоху Гомера, конечно, видели в спектре и голубой, и фиолетовый цвет ; однако в индийских гимнах небо, украшаясь десятками эпитетов, ни разу не названо голубым, и у Гомера фиалка оказывается черной, а море —пурпурным. Ощущение, очевидно, не было фиксировано. Вот здесь-то на помощь обыкновенно и является искусство, особенно поэзия. У англичан, под туманным северным небом, теперь самый богатый словарь красок, а есть африканские племена, которые под экваториальным солнцем различают цвета только в своих стадах, даже не цвета, а масти. Причина не в природе, очевидно, а в культурности. Кто теперь, увидев Альпы, не подпадет их обаянию : краски серебряные, кисти потоков, розовый, слоистый туман, а между тем Тит Ливии спокойно назвал их “отвратительными” (fœditas Alpium[22]), и едва ли не Руссо первый открыл миру, что в самом сердце Европы покоятся целые залежи чистейшего эстетического наслаждения. Annenskij “On aesthetic treatment of nature by Lermontov”, *op. cit*., 244-245.

[23]Paul Mazon translates the verses as “ le flot bouillonne ” (boiling wave) or “ la mer bouillonnante ” (boiling sea); Anatole Bailly’s *Dictionary* explains : πορφύρεος-οῦς, έα-ᾶ, εον-οῦν: “qui se soulève en bouillonnant, p. suite, qui se colore d’une teinte sombre, en parl. des flots de la mer . . . ” [that which raises as if boiling, later that which turns dark, speaking about the sea waves].

[24]Almost always “ ἐπὶ οἴνοπα πόντον ” of *The Iliad* is translated as “ dark ” : “ la noire mer ” (black sea) or “ la mer sombre ” (dark sea) in Leconte de Lisle (1850), “ le large aux teintes lie de vin ” (the French terme “ lie-de-vin ” ou “ wine coloured ” is excellent) in Paul Mazon (1938-1939), “ понт темноводный ” or “ черный понт ” in Gnedič (1829), “ dark-blue waves ” or “ the dark-blue sea ” in Edward Earl of Derby (1910). Cf. an interesting example : Vikentij Veresaev (1949) translates “ ἔνθ' ἐκ πόντου βὰς ἰοειδέος ἤπειρόνδε ” from *Odyssey* (V, 56) “ Вышел на сушу Гермес с фиалково-темного моря ”.

[25]J. J. Winckelmann, *Histoire de l'art chez les Anciens*. Traduit de l'allemand par G. Sellius (Paris: Hendrik Jansen, 1794), 499-500.

[26]*Ibid.*, 501-502.

[27]Cf. the remark of Henri Weil: “Πορφυρευτικαὶ στέγαι, lieu où se tiennent les pêcheurs de coquillages à pourpre (οἱ πορφυρείς ou οἱ πορφυρευταί) en attendant que leur filet se remplissent” (*Sept tragédies d’Euripide*. Texte grec, avec commentaire critique et explicatif par Henri Weil. (Paris: Hachette, 1879), 467; πορφυρεύς means “fisherman for the shells (or sea snails) with purple or dyer of purple”; πορφυρευτικός—“what relates to the fishing of the shells with purple”; πορφυρίξω means “to have the color connected to purple; speaking of the sea to have a dark color.” An example from *Odyssey* (VI, 53 and 305): ἠλάκατα στρωφῶσ᾽ ἁλιπόρφυρα—“they turn constantly the purple wool.”

[28]Еврипид [Euripides], *Трагедии* [*Tragedies*]. В двух томах. Перевод Инн. Анненского [Transl. by In. Annenskij]. Т. I. (Москва: Ладомир, 1999), 506.

[29]Euripide, *Tragédies complètes* II. Texte présenté, traduit et annoté par M. Delcourt-Curvers (Gallimard, 1962), 784 ; cf. Artaud's translation in 1842: "...retraite pour ceux qui pêchent le coquillage dont on tire la pourpre ".
[30]*The Iphigenia in Tauris* of Euripides. Translated into English rhyming verse by Gilbert Murray (New York, Oxford University Press, 1930), 15.
[31]Euripides, The Harvard Classics. Vol. 8. *Hippolytus*. 1909-1914. New York, Bartleby.com, 2001.
[32]Tite Live, A*b urbe condita*. Books XXI-XXII. With the English translation by B. O. Foster. (London: W. Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1929).
[33]«Они (слова,—Н.Г.) как горный гид ничего не добавляют к красоте заката или глетчера, но без них вы не можете любоваться ни тем, ни другим.» И. Анненский [I. Annenskij], "А. В. Бородиной, 25.VI.1906" [To A. V. Borodina, the 25 June 1906]. In : Annenskij, *Books of reflections*, *op. cit.*, 466.
[34]Cf. *Jardins et paysages : textes critiques de l'Antiquité à nos jours*. Textes rassemblés par Jean-Pierre Le Dantec. Larousse, 1996 ; Erwin Panofsky, *La perspective comme forme symbolique*. Minuit, 1975 ; Дмитрий Лихачёв [Dmitrij Lihačёv], Поэзия садов [Poetry of gardens]. Санкт-Петербург, Наука, 1991; М. Н. Соколов [M. N. Sokolov], *Время и место. Искусство Возрождения как перворубеж виртуального пространства* [*Place and time. The art of Renaissance as the milestone of virtual space*]. (Москва: Прогресс-Традиция, 2002).
[35]H. Diels, W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6e ed. (1952), reprint Zürich, 1996.
[36]John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*. 2nd ed., (London: Adam and Charles Back, 1908),200.
[37]*The Poem of Parmenides*. A New transl. with text and commentary by E. H. Campbell (Inopibus Press, 2011), 32-33.
[38]*Penseurs grecs avant Socrate. De Thalès de Millet à Prodicos*. Traduction, intr. et notes par Jean Voilquin. (GF-Flammarion, 1964), 95-96.
[39]*Фрагменты ранних греческих философов* [*Fragments of early Greek philosophers*]. Подг. А. В. Лебедев. Ч. 1 [Prepared by A. V. Lebedev. Part I]. (Москва: Наука, 1989), 291.
[40]Euripides, *Tragedies*. Transl. by Annenskij. Vol. I, *op. cit.*, 111.
[41]In more detail the state of the in-between, when "neither that but already not this" in Annenskij, see: А. Е. Барзах [A. E. Barsah], " Такой ". Заметки о поэзии Анненскогоv ["Such". Notes on poetry by Annenskij]. / *Urbi. Литературный альманах.* Вып. 5 [*Urbi. Literary almanac*. Issue 5]. Санкт-Петербург, 1995, p. 169-173 ; N. Gamalova, *La littérature comme lieu de rencontre. I. Annenskij, poète et critique* (Lyon: Université de Lyon 3, 2005), 282-286.
[42]In section 502 of "The Exposure of Newton's theory" which enters to his *Theory of colors*, Gœthe evokes a dark element of color, a light attenuation necessary to generate colors.
[43]About shades after sundown in the poetry of illustrious Russian Symbolist Vjačeslav Ivanov: Нина Сегал-Рудник, "Античный контекст стихотворения

В. И. Иванова 'Душа сумерек'" [Nina Segal-Rudnik, Ancient context of the V. I. Ivanov's poem 'The soul of dusk'], in : *Античность и русская культура Серебряного века.* [Antiquity and Russian culture of the Silver Age]. Отв. ред. Е.А.Тахо-Годи, М.Ю.Эдельштейн. М., Водолей, 2008, 90-91.

[44]Aristote, *Météorologiques*. T. II. Texte établi et traduit par Pierre Louis (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002), 15.

[45]Annenskij, "On aesthetic treatment of nature by Lermontov", *op. cit.*, 247.

[46] С точки зрения искусства у Гомера нет ни богов, ни людей, ни вещей, а есть особый идеализированный мир существ и явлений, где неизменно сквозь зыбкость смен и видимостей и как бы подчеркивая его прозрачность и делая её прекрасной, открывается мир божественных сущностей. То, в чем Т. Берк видит все облагораживающее искусство Гомера, для меня выясняется эстетически подобием его творчества приемам искусства другого ионийца, Полигнота: на его белых досках сквозь чистую воду источника виделись скрытые на дне его каменья, а одежды женщин давали просвечивать нежным женским формам, но зритель воспринимал и то и другое, и прекрасным было не одно лишь скрытое и не одно лишь явно прекрасное, а именно их гармоническая слаженность. И. Анненский [I. Annenski], "Елена и её маски" ["Elena and her masks"]. In : Еврипид [Euripides], *Драмы* [Dramas]. Перевод И. Ф. Анненского. Под ред. Ф. Ф. Зелинского. Т. 2. [Trans. by I. F. Annenskij. Ed. by F. F. Zelinsky. Vol. 2]. (Москва, изд. Сабашниковых, 1917), 224.

[47]Maurice Élie, *Lumière, couleurs et nature* (Vrin, 1993), 69.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

ANGUISH AND MODERNIST AESTHETICS[1]

LUBA JURGENSON

The Symbolist movement created a new worldview. It led to the redistribution of light and darkness (emptiness and fullness, non-being and ontological density, good and evil, in short, negativity and positivity). What represents the ultimate frontier for the aesthetics of realism—to be precise, the space of the "shaded," outer reality—will be the favorite terrain of Russian Symbolists and of some of their descendants. Those nuances or "shades" which express the desire of man to go beyond language, as stated by Wittgenstein,[2] constitute the very stake of modernity. Among the various "shades" we encounter the condition of modern angst (which begins with the foundational thought of Kierkegaard), a central point of "being-in-the-world" of the twentieth century. This new reality stays at the threshold: "Death, loss, anxiety/Knock at the people's door."[3] We frequently encounter this motif in the works of the first generation of Russian Symbolists (Zinaida Hippius, Konstantin Balmont, and Nikolai Minsky). It could be perceived that this new aesthetics strains the limits of the literary space: now it is open to irrational realities.

We do not plan on addressing psychological issues here and we do not pretend that modern man's feeling of anguish is different from the one that his predecessors felt. We do not assert that he is in a state of higher anxiety. The change occurs in the ways in which angst is characterized in philosophical thought and literature: far from being a sign of disorder, it appears as a category of being settled in non-being, as a psychic and affective trace of the inherent negativity of existence, the effect of nothingness.

From the aesthetic point of view, is Symbolism a *pendant* of philosophical thought that incorporates non-being as an object? Could we consider the Symbolist aesthetic as a step in the modern interrogation of the possibility of negative ontology? Ontology will be one of the main

questions during the first part of the twentieth century. We do not aim to examine the exchanges between literature and philosophy and their use of common devices, topics that still require study. However, we may ask whether the original sense of the porosity of the borders of each discipline authorizes us to make this comparison. To what degree do the concepts of negativity, which are traditionally attached to the Symbolist aesthetic, reflect not only the renewal of the perceptional parameters, but also represent a step in the cultural process? To ask this in slightly different terms, does the reintegration of negativity in the notion of existence create a possibility for us to examine the relationship between art and philosophy? In the Symbolist reinvention of the world, do the "names" for non-existence and negativity reflect a new position within European culture towards what traditionally remains nameless?

First, we will examine concepts of negativity in Symbolism and their connection with negativity per se, and then the status that is given to nothingness and to the concept of angst directly connected to it.

Negation

The negative dimension of the aesthetics of the first generation of Russian Symbolists, posited by the poets themselves and immediately perceived as such by their contemporaries, elicited many interpretations. It is the reason why we will put aside the analysis of negative concepts in the poetics of each author and will consider the link between the language of negation and the notions of negativity that the language conveys. There are three degrees of negation. The negative semantic is present through the particles "un-" in", "im-", "not" (ne, bez/s). Its usage is frequent, for these are negative operators applied to positive values. In other words, logistically they do not make the presence of nothingness thinkable beside an original denied positivity. The negativity then is deducted from the judgment effectuated by the act of negation: impotent, impossible, incomprehensible (*bessilny, nevozmojny, neponiatny*), the opposite of powerful, possible, comprehensible (*silny, vozmojny, noujny, poniatny*). The negative proposition therefore preserves the presuppositions of rational thought, even when the human being finds himself globally negated, as it is the case of Fedor Sologub: "Already nature did not live,/ It did not want, it did not breathe/ It was not able to, it did not exist."[4]

The Symbolist negation undermines the rational base of the relationship between the subject and the world when it joins the indeterminate, such as when it is applied to the adverbs of place or time, to interrogative or relative pronouns, the notions for which the referent is not

defined: *somebody, something, somewhere, one day.* For example, in Innokenti Annenski: "Nobody can leave the heavy obscurity of glass, never."[5] In Balmont: "And your slogan was henceforth: never more"[6] or in Sologub: "Being nobody, being nothing."[7] In Hippius: "My light sledge slithers without a trace/ And I repeat: never, never!"[8]

With the indetermination related to the negation, the solid wall of the positive presuppositions fissures, creating an unclear space between existence and non-existence. Finally the negation becomes independent when it performs a speech act and conveys an existential attitude at the same time, when it is not directed toward any object and thus does not go against any defined positivity, but envelops being as it is. We read in Balmont: "My nasty jailer always kept a mournful silence/He was repeating constantly the same word: 'No.'"[9] Or: "The sea was singed about love/It told: live! Live!/ But although the light had sprung in my heart/my heart said 'no.'"[10] In Valery Bryiusov: "Repulsions and desires/are links of negation."[11] In Minsky: "Why did you want/to extinguish the light of my transfigured soul/with this deadly word: 'no'?"[12] And in the poem of Zinaida Hippius entitled "No": "In the madness of our sagacity we are repeating always 'no.'"[13]

The "no" does not affect the intelligible parameters of reality like space, time or identity; it concerns being as such: through this linguistic operation existence becomes deniable. The manifestations of being are considered only as a reflected image (ephemeral and misleading) of the nothingness in which the world is rooted.

The verbal value of negation is a part of the etymology of the Russian *niet* which means "does not exist," is not (*nie iest*): it is a verbal act that allows one to understand the notion of nonexistence. This value of negation is also expressed, in an explicit way, in the poem of Hippius, "The feminine." "'It is not,'" when the negative form *nietu* gives birth to a character of a young girl who his Creator refuses to let be and who is condemned to eternal nonexistence.

The three phases do not correspond to chronological stages, but they function simultaneously as complementary enunciative postures or negotiators between the positive and negative poles of the Symbolist aesthetic. The negative proposition, when its referent is vague, becomes an expression of the experience that requires a location in language and in thought. Unless the negated object is defined, the verbal negation reaches the world of things and feelings giving way to nonbeing and autonomy derived from the statement that provides the proper space. Negation and negativity both turn out to be experience. The words of negativity are no longer the logical support of negation, but the trace of something

happening in the sensitive universe of the subject, something that is engraved in the world not only as an absence or lack, but also as an irreducible datum. Nothingness is then consubstantial to being: we see the emergence of a dialectical temporality.

Anguish

This original fissure, which breaks through the false continuity of time, is described by Aage Hansen-Löve as an epiphany of Nothingness: the instant indicates according to him "a state of terror, of panic, of rootlessness and of the collapse."[14]

The anguish subsequently makes Nothingness known as an event, which could be identified through the emotional state, as something rather than as nothing. The anguish of Nothingness is both an expression of negativity and of the indeterminate: it is without content. It has to deal with the ruins of a system, the ruins of a Whole divided into two parts: the ego and the world. It secretly accompanies and shadows knowledge of the world, which shows itself as rootless and without foundation.

In Russian Symbolism, we shall first find the poetic expressions of such anguish followed by examples in fiction. Thus we read in Minsky: "Oh, anguish without basis, henchman of the death or sycophant of the soul,"[15] or "a secret fear like a pallid spectre."[16] In Balmont: "And a sudden anguish possessed their heart. . . . But the sudden anguish possessed them."[17] The angst can be placed even in the essence of the ego, representing one of its alienated hypostases, as it is in Hippius' poem "She," when the anguishing property is attributed to the soul itself: "And this anguishing thing is my soul."[18] In a letter addressed to Walter Nouvel from 1906, Hippius contends: "It is clear that my soul is not at all like that, not a second it was like that. Nonetheless, all that is it; there is in it all that."[19] It could as well be generated by the world: "Estrangement and anguish of the universe without bottom."[20] Then even though the feeling of anguish could appear as one originated in political catastrophe (Balmont's work allows us such an interpretation[21]), it is attached to the cosmic feeling of infinity, which from an etymological point of view signifies the absence of a foundation. In this way, anguish, which was revealed in early Symbolism, even when it is associated with a cause, continues to issue from a vacuum. Anguish is in turn an origin of the awareness of being. That is why the absence of anguish is more troubling then anguish itself, as it is in Hippius' poem "Never": "I am anxious that there is no anguish in my soul./ Only the cold without pain caresses my heart."[22] Anguish is the opposite, not of serenity, but of the cold, which

evokes the existential sense of the negative word “never.”

The experience of negativity will be historicized in the universe of the second generation of Symbolists. Thus the nightmares of Bely's characters, who are confronted by the negativity of the real which threatens to swallow them at any moment: the nothingness that opens for them is part of the historical condition; it is a vacuum for the man who accesses the temporal dimension of the world (events) through his anxious perception of the mode in which the events mature in the depth of time. It is not the event, but its presentiment, its genesis, which reveals the secret menace in the most painless phenomena. The characters of Sologub's novels *Heavy Dreams* and *Petty Demon* struggle with anguish, which covers the world with a net of significances in which they are trapped as victims. In Bely's *Silver Dove,* the anguish that captures Darialsky (coming from the object of desire) is at first undetermined; the novel then constitutes the space of its progressive embodiment. The world of Bely’s characters in *Petersburg* represents the void, the space, which reflects the emergence of negativity within language. Olga Skonechnaya who has studied paranoia in the Symbolist novel, has shown that the theme of persecution in Bely and Sologub could be seen as the result of the use of obsolete methods of knowledge, which are used against the subject to persecute him. This then creates a delirious reality.

These forms of knowledge are not only part of realist poetics, but more globally serve as the speculative methods for the discovery of the world. The dysfunction in the relationship between the signifier and the signified, which we observe in Symbolist aesthetics, as well as the failure in communication between the subject and the world which it follows, introduce us not only to the new language but to new forms for the construction of culture.

The appearance of the binary opposition of anguish/vacuum in art and in thought will not be described as an exclusive attribute of this new (Symbolist, Post-symbolist) language; it is rather the sign of a change: a new relationship between entities such as subject/world/language.

Thus, anguish as “an attribute” of negative ontology already appears in the work of Leo Tolstoy, a writer and a thinker hostile to Symbolism. *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* could be read as a manifesto in favor of a largely verbal re-appropriation of the vacuum. The personification of death as a personal death which appears to Ivan Il'ich, is a response to society which attempts to free itself from anguish, and to philosophy which wishes to know nothing of the vacuum: “there is nothing to do with it.” This is a literary variant of the logical paradox of any statement about nothingness; likewise “death does not exist,” at the end of the book, death appears to

take spiritual revenge over language, which has nothing to say about nothingness. The emphasis on the root of existence – the vacuum – functions as a symptom of anguish. This anguish is what the colleagues of Ivan Il'ich in confronting death, hope to avoid when applying themselves to sterile occupations. This is the anguish that Tolstoy himself shared in his autobiographical writings and which became the part of his reality at the threshold of modernity, combining with the failure of the existing philosophical systems in front of the experience of the inevitability of death. Thus, Symbolism will take place in the intellectual and creative space that chronologically opens with the thought of anguish in Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard the presence of the vacuum is a necessary condition for the emergence of the historical being. This is a trend, which evolves in the 1920s and 1930s in Heidegger's anguish of *Dasein* and Chestov's philosophy of uprooting.

Is the Vacuum a Thing?

Without doubt, the First World War contributed to the collapse of important philosophical systems. Thus in his critique of the philosophy of the Whole, geared toward rational thought prevalent since pre-Socratic philosophy, but especially directed against the Hegelian philosophical system, Franz Rosenzweig in 1918 introduced the notion of Nothingness as the foundation of a new philosophy. He will go so far as to see in all philosophy which eludes this issue, a philosophy which is deprived of its own foundation, because "when the philosophy denies the obscure presupposition of all life, when it does not count death as a thing, but instead replaces it with the nothingness, it takes for itself the appearance of not having had a presupposition. Indeed, all holistic knowledge has as a presupposition: nothing." It is a "presupposition" which shakes the foundations of philosophy, because nothing turns out to have a foundation. The reinstatement of the question of nothingness in thought consists of changing emphasis from the Whole to the part and also includes taking into consideration the individual and its experience. There are data that do not allow us to turn away from the question of nothingness. Instead, it claims its own place in the philosophical territory through the experience of anguish.

"If philosophy did not want to stop its ears against the cry of anguished humanity it would have to start consciously with this premise: that the nothingness of death is a something; that the nothing of each new death is new and each time something terrible happens that can neither be talked away nor glossed over in silence."[23]

From this correlation between death, anguish and nothingness grows an idea that will be essential in twentieth-century thought: "Nothingness is not nothing. It is something."[24] Man should not push earthly anguish away, far from himself. . . . He should remain in the angst of death."[25] In other words, he should reject the lies of rational philosophy in order to "find himself." "Being is, whereas non-being is not." This enunciation of Parmenides became an aporia, especially if it is evaluated in terms of one of the key tenets of logic which presupposes that a concept must have a referent: it is impossible to say something about non-being without assuming that the words which designate it have a reference to something, in other words it is impossible to nominate something without affirming that it is. Therefore, if "nothing" is not an object of thought, "nothing" will not be able to be affirmed. After all, Kant does not assert anything else when he states: "The reality is something, the negation is nothing, a concept of the lack of an object, as shadow, cold." Wittgenstein continues the Kantian line of thought when he affirms in *Tractatus:* "Nothing in reality corresponds to the sign of negation. The prepositions P and non P have an opposed sense, but there corresponds to them one and same reality."[26] In the case of Husserl who would state the phenomenological problem of the origins of negation and to whom Heidegger dedicates *Being and Time* (but later will adopt critical distance from Husserl whose influence he mentions in the introduction), the negative judgment also represents its derivative character.

This fortress erected against the question of nothingness in occidental philosophy—the main item of the metaphysics of Heidegger—fractures (collapses) when philosophy revolts against the philosophical system of Hegel, and in a more global way against idealism. Already in Kierkegaard, who will discuss the philosophy of nothingness outside of logical presupposition, the question is connected to the notion of experience. At the origin of this paradox, Kierkegaard finds angst is used as a measurement of human freedom: it represents the anxious possibility of potentiality. Nothingness, which is a state of innocence, creates angst, the only possible place in the midst of the unknown world. The original sin—the initiation of man in the history of knowledge—is an answer to the original angst of nothing. "Innocence is ignorance. . . . In this state there is peace and repose, but it is simultaneously something else that is not contention and strife, for there is indeed nothing against which to strive. What, then, is it? Nothing. What effect does it have? It begets anxiety."[27]

Existence, which begins with the fall, appears as a consequence of that state. As such existence does not allow itself to be defined. It is discovered through experience, which is both the affect of Nothingness (anguish) and

the contrary of Nothingness. The freedom of man, which is a dialectical synthesis of the finite and the infinite, manifests itself in the original anguish. To affirm that anguish is a fundamental part of the human condition becomes the key stake of philosophy that searches to uncover man's authenticity, a state which is unthinkable without taking in consideration the role of nothingness in individual experience. To tear death away from the indeterminate, from “the dictatorship of It” is to bring back to existence its authentic sense liberated from the non-authenticity of undetermined death. In the philosophical path toward this appropriation of what establishes the human, anguish becomes the origin. We read in Heidegger:

> Thrownness into death reveals itself to *Dasein* in a more primordial and impressive manner in that state-of-mind which we have called "anxiety." Anxiety in the face of death is anxiety 'in the face of' that potentiality-for-Being which is one's own most, non-relational, and not to be outstripped. That in the face of which one has anxiety is Being-in-the-world itself. That about which one has this anxiety is simply *Dasein's* potentiality-for-Being. Anxiety in the face of death must not be confused with fear in the face of one's demise. This anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of 'weakness' in some individual; but, as a basic state-of-mind of *Dasein,* it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that *Dasein* exists as thrown Being *towards* its end. Thus the existential conception of "dying" is made clear as thrown Being towards its own most potentiality-for-Being, which is non-relational and not to be outstripped.[28]

It is natural that the origin will be established later in “What is Metaphysics?” as anterior to the logical operation of negation.

The Question of the Referent

The example of Tolstoy attests that anguish is not exclusively a Symbolist expression of the existential adjustment. This phenomenon began before Symbolism. Later however, in the twenties and thirties, the construction of the negative items and the verbal exploration of non-existence were developed and pushed to the extreme by the members of some Post Symbolist movements, especially by the group Oberiu (associated with the literature of the absurd). These movements conceived of nothingness entirely as an experience. In the same way, the necessity to reflect on the duality of nothingness/angst, initiated by Kierkegaard, produced new philosophical tools but only in the twenties and thirties.

The experience of uprooting must be seen as taking over the world of negativity and at the same time as an experience informing the emergence

of the existential part of language.

The paradox is that in the case of Symbolism — which repudiates terrestrial things — thought makes its foundation rooted in the *experience* of "being-in-the-world." However, in the experience of anguish, earthly existence appears like an "uprooting," or as deprivation or an absence of "ground" (*pochva*). Thus we can formulate a hypothesis: this experience takes place in a language which has its roots in itself, a language which is supposed to be the foundation for the perceiving subject and simultaneously the object of perception which is reality. Challenged by the Modernist movements, the founding function of the referent blows up. Negativity becomes characteristic of the world.

In the division between literature and philosophy, a displacement of borders is observed. Reality, driven out of the literary door, comes back through the philosophical window. It comes back like a residue of language which makes anguish a sort of revelation, an epiphany.

Eliminating the terrestrial—a radical position toward the referent that the subsequent movements will renegotiate—is an aesthetic gesture necessary to give way to negativity, which brings in the terrestrial. The diabolic negativity appears then like a step in the construction of new thought: a revaluation of experience, impossible without this reversal of negative and positive existential poles. In other words, the Symbolist nihilism—a sort of idealism—contains the premises of an anti-idealist approach to experience.

The representation of the other world is "objectified," the concrete world in contrast is "dematerialized," spatial and temporal landmarks vanish, the authenticity of visible things is questioned: all these elements convey a restructuring of values. Human experience is no longer attached to fulfilled actions, but to pure possibility or to a future which never will be: it is the experience of a stillborn potentiality. The impossibility of love, of happiness, of action, the impossibility of understanding, of telling and, ultimately, the impossibility of "I" and of world are well illustrated by Annensky's "Impossible" (1907) as well as the "impossible absolute happiness" of Bryiusov, the "always impossible happiness" or Sologub's desire for the impossible: "I desire the impossible."

This treatment of potential as a place of negative experience blocked at the threshold of a non-existing world—the possibility for impotency and failure — defines an aesthetic space where negative concepts denote a type of being. Nothingness is converted into identity and constitutes the basis of the world as well as the basis of the "I – You" relation. For example in Bal'mont's work: "The Big Nothing is insensible/You and I emerge there for an instant,/. . . The Big Nothing is insensible,/The Earth

and the sky are a silent temple vault,/I sleep quietly, I am the same and nobody/. . . .”

We can see likewise in Guippius’s poem “No,” quoted above, that there is a reversal through which negation is turned into positive value. We are witnessing the transformation of nothing into something: “In the madness of our wisdom, we repeat ‘no’,/And it will be given us to say, with a last authority, /Our innocent amazing ‘yes’!”

This reversal of negative and positive poles offers us the frame for reading poems in which the devil appears like a saviour, for example Bryusov’s “Lucifer” or Bal’mont’s “I destroyed death by death” (1899).

> I deployed shimmering links
> And, ripping the World, I set fire to myself. But thus,
> Burning and suffocated of pain,
> I destroyed the terrible nothingness.
> . . . .
> Impenetrable depth of the World beckons again,
> No more walls, no more piteous poor tale,
> And I am no more ugly ill Snake
> I am an emerald-azure Lucifer,
> In the vastness, liberated by me.

The liturgical formula in the title resumes the paradoxical intention of destroying nothingness: the poet liberates the world from its struts—as well as from ties of common perception and rational thought—re-establishing its impenetrable dimension (its rootlessness, the normal condition of a world haunted by nothingness). The world is thereby “rooted in the unfounded” or “founded in the groundless.”

For Hansen-Löve, the positivity of a negative world is the opposite of the experience of nothingness, which anguish reveals. We can put together these two aspects of Symbolist sensibility. It is because negative concepts assume positive meaning that nothingness announces itself as anterior to conceptualization and, thereby, serves as a foundation. The deracinated world is unattainable without the mediation of symbols, and one can encounter only its original negation (at its very root). The experience of uprooting can be seen to capture the negativity of the world: as an experience of the existential part of language.

Conclusion

Symbolist anguish presents itself as a palpable and sensitive manifestation of the change of paradigm. It is one of the ways in which a

subject has to experience the ontological dimension of negativity. The integration of it in the space of European art and thought occurs in several phases suggested by Kierkegaard and Tolstoy, and later, in a very different context, by Rosenzweig, Heidegger, and Shestov. The fact that among this list we find philosophers who offer a religious solution to the problem of negative ontology and others who refuse to see it, does not change anything within the framework of our interrogation. Symbolism manifests itself as a field of aesthetic experimentation, which receives this new object of modernity through anguish. Anguish does not have a foundation, because it itself is a foundation. It comes not as sign of dysfunction, but as primal data of human existence and integration of human time in which death is not a horizon, endlessly pushed away, of biographical and biological existence, but finality itself, and is present from the beginning of our existence as an initial condition of our awareness of who we are and of the world we live in. The thought embedded in experience reveals that anguish signifies the temporality of man.

The methodological paradox of this interrogation is built on the evidence that in European culture the Symbolist perception goes together with the necessity of taking into consideration the autonomy of language. By endowing language with its own reality (the symbol) and by rejecting the world of the sensitive as unreal, the new aesthetic makes it inevitable for non-being to enter in the area of the thinkable and "real", because language, itself, stops to offer shelter to rational thought and to block nonsense. In obliterating the semantic construction of signified, of signifier and of referent, this aesthetic liberates the space of the referent, which is from now on absent or vanishing, but in any case suspect: absence, non-being is converted into a referent and paradoxically becomes an object of the real.

Notes

[1] This article was published in French in*"Temps ressenti" et "Temps construit" dans la littérature russe et française au XXe siècle.* Sous la direction de Jean-Philippe Jaccard et Ioulia Podoroga. Editions Kimé, Paris, 2013.
[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein: "A Lecture on Ethics," in *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 12.
[3] Konstantin Bal'mont, *Stihotvorenija*, (Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel', 1969), 89.
[4] Fëdor Sologub, *Severnye cvety,* (Moscow: Skorpion, 1901), 91.
[5] Innokentij Annenskij, *Stihotvorenija I tragedii*, (Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel', 1959), 133. Annenski published under the pseudonym "Nik. T-o", literally "nobody" in Russian. Nobody is the name Odysseus used with the cyclops Polyphemus and, at the same time, the name of symbolist negativity connected in this way to antiquity.

[6] Konstantin Bal'mont, *Polnoe sobranie stihov v 10 tomah*, (Moscow: Skorpion, 1908-1914), t. 3, 214.
[7] Fëdor Sologub, *Stihotvorenija*, (Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel', 1978), 142.
[8] Zinaida Hippius, *Sobranie stihov 1899-1903*, (Moscow: Skorpion, 1904), 11.
[9] Konstantin Bal'mont, *Polnoe sobranie stihov*, *op. cit*., 131.
[10] Konstantin Bal'mont, *Stihotvorenija, op. cit*., 161.
[11] Valerij Brjusov, *Sobranie sočinenij v 7-mi tomah, t. 3* (Moscow: Hudožestvennaja lit-ra, 1973), 241.
[12] Nikolaj Minskij, *Polnoe sobranie stihotvorenij v 4 tomah*, (St. Petersberg: Izd. M. V. Pirožkova, 1907), 47.
[13] Z. Hippius, *op. cit*., 162.
[14] Aage Ansgar Hansen-Löve, *Russkii simvolizm: sistema poeticeskih motivov: rannij simvolizm* (St. Petersberg: "Akademičeskii proekt", 199), 270.
[15] N. Minsky, *Iz mraka k svetu. Izbrannye stihotvorenija*, (Berlin, Petrograd, Moscow: Izd. Z. I. Gržebina, 1922), 305-306.
[16] N. Minsky, *Polnoe sobranie stihotvorenij v 4 tomakh, op. cit*., t. 3, 112.
[17] Konstantin Bal'mont, *Izbrannye stihotvorenija i poėmy,* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1975), 117.
[18] Z. Gippius, *Sobranie stihov. Kniga vtoraja*, *op. cit*., 70-71.
[19] Z. Gippius, *Stihotvorenija,* (St. Petersberg: Akademičeskij proekt, 1999), 486.
[20] Konstantin Bal'mont, *Polnoe sobranie stihov v 10 tomakh*, *op. cit*., t. IV, 103.
[21] Cf. Konstantin Bal'mont, *Gde moj dom: stichotvorejija, chudozestvennaja proza, stat'I, ocerki, pis'ma* (Moscow: Respublika, 1992).
[22] Z. Gippius, *Sobranie stihov 1899-1903*, *op. cit*., 11.
[23] Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Universitätsbibliothek, 2002), 5.
[24] *Ibid*., 4.
[25] *Ibid*., 5.
[26] *Tractatus,* 4.0621
[27] Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 41.
[28] Martin Heidegger, *Being and time*, (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, and London: Harper & Row, 1962), 295.

Part Six:

Music

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

SYMBOLIC TOUCH IN THE PLAYING OF DEBUSSY'S PIANO MUSIC

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Dear Reader:

Do not expect a musician and musicologist, like me, to speak either about the pictorial aspects of music, or to venture on the dangerous ground, full of sophisms, of a discourse about the Symbolist synaesthesia of French music, or about Debussy being hailed as a "painter" of music, on the pretext that Turner, Whistler, Degas, Camille Claudel and others were his intellectual or affective travelling companions.[2] Debussy always kept his distance from reductive theories that made comparisons between the arts. He noted: "Music is the most noble of the arts as it allows the human soul infinite expression without having to submit to precise details and circumstances like colors and words . . ."[3]

The theories of Louis-Bertrand Castel, referencing the work of Roger de Piles, art critic under Louis XIV, clearly show that, since the nineteenth century, it has been painting that has always tried to merge with the immanent symbolism of music by putting more and more emphasis on line in drawing and by disturbing the rational sense of representation with the association of emotion with color. Intuitively conceptualized by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the aesthetic basis of symbolism in art, throughout its theoretical development, clearly consists in attributing to art the power and the mission to evoke and give the premonition of "something ineffable beyond language and articulated systems," obscure forces of inner sensibility and sublimations of a higher world, abstracted but unified, impossible to put into words.[4] All works by composers of serious music can claim to belong to a form of "symbolism" and seek this inner spirituality, fed by subjective fantasy, to explore how the reality of the

world is felt; and to convey, in an indirect or coded way, the fragile nature of this hope for individual or collective flight towards new and original territory.

It can then be understood that each of the following, in its way, reflects a type of musical symbolism: the theorised excesses of baroque music, Rousseau's aspiration to give priority to music over words, the secret codes of freemasonry that lie behind Mozartian conventions, the inrush of violence and formal deviation in Beethoven, as well as the aching exasperation of the hysteria-infused dream in Chopin and Schumann. This aesthetic sensibility reached its peak after 1870, when all forms of art felt the need to merge with the paradigm of music, which had long since practiced the secret symbolic language of abstract sound images. This "subtraction of meaning" has most recently been taken up again by the composer and philosopher Hughes Dufourt in his article in the catalogue of the Debussy exhibition in the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. We might recall the famous sentence of Paul Valéry, quoting Mallarmé, who reduced the Symbolist quest to: "Recapturing the property of music."[5] This explains the fascination for musicians of numerous painters like Gauguin, Maurice Denis, Odilon Redon, and later, Derain, Picasso and so on. It is for this reason that composers like Debussy, Satie, Chausson and Roussel felt comfortable beside these new converts to a new type of musical imagery, and above all felt at home with the themes, poetics and atmosphere developed by the Symbolist movement: the emphasis on the body, the receptivity to nature, the sublimation of the real, the perception of the world, the reflection of fantasies, the diversion of emotion, the disclosure of truth masked by immobility, the quest for the message hidden in the image, the photographic quality of memory, the passage into the collective 'I' and 'they', and the dominant theme of shadows or supernatural light. . .

Claude Debussy reached his maturity at the time when the artistic convergence of the Symbolist movement reached its peak, like an aesthetic fracturing, a creative rush that imposed a vision of art which, to a certain extent, art history has never rejected: that of the illusion of representation, of sight, of sound, where meaning is always beyond what we are given to look at or listen to. Criticism, subjectivity and doubt were put forth as dogma, before simple expression and message. But it was also at that time that the fragmentation of the Symbolist aesthetic of doubt appeared, reflecting the society of the Third Republic (*3ème République)*, whose great novelists described the hypocritical pre-democratic immobilism, concealing aristocratic, sectarian and racist resurgence and the social inequity. Artists of very different persuasions would proclaim themselves

to be Symbolists; this society, in which doubt and aesthetic diversity reigned, suited Debussy quite well in the end, as he, from a personal standpoint, had always suffered from a social inferiority complex, and had for a long time been unable to find his own language. All his music wears a mask, which hides and synthesizes both a multiplicity of stylistic intentions and a drifting polysemy, dissimulated in a body of sound, which is more and more divided instrumentally (notably in *La Mer*) and clearly scattered in waves of arabesques both transparent and opaque, dark and light.

Debussy's symbolism is first and foremost a symbolism of opposites: "Music is superior to painting as it can centralize variations of color and light of the same aspect"[6]; it is thus capable of targeting a musical object that would however most often be avoided, and make ambiguity of feeling heard through a wide use of effects of timbre and reflections. The following are some of the opposing features used: immobility/movement, clear image/ blurred resonances, repetition/intermittence, distance/ precision or proximity, physicality/sublimity, pale/colorful, narrative/ silence, presence/absence or implied presence, melodic time/harmonic space, articulated/inchoate or ragged, spoken forms/visual forms, desire for life/ languishing death. . .

His music expresses the contradictions of sensibility and imitates in an imaginary way the individual musical path of a faun-like artist, whose track wavers in the mirror of duplicated images and in the clusters of echoes, impregnated with doubt and foreboding; his music favors nuance over discourse and the infinite gradation of timbres over the pursuit of a musical construction. It can make color vanish by intermittence (*Les Fées sont d'exquises danseuses*) or even through silence (*Des pas sur la neige*) or make it burst into fire to temporarily favor articulation, breaks in rhythm, and the energy of the tempo (*L'Ile joyeuse*). This symbolism which juxtaposes contradictory intentions in a dream-like way is driven by a sort of dialectic, in which the two antagonistic principles seem to hide from each other within the shadows projected by multifaceted and powdery harmonies (as in *Reflets dans l'eau*) or with the sudden incandescent light of luminous showers (as in *les Fées d'artifice*), or with an endless spiral of a shadow illuminated from beneath and of a shaded, subdued and occasionally over-exposed light, which runs through *Pélleas et Mélisande*.

The evolution of Debussy's style bears the traces of the many means of artistic expression found in Symbolism: in the harmonic and expressive distance of the neo-classical style in the Cantata *La Damoiselle élue*, then in the lyricism of the mysterious gravitation and melodic envelopment of

the *Five Poems* (*Cinq Poèmes*) by Baudelaire and the musical sepia photographs of the *Ariettes oubliées,* in the hieratic frescos with sealed messages of certain *Préludes (Danseuses de Delphes, Canope),* in the worrying tapestries of arpeggios or the melodic hypersensitivity of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, in the false immobility of the motifs in *Images*, and lastly after 1910 in the extreme and unreal mobility of the ballet *Jeux* and the desiccation of the slightly but painfully chromatic harmonies. . . . Debussy's Symbolism is above all a question of poetics.

But in these poetics, music, unlike painting, introduces a third person into the chain of reception: THE PERFORMER, whose role is to make the sound of the score resonate, and thus transfer the poetics of Debussy's work and its Symbolist dimension into the world of feeling. The performer not only harnesses his intelligence and sensibility for this process of bringing expression to life, but also firstly employs bodily action. It is he who confers a physical reality on the Debussyist dream while interpreting the objective material nature of the score. He is at the focal point of the construction of an imaginary world whose silent original is then put into sound for the listener. To perform is not only to execute. It's about finding and reliving in a concert performance, the rhythm of the original gestures of a work examined in the finest detail while in a deep introspective frame of mind. Some have compared a piano performer to a master of Chinese calligraphy who finds the rhythm of the line first desired by the creator and perfectly copies the seismography, the trace of the inner movement, of the original that is lost in the mists of time.

The performer of Debussy has the task of producing a quality of sound that allows the listener to experience the Symbolist quest of the composer. The meeting point of the physical translation of the sound and of its intended meaning is crystalized in the performer's TOUCH. The bed of pianistic 'photosynthesis', the fingertip pad, is the actual place of this transmutation of physical energy into a gesture of emotional intentions. As in the cinema where the movement of the image is a trick, the pianist's touch allows the sound to build emotional dynamics that give the illusion of a fictional architecture full of sensibility. It only acts in the immediate moment and in the domain of sensibility, and transcends all necessity of discourse and objective meaning. It personalizes the work. The performer's only aim is to touch and give touch, style, breath, and vital impulse to the work. The touch creates the tone and movement, and 'symbolically' reflects the social culture.

The touch of the Debussy performer must overcome three obstacles:

Firstly, he must give an acoustic identity and poetic sound to the scales, lines, arpeggios, twirls and arabesques which overflow the melody

and which from mere accompaniment become the main content. They give the work its functional movement, its pneumatic airflow, and reinstate virtuosity in the shadows that evoke the inner idea. The arabesques become the projected shadow of the song, in this way conferring a Symbolist meaning on music that eludes its form, destroys its conventions, and places center stage the mirror of virtuosity that embraces and suffocates melody. Hesitant or glaring light can no longer pour out, except from the strange and guilt-provoking shadows, as at the beginning of *Feux d'artifice*.

Secondly, he must re-establish the role of silence, the importance of nuance and expressive intermittence in pianistic interpretation: "I have been to seek music behind all its veils."[7] For Debussy, it was the temptation of a protective shadow, of syncretic neutrality, of suicidal dissolution, of the sound reality.

Thirdly, he must find a mirror-like tone, fluttering, seductive, sometimes too beautiful, sometimes understated, out of line with the conventions of musical psychology; a tone evoking the flight of time, overwhelming regret, nostalgia, or strange, desensitized anguish - "let's be madly happy…let's also be melancholy and sad"[8]—but especially evoking the artist who watches himself create and feels the world vibrate within him. The shadows of the faun-like face in the portrait by Nadar contradict the flashes of light in the eyes of the composer photographed by Pierre Louys.

From these objectives, let us try to establish a typology of the Symbolist touch and the gestures of performing technique that are brought into play. For Debussy's music in particular, the pianist must master three types of touch:

The touch producing resonance is the one which tests mysterious and irrational depths, like that of the sublimation of sound: the one of shadows and deep vibrating notes (*Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*) and the one of supernatural light, subdued behind an invisible veil (*La Cathédrale engloutie*). The finger plunges right into the sound pressing with the flesh of the fingertip pads, whereas the hand immediately relaxes fully so that the resonance can express itself freely. "He seemed to help the keyboard give birth," wrote the poet Léon-Paul Fargue about Debussy's playing. The finger becomes penetrating, insistent, slightly possessive, while the hand and the arm remain free, to let the body of sound of harmonies with a spatial dimension, comprising complex elements, rise into the arch of the hand. This concerns the touch in all the slow harmonies and movements by Debussy: *Clair de lune, Sarabande, Hommage à Rameau, La Jeune fille aux cheveux de lin*, and so forth. This pianistic modelling borrows

from Chopin's nocturnal reflections of light, from the total lyrical commitment of Russian music and from the fullness of the Brahmsian spectrum, but with a certain lightness, a resigned languish that produces the Symbolist discrepancy. Does music really belong to our earth or to some other spiritual place? To the touch of re-explored depths can be added that of the effects of sublimation, notably in the high notes where the fingers veil the expression of the song or 'kneel' to simulate a higher aspiration, a change of degree, a marvellous vision, or a purification of the sound field. These sublime effects which run through the opera *Pelleas et Mélisande* and all his piano works, are a way of fending off, by adopting a Symbolist posture, the anguish concerning death and the guilt which tormented the composer. Their evocation by the pianist corresponds to the gesture consisting in raising the fingers and the hand(s) and striking the note or the notes by simply using the weight of the arm, as admirably mastered by the pianist Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. The equality of attack, both ineluctable and hushed, which is produced, gives the ear the feeling of a mysterious veil and extreme heart-piercing sensibility.

The questioning touch, quintessentially Symbolist, is that which restores, without designating it, the atmosphere of fundamental doubt and calling in question of the notion of art at the end of the nineteenth century. It is also the touch of musical narcissism, which gives the impression of music that listens to and criticizes itself; it is also the ironic touch which French music calls for, from Chabrier to Satie. The questioning requires absolute transparency and an opening of the sound, which fades away. The pianist obtains it by a change in intensity in the playing of the piano hammers, to the point of giving the impression that they can no longer be heard (in *Reflets dans l'eau* for example) or they are perceived as an echo, in a resonance of sympathetic strings, like in traditional Asian musical instruments. A fundamental gesture theorised by the pianist Walter Gieseking consists in pressing the key down to the bottom and raising it immediately half way, which creates this somewhat narcissistic effect of mysterious resonance, as if the sound came from elsewhere. The effect of irony does not require a special touch, rather the use of a neutral sound that follows the score. But it demands articulation, transition, brevity, and surprise in the *mise en scène* of sound and acoustic effects. This Symbolist irony was further developed in works created after 1910, which were freed of an excessively rich harmonic fabric to the advantage of a set of formal structures and more linear writing.

The micro-touch or touch of silence may seem paradoxical; however it is the most innovative. It ranges from the touch of the watercolor, close to drawing, to the touch of the fresco and stained-glass windows, making one

think of interior backlighting; it can also concern a neutral touch, on the edge of silence, a hollow touch, scarcely audible which represents the invisible or emptiness. The pianist must allow his fingers to fall as if nothing were beneath them. The gesture consists in using the first escapement, which recalls early instruments. The finger scratches the note (in *La Sérénade interrompue* or *les Epigraphes antiques*) or lightly touches the key with the top part of one finger so as to eliminate the harmonic of the sound and reproduce the dull sounds of the human heart or snatches of echoes heard from afar, which creates an effect of distance and space.

These three types of Symbolist touch, which the transmission of Claude Debussy's music needs, in the end have a single aim: to 'touch' the listener, and find that mysterious thing that Montaigne calls the "*tactus intimus*"[9] or "inner touch," that is to say the psychic point of touch where the unity between the affective state, the bodily state and the mental state is established; this "fundamental point of contact between the body and the sign,"[10] where the contact between two forms of music takes place, the music of our inner movements that we do not hear and that of real sounds that come from outside via the performer. But to reach this inner touch, which brings together our inner currents of energy with those of written sound, the performer must allow the listener to discover and feel the deep movements that brought about the creation of the composer's work. To this generic objective of the Symbolist spirit, Debussy added a special 'touch'. When he stated that he was seeking "music that each person carries inside them,"[11] "music which is more naked,"[12] it was sound play of shadow and light that he offered to the performer and to the listener, a play of natural light whose immobility hides an extreme mobility of suggested intentions, from where emerges *mezzo voce* the flute of the Faun or the imitation by the god Pan of "the long melancholic note of the toad complaining to the moonbeams."[13] Is the toad not a Symbolist animal?

Notes

[1] Translated from French by Frédéric Goodman.

[2] "Le Toucher Symboliste dans la Musique de Piano de Debussy/ « Symbolic Touch in the Playing of Debussy's Piano Music. » Plenary talk and piano performance at the International Symposium on *Light and Darkness in Symbolist Movement,* University of Illinois Allerton Conference Center, April 2012.

[3] Claude Debussy, *Peter* (1949): 119-120.

[4] Catherine Kintzler, *Peinture et musique* (Septentrion 2002): 186

[5] Paul Valéry, «Avant-propos,» *Connaissance de la déesse* (Gallimard : Pléiade, 1959), I: 1272.

[6] Letter from Debussy to Raoul Bardac, I, quoted in Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy, sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Fayard 1980): 274
[7] Letter from Debussy to Ernest Chausson, 2 October 1893, in *Correspondance* (Gallimard, 2005): 16.
[8] Letter from Debussy to Ernest Chausson, 5 June 1893, in *Correspondance* (Gallimard, 2005): 135.
[9] Cited by Jean Starobinsky in "Brêve histoire de la conscience du corps" (Paris: PUF, 1983): 216.
[10] Roman Jacobson, *Six leçons sur le son et le sens* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1976).
[11] Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* (Gallimard, 1987): 329.
[12] Ibid. 249.
[13] Ibid. 230.

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