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BURNE-JONES AND GUSTAVE MOREAU

THE poetic gravity, the almost suave nostalgia, which distinguish the vision of Burne-Jones, were not exclusively the fruits of an English æstheticism, still less merely the symptoms of a Pre-Raphaelite measles induced by the personal influence of Rossetti. The history of artistic movements in the nineteenth century can, perhaps, only be satisfactorily told from an international point of view; the Pre-Raphaelite germ was itself active on the Continent and, similarly, the romanticism reflected in the painting of Burne-Jones, however esoteric in its finer shades, nevertheless illustrates a vein of poetry in painting which was developed generally in Europe about the middle of the century. Burne-Jones's particular inspiration is most closely paralleled abroad in the genius of Gustave Moreau; it is in these two artists that the vein is to be found at its richest and most elaborate. It appears in a less precious, more ample, but not more lovely form in the work of Puvis de Chavannes and Hans von Marées; it is present in the graver productions of Boecklin and in the less didactic conceptions of Watts, and was exploited by Ferdinand Hodler, whose work Puvis de Chavannes paused to admire at the Salon of 1891, and by Gauguin. It ramified in countless directions, and much of what is visionary in modern art derives its imaginative strength ultimately from this source. One does not run the risk in this connection of over-estimating the individual influence of Moreau or Burne-Jones. Needless to say they were not pioneers; from the start, their visions excited the reverence of a cultivated section of the public whose mind was at once attuned to accept them. But the brand of romanticism which they so exquisitely and entirely expressed was

rich in results: nothing could be more mistaken than to regard the art of either as an exotic backwater.

The impulses which inspired Burne-Jones are, in some measure, forecast in the art of Blake's disciples. Neither Calvert nor Palmer was disposed to follow his master in his course among the stars. They rejected his unearthly caste of angels and devils; their imaginations were not chained to the empyrean nor deadened by the contemplation of natural objects. They were idealists, recalling an idyllic life, and by implication refuting the civilization of their times, but they conceived their ideal in terms of the world about them. Calvert declared that 'in the kingdom of the imagination, the ideal must ever be faithful to the general laws of nature'. Palmer reacted vividly to external appearances; his early landscapes have a mythical quality because he was able 'to charm the truthfulness of eternal laws into a guise it never wore before'. (Calvert.) The pictures of both express the nostalgia for a golden age upon this earth. The very gardens of heaven, in their eyes, wore the aspect of the world; the 'natural man rose up against the spiritual man' with an ideal which sprung from the earth. The blessed existence evoked in their works was equally untouched by the swiftly moving drama which rocked the firmament of Blake's vision. Their landscape is still, their figures, for the most part, are inert or move with marble gestures through the charmed silence of their surroundings. It is largely to the absence of dramatic movement in their composition, of anything desperate or ecstatic in the emotions they express, that these pictures owe their great suggestive power. With the remarkable exception of the Virgil woodcuts, the convulsive actions of Blake's characters, their pronounced passions, are too explicit to exercise the imagination beyond the limits of the crisis which provoked them. The visions of Palmer and Calvert carry the spectator into a grave, unhampered world, of which the pictures themselves present only so many suggestive fragments. It is a world which is mythological in character, but has no precise links with any established set of legends. Its manifestations make no distinction between

Christian and pagan felicities: Ruth moves through the same enchanted regions as the herdsmen of the Eclogues, and arcadian shepherds tend flocks of sheep portrayed as religiously as those of Christ's pasture.

Calvert professed an admiration for Ingres as approaching in style the ideal of the ancients; such a preference may appear odd in a man whose art was essentially the poetic reflection of a daydream, yet it was the studio of Ingres which brought forth poets and dreamers for whom the life and art of vanished ages was a subject of reverie and meditation rather than a field for archæological discovery;¹ and it is Chassériau, the most gifted of the pupils of Ingres, in whose paintings emerges the nostalgia for a more harmonious and lovely world, the almost mystic attitude towards legendary existences which prompted the visions of Calvert and Palmer and were guiding impulses behind the art of Moreau and Burne-Jones. The influence of Delacroix upon Chassériau cannot, of course, be ignored; in so far as it enriched his palette, it was beneficial. On the whole, however, the artist is at his best when he eludes it, and at the same time truer, we may surely assume, to his original genius, to the genius which produced the *Venus Anadyomène* in which a contemporary critic perceived 'la mythologie rendue et comprise avec cette élégance rêveuse et passionnée qui manque souvent aux artistes grecs et ferait croire qu'ils ne comprenaient pas toute la poésie de leurs symboles.' The artist has indeed suffused the incident with a nostalgic

¹ Delacroix had no such following; irritated by the medieval enthusiasms of Amaury Duval and Mottez, preferring Mozart to Beethoven, detesting at times 'les Schubert, les rêveurs, les Châteaubriand', his position as leader of a romantic movement became in the end somewhat paradoxical. The very reputation of Ingres owed much, according to Théophile Gautier, 'aux cris d'admiration des critiques admirateurs du quinzième siècle' who detected in his painting the severe line of the Italian primitives. The statuesque, impassive, but still curiously intense quality of many of Ingres' conceptions—an intensity which pervades, for instance, the *Vœu de Louis Treize* and the extraordinary wall painting at the Ecole des Beaux Arts—stimulates the mind more surely than *La Liberté sur les Barricades* or *La Justice de Trajan*, the visible splendour of which captures rather than provokes the imagination.

dream-like flavour unwarranted by antique examples. His Venus is an intensely legendary creature, but by no means specifically the goddess of classical mythology. In spite of the influence of Delacroix and, though dazzled by the visual impressions of his excursion to Africa, his work was only momentarily characterized, or rather marred, by precise interpretation of the geographical or historical setting of his subject matter; many, even, of his Arab figures 'n'étaient que des statues grecques drapées de burnous et un peu brunies par le soleil d'Afrique'. His *Esther se Parant* displays 'un corps de déesse grecque à tête de Sultane'. (Gautier.) He is indeed the 'Indien qui a fait ses études en Grèce', who blends with his native mysteries the cults of classical paganism. Throughout his ideal remained, to repeat the phrase of Calvert, 'faithful to the general laws of nature'; 'trouver la poésie dans le réel', 'Faire monumental, mais pourtant réel' are among the precepts to be found in his notes.

These were the aspects of Chassériau's art which nourished the inspiration of Gustave Moreau, in whose work they were emphasized and complicated to a point beyond which they could scarcely have been developed. Moreau's intricate visions have an elaborate and deliberate splendour hardly paralleled in Chassériau. His consciousness of the possibility of weaving contemporary poetry out of the legends of the past was more pronounced than that of the earlier painter; the world he describes is immensely enriched and infinitely more fabulous. A telling choice of exquisite and precious accessories was a characteristic of his production from the beginning. *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort*, dedicated to the memory of Chassériau, and *Jason et Médée*, both of 1865, are early examples of the meticulous attention with which he selected and enamelled, rather than painted, such minutiae as the hilt of a sword, the border of a garment or the detail of a capital. The object of this patience was not simply finish; the metallic blossoms which luxuriate in the cave of Polyphemus, the fantastic gear which adorns the figures of *Femmes et Licornes*, the censers and aromatic shrubs of the forecourt in *David Méditant*, are an essential

means of realizing the particular strangeness, the *genius loci* of the painter's vision. Moreover, the accumulation of such details enriches the surface of the pictures: the jewelled girdles, elaborate crowns, drinking vessels, musical instruments, are at times worked upon to such an extent and presented in such profusion that the picture itself assumes the quality of a precious object as opposed to a work of art. Moreau proceeded according to a principle of 'la richesse nécessaire', by which he meant that brilliance of colour and splendour of *mise-en-scène* were virtues peculiar to painting. In some of his conceptions, notably in 'Sémélé', the kaleidoscope of decorative detail quite smothers the significance of the subject. Nevertheless, this attention to accessories usually increases rather than extinguishes the suggestive power of his pictures: enriches the quality of his painting without obscuring his conception.

The principle of a 'la richesse nécessaire' was coupled in his mind with a 'principe de la belle inertie'. The gravity and stillness which are part of the magic of Palmer's or Calvert's idyllic country, which emphasize the fateful personalities of Chassériau's *Esther* or *Venus*, were deliberately cultivated by Gustave Moreau. He considered that the study of movement led to melodrama. The more violent manifestations of human passion, their accompanying grimaces and gesticulations, scandalized his sensibilities as being too familiar, a gross intrusion upon the province of pure beauty. The gods, saints and heroes who inhabit his pictures are moved by 'les gracieuses mélancolies et les nobles désespoirs' of a highly rarefied poetic world. Their emotions are intense but distilled; their gestures, though eloquent, are slow, leisured and economical. The warriors crowding about the figure of *Tyrtée Chantant pendant le Combat* (a relatively early conception) might have been carved in ivory; even when they fall, their descent seems held in suspense. Tyrtæus himself is a hieratic, impassive personage careless of the sacrifice at which he presides. The purely formal beauty of a pose or gesture is a dominating consideration. An attitude should never directly illustrate a

state of mind, but be a symbol of it, having a fixed, eternal character, the timeless significance of a cabbalistic sign. The most dire events are conceived as part of a ritual in which every gesture is as studied as the movements of a ceremony, every pose premeditated, or would appear to be so if we were not convinced that nobility of carriage and grace of attitude were instinctive in the characters concerned. The action of the wounded youth, usually known as the 'dying poet', in *Ulysse et les Prétendants*, would compel attention by its formal harmony alone. The exact context is not obvious; the figure makes a gesture of surprise at the fate which has overtaken him, or it might be that the movement is declamatory, that the poet dies in the very act of speaking his verse. The tragedy is more powerfully conveyed for the absence of psychological realism. Yet even such arrested movements are infrequent in Moreau's work. He described the figures of the Sistine frescoes to Ary Renan as 'figées dans un geste de somnambulisme idéal', a description which might certainly be applied to the magic beings of his own mythology. His inspiration, it has been said, 'n'est pas chaude dans son cœur, il la réduit en élixir, il la tient captivée dans une urne de diamant. . . .' (Henri Focillon.) His *Daughters of Thespius* are disposed about the palace of their father in rapt groups as if held by some charming but vaguely dreaded hallucination. His characters lose themselves in dreams and speculations more often than they act; for the most part they repose, as if their mere existence fulfilled some orphic mission. To his returning Argonauts, gathered motionless on the prow of their boat, he sought to give 'une teinte de gravité légère, de mélancolie tempérée, d'ivresse ensommeillée comme un parfum d'oranger voilé'. His still, impassive figures of Leda and Pasiphae seem sustained by a mysterious gnosis providing the spiritual key to the monstrous nature of their attachments.

The essential function of these paintings is to suggest depths of feeling beyond what is explicitly warranted by the incident depicted, to make the spectator aware of remote perspectives beyond the horizon of the picture space. The

artist evokes a transcendental life outside the limits of history, a life in which we are impelled momentarily to participate; we are introduced into the halls of his chimerical palaces, thread our way through the grottoes of his demi-gods, meditate upon wooded summits in the company of his gods. Such works as 'Hésiode et les Muses', 'Femmes et Licornes' and 'Autumn' are remarkable examples of the artist's power to project our minds into a spellbound land where everything is calm and voluptuous; where the most sinister happenings fail to disturb the enchantment. There is, however, a note of terror in the nostalgia with which the artist contemplates this world. The darker aspects of mythology, illustrated in 'Hercule au Lac Stymphale', 'Dionysos dévoré par ses Chevaux', are accepted, fearfully, as the indispensable underworld of a pagan idyll. Moreau held that the emergence of Christian beliefs freed the artist and poet from the fascination of antique deities who exercised their dominion with the impartiality of savage natural forces; few modern painters, however, appear to have felt more spontaneously, or provoked more surely, the nostalgia for a remote existence of which the figures of classical mythology were the visible symbols. The magnificence of his settings was supported by an erudition which embraced the whole field of mythology. He made quite arbitrary use of this learning; like the pastoral primitivism of Palmer and Calvert, the character of Moreau's legendary world was neither Greek nor Biblical nor Roman, but compiled from all these and from medieval and oriental sources also. The material was a source of poetry, even of a species of comparative religion, but was never the occasion of mere academic reconstruction. In flowered regions which suggest Persia rather than Helicon or Olympus, 'Les Muses quittent Apollon leur père, pour aller éclairer le monde'. The same sanctity illumines the sufferings of Prometheus and St. Sebastian. The physical features of his world were to some extent compounded from the art of past ages, from the antique, from the Italian—particularly Milanese—painting of

Sketch for 'The Sleeping Knights', the first subject of the Briar-Rose Cycle. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, from Persian miniatures. The confection was almost always original. Painting or literature which have become classic may provide a source of inspiration as fresh and direct as any spectacle or experience of nature. There is no hint of pastiche in Moreau's pictures. Though his imagination was stimulated by the art of the Museum, his means of expression were largely perfected in the study of nature. His figures and landscapes are not like apparitions for being distorted or impossible; he succeeds in investing the palpable world with super-eminent qualities.¹

Without enquiring precisely into the complicated nature of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, without sifting what was positivist and realist in it, a product of the European fervour of 1848, from what was poetic and transcendental, traceable to the example of Blake and his followers, it will be sufficient to say that these last aspects were predominant in the art of Rossetti. Confronted with one of his most intense designs, Burne-Jones was finally persuaded to abandon his project of entering the Church for the vocation of artist. Rossetti personally guided the course of his youthful productions. These it is customary to admire to-day, though they merely hint at the sphere of his personal vision, the full nature of which, when it ultimately became apparent, was seen to have more generalized roots. It may have been Watts who persuaded him to acquire an accomplished style as a draughtsman, less, one may suppose, as an aim in itself than in order that no problems of execution should obstruct the direct passage of the subject from the artist's mind into the picture. Certainly the fascination of Giorgonesque painting and of the more elegant and subtle aspects of fifteenth-century Florentine art contributed to the flow of rich but deliquescent images which characterize the central period of his production.

¹ Academy studies and other drawings of animals, preserved at the Musée Gustave Moreau, are of remarkable quality. It has been said that Moreau could '*faire vivre humainement des êtres invraisemblables*'; it has similarly been claimed for Boecklin that his mermaids, satyrs, etc., were organically possible.

Something, without doubt, of the intensity of Rossetti's spirit remained with him then, though perhaps only in so far as such intensity was common to aspiring minds of the time. Before he had either met Rossetti or seen examples of his work, the writings of Ruskin had made him familiar with the idea of painting as a vocation rather than a profession, and the influence of Tractarianism had aroused in him an idealistic dislike of the age. Rossetti merely lit the lamp; the *Chant d'Amour*, *Green Summer*, and *The Merciful Knight* show only faint traces of his manner.

In these pictures, as in the works of Gustave Moreau, it is as if curtains had been parted upon a magic world. We are not prompted to consider their design or handling, but are ushered into the groves or meadows they depict and initiated into the circle of their inhabitants. In the absence of a universally accepted faith, in the midst of the encroachments of industrial progress, the painter is moved to adopt an imaginary ideal, to turn his back upon contemporary conditions of existence. He is recorded to have declared that he would like to forget the world and be inside a picture. His distaste for mere transcriptions, however feeling, of the phenomena of nature produced at one moment an estrangement between himself and Ruskin. Responding to a criticism of someone's work that it was done entirely out of his head, he affirmed that this was the place he thought pictures should come from. He has described the results of his own inner vision as the reflection of a reflection of something entirely imaginary. Yet though he disliked the civilization in which he found himself and looked for a time when he 'would arise and the night be gone', his work contains no hidden message or lesson. He did not believe in didactic art. He would sit and stare at a completed picture, wondering why he had begun and what he meant. The spectator is simply asked to share the dream; the art consists, as with Gustave Moreau, in the painter's power to suggest its scope and beauty. The miracle of the wooden figure of Christ momentarily assuming flesh and blood to embrace the Merciful Knight is significant as an incident in a mythical

sphere where such things might be expected to occur, and not as an illustration of the rewards of mercy.

Burne-Jones devoted the same care to the realization of detail as Gustave Moreau, though the object of this attention was more exclusively decorative. Roses, lilies and sun-flowers recur as motifs which adorn his conceptions rather than add to their suggestive force. His foliage is normally stylised into metallic clusters, his drapery often treated with a rhythmic, almost byzantine conventionality, which bears no close relation to his idea. In his finest achievements, however, in the *Perseus*¹ and *Briar-Rose* cycles², this essentially decorative element is at its least intrusive. In the latter, indeed, the rose was bound to be woven into the poetical structure of the pictures; in the first of the series, its flowers are used with a startlingly beautiful effect, being cast like a brocade over the obscurity of the forest. The preciously elaborated detail of *The Baleful Head*, the last picture of the *Perseus* series, is not simply ornamental but builds up the luxuriance of the garden retreat in which Perseus and Andromeda contemplate, in the reflection of a well, the aspect of Medusa. It is, however, by the deep richness of his colour less than by the accumulation of costly accessories that Burne-Jones may be said to achieve that 'richesse nécessaire' which Moreau considered to be 'le propre de la peinture'. The pictures of his early maturity irradiate a peculiar uneasy effulgence unlike the light of day, at times conveying the impression of a phosphorescent underworld, at others, notably in the *Perseus* series, producing transparent submarine effects and always suggesting a phantom region lit from a source more mystic and less limpid than the sun. 'Une belle inertie' reigns there, on the whole more languorous than that of Moreau; the place, it has been said, has the stillness of a visionary world in which the fiercest conflicts happen, as it were, to slow music. There is no expression of exertion in the struggle between Perseus and the monster, no attempt on the part of the artist to render an

¹ The Civic Centre, Southampton (large version). ² Lord Faringdon (large version).

effect of movement. More so than Gustave Moreau, Burne-Jones deliberately avoided dramatic action or expression. His *Briar-Rose* series includes no scene of the awakening of the princess. Such a final picture, he felt, must have disturbed the lyrical quiet and romance of the other four. The subject matter of these, intense and tranquil at the same time, was perfectly adapted to the quality of the painter's inspiration, demanding the realization of a legendary kingdom whose inhabitants, locked in an enchantment, are the images of a gracious existence magically reduced to silence and inertia. Such an idea is, indeed, an illustration of the nostalgic attitude the painter adopted towards the creatures of his imagination. The sketch for the first subject, reproduced here, though lacking the meticulous splendour of the larger of the finished versions, is a clearer revelation of the melancholy which has been sweetened and become implicit in the final picture. The impression that these captivated beings are transformed for the time being into inanimate objects is emphasized in the sketch by what is almost a repetition of their attitudes in the shapes of the shields suspended above them. Heaped together, their congealed figures have almost the character of an igneous deposit once instinct with life, but eventually to be merged into the soil upon which it fell.

A comprehensive and impartial love of mythology and legend directed Burne-Jones in the choice of nearly all his subjects. Arabian and Persian stories, the legends recounted in Spenser, Chaucer and Malory, the Celtic and classical myths, gave wings to his imagination, but, out of the sensations they aroused, he evolved a vision which ignored their precise attributes. He is recorded to have criticised Tissot's *Life of Christ* for the very accuracy of its local colour. He clothed his knights in armour deliberately unassociated with any historical period. There is not less unction in his figure of Pygmalion confronted by the incarnation of Galatea than in that of the Merciful Knight kneeling to receive the benedictions of a wooden Christ. A medievalistic flavour of a superficial kind undoubtedly pervades a considerable part of his production; it was to be expected from the particular

intellectual atmosphere in which he moved, and was rarely more than a transmuted reflection of any specific historical model. The art of the past worked upon his imagination, but he was not immediately concerned to imitate its spirit. Like Calvert and Palmer, he looked back to 'a morning of the world' of a quite generalized character. In this respect his great devotion to the Grail Legend is revealing. Of all Christian legends it is one of the richest in pagan associations. Whatever its origins, whether its first appearance was evidence of the continued practice in gnostic circles of some ritual connected with the worship of Adonis, or whether its roots are to be found in Celtic mythology, it seems clear that the story is a survival from the pre-Christian era adapted to Christian ideas. Burne-Jones is said to have regarded it as an explanation of life, and as a youth at Oxford he had helped to inspire a select but abortive 'order of Sir Galahad'. One may safely assume that he never linked the story with any kind of occult thought. It is interesting to note, nevertheless, that occultism was current in French literary circles during the 'eighties and 'nineties, and claimed among its adepts Laurent Tailhade and Villiers de l'Isle Adam; that Joséphin Péladan founded a Rosicrucian Society, including an 'Ordre du Graal', and instituted in 1892 a short-lived 'Salon de la Rose ❖ Croix', which assembled a group of painters who were evidently indebted to the example of Gustave Moreau. One may detect, indeed, a faint air of poetic theosophy in both Moreau and Burne-Jones. The life they evoke is, in certain of its manifestations, one in which spiritual questionings are mystically resolved.

An art which dwells pre-eminently upon conceptual images, which is concerned with elements of form, colour and composition almost exclusively, as the machinery for an inner vision, may be expected to reflect or be reflected in the literature of the time. The transcendental view of mythology, which largely constituted the point of departure from which Moreau and Burne-Jones proceeded to elaborate their visions, the nostalgia which breathes from their productions, were echoed, sometimes exactly, by contemporary poets.

Painting and poetry proved equally satisfactory as the vehicle for their ideas. Just as we may trace the artistic ancestry of Moreau more relevantly to Ingres and his followers than to Delacroix, its literary origins are to be found rather in the Hellenism of André Chénier than in the romanticism of 1830. Some years before Moreau began to paint, his regretful attitude towards the antique world was closely foreshadowed in *Le Centaure* of Maurice de Guérin, 'l'André Chénier du panthéisme', with the creature's complaint that 'les dieux errants ont posé leur lyre sur les pierres; mais aucun . . . aucun ne l'y a oubliée'. The emotions of the poem are completely expressed in Moreau's *Le Centaure et le Poète*. Flaubert loaded the canvas of *Salammbô* with the same lavish trappings which give lustre to the pictures of Moreau, the splendour of his accessories frequently forming the setting for acts of impassive ferocity such as Moreau depicted. The Parnassians and symbolists provide closer parallels. *Les Trophées* is largely a series of exquisitely composed word pictures evoking a fabulous existence, idyllic or monstrous, 'où vit court et prend l'essor le peuple monstrueux de la mythologie'. The sonnets *Email* and *Rêves d'Email* are projects for pictures in the vein of Gustave Moreau. Hérédia's vision of antiquity is less adulterated but not more powerful than Moreau's. His Jason and Medea, in a poem dedicated to the painter and based on his picture of the same subject, move 'en un calme enchanté', Medea's words issue forth 'par l'air magique ou flotte un parfum de poison'. His *Stymphale* demonstrates the ease with which the painter's conceptions could assume literary form. The strange and precious imagery of Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* inevitably suggests the atmosphere of Moreau's Salome series, though it must be confessed that the lucubrations of des Esseintes on the subject of these pictures come nearer the spirit of Moreau's Salome, which, of all the painter's conceptions, is one of the least successful and most strained. Moreau's visions undoubtedly exerted an influence upon certain phases of the symbolist movement in literature; in the *Motifs de Légendes et de Mélancolie* of Henri de Régnier,

who wrote verses for the painter's *Orphée*, and in *Le Mot de l'Enigme* and *La Lyre*, from Bernard Lazare's *Miroir des Légendes*, the debt is sufficiently revealed. It is worth noting that both Moreau and Burne-Jones inspired Jean Lorrain, the curious exponent of 'les artistes mystérieux', a number of whose poems were written for the former's pictures.

The last twenty years of the nineteenth century were a period during which painting and poetry drew together. Poets were increasingly concerned with imagery, painters were decreasingly content merely to respond to the nature they saw about them and delved into the recesses of their imagination for material which might equally well have emerged in literary as in pictorial form. The scenes Burne-Jones lays before us are those which the poets of his generation nostalgically evoked. The country of Morris's romances, the Wood beyond the World, the Well at the World's End, has the same magic features. The sphere of Morris's imagination, however, did not normally provide a romantic refuge; closely connected in his mind with a fanciful conception of the idyllic character of medieval life, he sought to revive its conditions in late Victorian England. The nostalgia of Burne-Jones was more nearly allied in feeling to Coventry Patmore's vague desires for the 'mythic time of England's prime'. The principal English source of the romantic imagery of the period was undoubtedly Tennyson. Burne-Jones never reached, perhaps did not seek, the peaks of lyrical intensity achieved by the poet. He was indebted rather to his calmer, more mellifluous moments, to what was essentially idyllic in the *Idylls of the King*. His *Merlin* and *Nimue* is Tennysonian in all but the uncomfortable passion which runs through the poet's version of the legend. The figures of Burne-Jones have the graciousness of Tennyson's more distilled characters, but appear almost as if they had been weakened, through prayer and fasting, like the Damsel of the Holy Grail, and might have risen and floated when one looked upon them. The *Briar-Rose* must have been prompted by the *Day-Dream*, but it is altogether a more solemn and melancholy production; Burne-Jones's

'Sleeping Beauty', whose awakening is not depicted, has, perhaps, more in common with James Thomson's 'death-still' and 'life-sweet' 'Lady of the Images'. The art of Burne-Jones was not only inspired by poets, but also itself inspired them. Morris wrote verses for the *Briar-Rose*, and Rossetti set his *Circe* to poetry. Swinburne, whose first volume of poems and ballads was dedicated to the painter, is permeated with the same emotional, sensuous attitude towards the legends of Christianity and antiquity. Echoes of Burne-Jones's imagery and sentiment recur in the work of O'Shaughnessy, professedly 'a dreamer of dreams', a 'world loser' and a 'world forsaker'. In France, his art aroused the admiration of Péladan, and the Belgian Symbolist, Iwan Gilkin (for whose work Odilon Redon designed frontispieces), composed a play, 'Le Roi Cophétua', admittedly inspired by the well-known picture.

It would be quite useless to approach the study either of Burne-Jones or Moreau with the notion that 'formal relationships', 'pattern', 'structure', etc., have any absolute value in a picture as though it had practical functions requiring firmness or commodity, or, indeed, with the intention of considering colour as an abstract element to be praised or criticized for its own sake as one would the colour variations of a wallpaper or a carpet. The critical attitude which principally relies on such criteria is not only one which would be patently dealing with non-essentials in the case of Moreau or Burne-Jones, but one which, whatever its subject, tends to confuse the means with the ends, or at best to over-estimate the ends. Considered strictly as fulfilling an instrumental function, however, the design, the architecture of a picture, the sympathetic handling of the medium in which it is painted, may be invaluable qualities. They are qualities which are certainly present in the work of Gustave Moreau and Burne-Jones. The latter's illustrations to the Kelmscott books were too prolific, but provide a body of evidence for his powers of design; the best of his pencil drawings are remarkable for a self-assured elegance which arises largely from purity of contour or intricacy of pattern. Moreau's

water-colours display an extraordinary technical brilliance, an apparent spontaneity, a subtle colour sense which entirely justifies Odilon Redon's opinion of him as 'incontestablement un grand aquarelliste'. In the principal achievements of both painters, however, it is the conception which counts—to the realization of which, indeed, these other qualities make an inevitable contribution, but without distracting the attention from the interest of the artist's subject. The interpretation of the subject matter, the beauty of the conception, must be the basis for appreciation or criticism of their work. It may be said that both Moreau and Burne-Jones were prolific workers, and it must be admitted the quality of their production is unequal. Their value depends upon a priceless residue, as, for example, does Tennyson's. Burne-Jones's more ambitious pictures are usually his most successful: many of his single figures are vapid rather than delicate. His later designs for stained glass are facile and repetitive. Indeed, the final period of his activity, during which he employed assistants, is one of declining inspiration. The immense *Arthur in Avalon*, which he left unfinished at his death, is a conventionalized piece entirely without the magic which still faintly pervades *the Launcelot at the Chapel of the Holy Grail*. Towards the end of his career, he inclines to whittle away the earlier resonance of his colour, partly, it has been suggested, as a result of doubts raised as to the permanence of colours then being manufactured; whatever the reason, the loss was a fatal one. It is equally easy to indicate defects in the work of Moreau, which exhibits at times an extravagance which is tasteless rather than magnificent. A vice of interpretation of the kind which Berenson discovers in *The Last Supper* disfigures his *Salome* cycle and his *Jacob et l'Ange*. The religious lesson he embodied in his final, vast, unfinished *Chimères* introduces an unsatisfactory element strongly at variance with the poetic vein of his best pictures. These are, without exception, in the too rarely visited Musée Gustave Moreau and in private collections. The artist has too often been considered in the light of inferior *Phaëton*, *Jeune Fille Thrace* and *L'Apparition* in the French national

collections, just as judgements of Watts often seem based on the grandiloquent machines in the Tate Gallery without reference to the illuminating collection at Compton. Many of the most lovely conceptions of Burne-Jones, *Green Summer*, the *Briar-Rose*, *Aurora*, the *Wheel of Fortune*, are in private hands, though *The Legend of Perseus* is accessible to the public in the Southampton Gallery; only the most inadequate idea of the artist's imaginative range can be formed from the mediocre representation of his work in the London galleries.

There is no doubt that the influence of Gustave Moreau played a considerable part in the anti-realist reaction which took place in French painting and letters in the 'eighties. Though its traces may be more apparent in literature, it is clear that both the mystics and symbolists in painting owed something to Moreau's visionary art. However faint the present reputation of the former, their art was, with the enduring contribution of the symbolists, an historical factor in the development of modern art in its imaginative aspects. The list of Moreau's pupils, since become illustrious, is sufficiently well known, and at least it may be said that Rouault and Guérin drew inspiration not only from his teaching but also from his example. Moreau evidently influenced Devallières (who succeeded Rouault as curator of the Musée Moreau) and Odilon Redon. It has even been curiously claimed for Matisse that, if not in his manner at least in his vision, he retains more than is supposed of Moreau's teaching. Impressionism, an extreme form of realism, proved to be a blind alley. Cézanne's instinct for the monumental and static was in frequent conflict with the impressionist outlook by which his vision had undoubtedly been affected. Seurat, who studied and cultivated the implications of impressionism, is less valued for his 'divisionism' than for the nobility and gravity of his composition, qualities which it is likely he derived from Puvis de Chavannes, who communicated them also to Gauguin. The inspiration of Puvis, though it assumed a more limpid and less disturbing form, was closely analogous to that of Gustave Moreau.

There is the *Vision Antique* side by side with the *Inspiration Chrétienne*; the art of both asserts a formal gravity, 'a belle inertie', as a means of expression. The transition from what almost amounted to a classical conception of form combined with a purely idealistic vision, (even though this be expressed in accordance with the laws of nature) to an art such as flourishes to-day in which representation is incidental, is one which it is not difficult to conceive. It can, in fact, be observed taking place in the pictures of Gauguin. Maurice Denis could reconcile symbolism with the famous view that 'un tableau est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs dans un certain ordre assemblées.'

In England the art of Burne-Jones produced febrile imitators, Evelyn Pickering, Waterhouse, Spencer-Stanhope, and the more interesting Strudwick, (to whom Bernard Shaw devoted an admiring article in the *Art Journal* of 1891), but it exercised no enduring influence. Simeon Solomon, Beardsley, Ricketts were indebted to Burne-Jones; their talent however, though occasionally exquisite, was minor and without issue. The achievement of Walter Crane was exclusively decorative. Through his connection with Morris, Burne-Jones was himself overwhelmed by decorative undertakings in the execution of which his gift as a painter failed to expand and was even impoverished. The revival of the decorative arts, of which Morris was the light and impetus, and the influence of which was European, must be considered as one of the dominating artistic developments of the close of the century. One cannot help regretting that Morris never cultivated his own gift as a painter and that he diverted Burne-Jones from the poetic introspection which prompted his best work. It may be conjectured that the vitality of the revival in decoration and, to a more deadly extent, the vigorous elements introduced by the New English Art Club combined to exclude the possibility of any progressive tendencies arising out of the achievements of Watts, Rossetti, and, above all, Burne-Jones. The growing prestige in this country of the French realist and impressionist groups, which was manifested in the strivings of the New

English Art Club, however deserved, was most belated; even so, the exhibitors at the New English approached the French masters without knowledge of their greatest works. The realist themes of such men as Clausen, Bramley, La Thangue, etc., were derived from Bastien-Lepage rather than from Manet; in their method, they sought guidance from 'pleinairism' rather than impressionism or found fresh sources of strength in the example of Constable and Turner. They were making their efforts in this direction at a time when Manet was already dead, his art winning ever wider acceptance, and when the Salon des Indépendants was already founded. Developments were further complicated by the perhaps necessarily indigestible form in which the many and important movements in French painting subsequent to impressionism made themselves felt in this country. In 1910, an exhibition of French painters was held at the Grafton Galleries with the misleading title of 'Manet and the Impressionists'. It introduced for the first time to the London public the work of Cézanne, Gauguin, Matisse, Odilon Redon, Laprade, Picasso, Seurat, Denis, and others, a group of painters who, without the inclusion of Manet, would present sufficiently conflicting tendencies. The exhibition was followed by a 'Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition' in 1912 which included pictures by several of the same artists and also works by personalities so various as Van Dongen, Stanley Spencer, Braque and Henry Lamb. When one considers the extreme nature of Turner's final phase (which really excluded the possibility of discipleship), the impressionism implicit in Constable's pictures, the powerful realism of the first phase of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, one is bound to conclude that the foundation of the New English Art Club presented an element of fatal reaction, that, if it had never occurred, the art of Burne-Jones might well have brought forth a progressive symbolism which would have rendered the compelling influences of modern French painting less disconcerting.

WILLIAM EMPSON

PASSING THROUGH U.S.A.

I SPENT three months in America on the way home from China, getting to Los Angeles about the middle of November, and spending most of the time in Boston. The points about America's attitude to the war are well enough known but seem worth reviewing. I don't want to tell anecdotes except as they illustrate points. However, if any of my American friends see this article, as I hope they will, I want to assure them that I enjoyed and admired the country very heartily, and am grateful for their hospitality; if I seem a bit rude I am only taking for granted the same kind of freedom that they do about England. The amount of tact that goes on on our side is not healthy and must look a bit suspicious. Let me recommend the recent cry of A. P. Herbert, to the effect 'Pray God we can get through this without help from America!'—without the let-down after the up-lift, and the feverish bad temper about paying them for their noble sacrifices, and all the rest of it. A lot of people here would echo that, and for that matter the most important help America can give us at present is to hold the fort in the Far East, as she is doing. So I am not doing propaganda at them to drag them in. At the same time, from the point of view of the English reader, we want all the help we can get, and the first question about America is the propaganda set-up there.

The Americans have less spontaneous dislike of propaganda than we have, but much more fear of it at present. They like a good line of talk, a dramatic show, public excitement, and often even when they call it ballyhoo, don't much care whether it is or not. They are much more used than we are to the idea that advertisement keeps the economic system going even when false, so that it does good. And the assumptions that produced Christian Science (more widespread than