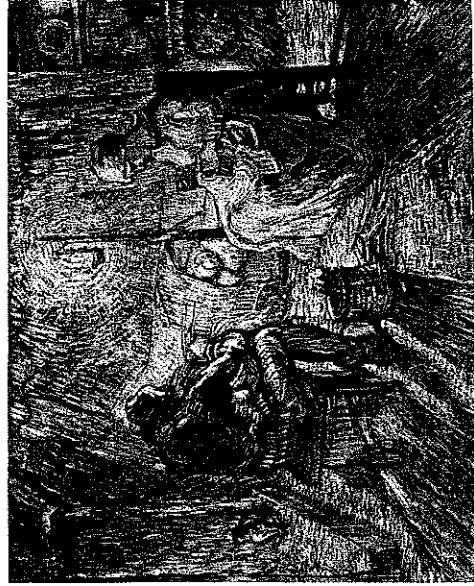


and I find that it teaches me things, and above all it sometimes gives me consolation.

Van Gogh's improvisations after Millet led him to explore strangely beautiful combinations of colours, subtler than the complementaries of the Arles paintings. The range is muted and muffled: ochres, browns, dull purples; very pale greens and pinks; lilac, saffron, turquoise. Often the colour is chalky, with a great deal of white mixed with the pigment; sometimes it becomes almost pallid and insipid. But the effect is exactly what Vincent intended: when he copies the peasant family seated by the child's bedside at evening (Ill. 68) he reinterprets Millet's subject for our own time. This picture too is a 'parable, as in the teaching of Christ'. Art, to Van Gogh, was a moral force for the betterment of man; he needed some such justification for having devoted his life to it.

Both his life and painting testify to the courage and endurance of a man who created something against all possible odds, in the face of every disadvantage, and with the absolute minimum of encouragement. Small wonder that Van Gogh and Gauguin should have been such an inspiration for the young painters who came after them. It took a little time to understand the significance of their art, but the impact that it ultimately made was all the greater.

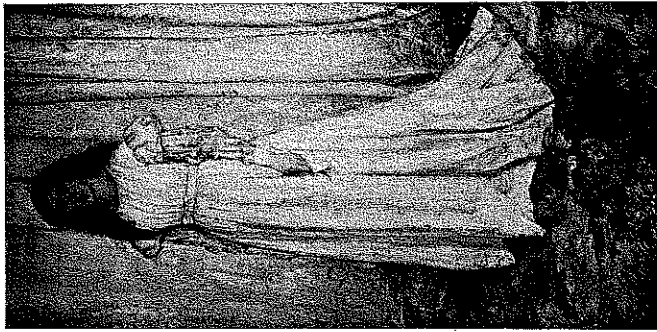


68 VINCENT VAN GOGH (1853-90) *La Vêillée* (after Millet), 1889. Oil on canvas, 28½" x 36¼" (72.5 x 92). Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Up to this point the story of modern painting has been largely told in terms of the activities of a dozen men whose art, like their lives, interlocks. Each extended the body of art as he found it in some new direction, and each extension changed that art irrevocably, so that young painters in 1900 confronted a very different situation from that which faced those in the 1860s.

There can be no doubt that the line already described from Courbet, Manet and the impressionists to Gauguin, Seurat and Van Gogh is the central stream of modern artistic development and that nothing can challenge its overriding importance. Yet a great deal of interesting painting was being done in the later 19th century, and not only in France. The wide influence of Millet's peasant painting has already been mentioned, but other realist and naturalist and early impressionist manners attracted adherents in every European country. By a kind of dialectical necessity, the realists always seem to be accompanied by idealist (or symbolist) painters, as if every Holman Hunt needed a Leighton, and every Menzel a Feuerbach. The manifold complexities of this general tendency for art to divide may depend on certain basic temperamental differences among artists - on, for example, the degree to which the painter or sculptor can envisage the finished work of art before he starts to make it. Does creation reside in the idea or in the action?

This chapter is devoted to artists of many nationalities working in several different countries; the evident common ground cannot, however, be explained by any such idea as the *Zeitgeist*, or the spirit of the age. The art of the immediate past will look much the same to artists wherever they may be, allowing, of course, for the local bias. The possible paths open to artists at any one point in time are limited, and it is no surprise to find painters in widely separated places producing similar work. But



69 JAMES ABBOT MCNEILL WHISTLER (1834-1903) *The White Girl*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 7' x 3' 6" (214.5 x 108). The National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (Harrie Whitmore Collection)

70 SIR JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS, BT. (1829-96) *Autumn Leaves*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 41" x 29" (104 x 74). Manchester City Art Galleries



very often what seem to be coincidences can be traced to the network of personal and artistic contacts surrounding any creative person, for however lonely and private creative activity may be, no artist works in isolation.

A good example of this cultural phenomenon is the picture that, after Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Ill. 1) made the greatest impact at the 1863 *Salon des Refusés*. This was Whistler's *White Girl* (Ill. 69). James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) was American-born, but his painting career was entirely spent in Europe, and to English eyes he is as British a painter as is the half-German Sickert. Admittedly he began as an art student in Paris, but many of his friends there were English, and he kept close contact with London, where part of his family were living.

The *White Girl* herself is a perfect example of the Anglo-French basis of Whistler's art. A portrait of his red-haired Irish mistress, Joanna Heffernan, the composition and handling are not far removed from the work of Whistler's French contemporaries - Manet, Degas, and his particular friend, Henri Fantin-Latour (1836-1904). All these painters, like their British contemporaries, had a special enthusiasm for Velasquez, whom, together with Rembrandt, they regarded as the greatest of all painters. We have already noticed Velasquez' influence on Courbet and Manet; it is equally clear in early Degas portraiture, for example, the *Bellelli Family* (Ill. 38).

But the *White Girl* has other qualities which cannot be attributed to the Velasquez-derived naturalism prevalent in Paris in the early 1860s. Before being refused by the Paris Salon, the picture had been turned down by London's Royal Academy - otherwise more generally receptive to Whistler's work than its companion body across the Channel. And the *White Girl* would in no way have looked out of place in England, because it is, up to a point, also a Pre-Raphaelite picture, as shown by reference to two characteristic Pre-Raphaelite works, Millais' *Autumn Leaves* of 1856 (Ill. 70) and Rossetti's *Annunciation* of 1850 (Ill. 71).

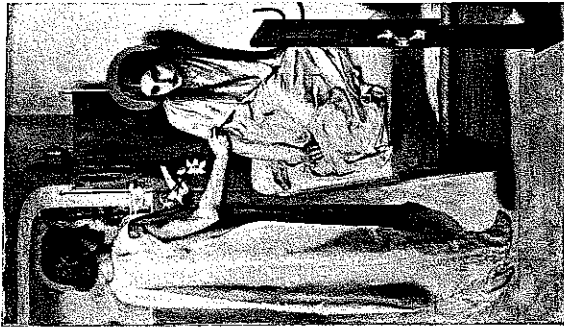
That mysterious, poetic, withdrawn expression of Whistler's *White Girl* certainly owes a great deal to John Everett Millais (1829-96) - and there are illustrations made by the two men in the early 1860s which are difficult to distinguish. Even the light touch of Whistler's

picture resembles Millais' handling, for the Englishman remained a sensitive artist even though his ideas were so quickly cheapened by popular success. And it is hard not to believe that the strange whiteness of the *White Girl* - later to be retitled *Symphony in White* - does not in part derive from Rossetti's *Annunciation*, the 'blessed white eyegore' as it was irreverently called in Pre-Raphaelite circles. Although it was in an Irish private collection where Whistler could not have seen it, its reputation as Rossetti's last exhibited picture was such that he would almost certainly have known about its appearance.

Whistler decided to settle permanently in London, and in 1862-63 he became the intimate friend of Rossetti, who quickly saw to it that the naturalistic elements disappeared entirely from his art. For Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) thought he knew exactly what painting should be concerned with, though putting the ideas into practice proved almost impossible for him. He was against the poetic use of naturalistic detail, which had been exploited so successfully by Millais and Holman Hunt. The *Annunciation* is almost stripped of symbolic detail; instead the message of purity and innocence which the picture conveys is expressed through the abstract means of colour and form.

In the 1860s Rossetti was experimenting with colour symbolism. When he painted *Beata Beatrix* (Ill. 72) in memory of the death of his wife in 1862, it was to 'embody symbolically' the death of Dante's Beatrice, with whom he identified her. The painting shows the moment of Beatrice's ascension to heaven: she sits at a balcony overlooking the city as if in a trance. For Rossetti each colour used has an explicit meaning - red for the bird messenger of death and the figure of love, white for the poppy which brings sleep, the purple and green of Beatrice's garments a combination of suffering and hope respectively.

Other Rossetti paintings of the 1860s show him exploiting another kind of symbolic language - that of line. The sinuous curve of falling tresses of hair is echoed in the folds of a dress, creating a distinct feeling of sensuality and luxury. The chaste flame and volute forms of another painter-poet, William Blake, are utilized to express the voluptuous eroticism of half-length female enchantresses bearing the names of Venus or Lilith or Asarte.



71 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI (1828-82) *The Annunciation*, 1850. Canvas mounted on wood, 28 1/2" x 16 1/2" (72 x 42). Tate Britain, London



72 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI (1828-82) *Beata Beatrix*, 1865-64. Oil on canvas, 34" x 26" (86 x 66). Tate Britain, London



73 JAMES ABBOT MCNEILL WHISTLER (1834-1903) *Three Figures: Pink and Grey*, 1867-68. Oil on canvas, 4' 7" x 6' 1" (139 x 185.5). Tate Britain, London

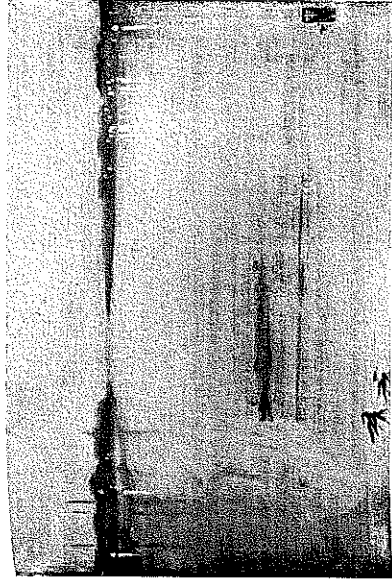
Rossetti's particular taste appealed less to Whistler than it did to Swinburne and Burne-Jones, other members of his circle. But in the *Six Projects*, or in *Three Figures: Pink and Grey* (Ill. 73) Whistler attempted the kind of painting of which they would all approve. The *Three Figures* was to be the fourth *Symphony in White*, and as the musical title suggests, it is a mood picture; the subject-matter has virtually no importance. The girls are abstracted figures, removed from time and place into a dream world, which carries a suggestion of the Japanese, and of the decadent classicism of Tanagra figurines.

After 1870 Whistler abandoned multi-figure compositions to concentrate on landscape - and it is not easy to say whether this was a confession of defeat, or a recognition of his particular strength. He was still concerned, however, with mood and atmosphere, and not with description. With a scrupulous regard for tone, he painted the Thames by night and called the result a *Nocturne in Blue and Silver* (Ill. 74), borrowing his title from music. Debussy repaid the compliment a few years later when, remembering Whistler's paintings, he called an orchestral piece *Nocturne*. The 19th century was a great age for asserting the connections between the arts - for music as descriptive poetry, or poetry as visual imagery, or, as we have seen, painting as music. And one of its greatest achievements, Wagnerian music-drama, effected a combination of such imaginative splendour that few artists could escape its spell.

Whistler didn't carry forward Rossetti's introduction of an abstract symbolism into painting; after Rossetti's death, it was his close follower Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98) who pursued this line of thinking. For him, paintings were 'beautiful romantic dreams', and he



74 SIR EDWARD COLEY BURNE-JONES, BT. (1833-98) *The Mill*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 3' x 6' 6" (90.5 x 197.5). The Victoria and Albert Museum, London



75 JAMES ABBOT MCNEILL WHISTLER (1834-1903) *Nocturne in Blue and Silver: Cremorne Lights*, c. 1870. Oil on canvas, 19 3/4" x 29 1/4" (50 x 74.5). Tate Britain, London

created an ideal world of legendary figures in a strange unworldly landscape. At its best, Burne-Jones's vision can be a captivating one, and a picture like *The Mill* (Ill. 74) is no mere literary illustration, but a work that depends as completely on its visual impact as do Gauguin's Tahitian paintings.

Burne-Jones had a considerable reputation among advanced circles on the continent for a few years after 1889, when he scored a striking success at the Paris international exhibition. Certain older French painters like Puvis de Chavannes (1824-98) and Gustave Moreau (1826-98) and Odilon Redon (1840-1916) had long felt out of tune with their times - they could not accept the dominant realist-impressionist tendency, but neither were they conservative reactionaries. By the late 1880s things were changing - and the moment for a new art seemed to have arrived.

Parallel dramatic changes were taking place in French literature, changes associated with the names of Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Huysmans, Proust, Gide, Moréas and others. The naturalism which had dominated the mid-19th century gave place to symbolism, just as in philosophy positivism and materialism began to be questioned by Bergson and others. All over Europe the new attitudes of a younger generation made themselves felt. The bases of science were questioned: no sooner had Freud begun to introduce his revolutionary new concept of the human personality than Einstein postulated new theories of the nature of the physical world. And the religious revival at the end of the 19th century was another aspect of a shift from material to spiritual values.



76 PUVIS DE CHAVANNES (1824-98) *The Poor Fisherman*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 5' 1" x 6' 4" (155 x 192). Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The uncertainty of values is nowhere more clearly expressed than in the fluctuating reputations of certain painters in late 19th century France. Puvis de Chavannes, for example, found his work criticized by Paul Mantz in 1863 because 'the women's bodies are pure abstractions.' But it was precisely this quality in paintings like *Le Doux Pays* (Ill. 45) and *The Poor Fisherman* (Ill. 76) that so attracted the younger artists. Puvis remained curiously unconcerned with the subjects of his pictures: 'I know nothing of philosophy, of history, or of science. I just get on with my job,' he told someone who asked what his painting meant. *The Poor Fisherman* contains no message, not even a symbolic one; it is a subjectless picture, which evokes a mood and offers the spectator the possibility of private reverie and association. Everyone could find something to admire in Puvis, and the great artistic event in Paris of the '90s was the banquet given in his honour, with Rodin presiding, and 550 painters, sculptors, poets and critics as guests.

Puvis' contemporary, Gustave Moreau, occupied a similar position. He makes franker use of symbols than Puvis does, and is not afraid to tackle the most portentous subjects. His *Young Girl carrying the head of Orpheus* of 1865 (Ill. 79) is a painting about the role of the artist, who, like Orpheus, continues to sing after his physical death. The conflict of the sexes, the enigma of life and death, the meaning of good and evil - these are the only subjects Moreau thought worth painting.

In the later '60s, Moreau was ridiculed by the critics, and withdrew into a private world, no longer exhibiting his work. But he won a reputation as a man of high ideals and strange learning, a visionary and a recluse. Mellowing with recognition, he became, in his last years, an inspiring teacher, whose pupils included Matisse and Georges Rouault.

Moreau's transfigured head of Orpheus caught the imagination of Odilon Redon, who used the same image in his own work. Redon, though an exact contemporary of the impressionists, could not share their attitudes. For the first part of his career he even eschewed the use of colour, as if their preoccupation with it had invalidated it for him. Restricting himself to black and white, he explored the recesses of the soul, presenting us with a lightless, timeless world - that same kingdom of the night that fascinated Arthur Rimbaud.

There is a logic about Redon's fantasies, even when they are as strange as *The Marsh Flower* (Ill. 77). The unfamiliar mixture of elements may disconcert, but it also carries conviction. One of Redon's early sets of lithographs was entitled *The Origins*, and a Darwinian search for the connection between animal and vegetable life fascinated him. Everything lives and suffers in Redon, even rocks and plants. Such mythical figures as centaurs, satyrs, Pegasus and Cyclops people Redon's universe: as for Man, he is the prisoner (Ill. 78), the one hidden behind the mask, the noble fool. Redon admired those who seek knowledge of mysteries, but he knew the risk of failure, and accepted human suffering as its price.

Redon cast Man in a subsidiary role, but the generation of painters who were born in the 1860s seem preoccupied with a consideration of Man's estate. This is the common ground that brings together such otherwise diverse talents as Munch and Bonnard; Lautrec and Vuillard. In their hands, the questioning initiated by Gauguin and Van Gogh is continued.

Edvard Munch (1863-1944) was a Norwegian who came to share Redon's concern for human suffering. He began as a naturalist, but a visit to Paris in 1889 and the impact of modern French painting, particularly the work of Gauguin, changed the direction of his art. 'No more interiors with women knitting and men reading,' he declared. 'I want to show men who breathe, feel, love, suffer. I want to paint such pictures in a cycle. I want to



77 ODILON REDON (1840-1916) *The Marsh Flower*, 1885. Charcoal on paper, 19 1/2" x 13" (49 x 33). Rijksmuseum Kröller Müller, Otterlo



78 ODILON REDON (1840-1916) *Mephistopheles*, 1877. Charcoal on paper, 15" x 13" (39 x 33). Private Collection

bring home to the spectator the sacred element in these things, so that he takes his hat off, just as he would in church.

Munch never painted a picture-cycle as such, but most of his works can be loosely related to each other, and they represent a consistent and very pessimistic view of life. As with Gauguin, childhood experience was decisive. Munch's mother had died of tuberculosis when he was five, and he could never free himself from the identification of sex and love with death and disease. Relationships between man and woman were impossible, because each sought to dominate. In *The Dance of Life* of 1900 (Ill. 80), the female figure is shown in successive roles of the innocent – withdrawn, virginal and unattainable; the temptress – lascivious and domineering; and the experienced – ravaged and diseased and now undesirable.

In such an existential situation, Munch could only relapse into melancholy resignation. 'My path has always been along an abyss,' he said, 'my life has been an effort to stand up.' Racked by alcoholism and mental instability, he saw painting only as another illness and intoxication. It could be turned to use as a means of self-analysis, and eventually Munch did achieve a precarious balance, partly through the assuaging powers of nature.

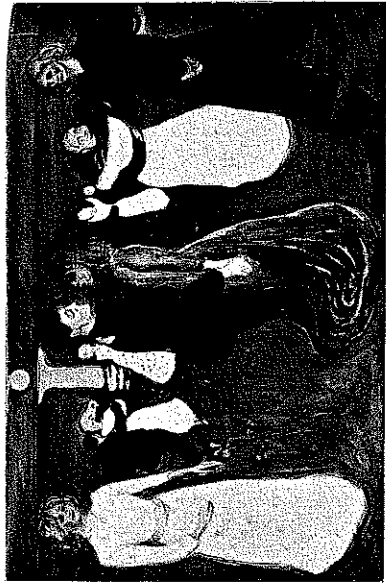
Munch was a friend of the Swedish dramatist Strindberg, who shared his gloomy view of the sexual relationship. His connection with Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish religious philosopher, and with Dostoevsky, whose great novels transformed European sensibility at the end of the 19th century, is also apparent.

Munch's work was disseminated not so much by his oil paintings as by his graphic work. He translated his images into lithographs and into woodcuts, finding, like Gauguin, that the crudeness of the medium enhanced the message and gave it a new force. This dissatisfaction with traditional media was common to artists of the 1890s. There was a remarkable revival of interest in every kind of graphic art, which affected book illustration and poster design as well as the production of prints. Fine artists who had hitherto neglected such ancillary activities now found them almost more gratifying than painting easel pictures.

This is certainly true of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), an artist whose real character has been all



79 GUSTAVE MOREAU (1826–98)
Young Girl carrying the Head of Orpheus, 1865. Oil on canvas, 5' x 3'
(154 x 99.5). Musée d'Orsay, Paris



80 EDVARD MUNCH (1863-1944) *The Dance of Life*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 4' 1" x 6' 3" (125 x 190). Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo

but submerged by his popular image. Admittedly Lautrec had his naturalist beginnings, and his connections with impressionist painting - with Degas in particular - are fundamental. Yet the philosophy behind his art, and the way he lived, brought him closer to Munch. He too was fascinated by life - as an outsider, an observer, not a participant. His work expresses no moral judgment, only a search for moments of intense physical and psychical experience before the inevitable annihilation. Lautrec was a great Anglophile, and the aestheticism of Walter Pater had clearly impressed him, chiefly through the influence of their mutual friend, Oscar Wilde. He could almost envisage himself as the hero of Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, which was published in 1891. Wilde's prefatory aphorisms provide a perceptive commentary on the nature of Lautrec's art: 'An artist can express everything . . . vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art. . . . It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.'

Thus when Lautrec paints the lesbians embracing in *Le Lit* (Ill. 82), we are concerned with morality or immorality only to the extent that we introduce the issue. The picture has neither the self-conscious bravado of Courbet's splendid painting of the same subject, nor the cold objectivity displayed by Degas when he tackled such subjects. Lautrec's private defence against the intrusions of life was to surround himself with the warmth of a family; his humanism is limited, not universal, but it embraces his friends - and this category can include anyone. With aristocratic disdain, Lautrec chose to

elevate to his social and human level pariahs like the inhabitants of the brothel.

Lautrec is an inescapably class-conscious artist, and so in a different way are his slightly younger contemporaries, Bonnard and Vuillard. They represent for us an apogee of the French bourgeois culture to which they so clearly belong - an observation made in no pejorative sense. Their social origins differed little from those of many another French artist, most of whom (unlike Lautrec) came from the middle class - but Bonnard and Vuillard, instead of accepting the social mobility granted by artistic creativity, seem quite deliberately to have chosen to preserve their specifically bourgeois identities. In a sense they were defending the position that both Munch and Lautrec found so alien.

As very young painters, both Bonnard and Vuillard were members of the Nabis, a semi-secret society of Parisian art students. One of the Nabis, Paul Sérusier, had in 1888 brought to Paris from Brittany the revolutionary message of such Gauguin paintings as *The Vision after the Sermon* (Ill. 56); plain, simple colours and increasingly abstract flat compositions are the hallmarks of the Nabis' style. Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940) in particular was for a few years around 1890 a bold and inventive painter of near-abstract small oils, yet he seems to have been unable to move forward along these lines and in the mid-1890s he abandoned experiment altogether. There was a general feeling at that time that the



82 HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC (1864-1901) *Le Lit*, 1892-95. Paper on panel, 31" x 27 3/4" (54 x 70.5). Musée d'Orsay, Paris



81 ÉDOUARD VUILLARD (1868-1940) *Interior at l'Eclaire-lac-Ville*, 1893. Oil on millboard panel, 12 1/2" x 14 1/2" (34.5 x 36.5). Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.

arts had produced enough innovation, and that the moment had come for a pause and a chance to assimilate the changes. In the decade between 1895 – the year of Oscar Wilde's trial – and 1905 – the year of the fauve Salon – few new ideas or new talents in painting emerged.

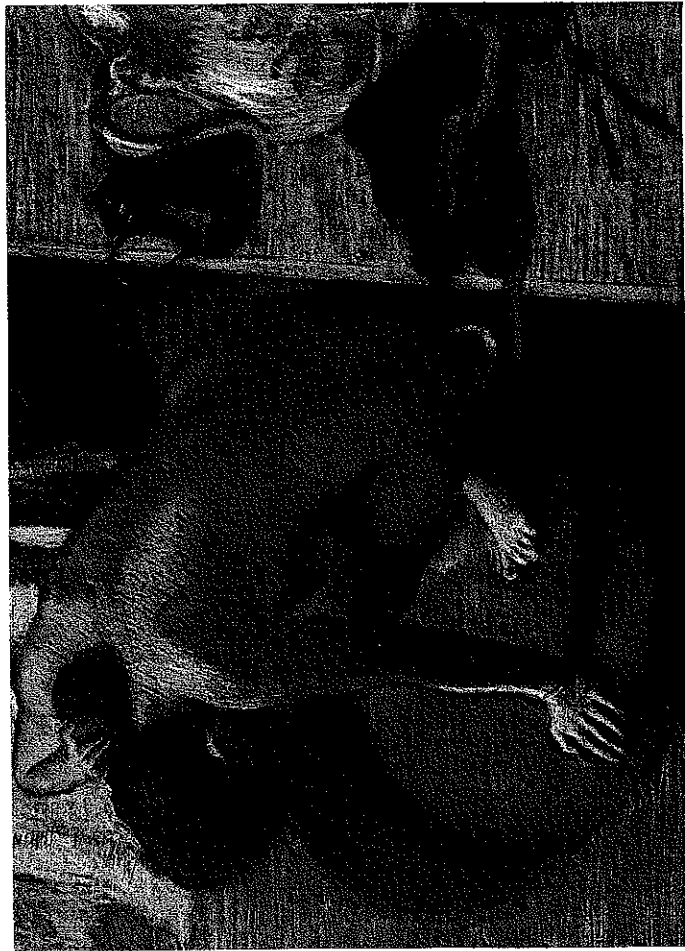
Vuillard chose to return to his bourgeois background, which henceforth provided his subject-matter. Again and again he painted the sitting-room at home, with his mother and sister working at their needlework, usually under artificial light (Ill. 81). He treated this setting with humour, tender affection and a sense of almost religious tranquility. Munch may have categorically rejected exactly this kind of subject, but for Vuillard it was the still centre of the universe, and he was unwilling to stray far away from it, or to introduce any alien or disturbing elements. Instead he progressively adorned and embellished it, transforming the stuffy, over-furnished interiors into richly patterned tapestries of form and colour.

The career of Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) closely resembled that of his friend Vuillard. As a young artist he was perhaps less imaginative, but he continued to paint right up to his death with an easy assurance that Vuillard had long since lost. Vuillard could never free himself from his artificially-lit Parisian interiors, but Bonnard moved from Paris to the South of France, and luxuriated in its warm colours and life-enhancing light. He came to feel a part of an ancient and living Mediterranean tradition, and *The Abduction of Europa* (Ill. 85) of about 1925 reinterprets an archaic legend in a timeless fashion. Landscape was important for him, though it remained subsidiary to the figure, the undertones of which were so much more profound.

Consider one of Bonnard's many pictures of a girl in her bath (Ill. 84). It is a subject that we connect with Degas (Ill. 83) but the feeling could not be more different. Where Degas observed the model clinically, Bonnard painted his wife, Marthe – but always as he remembered her when a young girl. Such pictures are meditations on the nature of existence, in which the past and present intermingle, just as they do in Marcel Proust's great novel; the work of art is at once a part of our world and yet removed from it on to an altogether more spiritual level. For the uxorious Bonnard, the girl is the paradigm of the sexual relationship as he experiences it – very differently from Munch, but every bit as humanly valid.

83 EDGAR DEGAS (1834–1917)
The Tub, 1886. Pastel on paper,
23½" × 32½" (60 × 83). Musée
d'Orsay, Paris

84 PIERRE BONNARD (1867–
1947) *Nu dans le bain*, 1937. Oil on
canvas, 3'1" × 4'10" (93 × 147).
Musée du Petit Palais, Paris

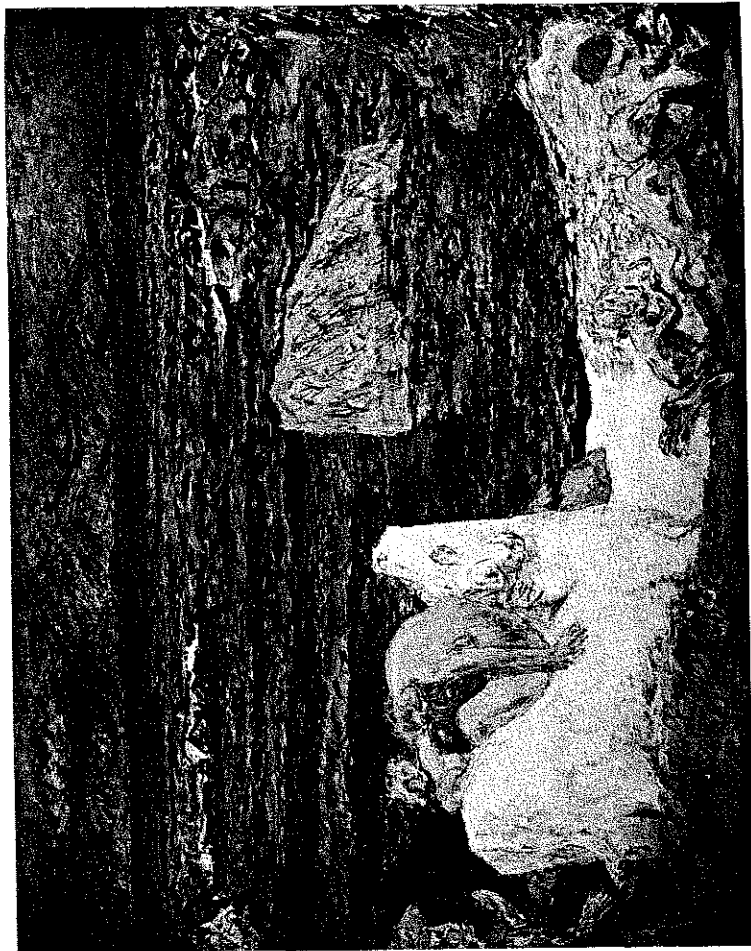


The mundane setting should not disguise the fact that she is surrounded by her natural element; she is a Venus rising from the waters.

The psychological implications of Bonnard's greatest paintings are accompanied by formal qualities of comparable depth and subtlety. The very touch of his brush on the canvas is an affectionate one, and his choice of colour is inexhaustibly inventive, as though no end could ever be found to the riches of life. Similarly his compositions are coherent, self-contained worlds which we are invited to enter and explore, relishing their strange ambiguities and familiar passages.

More than any other single painter, Bonnard bridges the 19th and 20th centuries. On the one hand he is clearly the heir of Monet and Renoir, yet he was to inspire the abstract painters of the 1940s, and in his attitude to art and to life he is close to Matisse, who was to set in train the re-making of painting in the early years of this century.

85 PIERRE BONNARD (1867-1947) *The Abduction of Europa*, c. 1925. Oil on canvas, 3'10" x 5' (117.5 x 153). The Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio (Gift of Edward Drummond Libby, 1930)



That Matisse should be the principal figure of a chapter entitled 'expressionism' may at first appear to be stretching a definition too far. But all labels attached to art movements are to a certain extent arbitrary and unsatisfactory. With rare exceptions, works of art are not made to fulfil aesthetic programmes; and artistic 'movements' are the generalizations of journalists when confronted by the existence of new work that cannot be fitted into any convenient pigeon hole. Such terms survive only because they have a certain historical validity, and also because they help to confer some sort of order on the apparent anarchy that the contemporary art scene has, ever since Romanticism, seemed to present.

Expressionism, as an art label, originated in Germany around 1910, and is now often restricted to central European art. It is not easy to define, except negatively in relation to impressionism, but in its original German usage it included what Roger Fry was at about the same time to call post-impressionism. The essential idea was that art should not be limited to the recording of visual impressions, but should express emotional experiences and spiritual values. As Franz Marc wrote, 'Today we seek behind the veil of appearances the hidden things in Nature that seem to us more important than the discoveries of the impressionists.' So defined, expressionism would of course embrace almost all the artists whose work has been discussed in the two preceding chapters, but this would extend a definition to the point of complete vagueness. The justification for applying it to the artists now to be considered is that they belong more or less to the same generation, and share some common ground.

The particular association of expressionism with Matisse is justified by the passage in the text of his *Notes of a Painter*, published in Paris in 1908 and immediately translated into German and Russian. Matisse declared: