

## Belgium

**Walter Geerts** – Belgium

University of Antwerp – Professional Professor of Italian and Comparative Literature

### Symbolist Fiction: Enchanted, Disenchanted. On André Gide's Début

André Gide's (1869 -1951) literary career starts when Symbolism is at its turning point, five years after Moréas' Manifesto. Young enough to participate occasionally in Mallarmé's famous Mardis Gide's artistic taste matures in the wake of the much admired Verlaine's Poètes maudits and his poetry. The enchantment, lasting for about five years: 1890 – 1895, opens with André Walter's Notebooks. It comes to an end with Symbolism light-heartedly parodied in Marshlands (1895). André Walter's Notebooks (1891) are a milestone in the literary history of Symbolism. Inspired by Schopenhauer's Welt Gide's Cahiers delve into the philosophical foundations of literature in its retreat from Naturalism. Such withdraw from reality had created more problems than solutions for the ongoing crisis. The Notebooks explore all possible routes of escape from the philosophically founded dead-end situation: the rendering of pure phenomena. Exploring the wide horizon of western poetry and philosophy, not only his own, rich, French tradition, the young Gide, in the wake of Verlaine's well known motto, adopts music as the leading principle for literature. André Walter, his easily recognizable alter ego, decides to write poetry, and prose, echoing Chopin's notes, especially those of the Nocturnes. Far from the body and its distracting requirements music unfolds as the preferred language of the soul. Even silence can be part of it. Other territories are explored: the figural design of the arabesque imitates the musical lines in avoiding all straight forward heading in a certain direction. Such attempt would imply that some external goal has to be pursued, beyond the trajectory of musical or pictorial lines, in an area heavily immersed in the material world. For literature, made of words and, thus, concepts, paradox is looming. The intended novel, Allain, the poetics of which is being developed by the Notebooks, is doomed to failure. Rather, doomed to a silent existence, on the same level as Schopenhauer's "noumena". For the history of Symbolism in the context of Western art, Gide's Notebooks are one of the most thorough explorations of the consequences of a radical symbolist poetics. With respect to my earlier book on Gide (1992) my paper will deal with some new aspects of this early exploration.

## Canada

**Allison Morehead** – Canada

Queen's University - Assistant Professor of Art History

### Maurice Denis and Symbolism in 1891

In March 1891, six months after publishing the “Definition of Neo-traditionalism,” in which the opening salvo implored readers to “Remember that a painting – before being a battle horse or a nude woman or some other anecdote – is essentially a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order,” Maurice Denis made his début at the Salon des Indépendants. For the exhibition, he sent an eclectic selection of more than 10 works, designed to show the range of his abilities and to attract attention from different symbolist critics in order to highlight new forms of visual symbolism being produced by artists who secretly called themselves the Nabis. Denis’s works ran the gamut from a large nude woman to religious scenes to a series of drawings inspired by Paul Verlaine’s *Sagesse*. Stylistically, the works included flat planes of color in the manner of Paul Gauguin, curving expressive arabesques more in tune with the paintings of Vincent van Gogh, and, perhaps surprisingly, a good deal of neo-impressionist pointillism.

The 1891 Independents took place at a particularly fraught moment for the symbolist avant-garde: Van Gogh was dead, Gauguin, newly proclaimed the symbolist painter par excellence, was about to leave for Tahiti, and Seurat would die during the exhibition. This paper takes a closer look at Denis’s strategic choice of works for the exhibition, and the response of critics with a stake in symbolism, including Adolphe Retté, Alphonse Germain and Julien Leclercq, in order to provide a snapshot of symbolist painting at a moment of intense competition to achieve and to be identified as having achieved painted symbolist form.

**François Lachance-Provençal** – Canada

Université de Montréal - Lecturer

**Titre** : « *Le coassement virtuose des grenouilles transies* » : L’esthétique intempestive de Nietzsche contre l’art pour l’art (Nietzsche's Aesthetics Against the Notion of "l'art pour l'art")

**Résumé** : La première réception de l’œuvre de Friedrich Nietzsche s’est effectuée dans les milieux symbolistes de la dernière décennie du dix-neuvième siècle. Lu, d’abord, dans le contexte de son commentaire sur la musique de Richard Wagner (formulé, par exemple, dans *La naissance de la tragédie*), on trouva dans le style dithyrambique et le destin tragique du philosophe un écho de l’esthétique symboliste. *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*, « livre pour tous et pour personne », fut rapidement élevé au rang de chef-d’œuvre de la littérature hermétique. Le pari de la communication est de proposer que cette réception marque le début d’une longue

période de confusion quant à la compréhension de l'esthétique nietzschéenne. En nous appuyant, comme le fit Martin Heidegger, sur les œuvres de maturité du philosophe, nous démontrerons que Nietzsche, après s'être distancié de Wagner en 1876, opère une profonde critique des thèses de l'art pour l'art chères aux courants issus du romantisme, dont le symbolisme. Cette critique s'effectue dans le cadre d'une réévaluation binaire des critères de la création artistique, structure favorisant les jeux d'opposition entre, par exemple, classicisme et romantisme, santé et maladie, légèreté et pesanteur, lumière et obscurité. Nous verrons que, pour Nietzsche, l'artiste plasticien, au contraire du philosophe-législateur créateur de formes, ne doit se réclamer que d'Apollon, divinité solaire, et non de Dionysos. À cet effet, il sera utile de dénouer une terminologie équivoque qui indique par le mot d'« artiste » deux réalités différentes, bien que complémentaires. En dernier lieu, nous qualifierons d'« antimoderne » l'esthétique intempestive de Nietzsche en lui attribuant l'étonnante caractéristique d'exclure nécessairement tout artiste s'y référant.

**Maria Ignacia Barraza** – Canada/Spain

University of Salamanca (Spain), Simon Fraser University (Vancouver)

Rewriting a mythological figure: Symbolist themes and motifs in Manuel Ciges Aparicio's *Circe and the poet*

Juan Ramón Jiménez, the Andalusian poet who was deeply influenced by the French Symbolists, once famously stated that “we [in Spain], as a matter of fact, accept symbolism under the name of modernism”, because, according to him, “Modernism [was] a general movement within which there exist[ed] other [...] schools as varied as naturalism, symbolism [and] impressionism [...]”. These words lead us to infer that Symbolism was a piece of the puzzle that made up the larger movement known as Modernism. And as it is well known, Spanish Modernism is generally accepted by literary critics as the movement “imported” to the Iberian Peninsula by the great Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío at the end of the 19th century. Modernismo, therefore, stood for the new impulse in the visual and literary arts common to all European nations beginning in the *fin de siècle*. As Ramón del Valle-Inclán –another author greatly influenced by the French Symbolists- stated, Modernismo represented a tendency to “heighten sensations and increase them in their number and intensity”. Furthermore, Valle-Inclán was an enthusiast of the wagnerian ideal of the fusion of the arts, shared by many of the Symbolists: “There are poets that dream about giving their verses the rhythm of dance, the melody of music and the magnificence of a sculpture”, he wrote in 1902. In this paper, I wish to dedicate my attention to an obscure and fascinating author who was influenced by the Spanish modernist writer *par excellence*, Ramón del Valle-Inclán. As well, I wish to show that certain motifs and themes dear to the Modernistas are present in one of the last novels he wrote, one rarely mentioned in Manuals of Spanish Literature. That author is Manuel Ciges Aparicio. Born in 1873, Ciges Aparicio is generally considered a lesser-known author of the literary Generation of 1898, along with famed names

like Miguel de Unamuno. In most of his novels he developed a very personal utopian socialist conception of life. The one novel that seems to pick up themes and motifs from the Aesthetes or Decadents is the novel *Circe and the poet* (1926). This novel can be interpreted as mirroring the irrational fears and obsessions that the Symbolists and Decadents felt towards the feminine element during the *fin de siècle*, which spilled over into the first two decades of the 20th century, as is generally known. The title itself is meaningful: *Circe and the poet*, that is, man under the powerful and mysterious control of woman, a theme dear to the Symbolists. The mythological figure of Circe fueled the imagination of many symbolist painters like Franz Von Stuck as well as of subsequent expressionist painters like George Grosz, whose modern take on the Greek enchantress could serve as an illustration to Ciges Aparicio's novel.

**Serena Keshavjee** – Canada  
University of Winnipeg

#### Emile Gallé and the Aestheticization of the Scientific Process

Scientific images, especially close-up views of biological forms were a popular motif in twentieth-century art, exemplified in the abstract work of Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Hans Arp, to name a few examples. Biology itself emerged in the nineteenth century, developing out of Natural History, one of the most important and popular scientific disciplines. Understanding how biological images and related evolutionary theories were perceived and utilized by fin-de-siècle Symbolist artists is crucial to contextualizing how these scientific concepts emerged as art motifs in the next century. Odilon Redon is one of the Symbolists who anticipated the use of close up microscopic imagery explored by Bauhaus artists and other Modernists. Equally important however, is Emile Gallé, who aestheticized biological forms and theories. Gallé, steeped in botany and biology, based his art on close scientific observation, and even more interestingly, attempted not just to copy natural forms, but to depict the processes of nature, which science was uncovering. Gallé was from Nancy in the region of Lorraine, and thus was fluent in both French and German. He was familiar with the writings of evolutionary biologist Ernst Haeckel and the scientist's project to aestheticize scientific imagery exemplified in *Art Forms of Nature*.

Although Gallé has been seen as “merely” a decorative artist, his ambitious vision and sophisticated art mark him as a Symbolist working with the applied arts. Gallé's utilization of some of the characteristics of scientific imagery to create his art anticipated the emergent biocentric philosophy which blossomed in twentieth-century in abstract art.

## **Greece**

**Aivalioti Maria** – Greece/France

University of Paris Ouest-Nanterre La Défense – PhD Candidate

The Fear of the Darkness, the Quest of the Light: The Representation of Religious Themes in the Work of Symbolist Painters

Symbolism forged its identity in *fin de siècle* Europe, during a period of radical transformations about the religion, of reconsideration of Catholicism's role and of revaluation of the faith and of the presence of divine. In this climate of questioning and of the strong influence of spiritualism, the Symbolists, investigating the world, felt the strong impulse to interpret the society and even their psychism through the representation of religious scenes and motifs. The goal is to demonstrate how and in which terms the symbolist painters incorporate these emblems in their work and to explore the game of their palette in the eternal quest of salvation and catharsis, as well.

## **France**

**Dominique Jarrassé** – France

Professeur d'histoire de l'art contemporain à l'université Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux 3 et à l'Ecole du Louvre

*La sculpture symboliste entre fluidité lumineuse et ombres expressionnistes*

A partir de l'œuvre de quelques sculpteurs symbolistes comme Dampt, Vallgren, Bartholomé, Saint-Marceaux, Biegas ou Aronson ..., je voudrais explorer la question du langage plastique symboliste. Deux options semblent en concurrence traduites par le modelé, ce fondement de l'expression sculpturale : la fluidité qui, mettant en pleine lumière les formes, relève d'un symbolisme idéaliste, l'aspérité d'un bosselage qui, accentuant les contrastes d'ombre et de lumière, outrant les traits jusqu'à les déformer, voire dramatisant les surfaces, tend à faire du symbolisme sculptural un art expressionniste avant la lettre. Ces deux tendances permettent de souligner comment deux modalités de la plasticité symboliste en sculpture révèlent, en adéquation avec la double postulation baudelairienne inhérente au symbolisme, la nature ambivalente, profondément mystique et humaine, de cette esthétique. Evidemment parfois ce sont des choix iconographiques qui semblent déterminer l'usage de ces types de modelé qui cohabitent chez un même artiste au gré de ses œuvres ou de son évolution, mais il y aussi le matériau, la technique de modelage ou de taille... J'accorderai une place privilégiée à Naoum

Aronson, sculpteur russe vivant en France encore trop méconnu et qui incarna remarquablement cette double aspiration.

### *Symbolist Sculpture Between Luminous Fluidity and Expressionist Shadows*

Using a few symbolist works by Dampé, Vallgren, Bartholomé, Saint-Marceaux, Biegas ou Aronson, I would like to explore the nature of the Symbolist language. There are two concurrent options that translate Symbolist sculptural expression. The first is the fluidity which manifests itself presenting forms in full light as a part of the Symbolism which could be considered idealist. The second is the texture of surfaces, which by stressing the contrasts of shadow and light, by subtracting the features while almost misshaping them or by dramatizing the surfaces had a tendency of making sculptural Symbolism the Expressionist art before its time. These two tendencies stress how two modalities of Symbolist expression in sculpture reveal the essence of Symbolist aesthetics: the ambivalent nature of Symbolism, at once deeply mystical and deeply human. It is sometimes the iconographical choices which seem to determine the usage of these modalities while they coexist in the works of the same artist. But in addition it is always important to consider the materials and the techniques used to create works of art. I will give a privileged place to Naoum Aronson, Russian sculptor who lived in France at a time when he was still unknown and who beautifully embodied in his work the double aspiration of the Symbolist movement.

**Jean-Pierre Armengaud** – France  
University of Evry Val d'Essonne

### The Symbolist Touch in the Playing of Piano Music

In our history of western art, the word “symbolism” still gives rise to a lot of confusion around its definition; Symbolism has often been confused with an ‘All-Aesthetic’ approach, which gives a commonplace air inside the Theorie of the Reception.

In music, Symbolism, stands out by having been the first artistic movement whose message includes, with a sort of a boomerang of meaning (not devoid of narcissism), an return-effect of the intellectual and affective impact produced by the work on the performer, the listener and the creator himself. The music not only express, but print in us his own resonance and his transcendence.

In order to identify the original sense of Symbolism, I propose to focus this study on the piano music of Claude Debussy, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of whose birth will be celebrated in 2012.

What interests us can be found in the moment when the work of art takes form under the fingers of the interpreter, and in the conscienceness of the listener, at the moment when the emitter and receiver of the message in creation meet: the moment of the the interpreter's touch – tactile, visual and mental.

This talk will thus provide a comparison going back and forward between the technique and the poetic of pianistic touch in certain works of Claude Debussy. This very special meeting between the language and the sound permit to study the notion of “mental touch” by the listener.

The part devoted to pianistic touch will propose a typology of pianistic touch with a symbolist ‘spirit’, within a reflection about the mediation of the interpreter's body: the subliming touch linked to the evocation of the forces of darkness, the touch of questioning and of motionless vision, the touch of resonance and light, the touch of pre-silence, of non-presence, all through the mobile articulation of sound with shades of colour.

The part devoted to the poetics of visual and mental ‘touch’ will analyse the transfer of rhetorical expression to the sound image, and also the transfer of the inner ‘touch’, the psycho-social reflection of a fractured society: the contradiction between the individual and the group, and the entrance of irony in music (Satie; Debussy).

The line of reasoning will be sprinkled with musical examples on the piano, notably drawn from the works of Debussy, “Les FÈes sont d'exquises danseuses”, “Reflets dans l'eau”, “Poissons d'or”, “Et la lune descend sur le Temple qui f°t”, “Etude pour les sonoritÈs opposÈes”, as well as a performance of the last piano work by Debussy, of which I gave the world premiÈre in 2003, and which has recently been published: “Les soirs illuminÈs par l'ardeur du charbon”.

**Joelle Joffe** – France  
Paris VIII University

### **Blacks Odilon Redon, Shadow or Light?**

“In the beginning was the Black” could be said by browsing the work of Odilon Redon.

Symbolist painting casts a veil over the real, over life, bodies and faces. Caravaggio, Rembrandt and Georges de la Tour deployed claro-oscuro, dramatizing scenes by illuminating a selected object. Odilon Redon exposes - ironically? - the macabre dream of a severed head ... sometimes reduced to a single glance.

"Naming an object removes three quarters of a poem's pleasure (Jouissance)... suggesting: there lies the dream." says Mallarmé. The Symbolist art movement was born. Redon follows this view and the titles of the artworks often accentuate the gap with its subject. While Freud uncovers the experience of pleasure ("Jouissance"), which combines pain and satisfaction, symbolist painters move away from conventional expressions.

Redon highlights exquisite and unique details, choosing "interpretations" with strange, raw and enigmatic meanings. It is the realm of the unspeakable and the invisible. It is the irony and dream-like quality of a world where everything seems mysterious and fictitious, worshipping artifices and disgusted of realism.

This work seeks to clarify whether symbolist painting shows or hides the object. We know that shadows result from the projection of light; are Redon's "Shadows" shade or... light and the "variable" truth of the artist's unconscious?

**Luba Jurgenson** – France  
HDR Paris-IV Sorbonne – Lecturer

### **Les esthétiques modernistes et le concept d'angoisse** Modernist Aesthetics and the Concept of Anguish

L'avènement du symbolisme modifie en profondeur le rapport du sujet au monde ainsi qu'au langage et, partant, redistribue les zones d'ombre et de lumière dans les représentations de la réalité. Ce qui constitue le propos-limite pour l'esthétique réaliste – précisément, l'espace de « l'ombre », la réalité seconde, l'au-delà du monde sensible – sera objet d'exploration dans les œuvres symbolistes ainsi que dans les mouvements modernistes ultérieurs, notamment les futurismes, le surréalisme ou la littérature de l'absurde. Parmi ces ombres qui ne se laissent pas saisir dans l'énonciation – mais qui, par cela même, en constituent l'enjeu essentiel – il y a cette dimension d'angoisse moderne, que l'on trouve déjà dans la pensée fondatrice de Kierkegaard, et qui constituera le point nodal de « l'être dans le monde » du XXe siècle. Sur l'exemple de symbolismes russe et français, mais aussi de textes antérieurs et ultérieurs qui se positionnent éventuellement en opposition au symbolisme (Tolstoï, ou encore les absurdistes Harms et Lipavski), je voudrais suivre les évolutions de ce concept pour tenter de cerner sa place dans l'esthétique symboliste et, au-delà, dans les formes esthétiques et philosophiques de l'appréhension du monde moderne.

**Lumières et reflets dans l'œuvre d'Annenskij**  
Light and Reflections in Annensky's Works

La symbolique de la lumière est universelle, surtout pour les langues slaves où le mot *lumière* (*svet*) désigne le monde et les hommes. Les premières lignes de *La métaphysique* d'Aristote parlent de la supériorité des perceptions visuelles. La vision et la lumière traversent les Écritures : Genèse, 1:14-18; Psaumes, 42-3, 111-4; Matthieu, 13: 43; Luc, 11:33-36; Éphésiens, 1:18 etc. Nous nous proposons d'examiner, de ce point de vue, la poésie et la dramaturgie d'Annenskij, poète proche de la décadence française et du symbolisme russe (tout en reconnaissant volontiers, et à juste titre, l'appartenance d'Annenskij au symbolisme, l'histoire littéraire classe ce poète à l'orée de ce mouvement). La notion de lumière s'inscrit chez lui dans un complexe réseau métaphorique et conceptuel.

1. Il s'agit avant tout des *reflets* et de la réfraction des rayons qui passent à travers un prisme ou un verre, ou encore de l'éclat projeté par les facettes des pierres précieuses. En dehors du sens propre, visuel, le reflet, au sens figuré, suppose une reproduction qui évoque la secondarité de la culture en général. Les reflets et les ombres nous renvoient à la célèbre allégorie de la Caverne. Cette référence platonicienne est placée chez Annenskij au cœur d'un véritable tissu intertextuel.
2. Le jeu de lumière et le scintillement traduisent l'incertitude, la tromperie, mais aussi les reflets chatoyants qui perpétuent le sens des œuvres littéraires. Les chercheurs ont plus d'une fois remarqué dans la poésie d'Annenskij les motifs des améthystes, du cristal, des cristaux qui fractionnent et font miroiter la lumière (par exemple, *Treize lignes*, *Améthystes*, *L'homme*).
3. Les sources de lumière sont souvent artificielles chez Annenskij, ce qui est parfaitement conforme à l'esthétique décadente (bougie, lanterne, miroir), ou encore l'éclat vient des astres qui brillent sans véritablement éclairer (lune, étoile). Les étoiles, cette autre notion constante de la poétique annenskienne, *miroitent*, *tremblent*, *scintillent*.
4. La lumière intérieure spirituelle est liée à l'image des yeux. Le motif platonicien de la communication par les yeux (cf. Luc, 11 :34), celui des yeux qui exsudent des fluides, est récurrent chez Annenskij.
5. Les pensées à leur tour sont présentées comme une substance visible, proche des rayons de la lumière. Notons, à titre d'exemple, l'opposition entre *le brouillard* symbolisant l'oubli ou l'inconscient et *la clarté ou un rayon de lumière* exprimant le souvenir, la mémoire ou la conscience.

## Свет и отражения в творчестве Анненского

Символика света — универсальна, особенно в славянских языках, в которых слово *свет* означает мир, человечество. Начальные строки *Метафизики* Аристотеля указывают на превосходство зрительных восприятий. Видение и свет прослеживаются в многочисленных текстах Писания: Бытие, I:14-18, Псалтирь, 42-3, 111-4, Евангелие от Матфея, 13:43, Евангелие от Луки, 11:33-36, Послание к Ефесеям, 1:18 и т.д. Мы рассмотрим поэтику света в поэзии и драматургии Анненского, поэта, близкого к французскому декадентству и русскому символизму (охотно и справедливо признавая принадлежность Анненского к символизму, история литературы отмечает и его обособленность по отношению к этому течению). Понятие *света* включено у Анненского в сложную метафорическую и концептуальную сеть.

1. Прежде всего речь идет об отражениях, о преломлении лучей, проходящих через призму или через стекло, или же о блеске, исходящем от граней драгоценных камней. Кроме прямого визуального смысла, отражение в переносном смысле подразумевает воспроизведение, напоминающее о вторичности культурного знака вообще. Отражения и тени отсылают нас к известной аллегории Пещеры. Данная ссылка на Платона стоит в центре настоящего интертекстуального сплетения в работах Анненского.
2. Игра блеска и мерцание передают неустойчивость, обманчивость мира, но вместе с тем — переливающиеся, дрожащие отражения множат смыслы литературных произведений. Исследователи не раз отмечали роль аметистов, хрустала в поэзии Анненского. Мы находим переливающиеся и дробящие свет кристаллы, например, в стихотворениях *Тринадцать строк*, *Аметисты*, *Человек*.
3. У Анненского источники света часто искусственны (свеча, фонарь, зеркал, медь), что вполне соответствует декадентской эстетике ; блеск может исходить от небесных светил (луна, звезды), которые сверкают собственно говоря не освещая. Звезды, ещё одно понятие-константа поэтики Анненского, сверкают дрожащим светом, мерцают, переливаются.
4. Внутренний духовных свет связан с образом глаз. Платоновский мотив общения через глаза, мотив источающих потоки или излучения глаз часто встречается у Анненского.

Мысли в свою очередь представлены как видимая субстанция, родственная лучам света. Отметим в качестве примера противопоставление тумана, символизирующего забытие или бессознательное и ясность или лучь света, выражающие воспоминание, работу памяти или сознания.

**Robert Doré** – France

Université de Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne – UFR d'Art et d'Archéologie

***Le parcours symboliste d'Armand Point***

The Symbolist Path of Armand Point

Armand Point (1861-1932) reçoit une formation de dessin au collège Rollin à Paris puis débute une carrière de peintre en Algérie de 1878 à 1891. Son retour en métropole est progressif : au Salon il présente des œuvres orientalistes baignées d'une lumière éclatante dès 1882. Vers 1888, Joséphin Péladan l'entraîne vers le Symbolisme Rose+Croix. Sa palette s'adoucit dans la lumière de l'Ile-de-France. Les thèmes féminins (jeunes femmes éthérées, rêveuses ou virevoltantes figurant souvent Hélène Linder, la Muse de l'artiste) dans les lumières de l'après-midi, du crépuscule ou de la nuit, au sein d'une nature empreinte de mystère sont fréquents, baignant dans les thèmes antiques ou du Moyen-Age souvent inspirés de l'Italie (notamment de Botticelli), dès les Salons de la Rose+Croix. La femme, idéalisée, devient une princesse de légende, une sainte ou une chimère, parfois proche d'une licorne. Les couleurs assourdis s'accommodent mieux des atmosphères de rêve de ses œuvres. L'enthousiasme baigne alors la majorité des œuvres.

Avec la communauté de Haute-Claire, Point dirige, dès fin 1896, une équipe d'artistes-artisans qui réalisent des coffrets émaillés portant des décors du Moyen-Age et de la Légende dorée, toujours en quête d'un passé idéalisé ; en peinture, la femme aspirant à la Beauté éternelle, rêve de l'artiste, est progressivement remplacée par la femme fatale : la Sirène, Eve tentatrice et Salomé apparaissent et prennent plus d'importance. Elles reflètent les difficultés sentimentales de l'artiste.

Salomé est représentée plusieurs fois, tantôt dansant, tantôt portant le plateau encore vide prêt à recevoir la tête de Saint Jean : Point récusé le réalisme de la tête coupée. A partir de 1900, il est très influencé par son ami Bourges qui lui inculque le souffle de la pensée grecque ainsi que son admiration pour Michel-Ange. *L'Effort humain* en est l'aboutissement en 1913.

Le culte de la Beauté anime encore l'artiste à la fin de sa vie mais le désintérêt du public pour le Symbolisme et le décès brutal de Gisèle Gouverneur le conduisent vers des œuvres plus mélancoliques, marquées par une tendance à la monochromie : scènes dramatiques d'inspiration mythologique et portraits parfois posthumes traduisant l'épaississement de l'ombre autour de l'artiste.

Nota : cette conférence sera accompagnée de la projection d'une trentaine d'œuvres de l'artiste.

## **Holland**

**Liesbeth Grotenhuis** – Holland

Independent Researcher at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

### **Isis' fingertips: the Symbolist use of starry skies**

Shus, Shus! Let's be quiet to listen to the world wisdom, as the woman with a Prussian blue veil suggests with her gesture of silence. Lucien Levy Duhrer places her against a Prussian blue sky since the hours that the firmament turns dark are most quiet. The effect even changed the palette of the Belgium Symbolist painters to a more monochromic use. Beside, Diderot states that 'Ruins in the light of the setting sun are more beautiful than during early dawn. The effect shall be discussed in view of Merson's painting of the holy Family that rests near a Sphinx in the desert that he executed during both nighttime as in a ruddy raising sun.

Van Gogh and Munch showed that the night skies were also perfect to let the glowing stars tell their secret stories. While in esoteric Symbolism the stars were related to hieroglyphs: already early 'scientists' like Athanasius Kircher recognized wisdom in the zodiac. Stars were signs of Egyptian Gods: while Hermes Trismegistus was seen as the creator of astronomy, Isis controlled the stars and the moon. The associated yellow/golden color was adopted by the Symbolists that in relation to blue represented a perfection that was super terrestrial.

In this paper I shall finally explain the extra layer Symbolist painters added to their stories with the use of starry skies. Khnopff related it to the world of the God of Sleep, Hypnos, as well as mirrors. While Kupka's 'Path of Silence' is only illuminated by sparkling stars. What would be written in these stars?

## **Italy**

**Anna Mazzanti** – Italy

Politecnico di Milano University

From "Fuoco" (Fire) to "Notturmo" (Nocturnal), the Interpretation of Light and Shade in D'Annunzio's work by his friends among the Italian Symbolistic Illustrators

Italian poet and writer D'Annunzio's role is well known as a promoter of arts in Italy and for his fondness towards Symbolist painters since his youth.

One of his passions was graphics as it is seen in the numerous illustrations of his writings. His first very important collection of poems "Isaotta Guttadauro" (1886) presented for the first time in Italy a sophisticated product with multi-colored illustrations, that included the work of several

artists living in Rome: Sartorio, De Carolis, Marius Pictor, Cellini. In their different styles and with the various inflections of Roman Symbolist taste at that time, the deep colors and themes are translated into ambiguous and mysterious shadowy tones, in the French and international manner (from Redon to Rops), with a sense of the permeability of light, and of the Pre-Raphaelite and neo-classical grace. During his life the Poet nurtured an interest in drawing and graphics and unfailingly published his most famous writings with illustrations by important Italian Symbolist artists who knew how to interpret with great refinement D'Annunzio's decadent poetics and to pay attention to creating an atmospheric environment characterized by the strongly luminous effects and deep shadows that unfolded in the verses, in Byzantine Rome and in Venice with its scenes of death and corrosion. I will choose to show some examples of the links and mutual influences between the text and the illustrations. The theme of light and shadow will be seen through the styles of D'Annunzio's illustrators in the panorama of graphics dedicated to the body of literary work produced in Italy between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Nicoletta Misler** – Italy

Università di Napoli “L'Orientale” – Professor Emeritus

*The Symbolist Legacy of Modern Dance in Early Soviet Culture: Obscurantism or Illumination?*

The focus of my presentation is on the evolution of modern dance in Russia during the Silver Age (1890s-1920s), especially within its relationship to the poetry and philosophy of the Symbolist writers such as Andrei Bely and Maksimilian Voloshin. One of my main theses is that dance served as a primary vehicle not only for the expression of Symbolist ideas, but also for the extension of these ideas well into the 1920s, i.e. into the post-Revolutionary period. I shall be pursuing two primary avenues of enquiry:

1. The concept of movement as described and extended by the Symbolists, especially in the context of music. Bely argued, for example, that all the disciplines should aspire towards music, i.e. towards the art of movement, because “movement lies at the basis of reality”. Accordingly, Bely and his colleagues constructed a hierarchy of the arts, whereby the more material ones such as architecture was at the base, the more fleeting ones such as dance was at the apex. Not unexpectedly, they gave immediate attention to the performances of Isadora Duncan in Russia (beginning in 1904) and to her apologists such as the Geptakhor group.
2. Of particular interest to the Symbolists was the transcendence not only of esthetic barriers, but also of social and sociological ones. In this respect, I shall be drawing attention to the transcendence of sexual perimeters within Russian modern dance and presenting Aleksandr Rumnev (mime and danseur plastique who achieved acclaim in the 1920s) as a symbol and symptom of that tendency. Supported by a new generation of Modernist critics such as Aleksei

Sidorov, Rumnev molded a new dance canon, contributing much to a radical form of free or abstract dance, while remaining strongly cognizant of the Symbolist legacy.

**Lucia Mannini** – Italy  
University of Siena – PhD – Decorative Arts

## Aspects of Symbolist Interiors: Figures, Lights and Colors in

### Early 20th -century Italian Stained Glass

Interiors in the late 19th century were unresponsive to a diffusion of light: thick curtains fell to the floor in front of windows letting only a weak light filter into the rooms, a light that increased the fascination of the objects that filled the rooms.

Art Nouveau purified the space, eliminated the heavy curtains, and let the light – a highly qualifying aesthetic element as well as a symbol – enter, yet a light softened by a magical clarity.

Light curtains were used to mitigate the glare of the sun, next to stained glass, which had the task of “shutting out” the outside world and creating a safe environment, maintaining the same cozy and crepuscular atmosphere of a 19th century interior.

Modern stained glass thus developed owing a debt to a 19th century sensibility, especially in inheriting a preference for “colored” environments. Windows had long been considered a symbol of the artist’s gaze looking outward at the world or, more often, looking inward at the soul; therefore stained glass could justly be charged with allusive meanings and lend itself to symbolist suggestions: a filter for light, but also a colored image that is embodied and comes to life through light, even making a room vibrate with its faint, ever-changing colors, as variable as the soul of whoever lived there. Luminous yet opalescent, it was in short particularly congenial to conveying the sense, typical of Art Nouveau and Symbolism, of a continually evolving metaphorical reality.

These issues are very present in the Italian texts that address the role of stained glass, especially in the writings of the Symbolist group in Rome and of the magazine “La Casa” (1908-1913), where important themes emerge in regards to stained glass, like the relationship between music and color and the influence that a chromatic predominance in an environment could have on the human psyche.

In Italian stained glass predominated the choice of naturalistic subjects – often derived from Tiffany’s famous models – with a special value in the development of Italian houses, where the possibility of having a garden often clashed with the prevailing reality of large housing developments: the stained glass was a “substitute” for nature, suggesting through illusionistic

compositions the feeling of being surrounded by an unexpected natural/artificial garden. Next to the floral repertoire, there was also the presence of animals dear to Art Nouveau and Symbolism, with a predilection for those subjects particularly suited to an attractive rendering in glass.

## **Russia**

**Olga Skonechnaya** – Russia/France

Université Paris-Sorbonne

### F. Sologub: the Disease of Power as Poetics

The conclusion of many of Sologub's plots presents itself as an act of transmitting the will – voluntary or compulsory (in a number of texts these two models mix together). The protagonist either dies (is ready to die), i.e. to hand over his will, or kills (is ready to kill), i.e. to take away the will of another. In both cases we see the final appropriating force: Death, Fate, which are sometimes “personified” by “someone”, “someone's invisible hand” or by a small demon, “uniting the souls”, etc. This force merges with that of the author, a fact that can be further confirmed by Sologub's own esthetic declarations.

But the very position of the invader himself is undivided from the fear of losing it, and in this case, more strongly than in other instances, it assumes the character of a disease. According to E. Canetti's “physiology” of power, paranoia is the specific disease of a ruler.

The paranoid character of many of Sologub's personages corresponds with the poetics' strategy of their creator. The author himself, on a number of occasions, uses a method, which E. Canetti calls “unmasking”, “undoing transformations” or “prohibitions on transformation”, in other words – to forbid the uncontrolled change of others, their movement based on one's own desire. The latter is interpreted as something illegal, something that breaks the hierarchy, that is dangerous for sustaining a particular status quo. “In unmasking, some creature is driven in on itself, limited to single position and prescribed one particular attitude, which is then taken to be its only genuine”. This side of Sologub's symbolization, which he himself defined as a “horrible transformation”, is particularly close to “unmasking”.

The actions of the “invisible hand” mean the changing of things accidental and unknown into “strangely” and “terribly” familiar ones; of the moving – into the immobile; of something uncertain in terms of its aims – into something exposed as hostile. These processes are determined by Sologub's principle of structuring, or grasping reality, where all objects are identified only in the light of their connection with the “ego” of the protagonist or the author.

## United Kingdom

**Sue Prideaux** – United Kingdom

Independent scholar – Yale University Press

### Strindberg and Symbolism

During the decade the playwright and painter August Strindberg (1849-1912) was at university, Nietzsche declared God dead and *The Origin of Species* was translated into Swedish. Religion was being replaced by the new pieties of evolutionary science but Strindberg could never, in his words, be satisfied with ending up as no more than a barrow load of manure spread over the garden. He was extremely close to two painters, Edvard Munch and Paul Gauguin during the time that led up to each man painting his masterpiece questioning the idea that the physical world exhaustively describes reality and the self is merely an evolutionary result. When Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893) was first exhibited in Paris, Strindberg described it as; 'A scream of fear as nature prepares to speak to the bewildered little creatures who, without resembling them at all, imagine themselves gods.' In Paris, Gauguin and Strindberg had close ties with the Symbolist circle before Gauguin returned to the South Seas to paint *Who Are We? Where Do We Come from? Where Do We Go?*(1897).

Strindberg's own quest to answer these questions gave rise to a period of almost two years studying the Occult, practising alchemy, studying colour symbolism, Swedenborg, theories of Correspondences and recording dreams as he tried to identify the components of that mysterious entity which, though invisible and non-provable, undoubtedly exists: the self. Less well-known is his approach to the quest for self through his interest in the work of Charcot, Janet and Bernheim, the teachers of Freud, and medical scientists like Carl Ludwig Schleich whose discovery of local anaesthesia raised new questions about the brain, consciousness and self. We can study this fascinating progress through Strindberg's *Occult Diary* (1896 – 1908).

As a playwright, Strindberg was far less interested in social situations than his great contemporaries Ibsen and Chekhov. His growing interest lay in revealing the unconscious through the language of the conscious and his late plays *A Dream Play* and *The Ghost Sonata* have never been surpassed in what has been called 'Dreaming materialised', not a bad definition of Symbolism.

## United States of America

**Alexandra Kieffer** – United States

Yale University – PhD Candidate in Music History

### Behind the Veil: Revealing the Exotic Body in Early Twentieth-Century French Music

The figure of the veil, long an exoticist trope in Western culture, took on a particular salience in fin-de-siècle French musical culture as a way of representing a feminized musical space of elusiveness and opacity. Both defenders and critics of “Debussysme” frequently cite Debussy’s “accords voilés” (to borrow a phrase from a 1912 essay by Raphaël Cor); more generally, these writers invoke interpositions of mediums or processes between the music – as heard and an imagined musical essence to which the music-as-heard can only allude. His music paradoxically grants access to the “ineffable” and yet at the same time (necessarily) hides it from view.

My paper explores the relationship between this generalized musical practice characterized by “accords voilés” and sites of explicit musical unveilings in which textual or dramatic context involves the revelation of exoticized female bodies. I argue that instances of such unveilings—for example, in Debussy’s 1912 ballet *Khamma*; Maurice Delage’s 1913 song cycle *Quatre Poèmes Hindous*; and Albert Roussel’s 1917 opera-ballet *Padmâvatî*—evidence a preoccupation with unveiling the exotic female body even as they articulate anxieties about seeing what lies behind the veil. Consequently, these pieces participate in a dialectic of revelation and concealment in which unveiling must always be provisional and subject to immediate re-veiling. In addition to reinscribing Western imaginings of the un-knowable exotic body, this dynamic distills the problematic associated with more general discursive constructions of musical “veils” in this period: the music must always withhold that which it promises to reveal. This paper situates these musical issues in relation to contemporary representations of the veil in other cultural spheres, and explores the unique perspective that musical constructions contribute to understanding the entanglements of gender, colonialism and epistemology in early twentieth-century France.

**Alison Hokanson** – United States

The Institute of Fine Arts, New York University – PhD Candidate

### Henri De Braekeleer as a Forerunner for the Treatment of

#### Light in Belgian Symbolist Painting

Scholars have long recognized the vital role played by light in Symbolist art as an agent of insight into the hidden dimensions of everyday life, revealing psychological undercurrents and

even animistic forces running beneath the mundane surface of the visible world. However, the origins of this conception of light in the painting and literature of the Realist era have not been sufficiently appreciated. My paper presents Henri De Braekeleer, a mid-nineteenth century Realist painter from Antwerp, as a significant precursor for the treatment of light in Belgian Symbolism.

This paper explores the roots of a Symbolist approach to illumination in De Braekeleer's interior scenes from the 1870s and in criticism of these canvases by avant-garde writers such as Camille Lemonnier and Émile Verhaeren from 1872–1891. These decades were not only the years of De Braekeleer's greatest renown, but also the period that saw the rise of Realism and then the advent of Symbolism in Belgium. Within this framework, I examine De Braekeleer's innovative presentation of light as the principal vehicle of pictorial narrative and mood, and I analyze how his style encouraged reviewers to interpret his paintings as evocations of a secret realm of emotions, dreams, and forgotten histories — a realm that encompassed objects as well as people. I trace the development of this understanding of light to its culmination in the Symbolist theme of *l'âme* (or *la vie*) *des choses*, the notion of an inanimate interior alive with memories and feelings.

Although De Braekeleer's distinctive style had no major imitators, I demonstrate how leading Belgian Symbolist artists such as Xavier Mellery and Georges Le Brun carried forward the general aesthetic of illumination developed in his work. In elaborating the relationship between De Braekeleer's emphatically prosaic paintings, and the dramatically uncanny canvases of the Symbolist generation, I establish how Symbolist conceptions of light emerged out of Realism. In this signal instance, Symbolist ideals did not constitute a wholesale reaction against the earlier artistic movement, but were instead forged from notions nascent within Realist art.

**Andrea Meyertholen** – United States  
Indiana University – PhD Candidate

### **Under the Cover of Darkness:**

The Transparent Obscurity of Arnold Böcklin's *Self-Portrait with Death Playing the Fiddle*

Describing the peculiar fame of Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901), journalist Maximilian Harden quipped: “First they ridiculed him, then they deified him.” Historian Peter Gay also marveled at the “capacity of civilized 19th-century bourgeois culture to integrate avant-garde subverters,” regarding Böcklin's shift from deviant to darling as a prime example of how “middle-class consumers of art managed to transform their fiercest challengers into icons.” While social and cultural forces did condition fluctuations in public taste, I believe Gay overlooks Böcklin's role in his own popularity. I propose that Böcklin cultivated a wide audience for his art by developing a style appealing to bourgeois and anti-bourgeois alike, a style best

characterized as transparent obscurity. Moreover, I intend to deconstruct this style through an analysis of Böcklin's 1872 *Self-Portrait with Death Playing the Fiddle*, a programmatic statement in which the painter communicates to his audience the nature of his aesthetic production, philosophical inclinations, and self-understanding as artist.

The self-portrait certainly features esoteric elements to attract “avant-garde subverters;” poised at the juncture of production and reception, Böcklin portrays himself painting while a whispering skeleton hovers over his ear playing a one-stringed violin. Heavy darkness envelops Böcklin and his ghastly consort to further obfuscate an already obscure message. However, this uncanny yet consciously-constructed image is not as esoteric as it first appears, and in fact relies on use and misuse of conventional iconography to make itself legible to “civilized 19th-century bourgeois culture.” Unlike a “fierce challenger,” Böcklin utilizes the shroud of darkness and obscurity as a means of rendering his aesthetic philosophy and artistic identity more transparent to audiences. I conclude by demonstrating how his greater oeuvre also negotiates the paradox of transparent obscurity to achieve iconic status among bourgeois and avant-garde publics, and consider the implications for his legacy within the Symbolist tradition.

**Andrew Marvick** – United States

Southern Utah University – Associate Professor of Art History

“*Locking the Door, Opening the Window: Formal-Cultural Links between Khnopff and Mondrian*”

For the April 2012 session of the AMLSD I propose a paper investigating unexpected yet, I will argue, substantial formal links between certain key works of the Belgian Symbolist painter Fernand Khnopff and the early and middle production of the seminal non-objective artist Piet Mondrian.

The paper begins with a brief delineation of a curious and characteristic formal feature of four otherwise quite distinct Khnopff works (the small “pure” landscape composition *Field at Fosset* [1894], the famous figure-in-interior composition *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* [1894], the Getty's signature *Portrait of Jeanne Kéfer* [1885], and the 1887 portrait of the artist's sister [in the collection of the BMRBA]): the systematic confounding of the viewer's expectations with regard to the placement of compositional elements in discrete picture planes through their integration with sectors of “positive content” in a neutral and pale or middle-value hue.

In his choice of diffuse light sources, relatively high keys of value and a (deceptively) prosaic literalness in the rendering of form, Khnopff departed from *fin-de-siècle* visual tropes which favored the reluctant emergence from (or ineluctible regression into) darkened and claustrophobic spaces, of which, say, the Salome series of Gustave Moreau and the productions

of Franz von Stuck are iconic examples. The effect of this rejection of shadow for rational, diffuse daylight or untinted natural interior light was two-fold: first, of course, it suggested that the artist's ultimately disequilibrating and unnatural vision was founded on the rational observation of nature, rather than engendered from the imagination -- a strategy for the evocation of *étrangeté* which many later artists (and in our time filmmakers) have since adopted in order better to encourage the viewer's suspension of disbelief. Second, it served to ally Khnopff's procedures for the Symbolist vision not with the school of Paris (and the Mallarmé *cénacle*), but instead with the unlikely latter-nineteenth-century French "*juste-milieu*" plein-air regionalist camp, who had organized loosely around the methods of Jules Bastien-Lepage. In effect, for Khnopff's purposes the spectator passed into unknown territory (the *province* of Symbolism) via the hard, coolly lit and rational spaces (the *terroir*) of a competing school of French *fin-de-siècle* painting: agrarian naturalism, albeit for entirely different thematic and expressive purposes.

At about the same time, the young Flemish artist Piet Mondrian began a career-long journey of exploration into the metaphysical aspects of "pure form" from a foundation of Symbolist imagery and style (replete with the lugubrious shadow-spaces of the Stuck and Moreau kind), starting with figure studies and portraits heavily laden with quasi-Leonardesque effects of *sfumato*-like murk and progressing at a remarkably regular pace into the clear, uneditorialized daylight of the Dutch landscape: proceeding, in other words, from the same stylistic and pictorial "fork in the road" which Khnopff had faced in the previous generation, toward what in retrospect may be seen, at least in this context, as a natural destination point for the former's exploration of form and light.

**Brent Judd** – United States

Sacred Heart-Griffin High School – Teacher of Theology and World Literature

### Light and Darkness in Kafka's *'Hunger Artist'* and Dostoevsky's *White Nights*

Light and darkness can represent the foundational contrast between all opposites. Such a contrast elicits the reality of difference insofar as the physical world in which we live is not defined by homogeneity but by breaks and gaps. Here I wish to employ the Lacanian sense of the *coupure* to denote these breaks and gaps, these departures from sameness. Symbolism lays claim to these gaps, for such gaps point to the reality of the Absolute. Symbolism always reaches beyond the concrete world by using the gaps between contrasts as the point of departure for that which lies beyond.

Hence the goal of Symbolism is not to wholly abandon the concrete world by escaping it. In fact, when both Franz Kafka's hunger artist and Fyodor Dostoevsky's narrator of *White Nights* lose contact with the physical world, the results are less than favorable. To eliminate darkness in

favor of all light might seem to be a positive step forward, yet when the darkness is eliminated, so too is the gap between light and darkness. Without this gap there can be no contact with the Absolute.

This paper will analyze both Kafka's "Hunger Artist" (1922) and Dostoevsky's *White Nights* (1848). Each work points to the necessity of maintaining the basic contrast between light and darkness, the perfect and the imperfect. Both Kafka's hunger artist and Dostoevsky's dreamer undergo a substantial loss that allows each to create a work of art. The loss each experiences represents an experience with the imperfect that acts as a prerequisite for artistic creation. Each demonstrates that one can approach the Absolute only through the contrasts between light and darkness.

**Britten LaRue** – United States

Southern Methodist University - Rights and Reproductions Coordinator; Nasher Sculpture Center - Curatorial Intern

"The Androgyne, the Transvestite and the Faun, or How Aubrey Beardsley Created Hybrids out of Black and White"

The work of English illustrator Aubrey Beardsley provides a fascinating study for the theme of this conference precisely because his compositions were created almost exclusively in black and white. His art is fundamentally defined by a stark oppositional structure. Yet, like his Symbolist contemporaries, his art is primarily concerned with a longing for the *union* of polarities. Published in creative dialogue with literary and poetic texts, his works are concerned with repeated types which underline his interest in hybridity, transformation and/or superimposition: the androgyne, the transvestite, the faun, human-vegetal fusions, and the bi-racial dwarf or eunuch. Yet critics and scholars have discussed Beardsley's use of these tropes as primarily for satiric and shock value. Indeed, his works are deeply ambivalent and difficult to "read" by his own devices. I believe that Beardsley chose his medium partly because it allowed him to distance himself from the poetic mood and the more tangible, suggestive nature of contemporary nonrealist oil painting. His spiritual connection to his characters was easily masked by the severity and flatness of ink.

For this paper, I would like to argue that Beardsley was deeply invested in the notion of the Ideal, particularly as it relates to the concept of the androgyne and the "third sex". I want to study examples in his work which represent both the metaphysical and optimistic idea of the androgyne developed in the earlier half of the nineteenth century as well as the homoerotic attraction to the ephebe which was more dominant in the fin de siècle. I want to illuminate how Beardsley aimed to confront his reader with very real longings and confusion about gender

identity felt by the artist and many of his contemporaries. The goal of such a study is to show how a style grounded in the duality of black and white could so effectively and imaginatively explore the space in between.

**Carl Niekerk** – United States

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign - Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

### Symbolism in Mahler's Second Symphony

This talk looks at the literary and cultural sources of Mahler's Second Symphony. As a first step, my talk examines the debate on religion that took place during the late 1870s, Mahler's intellectually formative student days (key figures in this debate were Mahler's close friend and intellectual mentor Siegfried Lipiner, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Richard Wagner). I will argue that the concept of the 'symbol' emerges as one of the key terms that allows us to differentiate between the different positions of the participants in this debate. Secondly, I examine the texts that Mahler decided to use in his Second Symphony, in particular the highly significant changes that Mahler made to Klopstock's poem 'Die Auferstehung.' One of my conclusions is that Mahler's view of religion is far from orthodox or conventional and seeks to incorporate Nietzsche's fundamental criticism of religion by looking at the symbolic roots of all religion. Finally, using Martha Nussbaum's work on the cultural significance of emotions (and, more specifically, her deliberations on Mahler's Second Symphony in her book *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* [2001]), my talk seeks to demonstrate not only the key role that emotions play in understanding the functioning of symbols, but also that nature symbolism in Mahler's text can help in attributing meaning to human emotions, and thus can provide its listeners with a sense of value in post-metaphysical times.

**Cassandra Sciortino** – United States

### The Revival of Dante and Beatrice and the Taste for Florence in 19th Century Britain

This paper examines the rise of Dante and Beatrice in the nineteenth century and how the poet's critical fortune — and his muse — shaped British taste for early Renaissance Florence. The paper argues that the Italian Risorgimento's mobilization of the historical figure of Dante, especially as exiled author of the *Divine Comedy*, served as a powerful symbol for the newly forming nation's foundational Italian identity. Following the successful unification of Italy appreciation for the

poet as the young author of the Vita Nuova began to rise in Italy and elsewhere. The poet's critical role in charging early Italian Florence with restorative power in the first half of the century shifted in the second half of the nineteenth century toward a discourse aligned to the spiritually transformative power of Beatrice (beauty). The growth in interest in Beatrice is a critical part of the process by which aestheticism and symbolism in Britain came to be linked to *Trecento* and *Quattrocento* Florence. Among the works considered in this paper are those by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, especially the inspiration he drew from discovery of the Bargello portrait of Dante as a youthful poet, as well as works by Walter Crane, Henry Holiday, Frederic Lord Leighton, and Edward Burne-Jones.

**Deborah H. Cibelli** – United States  
Nicholls State University – Professor of Art History

*The Duality of Light in Rossetti's Ekphrastic Poems on Painting*

Prominent Rossetti scholar, Alicia Faxon has noted that the writing and art of Dante Gabriel Rossetti complement each other and that “from the time of his first painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, he wrote poems to accompany his paintings.”<sup>1</sup> On a fundamental level Rossetti translated visual imagery into different media. The word translated is used to describe the relationship between image and text because of the way in which Rossetti himself defined a translation as “perhaps the most direct form of commentary”.<sup>2</sup> In the same spirit, he returned to his written and artistic projects throughout his career so that each work underwent continual reinterpretation.

What is less well known is that Rossetti also produced a painting based upon Dante Alighieri's descriptions of an artwork in *Purgatorio* canto x. In 1850, early in his career Rossetti turned to Dante's passages about an Annunciation to produce the painting with the title *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* / “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” Rossetti's reliance upon a literary description to create a work of art is an example of *ekphrasis*, a technique that followed classical models developed first by Homer to describe the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* XVIII to subsume 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. It is of note that Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, a religious painting, sprang from his close reading of Dante's description of an Annunciation relief panel even though in crafting it, Rossetti departed from many of the conventions of Renaissance art. In assessing this work and other examples of his art and writing, I will argue that 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 pictures and sonnets were inter-textual with one text becoming part of a critical commentary on another. 3

The last few lines of canto x that directly inspired Rossetti, translated here by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, noted that the figure of Mary was expressive:

And in her mien this language had impressed,  
"Ecce ancilla Dei," as distinctly  
As any figure stamps itself in wax (Alighieri).

*According to Dante, the words Ecce ancilla dei (or domini) were “imprinted in her attitude “ (Barkan 67). Rossetti took this to heart as he created the painting in the Tate Gallery from 1849-50. His siblings Christina and William Michael Rossetti were the models for the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Gabriel (Ormond 165).<sup>4</sup> In the final painting based upon figure studies, Christina, shown nude and vulnerable in the drawings, is portrayed as the Virgin dressed in a plain white garment seated on a low wooden bed responding to the salutation with the stricken look on her face and a pose in which she physically recoils to show her apprehension in being selected.*

*The event took place in a simple interior illuminated by the flame in the wall sconce. Light also emanates from the haloes, from the entire figure of the Archangel, and from the dove referencing the Holy Spirit. In addition to the traditional religious motifs, the wingless Archangel, hovering near Mary, had an unusual source of illumination in the form of the yellow flames that flickered around his feet. While Rossetti included haloes and luminous Archangel and Holy Spirit, in a most profound sense, he used light differently than the Renaissance to separate and divide rather than unify the figures. The disparate sources of light underscored the separate spiritual and earthly realms occupied by the figures.*

*Another way in which Rossetti’s painting departed from Renaissance work such as the sumptuous Annunciation by Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi from 1333 in Siena or in the famous version of the same subject painted by Fra Angelico for the church of San Domenico in Cortona from c. 1432-34 was that Rossetti did not inscribe Gabriel’s salutation on the painting.<sup>5</sup> Instead, he wrote a sonnet on the original frame interpreting the work (Stein 186). Rossetti relied upon the physical properties of the painting to convey meaning when he looked to Dante to give painting parity with poetry and suggested that the phrase, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord,” was “imprinted” in the figure of the Virgin Mary. By so closely fashioning the imagery to embody this textual reference, Rossetti’s 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 (Lee 197). In turn, his other work was thought of as “silent poems” and became the subject of many of his sonnets.<sup>6</sup> For Rossetti, Simonides’ dictum also meant that poetry was a speaking picture.

Part of the discourse regarding *ekphrasis* that remained relevant for Rossetti and others during the nineteenth century was the debate about emotive quality of poetry and painting. The affective nature accorded to art and writing was also part of the aesthetics exemplified by the work of the Victorian critic Walter Pater who wrote on Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites and who referred to the aesthetics of Gotthold Ephriam Lessing to compare poetry and painting (Pater 52; Barolsky 470; Wellek 35). Rossetti knew of the theoretical issues Pater explored in *The Renaissance* and emphasized the emotional import of the sister arts (Stein 3).

Rossetti was also keenly aware of the ekphrastic tradition, producing his “Sonnets for Pictures” published in the Pre-Raphaelite magazine *The Germ* in 1850 when he was 22 years old. In the text he wrote about paintings by Mantegna, Hans Memling, Giorgione, and Ingres after a visit to the museums and galleries in France and Belgium with William Holman Hunt during the fall of 1849 (Ormond 156). For Rossetti the aesthetic experience of viewing the masters was such that he felt inspired to write poetry that was not merely descriptive but also captured fleeting emotion (Ireland 311).

In the sonnet, “For an Allegorical Dance of Women by Andrea Mantegna” he envisioned the painting as a scene in which Mantegna was projected into the place of the poet and musician, Apollo. In one representative passage, Rossetti noted:

Scarcely, I think; yet it indeed *may* be  
The meaning reached him, when this music rang  
Clear through his frame, a sweet possessive pang,  
And he beheld these rocks and that ridged sea.  
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  
How many feet; nor bent assuredly  
His eyes from the blind fixedness of thought  
To know the dancers....<sup>7</sup>

Apollo is physically absorbed by the music he creates and is set apart from Vulcan, Mars, and Mercury. The female dancers are more important as allegorical figures, not as individuals. They

move as a group that Rossetti imagines come in such close proximity to Apollo that their hair brushes across his face. With their graceful movements and lithe forms the women are physically alluring and represent beauty.

Rossetti also favored religious subjects inspired by the medieval period as well as the early Renaissance that were part of his “Art Catholic,” a title he used for a publication of early poems related to his artwork. The women in these works were drawn from Dante’s narrative about his love for the deceased Beatrice and from Rossetti’s own translations of the poet. For in addition to translating Dante’s *Vita nuova* into English circa 1848, Rossetti wrote his own poetry and prose indebted to Dante, and he executed a series of corresponding artworks.

The traditional view of Beatrice presented by critic Ronald W. Johnson in his discussion of Rossetti’s work, was that Beatrice was transformed to express the different states of the poet’s soul:

The poet’s soul experienced each spiritual sphere through his various visions of Beatrice. Thus Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven were all brought into present experience, down to earth, through an essentially ideal love. Human love was transformed into heavenly love and Beatrice guided Dante to the higher mysteries and all-transforming experience. Divinity is thus not conceived as an object but as an experience whose only knowable form is beauty (551).

While Rossetti made the hierarchy of earthly and heavenly love a central theme within his oeuvre, his work was not necessarily Platonic. Instead he created a duality of sacred and profane love using sensual women virtuous sources of spiritual energy” (Morrison 70; Buchanan 334). One version of this, the theme of an earthbound lover longing for physical reunion with the celestial woman dominates such work as his sonnet “The Blessed Damozel” (Bentley 31). This sonnet was first published in *The Germ* in 1850 with “Sonnets for Pictures” and was revised and republished in the 1870s when Rossetti produced two versions of the painting with the same title.

The narrator of “The Blessed Damozel” has been described as a parenthetical speaker (Howard 41) who “present[s] a ‘picture’ [while] imagining the dialogue” and emotional interaction between the deceased heavenly female and her living male lover (Bentley 36). The trope of the picture and the translation of the imagery into two related paintings make the poem ekphrastic. The poem also contains imagery that shows Rossetti referenced Renaissance painting.

The first verse introduced the female figure surrounded by Renaissance symbols:

“The blessed Damozel leaned out  
From the gold bar of Heaven:  
Her blue eyes were deeper much  
Than a deep water, even.  
She had three lilies in her had,  
And the stars in her hair were seven.

The gold bar described in the poem became the gilded frame dividing the paintings into two sections so that they resembled Renaissance altarpieces with predella panels. The elaborate frame of the first version was inscribed with fragments of the verse while the second version had a carved and gilded frame designed for the patron Frederick Leyland (Stein 175). The background of the second version varies slightly and has two figures clothed in flames holding palm leaves instead of three and the head of a small winged child above the Damozel (Thomas 73). The child may have been added to make the painting more poignant and yet the child still represents the angelic souls placed among the reunited lovers referenced in the poem.

Rossetti included Marian imagery of three lilies, a motif representing purity commonly found in paintings of the Annunciation, and seven stars alluding to the seven joys and sorrows of the Virgin. The motifs suggest that the figure is worthy company for the Virgin (Bentley p#). Similarly, there is a religious sensibility in which Heaven and Earth are “simultaneously knowable” and there is the possibility for the “soul to journey to heaven” (Bentley 36). Therefore it is not surprising Rossetti referred to different sources of light to describe the imaginary reunion of the lovers and to make the meeting almost sacred.

In a telling passage the character of the Blessed Damozel notes:

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,  
And we will step down as to a stream  
And bathe there in God's sight.

The aureole resembles a halo that illuminates the figure that the Blessed Damozel wants to enter the field of light. The male lover is described as she imagines him and 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 reaffirming the separation:

(I saw her smile.) But soon their flight

Was vague 'mid the poised spheres,

And then she cast her arms along

The golden barriers.

And laid her face between her hands,

And wept. (I heard her tears.)

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 43). In Rossetti's ideal iteration light represents the lover's longing for her physical presence and ultimately signals alienation and despair rather than divine grace.

The poem of the Blessed Damozel pays homage to Dante and provides a Symbolist ekphrasis of the paintings that represent the aggregate of the couple's fears and desires. 9 In both his art and writing Rossetti translated the duality of the sacred and profane love and captured all of the attendant emotions of the lovers by casting his figures in a dividing light.

**Ethan Lewis** – United States

University of Illinois at Springfield - Associate Professor of English

*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and The Object that is Desire

The *A[merican] L[ibrary] A[ssociation]*'s surprising selection of Carson McCullers' seventy year-old novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, as the featured text in its *Big Read* campaign, unwittingly afforded readers across the nation an exemplar for comprehending Symbolism. Or perhaps not unwittingly—who better than librarians, loaning for (a) living temporary stopgaps of desire: books, which satisfy by prompting an appetite for more books—who more than they understand Symbolism's fundamental economy.

My piece explicates McCullers' essay in novel form about a.) *wanting as what we want*; and b.) *the ostensible object of desire as perpetuating longing*. At the outset of the narrative, young Mick Kelly hungers thus: "I want—I want—I want—was all that she could think about—but just what this real want was she did not know" (52). This longing is enacted by the novel's four protagonists—all of who believe they have found fulfillment in their friendship with Mr. John Singer. But Singer is an anomaly, not least in name. *He is a deaf mute, who functions (logically) as a **signer** pointing to the truth that want is what we want.*

Yet what perpetuates essential desire is not readily transferrable. Soon after Singer's 'perpetuator,' Antonapoulos, perishes, so too does Singer. Thus he leaves the four for whom he *falsely signified fulfillment* (for he *truly denoted desire*)—he leaves them **wanting**. By means of which wanting, they persevere as Singer could not.

Because situated *in (the) interpretive between*, Symbolism is most fruitfully examined intertextually. Poems by Emily Dickinson, E.A. Robinson, and Rainer Maria Rilke are also brought to bear upon the meaning of McCullers' novel.

**George Gasya** – United States

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign – Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures

### The Symbolology of Nation and Community in Joseph Conrad's *Nostramo*

Literature, Conrad wrote in the much-cited preface – it constitutes his most direct explication of method – to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, an early (1897) novel, "if it aspires to be art, appeals to the temperament.... like painting, like music, like all art, fiction appeals primarily to the senses. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music." He continues with the observation that the chief task for a modern(-ist) artist committed to representing the authenticity of lived experience must be one of producing an aesthetic affect, via disruptive though not unsettling interventions, in order to "arrest, for a space of a breath, the hands busy with the work of the earth, and compel man to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows – such is the goal, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a very few to achieve."

Having thus delineated his artistic vision in terms of an absolute valorization of an individualist (and somewhat elitist) subjectivity, Conrad describes the core of his literary program thus: "My task, which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*. That – and no more, and it is everything. If I

succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm – all you demand and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.”

The total work of art, for Conrad, therefore, would of necessity contain an inner tension between the power accorded to the written word (as authoritative) and the subjective gaze qua authorizer; any resultant transmission or re-presentation of lived experience in a textual, fictionalized form would therefore legitimate its authenticity precisely through its reliance on the *truth of the senses*. Thus, paradoxically, qualities of subjective experience such as “plasticity” and “magic” would be marshaled in support of an authoritative “vision” of “form and colour, of sunshine and shadows.” It was thus that Conrad would go about making you “feel” and “see” the “truth.”

This nearly dialectical program required an extensive vocabulary of legitimization, an authorizing discourse; that vocabulary and that discourse would be provided via the organizing logics of impressionism and, particularly, the aesthetics of symbolism. Drawing on the work of Eloise Knapp Hay, Daniel Schwarz, and others, my paper systematizes and analyzes the Conradian system of symbolic identification/affiliation and symbolist aesthetics which, while operative in several of his best works (such as *Heart of Darkness*) finds fullest articulation in his most overtly political novel, the quasi-utopian, pseudo-post-colonial narrative of secession, revolution, and reaction that is *Nostramo* (1904). My discussion will focus in particular on the chief organizing trope of (South) American space as sheer Utopian potentiality, and also on the novel’s preeminent figures (or rather symbols) of political agency/will who make “history happen”: the People, the Nation, the Leader, the Intellectual and, last but not least, “Material Interests” – Conradian shorthand for the force of history itself.

**Hüseyin Altındış** – Turkey/United States

University of Arkansas – PhD Student; Selcuk University School of Foreign Languages - Instructor

#### Visual Patterns of Light and Dark in Faulkner’s “The Light in August”

Much has been written about Faulkner’s novels, his development, about his decadent, dilettantish persona and about the pervasive influence of symbolism on all of his verse. Stephane Mallarme influenced Faulkner deeply and it is known that Faulkner’s first published poem “L’Apres-Midi d’un Faun” is adapted from *eglogue*. Mallarme was not the only person that Faulkner was influenced. There are also translations and adaptations from Verlaine. We know that Faulkner continued to read Symbolists, Mallarme, Verlaine and Laforgue, whom he referred as old friends. It is inevitable that this influence will reflect itself in Faulkner’s “Light in August”. In Faulkner’s works we can see the Symbolist preoccupation with musicality of the language. The aim of this paper is to analyze visual patterns Light and Dark symbols in this work and mention about its reflections on William de Kooning’s painting called “Light in August.”

**Jonathan Perkins** – United States

University of Illinois at Springfield - Associate Professor of Art History

Fantastic Nature: Associations between Paul Klee and Odilon Redon

My paper explores the associations between the imagery and style of the French Symbolist Odilon Redon and the Swiss Modernist Paul Klee. My analysis of the connections between these two avant garde artists aims to point out new ways in which Paul Klee's artistic process may be associated with Symbolism.

**Kurt Rehmlow** – United States

University of Texas, Assistant Professor of Art History

“The admiration one feels for something strange and uncanny”: Edward Steichen, Continental Symbolism, and the 1905 London Photographic Salon

In 1904, Alfred Horsely Hinton, editor of the British periodical *Amateur Photographer* and a founder member of the Linked Ring, a London-based photography club, wrote to Alfred Stieglitz to critique recent photographs by Edward Steichen. In the note, Hinton remarks, “I admire Steichen’s work for myself but it is the admiration one feels for something strange and uncanny—I can’t think that such work is healthy or would *in this country* have a beneficial influence.... I still hanker after that in Art which shall make men kind, generous, noble and make them good citizens.” Hinton was an important supporter of pictorialism in Great Britain. It is understandable, then, that in writing to a prominent advocate of American pictorialism, he should invoke national identity. Nevertheless, Hinton’s critique of Steichen’s work is surprisingly pointed. Hinton was no stranger to photographic experimentation. Since its inception, several chief members of the Linked Ring Brotherhood had advocated and practiced what they termed photographic Impressionism. In terms of technique, Steichen’s work was not markedly different. The contrast was philosophical. Although Steichen likewise termed his work Impressionist, when contrasted with British photographic Impressionism, it would more fittingly be characterized as Symbolist. Of course, it is difficult to determine just where Impressionist and Symbolist aesthetics begin and end, but it will be the purpose of this paper to detail Steichen’s efforts to fix the boundaries. I will begin by noting the terms that British critics used to describe Impressionism in photography. I will then identify those that Steichen used to characterize his own project. Finally, I will consider Steichen’s work at the height of his Symbolist phase by examining his contributions to the 1905 Photographic Salon in London, a group of works that, taken together, can be read as a polemical response to Hinton’s critique of the previous year. The

artist identified his program by making direct reference to recognizable Symbolist precursors in art and literature, but he also made an effort to clearly interpret their work in his images.

**Larry Shiner** – United States

University of Illinois at Springfield - Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, History, Visual Arts

### Is there a Symbolist Architecture? Mackintosh and Gaudi

Under the rubric “symbolism,” architecture dictionaries sometimes mention the work of Mackintosh and Gaudi as “symbolist” architecture. Obviously, architecture has historically had a symbolic function and many architects have self-consciously used symbolism, but this paper explores the senses in which the work of Mackintosh and Gaudi reflects core tendencies of the Symbolist movement.

**Leslie S. Curtis** – United States

John Carroll University - Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Art History and Humanities

### Odilon Redon: *The Mystic Knight* and the Severed Head

This paper examines Odilon Redon’s treatment of the *Mystic Knight*, a theme he explored in a variety of media, from charcoal and lithography to pastel to oil painting. Indeed one of the key works on this theme, now in Bordeaux, began as an early charcoal drawing and later was retouched with colorful pastels and white highlights. More specifically, I examine the imagery of the severed head that appears within a number of works centered around this theme. The *Mystic Knight* is significant because it is situated between Redon’s early works in black and white (his “noirs”) and his later works that deal with light and color. Indeed, the imagery in the *Mystic Knight* fluctuates between the poles of *Night* and *Day*, the titles given to a pair of large decorative panels that were created towards the end of Redon’s career and which can be seen as a kind of summation of the artist’s work. These were commissioned by the artist’s friend Gustave Fayet for the library at the Abbaye de Fontfroide in southern France. This paper will also consider the new information that has emerged from an exhibition on Redon, currently on view in Paris and to appear later this summer at the Musée Fabre in Montpellier. With this paper on Redon’s theme of the *Mystic Knight*, I undertake the third in a trilogy of studies on Redon’s fascination with imagery of the severed head.

**Liana De Girolami Cheney** – United States

University of Massachusetts at Lowell - Professor of Art History, Chairperson Department of Cultural Studies, and Coordinator of Art History, Interdisciplinary and Intercollegiate Studies

### Edward Burne-Jones' The Sirens: Magical Whispers

*A mermaid found a swimming lad,  
Picked him for her own,  
Pressed her body to his body,  
Laughed; and plunging down  
Forgot in cruel happiness  
That even lovers drown.*

-William Butler Yeats

This presentation will analyze the symbolism of the Sirens as creatures of water in the spectacular painting of the Pre-Raphaelite artist, Edward Burne-Jones, *The Sirens* (1870, at the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Florida). The dual symbolism of the water—source of life and death is paralleled to the Symbolist concept of *femme fatale*. Sirens are hybrid creatures, half animal half woman with strong feminine identities (Fig. 1). Beginning in 1870, Burne-Jones commences painting this theme, reworking it in 1880, 1891, 1895 and 1896. Despite his many attempts to complete the work, it remains unfinished at his death in 1898.

Numerous sketches and drawings perhaps the largest study found in the National Gallery of South Africa, Cape Town, attest to Burne-Jones' assiduous and inexhaustible commitment to complete such an ambitious project. Other drawings for the Siren's composition derive from the study of Renaissance painters, in particular Botticelli's *The Coronation of the Virgin*. Burne-Jones depicts a siren alluring with her melodious music the enchanted sailors from a musical angel in Botticelli's composition. He strongly admires Botticelli's paintings because of his sensitivity toward beauty. "Botticelli thinks well about (a painting) before he begins, and does what is beautiful always," Burne-Jones writes.

In Burne-Jones' painting, a group of sirens stands before the rocks

awaiting the arrival of a mysteriously-captured ship. The debris on the beach reveals their cryptic and ominous actions—men's bones and 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. The horizon with the last beam of light, alerts the viewer of impending doom. Burne-Jones' conceit may also derive from the Renaissance pictorial tradition, as shown in Andrea Alciato's Emblem 102, Sirens, in *Diverse Imprese* (Lyon 1551) and in *Emblematum libellus* (Venice 1546), The epigram alludes to seductive women as Burne-Jones' Sirens and states the following.

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 fish- tail 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.

In a letter of October 1891 to his dear friend and patron, F. R. Leyland, Burne-Jones explains this painting,

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.

In her book, Penelope Fitzgerald describes this work as a "picture where magic is in control—truer than real—a ship under full sail, without wind, harbors into a shallow cove." Although Burne-Jones only saw the sea twice before he was twenty-three years old, his passion and impressions 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." In *The Sirens*, he 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, given life, and wrongly placed, waste away; so that there are two groups of sirens, one noble and saving and the other is fatal.

Like with Andromeda in the Perseus cycle (1875-88 Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, Germany), Burne-Jones visually bewitches the viewer to admire the beauty in *The Sirens* without considering its dramatic consequences. The viewer remains suspended in a paradoxical state. Burne-Jones' focuses, however, on creating an image out of love, for love, and for beauty's sake. "Only this is true, that beauty is very beautiful and softens, and comforts, and inspires, and rouses, and lifts up, and never fails," Burne-Jones writes.

**Michelle Facos** – United States  
Indiana University – Professor of Art

### Defining Nordic Symbolist Landscape Painting

My paper addresses the confusion surrounding Nordic landscape painting produced in the decades around 1900 and the extent to which it can be considered Symbolist. Unfamiliarity with the singular conditions of climate, nature, and light in the far North (with even great differences between northern and southern Nordic regions) continues to lead to misperception and misinterpretation of Nordic landscape paintings. While, for instance, Gallen-Kallela's *Keitele* might appear as a winter scene to non-Scandinavians, anyone familiar with the region would immediately recognize it as a springtime subject (thawed lakes usually signify not-winter). I suggest beginning with unambiguous (if oversimplified) working definitions of three concepts: Symbolism, National Romanticism, and Mood Painting in order to come to a clearer understanding of the place of Nordic landscape painting in the context of Symbolism. I explore the degree to which the label Symbolist has been applied indiscriminately to particular Nordic landscape paintings and propose the necessity of first-hand experience of Nordic nature in order to determine the boundaries between Naturalism and Symbolism. An inability to judge the actual conditions of light and color in Nordic nature has led to numerous incorrect interpretations of landscape paintings as Symbolist. Thus the intentionality of expressing ideas that forms a crucial component of Symbolist painting is often either distorted or completely lost.

**Mary Slavkin** – United States  
CUNY Graduate Center – PhD Student

Dissident Aesthetics, Dissident Politics:  
Nationalist, Conservative, and Heterodox Currents in the Nabis

The Nabis opposed mainstream society, art, ideas, and politics. They rejected the materialism, positivism, and secularism of the Third Republic, turning to heterodox, dissident movements and ideas, including such widely varying philosophies as anarchism and French nationalism. In this presentation, I focus on the theme of nationalism, arguing that the Nabis promoted French culture, art, and history in both their art and their theories. The Nabi artists, especially Maurice Denis, produced many works that combined religious subjects, medieval themes, and styles and ideas derived from the Italian Renaissance. I focus on Denis' works and theories, as well as considering how he interacted with the larger group, pushing them toward Catholicism and nationalism in the years before their separation when the Dreyfus Affair erupted. I consider Denis' religious paintings, as well as his book illustrations and the concepts behind his no-longer-extant theatre sets. These works all oppose the secularizing policies of the Third Republic through their emphatic Catholicism, they encourage nationalism by reclaiming medievalism as a historically French style, and simultaneously, they establish links to Italian traditions by emphasizing a shared Latinism. In addition to addressing the art of the Nabis, this presentation considers Denis' aesthetic and political theories and situates these themes within the context of contemporary political discourses, showing the broader implications of this conservative, nationalistic tendency.

**Michael Croteau** – United States  
Forensic Scientist, Independent scholar, Art collector

THE DREAM, THE WHEEL AND THE CRUCIBLE OF SYMBOLISM

In 1879 Odilon Redon published his first album of lithographs, *In the Dream*. For an artist who had previously exhibited infrequently, the ten prints and frontispiece of this album served as a declaration of intent to produce and justify an artistic aesthetic of indeterminate meaning and mysterious expression, an aesthetic which he would practice for the rest of his life.

This paper will concentrate on just one of those lithographs to demonstrate some of the means by which he created his pieces of suggestive ambiguity, and will later broaden the discussion to show how these methods helped contribute to the nascent development of pictorial forms of symbolism.

The Wheel, the third lithograph in the series, has a simple iconography – two flying heads and a portion of a wheel suspended in the air. The two winged heads are strikingly different in appearance. The head on the left is larger, and bears the recognizable features of an older person. Its wings (actually only one wing is visible) are small relative to the size of the head and are modestly tucked in under the head. The head on the right is much smaller, with simple, almost infantile features and has a set of large, actively flapping wings.

This paper proposes to show that Redon likely used elements from philosophy (Pascal's *Pensees*), traditional artistic imagery (paintings of winged heads representing angels, such as by Giovanni Bellini, available to Redon in the Louvre) and contemporary theories of biology (Cuvier's theory that hyper-development of a body part must be accompanied the atrophy of another part) to create an image that suggests the intellect develops at the price of the spirit, and vice-versa, in rotating fashion. There will be a discussion of how extracting ideas from different fields inhibits the process of interpretation, how this fits with other Redon strategies for increasing indeterminacy, and how such images contributed to the development of the symbolist movement.

**Nadja Berkovich** – United States

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign - Department of Slavic Languages & Literatures and the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center

### **An-sky's *The Dybbuk*: Demonic Possession, Desire, and Death**

Semen An-sky's symbolist play *The Dybbuk* (1912) used ethnographic material that he collected through fieldwork to address the social anxieties of his time, which are supernaturally and mystically coded. By situating *The Dybbuk* within the Russian and Western European Symbolist canon, I demonstrate that Yiddish literature was not alien to Modernism. Indeed, its exploration of the supernatural, the Eternal Feminine and the confluence of life and art, was informed by modernist tropes and formats, the difference being that Yiddish writers contextualized these themes with reference to the colonial subjects of the Empire. An-sky's protagonist, Leah, is possessed by the spirit (dybbuk) of her deceased beloved. She exists at the intersection of several worlds, none of which can satisfy her desire to recover her lost love. I interpret her demonic possession as an instance of "eternal memory, eternally triumph[ing] over death," to quote the Russian symbolist Viacheslav Ivanov (*Vechnaia pamiat'*). Memory that connects the past, the present, and an untextualized future is embodied in the spirit of the dybbuk who mediates between Leah's unsatisfied desire and her death, which brings her a kind of "salvation" and reunification with her beloved. Moreover, through this dramatic merging of her happy past, her traditional Jewish environment, and the otherworldly, she realizes her desire for her lost love object. As a writer, An-sky proclaimed as his mission the transformation of his own experiences

into literary forms - *zhiznetvorchestvo*. He was always in the process of inventing and reinventing himself. If An-sky's play functioned as creative interpretation of concrete ethnographic material and as a vehicle for preserving Jewish popular culture and learning about it, it also invites the model audience to treat it analytically. If, in the Symbolist model, Beauty transforms the world, so does beautiful Leah, who refuses to accept the arranged marriage and prefers to reunite with her dead beloved on the supernatural plateau.

**Rachel Chalmers** – United States

University of Illinois at Springfield – MA Alumni; Salt Creek Academy – Teacher

### Nietzsche and Soloviev: Illuminating the Path to Overman

Friedrich Nietzsche's writing reflects a philosophy that rejects social values in general and seeks to replace them with values more conducive to man's progress, an idea Russian Symbolist writers embraced. Nietzsche repudiates Judeo-Christian morality in particular, calling it a step in man's evolution that has become obsolete, and attempts to replace it with a value system of his own that will enable man to become divine. Nietzsche defends his stance toward traditional values by reinterpreting the history of Judeo-Christian morals and inventing an anthropological origin of God in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. This origin empowers Nietzsche to declare God dead and enables man to assume god-like status through an act of creative will, a process Nietzsche's prophet-messiah Zarathustra illustrates as he embarks upon a metaphysical quest to transcend his humanity and become overman. Nietzsche signifies Zarathustra's goal with several symbols throughout *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; their appearance at the text's conclusion implies Zarathustra achieves Nietzsche's objective. Despite Zarathustra's apparent triumph, Nietzsche admits his weaknesses hinder his own progress toward the overman.

Vladimir Soloviev, also influential in Russian Symbolism, analyzes the causes and consequences of man's rejection of God in his writing. "The Idea of a Superman" examines Nietzsche's concept of the overman specifically and identifies the source of Nietzsche's struggle. Nietzsche's hostility toward Christianity obscures his understanding of the means to transcend humanity and become overman, Soloviev explains. Only through Christ can man transcend his human frailty; Christ is the light in the darkness, the path and bridge to the overman. Without Christ, man remains but a shadow of who he can become. Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity makes achievement of his goal impossible.

**Rosina Neginsky** – United States

University of Illinois at Springfield – Associate Professor

## Salome: Between Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley

This paper examines the complexity of Oscar Wilde's play "Salome" and how Aubrey Beardsley's and Lovis Corinth's images inspired by the play interpret the play. The emphasis is put on Beardsley's interpretation of androgyny and Corinth's views of a woman and her role as a femme fatale.

**Susan Martis** – United States

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## Light, Obscurity and Symbolist Themes in American Sculpture, 1885-1920

The American sculptors George Grey Barnard and Lorado Taft went to Paris in the 1880s to study art in the academic tradition, but the context of Symbolism and modern aesthetic innovations emerging in the city eventually seeped into their sculptures and into the work of artists who followed their path. This paper will examine light and obscurity in sculptures with Symbolist content made by Barnard, Taft and Malvina Hoffman, who were among the first sculptors from the United States to create enigmatic images, some with specific Symbolist literary sources, and to simulate the style of Auguste Rodin for a period of their careers. They understood that leaving portions of their figures embedded in matter heightened the abstract evocations, with surfaces reflecting internal emotions, thus simultaneously portraying sensations of the body and soul, as shown in Barnard's *Brotherly Love* (c. 1886-7, figure 1), Taft's *Solitude of the Soul* (c. 1901, figure 2), and Hoffman's *Column of Life* (1919, figure 3). Yet, some of their Symbolist works appear to be literal, full-figured depictions of their sources, such as Taft's *The Blind* (1908, figure 4) and Hoffman's *The Offering* (1919, figure 5), inspired by the literature of Maurice Maeterlinck and Paul Verlaine, respectively. This range of representational and abstract form reinforces the sculptors' transitional position between Beaux Arts and modern artistic practices in American sculpture. Their visions of the body challenged American conventions by depicting physical sensations that connoted more overt sensual, as well as psychological, expression and related to philosophical themes.

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## “The Psycho-graphic Picture in Symbolist Art”

In her recent *Symbolist Art in Context*, Michelle Facos identifies a category of late-nineteenth century imagery she calls “thought-bubble” paintings. Facos explains that while these images appear to depict figures in the material world, they often compress pictorial space such that the

single figure is harshly juxtaposed against a scene ostensibly taking place in the background. Facos persuasively argues that these background vignettes should actually be read as representations of the depicted figure's imagination. This paper takes the next step in this argument, by proposing a theoretical model to explain the thought-bubble phenomenon and relate it to nineteenth-century developments in psychology and Symbolist aesthetics.

In his *Nine Letters on Landscape Painting*, Carl Gustav Carus argues that artistic creativity emanates from the mind – the Hegelian human spirit – rather than as a result of divine intervention from outside. The mind, in this model, operates in some sense separately from the senses, as a sort of autonomous mechanism for emulating the material world in immaterial, imagined terms. Carus' observations are considered seminal for the development of the “open-mind” and “depth psychology” models of the human consciousness developed by Freud and others at the turn of the century. This paper will demonstrate that they are also useful in theorizing the Symbolist consciousness, which is most saliently represented in Facos's thought-bubble paintings.