

Les paysages d'Ozias Leduc, lieux de méditation/

Contemplative Scenes, the Landscapes of Ozias Leduc

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Thanks largely to the curatorial efforts of Jean-René Ostiguy (*Ozias Leduc: peinture symboliste et religieuse*, Ottawa, 1974) and Laurier Lacroix (*Dessins inédits d'Ozias Leduc*, Montréal, 1978), interest in the art of Ozias Leduc has enjoyed a much deserved revival within the last decade or so. In addition to these two exhibitions, several recent master's theses (Concordia University and the Universities of Montréal and Toronto) have been devoted to various aspects of the St. Hilaire artist's work. The circulating exhibition *Les paysages d'Ozias Leduc, lieux de méditation*, guest-curated by Louise Beaudry for the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in fact grew out of Beaudry's own master's thesis on four of Leduc's landscapes.¹

The exhibition is small, comprising twelve landscapes in oil, of which almost all (save *Paysage* (Cat. No. 2) and *Paysage d'automne* (Cat. No. 6) were exhibited in Ostiguy's more broadly based 1974 Leduc exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada. Here, however, for the first time, Leduc's landscapes constitute the single focus. One is grateful for the opportunity not only to concentrate on this important aspect of Leduc's oeuvre, but also to revel in the beautiful iconic images of the St. Hilaire landscape. A catalogue accompanies the exhibition, but for viewers unfamiliar with her text, Beaudry attempts to convey a sense of the nature of these works by accompanying each landscape with a poem by Leduc or an excerpt from one of his writings. It should be noted, however, that a di-

rect correspondence between the painting and the poem or writing was not necessarily intended by the artist.

The catalogue is attractively designed and consists of an introductory essay followed by a detailed analysis and current information pertinent to each work: its provenance, technique, exhibition history, and bibliography.² The author's inclusion of information regarding the historical aspects of some of the scenes, as well as her clarification of previously incorrectly identified subjects, is very much appreciated. All twelve works are illustrated in the catalogue, and Beaudry is to be commended for offering the first colour illustrations of the following privately owned and therefore seldom seen works: *Paysage* (Cat. No. 2), *L'île enchantée* (Cat. No. 9), and *Paysage de neige* (Cat. No. 12). In *Les paysages d'Ozias Leduc, lieux de méditation*, Beaudry has not only presented an exhibition that has great visual appeal, but clearly has also attempted a scholarly interpretation of the landscapes. This review is conceived primarily with the latter purpose in mind, in the context of academic research.

First, some technical inaccuracies should be clarified. Of primary importance is the author's incorrect citation of Leduc's manuscript text "Le symbolisme des couleurs." The original text is not in the National Gallery of Canada's "Ozias Leduc Papers" (which do not exist as such), but is in the Archives nationales du Québec in Montréal.³ As of July, 1985, the approximately two hundred files of material on Leduc had been reorganized and coherently indexed for easier access. It would also have been helpful if the call numbers of the specific Leduc files for the A.N.Q.M. had been included.

The reader should also beware of sloppy footnoting, or the lack of a footnote altogether.⁴ Finally, the English translation

from the French should be read with discretion. There are outright mistakes (for example, "lavis blanc-mauve," p.47, becomes "mauvy-blue," p.46), but more important to note are the shifts in implication. These shifts misrepresent the author's actual meaning, often to her disadvantage.⁵

In her catalogue, Beaudry states that she has restricted her choice to landscapes, hypothesizing that they are anagogical scenes, i.e., they "s'élève[nt] du sens littéral à un sens mystique" (p. 8) / "rise from a literal meaning to a mystical one" (p. 7). According to the author, this interpretation can be justified by Leduc's personal writings and is supported by the artist's particular use of colour, line, composition, and choice of motif within each painting. Each painting must further satisfy three criteria: (1) it must be a "finished" work in oil; (2) it cannot be anecdotal; (3) it must be inspired by nature rather than by memory.

The landscapes Beaudry has chosen cover a span of twenty-seven years (1913-1940) but are not inclusive, as the author herself has indicated. All supposedly meet the author's criteria for inclusion. Yet, if "croquis, esquisses et tous les autres dessins se rapportant à ces oeuvres" (p. 8) / "sketches, drawings, and studies relating to these paintings" (p. 7) were excluded, why is *Paysage d'automne* (Cat. No. 6) in the exhibition when it is so clearly an oil sketch related to *Paysage d'automne, lac Hertel* (Cat. No. 5)? The much smaller rendition of the same subject from the same viewpoint, combined with its lighter, more portable cardboard base and its looser handling of paint, surely suggests that *Paysage d'automne* is an oil sketch (*plein air* perhaps?) that was later worked up into the three-times-larger canvas *Paysage d'automne, lac Hertel*. This seems to have escaped the author's notice, as she states that she has not been able to determine

which work was executed first.

The second criterion is that landscapes cannot be "anecdotiques, référentielles à un contexte narratif ou mythologique" (p.16, n. 6) / "anecdotal [i.e.] directly related to a narrative or mythological context" (p.17). Granted, the paintings *Fin de journée* (Cat. No. 3), *La maison du passeur* (Cat. No.11), and *Paysage de neige* (Cat. No.12) do not overtly tell a story. But are they not anecdotal insofar as human activity is implied (geologists leaving a smouldering fire and tools / a ferryman about to return home / glow of a fireside chat?). Beaudry excludes *Erato, muse dans la forêt* (National Gallery of Canada) because it contains a mythical figure, the muse of poetry. But there is no mythological narrative or anecdote in this painting; the figure is clearly an allegorical expression of an *idea*. Erato is placed in the painting by Leduc as the emblematic figure of harmony and beauty and is related to the artist's ideological perception of Mont St. Hilaire. The author's criterion would seem to be intended to eliminate the human element (especially the human figure) lest its presence compromise the contemplative aspect of the scenes. However, the inclusion of *Erato, muse dans la forêt* would have been worthwhile: while this is not the proper place for a detailed analysis of the painting, suffice it to say that thematically and formally, the painting is a precursor to the artist's later, "pure" landscapes. On an iconographical level (the muse Erato as personification of harmony and beauty), Leduc is dealing with the progression from a terrestrial realm to a spiritual realm. Formally, through the manipulation of space, light, and colour, the artist is able to elevate his view of the forested mountainside from a natural to a cosmic domain, from microcosm to macrocosm. In Leduc's later landscapes there is a pronounced tendency toward two-dimensionality. The mainte-

nance of the integrity of the picture plane (which Beaudry does mention on p.13 and p.31, n. 5) is heralded in his treatment of the landscape in *Erato, muse dans la forêt*. The painting's inclusion would have provided an interesting and enlightening introduction to the development of Leduc's "contemplative" landscapes.

The third criterion—that a painting must be inspired by nature rather than by memory—is clearly implied in the author's footnote discussion of the *Imaginations* landscape drawings series:

La série de dessins intitulée *Imaginations...* de 1936-1941..., qui montre un intérêt plus accentué pour l'aspect formel des oeuvres, est également exclue de cette étude. Comme l'explique M. Laurier Lacroix... les oeuvres de cette série sont des dessins et des croquis du fruit de l'imaginaire de l'artiste, celui-ci s'inspirant de souvenirs et non pas de la nature même. (p.16, n. 6) / The series of drawings entitled *Imaginations...*, executed between 1936 and 1941..., which shows a more marked preoccupation with the formal aspects, has, however, been omitted from this study. As explained by Laurier Lacroix..., the works in this series are drawings and sketches originating in the artist's imagination, and are based on memories and not on nature as such. (p.17)

Why then is *Crépuscule lunaire* (Cat. No.10) included in the exhibition? As Laurier Lacroix has pointed out, *Crépuscule lunaire* is directly related to the twenty-second drawing (inscribed verso "Crépuscule lunaire") of the *Imaginations* series.⁶ Accepting that *Crépuscule lunaire* is one of the *Imaginations*, one wonders at this point if *Paysage* (Cat. No. 2) is not also

related to this series. Beaudry has dated this painting to c. 1913, but does not explain why. *Paysage* is no more than a quarter of the size of any of the other landscapes Leduc painted around this time (*Le cumulus bleu*, Cat. No. 1; *Fin de journée*, Cat. No. 3; *Effet gris, neige*, fig. 4, p.17; *Pommes vertes*, Cat. No. 4). But it is only slightly smaller than *Crépuscule lunaire*, and the handling of the thick impasto in these two works is revealingly similar.⁷ These factors, combined with the patently imaginary appearance of the landscape (no proposal has been made concerning the identity of the location), point to the real possibility that *Paysage* is at least indirectly related to the *Imaginations* series.

By the same token, the inclusion of *L'île enchantée* (Cat. No. 9) is also curious. Lacroix has already pointed out that this painting is based on a charcoal sketch entitled "Le jardin enchantée," which is an imaginary landscape.⁸ As such, *L'île enchantée* is a precursor to the *Imaginations* series. Beaudry cites Lacroix's description of *L'île enchantée* (p.49), but for unknown reasons makes no reference to his statement that the work is derived from Leduc's imagination. According to the author, the painting is imaginary in character, but only because it is "plus libre en facture" ("freer style"). Thus, based simply on these criteria set forth by the author, the inclusion of four paintings, *Paysage d'automne*, *L'île enchantée*, *Crépuscule lunaire*, and *Paysage*, is hard to justify. This tends to weaken the thesis that the paintings in this exhibition lend themselves to anagogical readings.

Beaudry's anagogical readings of these landscapes centre around the symbolic interpretations of certain colours and/or motifs within the paintings and are supported primarily by two printed sources, one primary, the other secondary: "Le symbolisme des couleurs," is an undated manu-

script by Leduc in which, as Beaudry reveals, he lists the traditional symbols attributed to colour (p. 8/p. 7), and *A Dictionary of Symbols* is an English translation of a book in Spanish by Juan Cirlot published in 1962. Beaudry uses these two sources at times conjunctively and at times individually. In either case, methodological problems arise.

With reference to Leduc's "Le symbolisme des couleurs," the methodological problem is one encountered by anyone who has done research on Leduc. Many of his personal writings are not dated, and, of the few that are, most come from his later years, especially the nineteen-thirties. This is a frustrating state of affairs, but one cannot simply assume a direct correlation between Leduc's undated manuscript on colour symbolism and all of his landscapes between 1913 and 1940, without some qualification.

To Beaudry's credit, she proposes that the information in Leduc's text on colour symbolism was probably culled from his reading of various authors such as Émile Mâle and Joris-Karl Huysmans.⁹ It is believed that Leduc owned the 1908 edition of Huysmans's *Trois églises et trois primitifs* and had read all of Mâle's books,¹⁰ although the author does not point this out. Of course, ideally one would have to establish when Leduc actually had access to these books and, in the case of Mâle's works, which titles and which editions he read.¹¹ Failing this, one might offer specific examples of correspondence between Huysmans's and Mâle's writings on colour symbolism and Leduc's text on colour symbolism.

The problems presented by the author's unqualified use of Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols* are of a somewhat different nature. First, the book was published in 1962, almost half a century after the earliest land-

scape exhibited (*Le cumulus bleu*, 1913). Second, the edition Beaudry has used is an English translation of the Spanish original. The author's justification for using Cirlot's dictionary is that the symbolism of different objects noted by the Spanish author "découlent des traditions historiques et sont retrouvés à travers l'histoire de l'art, utilisés par les artistes et expliqués par divers historiens" / "occur traditionally throughout art history, but are used by artists and explained by historians" (p.18), and that one can safely assume that Leduc "s'était familiarisé avec les définitions symboliques de différents motifs grâce aux textes de Mâle et de Huysmans portant, entre autres, sur l'art roman" / "through his readings of Mâle and Huysmans on various subjects, including Romanesque art, was familiar with the symbolic definitions of different motifs" (p.18, n.20). Taking Beaudry's statement at face value, the reader can only infer that there is an unequivocal correspondence between Huysmans's and Mâle's symbolic definitions of motifs and Cirlot's symbolic explanations of those same motifs. If this is the case, why not use Huysmans and Mâle, exclusive of Cirlot, as the sources for the interpretation of symbols? The qualifications mentioned previously with respect to Leduc's use of these two authors also apply here, but, nonetheless, the relatively greater degree of contemporaneity that Huysmans and Mâle offer in comparison to Cirlot would certainly lend more credibility to Beaudry's approach. Her unqualified use of Mâle's 1925 publication of *L'art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France* to support her interpretation of two of Leduc's landscapes produced a decade *before* this edition does not help to convince the reader that there is a direct correlation between Leduc's symbolic interpretation of "summer" (*Pommes vertes*, p.35, n. 2) or "winter" (*Neige dorée*, p.43, n. 8) and Mâle's historical interpreta-

tion of the medieval symbolism of the seasons. Moreover, the author does not indicate the fact that this edition is the sixth of this particular book, originally published in 1898 and which, in the course of the twenty-five intervening years, had undergone five revisions (1902, 1910, 1919, 1923, 1925). The reader would like to know Beaudry's motivation for using the sixth edition of *L'art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France*. Was it this particular edition that Leduc had in his library? However, Beaudry uses Cirlot, rather than Mâle or Huysmans, as her primary source for iconological interpretations of Leduc's landscapes.

The author begins with a comparison of the first two paintings, *Le cumulus bleu* (Cat. No. 1) and *Paysage* (Cat. No. 2). Beaudry suggests that the two landscapes are similar: a dark earth and luminous sky constituting two unequal parts that are "linked" formally by clouds. Iconographically, the clouds also allow the shift from a reading of the "profane" image (landscape—earthly realm established by its greenish-blue colour) to a mystical realm (sky). The author then proceeds to examine *Le cumulus bleu* more closely, offering for this particular painting the dichotomous anagogical interpretation of, on the one hand, man desiring to reach God, but, on the other hand, of not being able to because there is no mediator to effect his redemption. Such an interpretation seems anathematic to the Roman Catholic faith of which Leduc was a devoted practitioner. That Leduc would ignore or question the existence of the Redeemer is inconceivable.

In addition, Beaudry's presentation of her interpretation of colour and motifs is rife with inconsistencies. Citing the artist's text "Le symbolisme des couleurs" and referring to the hillside, the author offers the opinion that "dans le cadre du registre ter-

restre, la chromatique du vert signifiant chez Leduc renouvellement et régénération de même que celle de bleu foncé symbolisant aussi la régénération renforcent cette idée du désir et de l'espoir d'atteindre à Dieu" / "the use of greens to depict the earthly realm symbolizes renewal and regeneration in Leduc's work, and the dark blue, also symbolizing regeneration, reinforces this idea of the desire and hope of attaining God" (p.24). What's this? The previously overall "greenish-blue" colour that established the "profane" realm of earth (the hillside) has suddenly been "factored" into two distinct colours (green, dark blue) and has assumed an interpretation symbolic of spiritual concerns. Beaudry also makes no reference to the muted yellow dashes and few coral/orange specks that are also part of this profane/spiritual grass. Is green not the local, natural colour of a grassy hill? And, as an aesthetic device, does not Leduc's incorporation of short striations of blue and muted yellow and coral/orange enrich and modulate the green of the hill, while at the same time referring to the natural effect of the reflected light of the sky (coral/orange and blue) on the grass? Contrary to Beaudry's assertion that the cloud obscures the light, the light does in fact permeate the cumulus cloud, as manifested by the "pointillistic" application of coral/orange and rose on the right side of the cloud. While the author could perhaps have argued that this shift from "profane" to "symbolic" colour is part of the anagogical progression within this painting, she makes no attempt to coordinate these two distinct interpretations of Leduc's use of colour; rather, she clearly emphasizes the compositional role of the blasted tree trunk and the cloud and the sky's luminosity in this context. The direction of the reading of these "profane" motifs is upward, suggesting aspiration to a more spiritual level. Combined

with the understanding of their symbolic significance (tree: spiritual fervour; cloud: link between sacred and profane space; luminosity: God/redemption), the anagoge would be complete and the spiritual level—man's desire to reach God—comprehended.

But Beaudry's anagogical progression is beset by contradictory interpretations of symbols. She maintains that a cloud (as motif), by virtue of its "intemporalité qui lui est inhérente" / "inherent atemporality" (p.14), can be understood on an anagogical level as "symbolisant le lien entre le terrestre et le divin" / "symbolizing the link between the earthly and the divine" (p.24) which is the anagogical meaning assigned to the cloud in *Le cumulus bleu*. She uses this interpretation of the "universal" cloud to justify the spiritual interpretation that the painting refers to man's desire to attain God. But then she makes this same cloud do double duty as a particularized cloud, massive and opaque, obscuring the heavenly light and leading to the quite different spiritual interpretation that the painting refers to "condition d'homme fautif" / "Man's flawed state" (p.24) and inability to attain God in the absence of a Redeemer. It would seem that Beaudry has inadvertently given two distinct anagogical interpretations. Her presentation of this analysis renders the anagoge impotent as it progresses anagogically to one spiritual interpretation, then reverts to the profane and then back to the sacred.

The author's anagogical interpretation of *Paysage* (Cat. No. 2) is that it shows man's spiritual transcendence and ultimate unification with God. First, it should be noted that *Paysage*, contrary to Beaudry's assertion, is not divided into two unequal parts; rather, the ratio of land / profane to sky / sacred is virtually even.

With reference to colour symbolism, the author establishes that the "greenish-blue"

(presumably of the floor of the gorge) identifies the earthly realm, and, based on the author's previous suggestion that green and dark blue symbolize renewal and regeneration, the reader infers that *Paysage's* spiritual level of interpretation is also concerned with man's desire to reach God. But then how is one to interpret symbolically the distinctly brown/black colouration of the gorge's rock walls? In another painting (*Fin de journée*, Cat. No. 3), the blackish-brown colouring of the rock "wall" is interpreted by the author as representing the "couleur de Satan; c'est l'amour des ténèbres et du mensonge" / "colour of Satan, . . . the love of darkness and lies" (p.31, n. 8) based on Leduc's colour symbolism text. Such an interpretation seems incompatible with the colour symbolism of "greenish-blue," and no attempt at reconciling the two has been made by the author.

On an iconographic level, the author gives an exceedingly literal interpretation of the elements of the landscape in *Paysage*. She asserts that the stream flowing from the waterfall "est aussi une forme brisée (flaques)" / "also creates a broken form (puddles)" (p.24) which represent "la nature humaine" and "des constituants d'espérance de vie (eau), mais rompus" / "human nature" and "elements of earthly hope (water), but incomplete" (p.24). Man's hope of transcending the earthly realm and reaching God are fulfilled only through his faith in Him. In *Paysage*, according to the author, the concept of man's transcendence is conveyed by the water, cloud, and light. She sees man's transition from terrestrial to spiritual realm and union with God as analogous to the natural phenomenon of the water cycle whereby water (man), through the warmth of the sunlight (faith in God), evaporates to form water vapour in the form of clouds (God/man's transcendence and union with Him).

The anagogical interpretation thus progresses from the landscape in *Paysage* depicting, literally, the natural water cycle, to the landscape symbolizing man's union with God. The reading of this painting proposed by Beaudry can be discounted on two grounds: (1) her interpretation of the broken pools of water as representing man's unfulfilled hopes is invalid based on the simple observation that these "incomplete" pools of water are not incomplete. The stream is continuous, its sections of flowing water connected by a series of smaller waterfalls. (2) The author offers absolutely no evidence that the landscape (on a "profane" level) in *Paysage* is intended to be a depiction of the water cycle; nor does she suggest any reasons for the viewer to interpret it as such. To stress the point of how inappropriate such a literal interpretation is: what happens when it rains again to replenish the stream? Does this mean that not only man, but God too, will fall (cloud [water vapour] is symbol of God—"divine presence")?

Similar problems arise with the interpretation of *Fin de journée* (Cat. No. 3). Beaudry quotes Leduc as having stated that white is the "... symbole de Dieu. Le dualisme de la lumière et des ténèbres s'exprime par le blanc et le noir. C'est le symbole du bien et du mal" / "... the symbol of God. The dualism of light and darkness is expressed by white and black. It is the symbol of good and evil" (p.30) and that black is "le néant, l'erreur" / "nothingness" (p.29). Yet apart from footnote 8 (p.31), in which the author refers to the symbolism of "blackish-brown," nowhere in her description of the painting is white or black mentioned. Put simply, if there is no white or black to speak of, how can an interpretation of "good and evil" be justified?

The reader is even more confused by the author's discussion of the ladder motif.

When discussing *Fin de journée* on a "profane" level, the author first refers to the ladder as "precarious." Yet within the same paragraph, in her reference to the reading of the motif on a "spiritual" level, she maintains that the ladder symbolizes "Christ the Redeemer." Is the "precarious ladder" really compatible with its interpretation as "Christ the Redeemer?" Apparently not, for suddenly the motif, once again on a profane level, is no longer a "precarious ladder" but "le lien entre le registre terrestre et le ciel illuminé" / "the link between the earthly realm and the brightly lit sky" (p.30).

Beaudry's treatment of the rock motif further decreases the validity of her interpretation. She categorically states that the rock in the painting is the "symbole de la faillibilité humaine et de sa propre temporalité" (p.30) / "symbol of human fallibility and his own temporality" (p.29). At this point she refers to Cirlot as her support for this symbolic definition, but cites "wall," not the entry "rock," without any elaboration. Moreover, Cirlot frequently points out in his interpretive texts of various objects that these objects often have more than one symbolic meaning. The significance of "wall," Cirlot notes, is "diverse, dependent upon which of its characteristics is taken as fundamental."¹² Cirlot continues that "a wall enclosing a space expresses the ideas of impotence, delay, resistance, or a limiting situation," but that "the wall seen from within as an enclosure has a secondary implication of protection which, according to its function and the attitude of the individual, may even be taken as its principal meaning."¹³ Clearly, Beaudry chose the first of Cirlot's symbolic definitions as the basis for her interpretation of the rock as "human fallibility and temporality," although Leduc's depiction of the rock in the painting is easily, if not more, in keeping with the second description—as a wall "seen from

within." As the latter, the rock would assume the more positive connotation of "protector." This more optimistic interpretation of the rock is in fact one which, to use the author's own approach of "symbolic assignment," would better suit her ultimate analogical reading of *Fin de journée*. For is not "rock" symbol of solidity and integrity (Cirlot, p.262; "the Lord is my rock," II Samuel 22:2) and thus in *Fin de journée* symbolic of Christ as Redeemer, as Mediator between man and God? In suggesting this, I am not advocating or denying the legitimacy of using Cirlot's dictionary; I am merely pointing out the problems of interpretation that arise so readily from its subjective use, i.e., when not coupled with an understanding of the work on its own terms and in an art-historical context.

In *Pommes vertes* we encounter again the questionable practice of interpreting the natural colour of an object as symbolic colour based on Leduc's text on colour symbolism. The author notes that the predominant colour of the painting is green, which, in Leduc's words, is "symbole des espérances nouvelles du monde" / "symbol of the world's new hopes" (p.35, n. 1). But the author herself proposes that the scene is set in late July, for "les pommes sont vertes à cette période de l'été" / "apples are green during the summer heat" (p.35, n. 2). Might not the green of the foliage also refer to the natural colour of the leaves? The author then proceeds to discuss the colour and motif symbolism as one. The apple suggests (according to Cirlot) "totality, immortality, and permanence" and, united with green, the "green apple," according to Beaudry, signifies the "espoir et promesse en la totalité de Dieu [et] souligne son aspiration d'atteindre à Dieu" / "hope and promise in God's wholeness [and] intensifies man's desire to reach God" (p.34).

To strengthen this interpretation, the

author attempts to discount the potential interpretation of *Pommes vertes* as "Eden before the Fall." In doing so, she does a virtual "about-face." Symbolic interpretation of colour suddenly is not an issue here. Beaudry has chosen to separate the colour and motif symbolism and refers to the colour of the apple only on the "profane," literal level. Here "green" assumes an added, negative quality; the apples are now "too green" and thus "scarcely appetizing." But, one asks, would the spectator thus finding the apples too green and unappetizing on the profane level not have considerable difficulty transcending this "profane" meaning of "green apple" to comprehend its "spiritual" significance as "hope and promise in God's wholeness?" What is more, if on a symbolic level the foliage of the apple tree represents "evil," based on the dark shadows it has created on a "profane" level, how can the reader then accept the author's subsequent assertion that, on a spiritual level, this same shadow-casting apple tree represents "Christ the Saviour?"

The analysis of *Neige dorée* (Cat. No. 7) takes literalism to its extreme. The basic premise of the author's iconographic interpretation is that the trees depicted in the painting are specifically of the white pine species, and she goes to considerable effort to validate this identification. Because, according to Cirlot, "pine" symbolizes immortality, and because, according to Leduc's colour symbolism text, "white symbolizes God," and because there is one particular pine tree in the painting that is isolated compositionally and is further emphasized in terms of light and colour, on a "spiritual" level this painting symbolizes Christ Redeemed (through the Crucifixion) and His unification with God. Beaudry maintains that the lone white pine signifies Christ crucified, and that the two "flanking" white pines represent the good and the bad thief,

with the tiny white pine referring to "l'homme repentant" / "repentant man" who identifies "sa déchéance humaine avec celle du bon larron" / "his human failings with those of the good thief" (p.42) before whom he kneels. Beaudry's approach is questionable and her interpretation can be dismantled on several grounds. She makes no distinction between her use of the term "white" as a colour and as part of a name. Using the two meanings interchangeably, she applies the symbolism of a physical, perceptible colour to something that really exists only in an abstract sense—the *name* of a species. Furthermore, if the one "white pine" represents immortality, then logically so do all the white pines in the painting. At this point one asks, how can the bad thief also be "immortal?" Also, the author's identification of the three pines as the symbolic rendition of the "Crucifixion" fails to convince because it is generally accepted that the "bad thief" was on Christ's left. What is "repentant man" doing kneeling before the "bad thief?" Moreover, the author maintains that the fact that a monumental cross was raised (1841-1846) on the site of the pine, of which Leduc was well aware, lends credence to her proposal that the "lone" white pine in *Neige dorée* represents crucified Christ. However, Forbin-Janson's monumental cross was not erected on the "site of the pine" at all, but rather on the "pain de sucre" (on the summit of the mountain), as Leduc himself clearly relates in his "history" of St. Hilaire.¹⁴

Finally, the author's spatial analysis of *Neige dorée* is debatable. Rather than having a composition that leads the eye slowly from the foreground to the background as Beaudry maintains, the impact of the painting, in my opinion, is felt immediately. This is effected by Leduc's use of two degrees of aerial perspective. At the bottom of the picture, the spectator is above but close to the

ground. In the middle area, the spectator is at a much higher level, more distant from the upwardly raking perspective. The transition is rapid and disjunctive. The fusion of the two degrees of aerial perspective—close-up and distant—"flattens" the recession and causes the spectator's eye to ascend rapidly to the "pain de sucre" at the top of the painting. This does not make for a "controlled" reading of the painting.

With *L'heure mauve* (Cat. No. 8), the author asserts that the colour mauve that permeates the whole image is symbolic of "Dieu, l'union du Christ ressuscité avec Dieu le Père" / "God, and the Union of the resurrected Christ with God the Father" (p.47). Beaudry's justification for this assertion is that mauve is made by mixing violet and white, the two colours which, according to Leduc, symbolize respectively "verbe incarné . . . l'union consubstantielle du Père et du Fils" / "word incarnate . . . the consubstantial union of the Father and Son" (violet) and "Être suprême" / "Supreme Being" (white) (p.48). Apparently, Leduc does not list a symbolic meaning for "mauve." What the author has done essentially is her own "palette mixing," an approach to symbolic colour interpretation the legitimacy of which is highly questionable.

Apart from this factor, however, the author's discussion of *L'heure mauve* in many ways constitutes the highlight of her catalogue analyses. This is due primarily to the author's concentration on the formal qualities of the painting rather than on the definitive symbolic interpretations of particular motifs. Although Beaudry still insists upon a specific Cirlotian definition for the oak leaf ("strength and long life"), and in spite of the inconsistencies inherent in the use of this particular symbolic definition in this context (the leaves in the painting are dead), the author's formal analysis tends to overcome these "impediments." The final

impression is not one of a "specific" reading of the painting literally or anagogically, but an *experiencing* of its general spirituality on the basis of the synthesis of its form and content.

Disappointingly, Beaudry resumes her earlier emphasis on the definitive symbolism of motifs, and inconsistencies and contradictions again arise. In *L'île enchantée* (Cat. No. 9) the tree, symbol of "absolute reality" according to Cirlot, here defines the "espace du registre terrestre" / "space of the earthly realm" (p.51), whereas in the introduction to the catalogue it was categorically touted as the "symbole du cosmos et de l'immortalité" and the "axe par lequel sont reliés les trois mondes; ceux de l'enfer, de la terre et du ciel" (p.14) / "symbol of the cosmos and immortality" and the "link that joins the three worlds: hell, earth, and heaven" (p.13). In *Crépuscule lunaire*, the author maintains that the "central tree" symbolizes "Christ the Redeemer" (also implied by its close proximity to the moon), yet it is obvious that there is no definitive "central tree"; the moon ("God") is in fact flanked on one side by two trees, and on the other side by the rest of the woods. And, in *La maison du passeur* (Cat. No.11), the author first maintains that the house bathed in sunlight refers to "Dieu veille sur l'homme" / "God watching over man" (p.55) based on her symbolic interpretation of light ("God") and on Cirlot's symbolic definition of house ("human life"). Subsequently the illuminated house assumes a different nuance: man's union with God. The shift is slight but significant, for if the ferry refers to man's passage to this higher spiritual level, then the author's first, less mysterious interpretation is not plausible.

The inconsistencies and contradictions pointed out in this review are not exhaustive; the reader can expect more. Apart from the unqualified use of undated and

"post"-dated material, the primary reason for Beaudry's problems of interpretation is the excessive reliance on the supposedly definitive symbolic meaning of specific objects, compounded by mostly insufficient integration of these interpretations with the formal aspects of the painting. One gets the sense that the author does have personal thoughts on the iconographic interpretations which arise from her own perception of the work, but that these interpretations are "contaminated" by her unqualified use of Cirlot as her "justification."

I am not entirely disagreeing with Beaudry's interpretation of these works. In spite of the inconsistencies pointed out in *Le cumulus bleu* and *Fin de journée*, I too can see elements of an "idealist" symbolism in which motifs are used to "objectify the subjective."¹⁵ But it is worthwhile to note that these two works were painted at the beginning of the artist's production of "pure" (i.e., without figures) landscapes; they are the first landscapes of this type painted after *Erato, muse dans la forêt* (c. 1906). It is also important to note that *Le cumulus bleu* and *Fin de journée* date from the beginning of Leduc's firm friendship with French-Canadian writers such as Guy Delahaye and Robert Laroque de Roquebrune. These poets were familiar with and aimed to write in the manner of the European literary idealists—the so-called "decadent" Symbolists.¹⁶

Although the formal qualities of the "flattened" space are seen in these two paintings, Leduc's emphasis on certain motifs (the proximity of the blasted tree trunk to the unnaturally coloured cloud, or the disproportionate scale of the geologists' tools to the ladder and the height of the cliff) indicate that *Le cumulus bleu* and *Fin de journée* are related to the "idealist" symbolist mode. I am of the impression that *Pay-sage de neige* (Cat. No.12) was also con-

ceived within this mode,¹⁷ and perhaps the same can be said of *La maison du passeur*.¹⁸ But the fact that almost two decades separate these works from *L'heure mauve* is not insignificant; the evolution of Leduc's thought that took place within this time span should be considered, but is a matter that has yet to be investigated.

With *Pommes vertes* (1914-1915), however, it appears that Leduc has shifted from the previous emblematic approach to one that might be referred to as more "synthetist." Gone is the successive concentrated reading of a sequence of individual objects. Leduc's images of the apples and branches renders them almost abstract circular entities within a larger abstracted image. The viewer does not concentrate on the motif "apple" (or "green apple"), but on the image as a whole, including the luminosity that defines the space between the branches. Form and content are "synthesized" through Leduc's "subjectification of the objective."

A similar case can be made for *Neige dorée*, where, arguably, the formal aspects of the painting do not work to reveal the specific symbolic meaning of the individual "profane" objects. It is only in her perceptive analysis of *L'heure mauve* that the author, by emphasizing the nature of the formal aspects of the painting, comes closest to conveying the sense of Leduc as a "synthetist" symbolist ("subjectifying the objective") rather than an "idealist" symbolist ("objectifying the subjective").

In using the term "synthetist" I am deliberately making reference to the term as used by Maurice Denis. Leduc's knowledge of Denis' theoretical work probably dates back to at least the winter of 1915, when he was introduced to the Abbé Olivier Mauralet, who had met Denis while studying in France from 1910 to 1913.¹⁹ It is also possible that Leduc became familiar with

Denis's work previous to this, as Denis's *Theories 1890-1910* was published in 1912, where he refers to the "étroite correspondance entre des formes et des sensations"²⁰ that can perhaps be significantly related to *Pommes vertes*, *Neige dorée*, and *L'heure mauve*, not to mention *Effet gris, neige* (1914) and *Lueurs du soir* (1916). This connection between Leduc's landscapes 1914-1921 and Maurice Denis is only a tentative proposal. Much research needs to be done regarding not only Leduc's relationship to Denis, but as well to European Symbolism in a broader scope, including that of the northern Scandinavian artists.²¹ At this point, suffice it to say that Leduc's concept of a symbolist landscape as seen in *Pommes vertes* (1914-15) appears to differ from that in *Le cumulus bleu* or *Fin de journée* (both 1913). There is a shift, perhaps identifiable as one from the earlier "idealist" approach to a more "synthetist" approach.

It should be noted that Beaudry does mention both Maurice Denis and the French Canadian literary circle, but no attempt is made to even define the type of symbolism she is dealing with, let alone distinguish between an emblematic "idealist" symbolism and a "synthetist" symbolism. This is a rather inappropriate omission, considering the period in which Leduc was producing these important "pure" landscapes.

The author's failure to "expose" the possibility of a "synthetist" approach to landscape symbolism on Leduc's part is also highly curious for two reasons: (1) her discussion of *Paysage d'automne, lac Hertel* (Cat. No. 5) lacks any reference whatsoever to even a possible specific symbolic interpretation in the "idealist" tradition, a fact which not only makes the painting's inclusion seem gratuitous, but also automatically shifts the focus to the formal qualities of the painting; and (2) the author *does* dis-

cuss Maurice Denis—in terms of the theory and aesthetic underlying the formal characteristics of a work and in much greater detail—in her M.A. thesis. In fact, Beaudry even includes a quotation from Leduc which has affinities with what "synthetist" symbolists such as Denis had earlier expounded:

Cette image, quelque soit l'idée dont elle est la synthèse, comment vit elle? Certainement par l'arrangement des éléments qui la compose, lignes, formes suggérées, valeur des tons, couleurs, équilibre de l'ensemble.²²

Moreover, in her thesis discussion of *Lueurs du soir* (1916), the concentration is clearly on the formal aspects of the painting. Indeed, in comparing this painting with *Fin de journée* (1913), the author points out that the "élément-motif" of the curling smoke in the earlier painting is transformed into a formal "volute" in *Lueurs du soir*.²³ If her catalogue footnote reference to *Lueurs du soir* (p.31, n. 5) is any indication, the symbolic interpretation would surely refer to the more "synthetist" aspects of the image, and in its absence of "symbolic assignment" would share an affinity with the analysis of *Paysage d'automne, lac Hertel*. Why then, in *Les paysages d'Ozias Leduc, lieux de méditation*, does the author insist on attempting to attribute to each landscape a particular iconography based on the specific symbolic definition of various motifs? Why the sudden shift of emphasis? Frankly, I can't come up with a convincing reason. I can only propose that the author believed that an interpretation of these landscapes primarily in the context of an "idealist" symbolism would complement her more formal-oriented analysis of the works in her M.A. thesis. In the end, however, one thinks that the innumerable in-

consistencies, contradictions, and other problems that arose from such a categorical interpretation would have been enough for Beaudry to reconsider not only her assessment of the individual works, but also the validity of the premises upon which her analysis was based.

Leduc's landscapes are certainly spiritual works meant, I agree, to raise the viewer to a higher level of comprehension. But Beaudry's analyses, especially with reference to the landscapes 1914-1921, do not convince that this spirituality is of a specific, dogmatically religious nature. From *Effet gris, neige* (1914) to *L'heure mauve* (1922), the landscapes are more iconic images, "synthetist" vehicles that enable the spectator to transcend the terrestrial realm to a higher spiritual plane. The symbolic interpretation of these paintings should therefore not be so black or white, so individually definitive as Beaudry's, but rather of a more universally abstract and experiential nature. The proposition presented by Beaudry in her exhibition catalogue lacks conviction.

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Notes

¹ Louise BEAUDRY, "Une analyse formelle et iconographique de quatre paysages (1913-1921) d'Ozias Leduc (1864-1955)" (Université de Montréal, 1983). The four landscapes are: *Fin du jour* (now referred to as *Fin de journée*), *Pommes vertes*, *Neige dorée*, and *L'heure mauve*.

² These information records are impressive; the author has clearly put a great deal of effort into compiling them. A quick glance through them reveals a

few omissions, however. *Pommes vertes* suffers most: the author has left out five exhibition citations that were originally referred to in Jean-René OSTIGUY, *Ozias Leduc: peinture symboliste et religieuse* (exh. cat.) (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1974), p.146. To the provenance of *Le cumulus bleu* can be added the date "1916" after Oscar Dufresne. This is based on a 1944 letter Leduc wrote to Candide Dufresne (Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal, 06, M-P58/1/7). In the letter Leduc refers to *Le cumulus bleu* as having been acquired at the Bibliothèque St. Sulpice exhibition in 1916.

³ The National Gallery of Canada does, however, have in its library files "Leduc, Ozias," although it is not clear if Beaudry is referring to this particular source of photocopied material.

⁴ Examples, respectively, are: (1) p.35, the second part of footnote 2 re "apple"—instead should have been in footnote 1, and (2) p. 9: "Selon Leduc . . . et la matière ne peut signifier sans la pensée."

⁵ For example, Beaudry writes, referring to the tree's predominance in Leduc's works: "Sa fréquence d'utilisation découle de sa présence immédiate dans l'environnement de l'artiste" (p.13). In English this is translated to: "Its frequent use is attributable to its ubiquity in the artist's environment" (p.13). The original French implies that Leduc's use of the tree was *inspired* rather than dictated by its prominence, that ultimately it was Leduc's conscious choice to use it as symbol. The English translation negates the implication of "conscious choice."

⁶ Laurier LACROIX, ed., *Dessins inédits d'Ozias Leduc* (exh. cat.) (Montréal: Concordia University, 1978), p.87.

⁷ This observation tends to dismiss the validity of Beaudry's blanket assertion that Leduc's style was "quasi académique" with reference to his "touche quasi imperceptible du pinceau" (p.13) / "almost academic . . . with a virtually imperceptible stroke of the brush."

⁸ LACROIX, ed., p.62.

⁹ With reference to possible sources for Leduc's "Le symbolisme des couleurs," it would be interesting to compare it to a two-column newspaper article apparently clipped by the artist and entitled "Les couleurs et leurs symboles" (A.N.Q.M., 06, M-P58/2/23). I have not yet systematically attempted to identify the date or title of the newspaper from which the article was taken. The only clue as to the source is the "Vol.XX, No.152" in the upper right corner of the clipping, but with thorough research the missing information surely could be provided.

¹⁰ Regarding Huysmans's book, the source for this information is OSTIGUY, p.223. Regarding Mâle's books, the source for this information is a memoran-

dum from Guy Viau to Jean-René Ostiguy dated 5 June 1968 in which Viau lists books that Leduc read (File: Leduc, Ozias, National Gallery of Canada Library). Viau acquired the information from Leduc's assistant, Gabrielle Messier.

¹¹ It is generally accepted that Olivier Maurault, to whom Leduc was introduced during the winter of 1915, introduced the artist to the writings of Émile Mâle (see LACROIX, ed., p.53). As for Leduc's introduction to Huysmans's work, one thinks of the artist's friendship with the French-Canadian circle of "symboliste" poets and writers who were indebted to the late-nineteenth-century European literary "Symbolistes."

¹² Juan CIRLOT, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. J. Sage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p.343.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

¹⁴ One wonders if "pin" wasn't a typographical error in the author's original typescript—should it be "pain," referring to the "pain de sucre"? On the other hand, her discussion of the story in such close proximity to her interpretation of the white pine ("pin") within the same footnote leads one to believe that perhaps her understanding of the events is inaccurate.

¹⁵ My use of the terms "idealist" and "synthetist" and the phrases "objectification of the subjective" and "subjectification of the objective" are based on H.R. Rookmaaker's analysis of late-nineteenth-century symbolism. See H.R. ROOKMAAKER, *Synthetist Art Theories* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1959), p.71. (This is not to say that Leduc's work fits neatly into either category; rather, these terms are a point of departure for understanding of the evolution of his art.)

¹⁶ It is worthwhile to note that Laroque de Roquebrune, in an article "La jeune génération littéraire en 1914," acknowledges the French-Canadian debt to European literary symbolism: "Certes, aucun poète ou aucun écrivain ne voulait oublier que le symbolisme avait été une merveilleuse formule de beauté. Ce bel arbre n'était pas encore mort, et maintes jeunes gens venaient s'asseoir et méditer à son ombre." Robert Laroque de ROQUEBRUNE, "La jeune génération littéraire avant 1914," *Le Nigog* (1918), p.268. An example of French-Canadian symbolist literature is Guy Delahaye's *Mignonne allons voir si la rose . . . est sans épines* (Montréal, 1912). Leduc in fact illustrated Delahaye's book with culs-de-lampe, one of which, "Good and Evil," is symbolized by the framing of an equilateral triangle (good) by the heart-shaped form of a snake (evil). The snake as a symbol of evil and lust was often used by "idealist" symbolist painters such as Jean Delville in *Idol of Perversity* (1891) (illustrated in Robert DELEVOY, *Journal du Symbolisme* [Gêneve: Skira, 1977], p.132.)

¹⁷ It is interesting to draw a parallel between *Paysage de neige* and Leduc's *Nature morte* of the same year (1940) in terms of "idealist" symbolism. Both have themes of impending death and transcendence, in *Paysage de neige* implied by the fire in the hearth, the desolation of the winter scene, and the brilliant sky. In the still life the significance is conveyed by Leduc's incorporation of a rendition of Michelangelo's tomb sculpture "Dusk," a book whose title is *Destin*, and the image of a sanctified person. *Nature Morte* (1940) is illustrated in OSTIGUY, p.192.

¹⁸ I am not entirely convinced that there are mystical overtones to this painting. The lighting, so important an aspect to the "spiritual" interpretation of Leduc's landscapes, is in *La maison du passeur* dissimilar to the other "idealistic" landscapes that Beaudry has presented.

¹⁹ Olivier MAURAUULT, *Confidences* (Ottawa: Fides, 1959), p.74. This is noted by LACROIX, ed., p.53.

²⁰ "Close correspondence between form and sensations." Maurice DENIS, *Théories 1890-1910* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Occident, 1912), p.33. Noted in ROOKMAAKER, p.163.

²¹ Leduc's paintings such as *Lueurs du soir* and *L'heure mauve* carry a remarkable affinity in subject, style, and mood to, respectively, Gustaf Fjaestad's *Winter Moonlight* (1895) (colour reproduction in Roald NASGAARD, *The Mystic North* [exh. cat.] [Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1984], p.76) and Akseli Gallen-Kallela's *Winter* (1902) (illustrated in NASGAARD, *Ibid.*, p.61). It is worthwhile to note that a number of articles on the northern symbolist painters appeared in *Studio* and *Art et Décoration* magazines (around 1913), both of which Leduc subscribed to.

²² BEAUDRY, p.107. This note of Leduc's is, unfortunately, undated. It would be valuable, however, to attempt to find a more direct correlation between this and some of the synthetist writings in hopes of perhaps clarifying its date and context.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.53. With respect to *Lueurs du soir*, its exclusion is the result of the painting having been stolen in France in August, 1983, hence its designation "oeuvre non localisée." Beaudry also notes that *Effet gris, neige* was not available for the exhibition (p.18, n.16).