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The Scandal of M. Alphonse Legros

Elizabeth Prettejohn

A dozen figures, kneeling or standing, face to the left (*plate 1*). A priest and an acolyte stand above them, and face to the right to administer communion over a curving rail dressed with snow-white linen. This area of light masses contrasts abruptly with the shadowy depths of surrounding space, stone-built and quite plain, although it is difficult to be certain exactly which part of the church we are seeing. Things are clearer in the etching of 1861 on which the painting appears to be based (*plate 2*), and the title of the etching names the church: Saint-Médard on the left bank of the Seine, in a part of Paris much frequented by the artist, Alphonse Legros (1837–1911), before his move to London in 1863.[1] It is easy to suppose that this is a scene he witnessed himself, a slice of religious life in modern Paris.

Perhaps, then, the painting may be considered a distilled memory of the scene, painted later in London, and tinged with nostalgia for a French religious practice now growing distant, from the artist's point of view, in time and place. Compared to the etching, the painting appears aestheticized: the homely bonnet of the principal female figure has vanished, and the nearer woman's shapeless garments have marshalled their folds, coming to resemble Venetian damasks and silks; the stocky candlestick-bearer with Dominican cape and tonsure has become a beautiful boy with an elegantly long taper; the patterned-and-fringed green rug eases the rigours of kneeling on stone just as it adds richness of colour. One might surmise that the setting has been generalized, its French Catholic appurtenances muted, to make the scene more palatable to an English Protestant audience. *La Communion dans l'église Saint-Médard*, the title of the etching, is translated into English as *The Communion*, the painting's title at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1867.[2] The translation is in keeping with Legros's practice in the first six years of his residence in London, when he gave English titles to his Royal Academy exhibits[3]; but it also simplifies and abstracts the subject matter. Is that simply because an English audience might have no particular interest in customs at the church of Saint-Médard? The scene has been universalized, and certainly made more beautiful; one might say 'aestheticized' in the strict sense that it engages with artistic concerns shared by the English artists of the emerging aesthetic movement. Despite greater sobriety of colour, it inhabits something like the same world as Simeon Solomon's priestly figures of similar date, as in a watercolour of 1870, *The Mystery of Faith* (*plate 3*).

The changes from etching to painting also move the scene away from Parisian modernity towards timelessness, and the colouring seems redolent of the Old Masters – echoes of Zurbarán and Velázquez, perhaps, but with a saturation and density that recall Holbein, and some Venetian touches. In the art history of the later twentieth

Detail from Alphonse Legros, *Ex Voto*, 1860–61 (*plate 5*).

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1 Alphonse Legros, *The Communion*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 88.9 × 76.2 cm. Walthamstow: William Morris Gallery. Photo: William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest.

century this apparent retreat from modernity signified, almost automatically, a loss of vigour or grit, a dereliction of avant-garde duty.

And yet in another sense the painting is more challenging than the etching. The etching is easy enough to grasp as an ethnographic study of a contemporary religious practice, one that is interesting as a feature of the society in which it occurs, but in which a secular viewer need have no further investment. By contrast, the painting might seem compromised by some sort of attraction to 'the mystery of faith' (to borrow Solomon's expression). If you are the kind of person who feels uncomfortable with heartfelt devotion or with the Christian sacraments, you will find this painting challenging to look at, and that may well have been the case for many of its viewers at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1867. In other words: this could be interpreted as quite an oppositional picture in its English context of 1867 – as oppositional in its own way as Édouard Manet's *Anges au tombeau du Christ* was in its French context of 1864 (*plate* 4), a painting with which it shares an extreme tonal contrast between snow-white linen and shadowy blacks.

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The Communion: the title declines to specify a religious denomination, and communion is a sacrament in both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches – also one around which there were perturbations at this date in both Anglican and French Catholic contexts. For example, Christina Rossetti's short story of 1850, *Maude*, revolves around a teenaged girl's moral qualms about taking communion.[4] In France, too, women's religious practice was an issue of debate throughout the Second Empire and beyond.[5] Legros's painting can scarcely be said to have a narrative or action; what might be called its significance is concentrated in the top left-hand quarter, which also contains its highest lights – balanced, to an extent, by the white habits of the Dominican friars to the right, yet also focused remarkably on the tiny spot of white that represents the communion wafer. This is the brightest light in the painting, and might be compared to Solomon's *Mystery of Faith*, where the host within the monstrance is represented by a white space, as though the 'real presence' can only be hinted to

2 Alphonse Legros, *La communion dans l'église Saint-Médard* [*Communion in the Church of St Médard*], 1861. Etching (first state), 36.2 × 26.8 cm. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Département estampes et photographie). Photo: BnF.

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human eyes through an absence. In the Legros the wafer also marks the point of incipient contact between the fleshy hand of the priest, on which a gold ring glints, and the woman's lips, tilted upwards in anticipation. This conjunction, too, might make some viewers uncomfortable, and the more so as there is no actual contact. The woman's religious submission is entirely contained within her own body, but it is also powerfully sensualized: her eyelids are lowered to rivet her gaze on the wafer as it approaches her lips, slightly pallid yet full and just about to part, as her hands grasp the pure white linen of the cloth, which the nearer woman brings close to her lips, in reverence.[6] Is it important that the three figures kneeling at the communion rail are women – a kind of female trinity – but all the others men? They surround the women, with priest and acolyte looming over them, two Dominican friars guarding their backs, and a group of robed figures quite far back, but perhaps the more menacing as they mass, silently, in the distant reaches of the church interior. The sense that the

3 Simeon Solomon, *The Mystery of Faith*, 1870. Watercolour on paper, 50.8 × 38 cm. Port Sunlight: Lady Lever Art Gallery. Photo: National Museums Liverpool (Lady Lever Art Gallery).

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4 Édouard Manet, *Les anges au tombeau du Christ* [*The Angels at the Tomb of Christ*], 1864. Oil on canvas, 179.4 × 149.9 cm. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art (H. O. Havemeyer Collection). Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

women are under supervision is strong, and that again is something that might make viewers uncomfortable – viewers who mistrust religious authority as well as those uneasy about the subjection of women.

This painting makes an apposite point of entry to Legros's work partly because it adumbrates points of methodological importance which will be addressed below, but also because it is simultaneously so beautiful and so neglected. *The Communion* has scarcely been seen in public since its first appearance in 1867.[7] Some of the reasons for this obscurity might seem merely contingent. In the 1930s the painting was purchased by the artist Frank Brangwyn, who gave it to the William Morris Gallery as part of its founding collection in 1940. Brangwyn's gift makes some kind of sense, since there are significant points of contact between Morris and Legros: born just three years apart, they moved in the same London artistic circles, and shared important patrons as well as political sympathies. Nor is it strange to find this and other works by Legros in Brangwyn's collection; Legros was revered by British artists of the generation that came of age around 1900. Even so, Legros's painting is not easy to integrate into the displays at the William Morris Gallery, which centre on the applied art productions of Morris's

design firm and the Arts and Crafts movement. Understandably, it ordinarily stays in the storeroom.

Nonetheless, the almost total absence of this painting both from public display and from the scholarly record makes a particularly piquant instance of the first meaning I wish to invoke with my title, 'The Scandal of M. Alphonse Legros'. It is scandalous that Legros is so inconspicuous in our art history books. Michael Fried said as much as long ago as 1996:

> Nothing more reveals the extent to which art history has still not come to terms with the situation of advanced French painting in the early 1860s than the obscurity surrounding the name of Alphonse Legros.[8]

Over two decades later, one is only tempted to add: 'and nothing more reveals the extent to which art history has still not come to terms with the situation of advanced British painting in the 1860s (and beyond) than the obscurity surrounding the name of Alphonse Legros'. In the period since Fried's observation about the scholarly neglect of Legros, the study of later nineteenth-century British art has been spectacularly on the rise, while that of French art from the same era has perhaps lost the commanding position that it held for Fried's generation. One might have thought that Legros, active in both arenas, would attract increasing attention, but on the contrary: you will search in vain for any sustained discussion of his work among historians of either French or British art. With Henri Fantin-Latour and James McNeill Whistler, in 1858, Legros formed the 'Société des Trois', perhaps the first self-consciously 'avant-garde' artists' collective in Paris.[9] Yet in Bridget Alsdorf's *Fellow-Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting* (2013), Legros makes only a brief appearance as a male model, taking his place in a compositional triangle with his Société des Trois colleagues in Fantin's manifesto painting, *Hommage à Eugène Delacroix* (1864, Musée d'Orsay, Paris); his contribution as an artist, and indeed his role within the Société des Trois itself, remain largely unexplored.[10] And he fares no better in books on English progressive art of the 1860s by Allen Staley (2011) and Elizabeth Prettejohn (2008), both of whom scandalously neglect Legros even though they place considerable emphasis on members of the reformulated Société des Trois of London later in the 1860s, Whistler and Albert Moore.[11]

In this essay I want to begin to make amends, by exploring three aspects of Legros's work that proved intractable to previous scholars: his decision to abandon Parisian modernism and 'become British'; his choice of subject matter involving religious observance; and his lifelong commitment to the art of the past. I call these 'scandals' in a slightly different sense; they have been no-go zones or taboo areas in the art-historical scholarship of recent decades. New perspectives are beginning to emerge in all three areas, however, as debates about globalization, the politics of religion, and the role of artistic tradition assume new urgency in the changing circumstances of the twenty-first century. In this essay I argue that Legros's art can offer fresh insights into these areas of growing concern to the art history of the future.

The Scandal of Nationality

One might lay the blame for Legros's neglect on the art-historical addiction to regional or national schools, traceable as far back as Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550). To art historians of the last generation, Legros's art might have seemed anomalous in either 'British Victorian' or 'French avant-garde' contexts – he appeared foreign or alien to both. Now, in a twenty-first-century world preoccupied with internationalism

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and global connectivity, national and regional boundaries are being questioned everywhere, and there are glimmers, at last, of new interest in Legros in art-historical contexts that emphasize international relations over national divisions. In a book of 2018, Melissa Berry re-describes the Société des Trois as a 'translocal artistic union'.[12] Legros also finds a role in the exhibition at Tate Britain and the Petit Palais, *Impressionists in London: French Artists in Exile 1870–1904* (2017–18), and in an accompanying catalogue essay by Anna Gruetzner Robins that casts him as 'migrant and cultural ambassador', terms that suggest his new-found relevance.[13] In this context, Legros figures among the French artists who emigrated to London for political or economic reasons around the time of the Franco-Prussian War (1870) and the Paris Commune (1871); indeed Legros, settled in London since 1863, proves crucial to the exhibition's narrative through the support that he gave to his exiled compatriots. This permits Legros's well-documented left politics to enter the discussion, and one is tempted to wonder why the Marxist-oriented social historians of the last generation paid him so little attention.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the London art critics responded to Legros's inclusion in this exhibition with incomprehension at best, and more often with expressions of distaste.[14] Despite the compelling evidence of Legros's historical importance to the Franco-British cultural exchange explored in the exhibition, reviewers found themselves unable to relate his work to standard reference points in the French modernist canon, nor could they find compensation in the new British contexts for the work of Legros and the other French émigrés who followed him. For Jonathan Jones of *The Guardian*, Legros and his close friend the sculptor Jules Dalou 'were welcomed into Victorian art because they shared its conservative outlook'; the word 'conservative' in this context (like its inevitable twin, 'academic', which duly appears in the same review) has no particular content, but serves merely as an ideological counter.[15] Here and in other reviews, traditional prejudices against British art came to the fore as critics missed the familiar delights of French impressionism apparently promised by the title *Impressionists in London*, no doubt chosen rather for its popular appeal than for its appropriateness to the exhibition's argument. It will take more than an openness to globalization and international exchange to dislodge the entrenched bias in favour of the French modernist 'isms'.

It may come as a surprise that the London art critics of the 1860s were more generous about nationality than their twenty-first-century equivalents. They invariably referred to the artist as 'M. Legros' (not 'Mr', as would have been normal for a living artist of British origin). A very few responded to his work with a tinge of unease at its Frenchness, or pretended not to understand the subjects of his more Roman Catholic religious pictures. The notoriously conservative critic of the *Art-Journal*, for example, insisted on mis-recognizing the ex-voto (or image erected in fulfilment of a vow), depicted in Legros's painting of that name (*plate* 5), as the commemoration of a recent murder on the very spot.[16] For the most part, however, the critics betrayed an almost exaggerated deference explicitly linked to the artist's French background and training.[17] *Ex Voto* was Legros's first Royal Academy exhibit in 1864, at a point when he was still quite a young and inexperienced artist, but William Michael Rossetti, writing in a highbrow new journal, the *Fine Arts Quarterly Review*, spoke of it with something like reverence:

> M. Legros's picture was not only one of the most important in the exhibition in largeness of treatment and in scale, but we have no hesitation in terming it the greatest work contributed [. . .]. In fact, we call it a great picture, and the man capable of producing it a great painter: and we cede to a Frenchman the honours of the British artistic year, 1864.[18]

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5 Alphonse Legros, *Ex Voto*, 1860–61. Oil on canvas, 174 × 197 cm. Dijon: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Photo: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon/Hugo Martens.

No doubt William was determined to help Legros establish himself in England, in concert with his brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who introduced Legros to his own patrons. There is no reason, however, to doubt the sincerity of William's puff. Moreover, Rossetti's approbation was shared by other critics who had less reason to be partisan, and frequently repeated in subsequent years.[19]

Ex Voto is also the painting by Legros that has attracted most attention from recent scholars. First exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1861, it was entirely French in origin, easily interpreted as an example of realism from the younger generation of Courbet's followers, and therefore well within the comfort zone of today's art historians, trained when the French nineteenth century was in art-historical ascendancy under the leadership of figures such as T. J. Clark, Griselda Pollock, and Fried himself. Fried gives the work a brilliant reading that makes it the cornerstone of the group that he christens the 'Generation of 1863', with reference to the notorious Salon des Refusés, the alternative exhibition organized that year to placate the large number of artists whose work had been rejected by the Salon jury.[20] In fact his group turns out to be none other than the Société des Trois as originally formed in Paris five years earlier – Whistler, Fantin, and Legros – plus Manet, the paradoxical anti-hero of the Salon

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des Refusés by virtue not only of his own exhibit, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), but also of his portrait by Legros in unusually stylish vein, shown in the Refusés (*plate* 6). Two ambitious subject paintings by Legros were accepted at the official Salon in 1863, an interesting indication that our artist's integrity could be recognized by the authorities as well as by his artistically progressive friends.[21] Yet the other *succès de scandale* at the Refusés, Whistler's *Dame Blanche* (*The White Girl*, 1861–62, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC), recalls Legros's *Ex Voto* in its realist presentation of a woman in a white dress. Legros may have been on the verge of official approval, but he was also – aged twenty-six – a leader among younger and more oppositional artists.

Fried is surely right to emphasize the tight network of relationships, circa 1863, among Manet, Fantin, Whistler, and Legros, and the significance of that network for the development of vanguard painting in Paris over the next years. What he does not, or cannot, acknowledge, however, is the transformative effect of contact with the London art world at that crucial moment. By the end of the year that gives Fried the name for his grouping – 1863 – Whistler and Legros had both relocated to London. Fantin could not be persuaded to emigrate, but he was increasingly making work for

6 Alphonse Legros, *Portrait de E. M. [Édouard Manet]*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 61.5 × 50 cm. Paris: Petit Palais (Musée des Beaux-arts de la Ville de Paris). Photo: RMN.

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the English market, and successful there, to the extent that there is, today, almost no provincial English gallery in which one cannot see a fine Fantin flower-piece.[22] In February 1864, Whistler suggested that Fantin include Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the group portrait, *Hommage à Delacroix* (a plan thwarted by Rossetti's reluctance to travel to Paris for a sitting).[23] Even Manet turned his attention to London, which he visited in 1868 with a view to establishing a reputation in England; three years earlier, he had submitted work (unsuccessfully) to the Royal Academy.[24] Like Legros, he enlisted support from Rossetti, whose *Lady Lilith* (1864–68, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington) might be regarded as another intertext with the white dress of *Ex Voto*. Fried simply ignores these English connections, and for him Legros effectively ceases to exist after 1863; his Legros is pure French. Thus, in Fried's book, *Ex Voto* is effectively Legros's final, as well as his first, masterpiece.

While it is no longer de rigueur to express open scorn for British artists, French modernism and 'Victorian' art remain largely segregated fields, and even today there remains a sense, in both academic and museum contexts, that the study of British modern art is somehow lower in status. In such an intellectual climate, Legros's decision effectively to 'become British' is simply uninterpretable. That must be one important reason for the 'obscurity' in which he still languishes.

There is a larger argument to be made about how the wider network of relationships, not only between Paris and London but also with other art centres, facilitated the extraordinary genesis of modern painting that the art historians of the last generation, with their addiction to national schools, located too narrowly in Paris. Such an account would call attention to a variety of artists and projects that have been difficult to integrate into conventional narratives of the development of modern art: James Tissot, for example, whose very name indicates loyalties to both England and France, and whose early work also responds to the Antwerp circle around Henri Leys; Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Dutch-born and Antwerp-trained, who settled in London only after the Franco-Prussian War impeded his plans to move to Paris; and Fernand Khnopff, the Belgian Anglophile. The list burgeons as exhibiting opportunities, artistic networks, public and private collecting all became ever more internationalized, through to 1914. On purely historicist grounds, art historians need a much more flexible model for how the multiple art centres of the nineteenth century interacted.

Within such a framework, Legros, far from being uninterpretable, would play a significant or even pioneering role. Rather than seeing him as a pure Frenchman who just happened to practise in London – migrant, exile, émigré – we might regard Gruetzner Robins's term, 'cultural ambassador', as more apposite. Shortly after settling in London, Legros resumed exhibiting at the Salon; he also contributed to the second impressionist group exhibition in 1876, probably at the instigation of Edgar Degas, who had visited him in London the previous summer.[25] He showed, by invitation, at the Grosvenor Gallery, stronghold of British aestheticism, from its first exhibition of 1877,[26] and with those who seceded from the Grosvenor to establish the New Gallery; installation shots of the first New Gallery exhibition, in 1888, show Legros's *Femmes en prière* (1888, Tate, London), occupying pride of place at the centre of one long wall in the prestigious west gallery.[27] By the turn of the twentieth century, he was showing prints, sculptures, and medals, as well as paintings, in the dealers' galleries that increasingly presented more innovative art. A caricature of about 1904 by William Orpen shows Legros with his friend Auguste Rodin at the head of a queue of artists associated with the New English Art Club (founded 1886) and the Slade School; the artists march along a windswept cliff, hats flying, perhaps to indicate the riskiness of their vanguard practices (National Portrait Gallery, London).[28] In his sixties, Legros was attracting a new following among younger artists and critics, with

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admiring notices, for example, from Walter Sickert, Roger Fry, and Léonce Bénédite.[29] When Legros's name dropped out of the art-historical record, after his death in 1911, a key was lost to the complexities of the international art world throughout the period from the 1860s through to the First World War.

The reciprocal difficulty is that Legros's own work cannot be adequately understood within any single national context. As suggested above, his *Communion* makes better sense when considered not merely as a nostalgic memory of something in the artist's French past, but in triangulation with both Manet's *Anges au tombeau du Christ* and Solomon's *Mystery of Faith*. At the same Royal Academy exhibition, that of 1867, Legros also showed a mythological subject, *Cupid and Psyche* (plate 7). Should we seek a context in France for this painting of a female nude in a landscape, comparable for example with Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, seen at the Salon des Refusés four years earlier? Or is it preferable to relate it to the emerging classical revival in British painting? In the latter case, Legros's nude vies for primacy with the work traditionally credited as reintroducing the large-scale female nude at the Royal Academy after a period in abeyance, Frederic Leighton's *Venus Disrobing for the Bath* (1867, private collection).[30]

As in the previous case, it may be more interesting to triangulate. At the Old Water-Colour Society exhibition of 1867, Edward Burne-Jones showed two compositions of a nude Psyche: one close in subject to Legros's, *Cupid Finding Psyche* as she sleeps (a

7 Alphonse Legros, *Cupid and Psyche*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 116.8 × 141.4 cm. London: Tate. Photo: Tate.

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version of *plate* 8); the other representing a later episode in the tale, *Cupid Delivering Psyche* from her deathly slumber after she has opened the forbidden casket in defiance of the gods.[31] There is a realist tangibility about Legros's painting of both flesh and foliage that contrasts with the more ethereal watercolours of Burne-Jones, and appeared French to London critics.[32] Legros's Cupid also resembles contemporary male figures by Solomon, although again solider in flesh and blood. There is, however, another French connection: just three years earlier, Courbet designed a composition of two female nudes, submitted to the Salon as *Étude de femmes* (and rejected, apparently for moral reasons) but understood in artistic circles to represent an imagined encounter between a jealous Venus and the sleeping Psyche.[33]

8 Edward Burne-Jones, *Cupid and Psyche*, *c.* 1870. Watercolour, gouache, and pastel on paper, mounted on linen, 70.2 × 48.3 cm. New Haven: Yale Center for British Art. Photo: YCBA.

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Legros's painting condenses these British and French points of reference into an experimental work, unusual in his oeuvre but closely related to an intriguing set of contemporary explorations of the legend of Cupid and Psyche in the artistic circle that would soon become associated with the terms 'aesthetic' and 'art for art's sake'. The interest began with William Morris's long poem on the story (from the *Metamorphoses* of the second-century Latin author Apuleius), the first tale written for the cycle that came to be called *The Earthly Paradise*, for which Burne-Jones designed hundreds of illustrations; the project for an illustrated edition proved too ambitious, but the designs produced countless spin-offs including the watercolours exhibited in 1867. The project caught the interest of George and Rosalind Howard, later Earl and Countess of Carlisle; they commissioned a narrative frieze on the Cupid and Psyche legend for their new house at Palace Green in Kensington, designed at this same moment by Philip Webb with interiors by the Morris firm.[34] The Howards also bought the painting by Legros, who – introduced by Burne-Jones – had become George Howard's painting teacher.[35] Somewhat later, Walter Pater included a translation of the Cupid and Psyche tale in his novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Why did the story of Cupid and Psyche capture the imaginations of these artists, writers, and patrons at just this date? Certainly, the eroticism of the tale, and the opportunities that it offers for representing the youthful nude body, must have been an element. Perhaps, too, the story of Psyche's defiance of authority struck a chord in these politically progressive circles – the tale is a rare example, from ancient mythology, of a mortal who defies a specific order from a god, and gets away with it.

In 1868 the Howards commissioned Legros to paint a portrait of Burne-Jones (Aberdeen Art Gallery); like the recent *Cupid and Psyche*, it features a startlingly green landscape, this time more overtly Giorgionesque, in keeping with the sitter's own interests. Moreover, the Howards owned Legros's *Scène de barricade* (1870, untraced), as well as *Le repas des pauvres* (1877, Tate, London) – interesting indications of the left politics that Legros shared with the Morris and Burne-Jones circle and with the Howards (particularly Rosalind, later known as 'the radical Countess').[36] *Scène de barricade* is also an indication of the sympathy with contemporaneous French politics in this circle, which reached a height in 1870 and over the next couple of years, with, for example, Swinburne's impassioned essay on Victor Hugo's *L'Année terrible*, in the *Fortnightly Review* for 1872,[37] and the exhibition for the relief of the French peasantry in the winter of 1870–71. Legros was prominent among the exhibitors, and may have played an organizational role; William Michael Rossetti records meeting him at the exhibition in February 1871.[38] In 1875 Rossetti praised Legros's portrait of 'the keen-brained and great-hearted Republican' Léon Gambetta (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), shown at the Society of French Artists in London.[39] Shared political convictions created powerful links between English and French artistic circles at this date, and Legros was at the centre of them. From 1870, Legros reverted to the French language for the titles of his Royal Academy exhibits. Perhaps this was a sign of solidarity with his compatriots in the difficult years of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune, but it was one evidently welcomed by Legros's English patrons, who were buying his work with steadily increasing enthusiasm.

The Howards' house at 1 Palace Green eventually contained quite a variety of works by Legros, and they were not alone: within a decade of his arrival in England, Legros was well represented in all the important collections of progressive art being formed in the Kensington and Holland Park areas, under the guidance of the artists Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Frederic Leighton, and George Frederic Watts as well as Burne-Jones and Morris – in short, the most glamorous new art collections in London. If a

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couple of art-lovers of the later 1870s or 1880s were to take a walk starting at the South Kensington Museum (the institution now called the Victoria and Albert Museum), and had appropriate social connections, they would be able to see dozens of paintings by Legros by the time they reached Leighton's studio-house in Holland Park – far more paintings by Legros, indeed, than can be traced today.

Proceeding up Prince's Gate, the art-lovers would pass the house of Frederick Leyland at number 49 where, in the staircase hall, they would find Legros's *Rehearsal* and *Le Maître de chapelle*, both now untraced.[40] At number 52, the house of the Liberal MP Eustace Smith and his wife Eustacia, they could see *La Bénédiction de la mer* (see *plate 12*) and *Chantres espagnols*. If they then proceeded north to Hyde Park, turned left, and headed for Kensington Palace they would come to the Howards' house at 1 Palace Green and also the residence of Ernst and Eliza Benzon at 10 Kensington Palace Gardens, where they could see a *Procession of Monks*. Turning west to Campden Hill they would find a Legros *Church Interior* at Airlie Lodge (home of Lord Airlie and his wife Blanche, Rosalind Howard's sister).[41] Across Holland Park at 8 Holland Villas Road was the house of Constantine Ionides, who also took Legros's advice on purchases of historic and contemporary art for his wider collection; thus the Ionides bequest at the Victoria and Albert Museum includes numerous works by French friends of Legros, from Degas and Courbet to the sculptors Dalou and Rodin.[42] Ionides owned dozens of paintings, sculptures, medals, and prints by Legros, including some of his most important works, such as the superb *Chaudronnier* (or *Tinker*) shown at the Royal Academy in 1874, the Paris Salon in 1875, and in 1877 at the opening exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery (*plate 9*). If the art-lovers then walked down to the Melbury Road area particularly favoured by artists for their studio-houses, they would find works by Legros in the possession of Watts and Leighton.[43] Even at a much humbler house in Earl's Terrace, just across Kensington High Street, where Pater lived from 1885 to 1893, the art-lovers might have seen two prints by Legros.[44] In this part of London, artists and the most adventurous collectors lived side by side; Legros himself lived at two successive addresses nearby.[45]

These data demonstrate how well represented Legros was in the most ambitious art collections that were being formed in London from the 1860s onward. This was closely linked to the fact that he was French. Moreover, his distinctly lower-middle-class origins did not prevent English artists, critics, and patrons from treating him with deference; that includes some people who are usually considered to be members of the social elite, for example Frederic Leighton. In a game of 'Name Your Favourites' dated 1871, when he was Principal of the art school in Bombay, Lockwood Kipling (brother-in-law of Burne-Jones and father of Rudyard Kipling) listed, under the category 'Your favourite painters', Legros and Michelangelo (in that order).[46] A few years later Pater, in a never-finished manuscript entitled 'The Aesthetic Life', wrote of the contemporary art scene as follows: 'Without pausing to estimate our modern art in detail it is enough to suggest the importance in the aesthetic fortune of our day of three such artists as Mr Whistler Mr Legros and Mr Burne-Jones.'[47] Pater effectively proposes a new 'Société des Trois' for the later decades of the century.

Legros literally 'became British' when he took British nationality in 1880; with a British wife and nine children it was scarcely likely that his French friends' entreaties to return would be successful. On the other hand was his notorious inability, or unwillingness, to speak English.[48] Of course we shall never know how far he really lacked verbal skills – he is also said to have had difficulty writing, in either language – however, there is plenty of testimony that he taught his students not by lecturing or explaining things in words, but rather by example. As his most devoted pupil and assistant, Charles Holroyd, remembered:

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> He painted before the students to teach them a simple and direct method, and would draw before them from life and from the antique. When we went round the schools he would take a student's drawing in hand and, calling the other students to him, complete the drawing in their presence.[49]

This is a reminder that the visual arts are in some sense a universal language, that they have the utopian potential, at least, to create communication between people who cannot understand each other's words. However, I should like to argue that it also relates closely to what might be called a theoretical tenet of English aestheticism as an artistic movement: its rejection of any content that can be paraphrased in words – or, put more positively, its love of the ineffable. As Swinburne said of a painting by Albert Moore: 'its meaning is beauty; and its reason for being is to be';[50] the apparently tautologous slogan 'art for art's sake' follows suit. I have argued elsewhere that this redundant phraseology is not just aesthetic mystification or highfalutin jargon.[51] Rather it represents a serious ambition to make art that cannot be reduced to rule or precept, but instead allows for that genuinely free play of the sensuous and the intellectual that can give the thrill of beauty.[52] Legros's *Chaudronnier* makes as good an example as any: no one would call this man beautiful, with his rough shoes and battered pots, and even the landscape is fairly unremarkable. Yet I am confident in calling the painting beautiful,

9 Alphonse Legros, *Un Chaudronnier* [*A Tinker*], 1874. Oil on canvas, 115 × 132.5 cm. London: Victoria and Albert Museum. Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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and beautiful enough to justify a scale – well over a metre each way – not normally conceivable for a picture of a rural labourer.

The Scandal of Religion

The opening paragraphs of this essay may have overemphasized the sinister interpretation of *The Communion*: that picture is not propaganda, and it may not be possible to draw from it a moral or political message about religious authority. In other words, it may be called beautiful in the same 'ineffable' way that *Le Chaudronnier* is beautiful. However, the social art history of recent decades has much preferred pictures of rural labourers to pictures of religious devotion, more especially when the latter lack a clearly critical message. Manet's two religious paintings may be admitted as ironic or perhaps even parodic[53]; Simeon Solomon's haunting representations of the rituals of several religions can be excused on the supposition of an ulterior motive, a homoerotic fascination with the handsome young priests.[54] Far more difficult for many to countenance, in today's secular academic world, is the scandalous possibility that Legros might have been serious about religion.[55] Even more difficult is any sense that an artist otherwise admired as avant-garde, or left-leaning in politics, could take religion seriously. Scholarly neglect of Legros's religious works may, then, betray a deep-seated unease, or what might be called a paranoid fear of the non-secular. Within very recent years, however, several influential scholars have begun to question the art-historical neglect of the religious. In a book of 2017, Thomas Crow calls attention to what he labels a 'disabling blind spot in today's art-historical inquiry', similar in many respects to what I am here calling 'the scandal of religion' – in his words, 'failing to take religion seriously'.[56] Legros's religious art makes a particularly compelling test-case for exploring this 'scandal' or 'blind spot'.

Once again, nineteenth-century critics could display a more generous spirit than their successors. Legros's work was particularly favoured by the two critics on either side of the Channel whose art criticism has passed from the realm of journalism to that of literature: Charles Baudelaire and Walter Pater, both of whom referred repeatedly to Legros and, intriguingly, took special interest in the religious aspect of his art.[57] That may not be a coincidence; Pater is likely to have taken note of the passages on Legros in Baudelaire, a writer he particularly admired, and whose criticism may have helped to draw his attention to the artist.

In his Salon of 1859, Baudelaire writes of the first religious painting Legros showed at a public exhibition, *L'Angélus* (*plate 10*), together with a painting by another artist of the younger realist generation, Amand Gautier, *Les Soeurs de charité* (*plate 11*):

> I don't know whether Messieurs Legros and Amand Gautier possess faith as the Church understands it, but assuredly they have, in composing, each of them, an excellent work of piety, sufficient faith for the object in view. They have proved that even in the nineteenth century the artist can produce a good religious painting, provided his imagination is suited to elevating itself that far.[58]

The comparison is revealing: while both paintings are sober in colour and generally realist in feeling, and both involve women's religious observance in modern life, Amand Gautier's nuns are relatively attractive, arranging themselves into elegant groups, and adorned with spotless white headdresses. Legros's painting is more uncompromising in its investigation of unlovely figures, some of them aged and gnarled, dispersed apparently at random around a fairly dingy church interior; and the clothes are more specific – including the green umbrella in the foreground, a detail

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10 Alphonse Legros, *L'Angélus* [*The Angelus*], 1859. Oil on canvas, 65.5 × 80.9 cm. Private collection. Photo: Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.

that Baudelaire specifically mentioned: 'all that little world, clothed in corduroy [. . .] and cotton, which the Angelus assembles in the evening under the church vaults of our great cities, with their clogs and their umbrellas'.[59]

Thirty years later Pater was still emphasizing the element of quotidian religious observance in references to Legros that crop up in diverse contexts. In worshipping figures by the Italian Renaissance painter Bergognone, Pater finds 'a lowly religious sincerity which may remind us of the contemporary work of M. Legros'.[60] The priestly characters in a novel of 1889 by Ferdinand Fabre remind Pater of 'those solemn ecclesiastical heads familiar in the paintings and etchings of M. Alphonse Legros'.[61]

For these nineteenth-century critics, then, Legros is particularly distinguished as a religious painter, and a modern religious painter at that – one who finds a convincing idiom for representing religious practices of the present day. Yet this contribution of Legros's has all but disappeared from the art-historical record. He is not mentioned in the otherwise interesting book of 1992 by Michael Paul Driskel, *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* – and not because Driskel is unaware of his existence, for his bibliography lists several texts on Legros. However, he is unable to find a place for Legros's work in his scheme for nineteenth-century French religious painting, which he represents in a structuralist diagram of the kind then in scholarly fashion.[62] In the upper left corner is a 'hieratic' religious art, associated pictorially

11 Amand Gautier, *Les Soeurs de charité* [*The Sisters of Charity*, now known as *La Promenade des soeurs*], 1859. Oil on canvas, 106 × 187 cm. Lille: Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille. Photo: RMN/Bernard Philip.

with frontality and stasis, and intellectually – or in Driskel's word 'rhetorically' – with religious authority and ultramontanism. This is opposed, in the bottom right corner, to a progressive approach, associated rhetorically with secularism and modernity, and pictorially with naturalism and movement. Driskel takes as his examples two works with the same religious subject, the *Pietà*, by Hippolyte Flandrin (in the 'hieratic' top left corner) and Eugène Delacroix (in the 'naturalistic' bottom right).

There is no place for Legros in this diagram.[63] Generally speaking, in Legros's religious pictures there is stasis rather than movement, but naturalism rather than the hieratic. Rather than either the strict frontality that is for Driskel a key marker of conservatism, or the three-quarter, twisting and turning views of a Delacroix, in Legros there is a near-obsessive preference for a profile view, and often (though not always) for figures in profile facing left.

Not only do Legros's paintings refuse to be secular, as we normally expect progressive art of the nineteenth century to be; they even resist interpretation as religious art. Their rhetorical and pictorial axes fail to work together in any predictable pattern. A good example, among many, might be *La Bénédiction de la mer*, first seen at the Royal Academy in 1873 (*plate 12*). This is a large painting, nearly two-and-a-half metres wide and considerably larger even than Legros's *chef d'oeuvre* of the previous decade, *Ex Voto*. On first glance it appears to be a kind of seaside version of Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* (1849–50, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), blonder and brighter in tone and mood, although the bare ribs of the wrecked ship in the middle distance show that more is at stake than a festive provincial ceremony. Continuing to look, the viewer begins to notice the absence of men in the foreground (except for one male figure nearly buried at the back of the group on the right). The blessing of the sea is a serious business, although it may be vulnerable to the charge of superstition, or even seem a kind of pagan survival: the priests in the far background are calling on the blessing of God, or the gods, to propitiate the waters, freshening beyond the rocks with just a hint in the whitecaps of the power that they hold. The kneeling and seated figures in the foreground stay well

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back from the ceremony and the water, and their menfolk must be either at sea or already lost to it.

Perhaps this can be read straightforwardly as a realist exploration of an old custom in a seaside community, and of the way that community deals with its hardships. One cannot help wondering whether the very naturalistic baby on the right has already lost its father. However, the anecdote is not emphasized, after the fashion of a Victorian narrative painting, nor is there any obvious explanation for the basket and the green umbrella, apart from their down-to-earth utility. Those accessories had been making their way from picture to picture since the umbrella of *L'Angélus*, joined by the basket and a baby in *The Baptism* (*c.* 1869, William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow), and again (though without the baby) in *Un pèlerinage* (1871, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). One begins to wonder whether the green umbrella is a witty reminder to initiates of Baudelaire's review of 1859, where it received a mention on its first appearance. Even if that is a coincidence, its recurrence must be an element in the delicate balance between tradition and modernity that is surely crucial to these pictures. The umbrella is not aggressively modern or out of keeping, but its presence, always in the foreground, prevents the viewer from thinking that these are timeless or generic scenes of rural devotion. The costumes, too, strike a balance between the transient and the timeless. The caps and headscarves are highly specific; the patterning, quilting, tucks and ribbons must be carefully observed, no doubt correct records of local custom. But they are also richly and broadly painted, and there is something haunting about the way they are seen from behind; they focalize the view towards the ritual and the sea more quietly, but also more intriguingly and intently, than a gesture or a facial expression could do.

12 Alphonse Legros, *La Bénédiction de la mer* [*The Blessing of the Sea*], 1872. Oil on canvas, 179.5 × 243.3 cm. Sheffield: Graves Art Gallery. Photo: Museums Sheffield/ Bridgeman Images.

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Despite first impressions, Legros has moved quite far away from Courbet's kind of realism. It is important that he has not done so by relaxing his honesty, or the relentlessness of his gaze. Still present are the ungainly feet and shoes, the plain faces, the heavy clothes that hide the body forms. The picture takes seriously the religious experience of these people. What is more, it asks the beholder to do so too – not by joining them or even communicating with them; the figures in profile view and in this case the *Rückenfiguren*, figures seen from the back, remain in their world, not that of the urban, middle-class viewer of Legros's time (or ours). The picture does not condescend, or criticize, or ironize their religious experience, any more than their poverty. Does that mean that Legros shares their faith? The answer is elusive, but it may in any case be none of our business.[64] All we need to know, as Baudelaire says, is that he has faith enough for the job that he has to do. That job is to persuade us to respect these people's piety, which he does after the fashion of his own trade, by making it beautiful – not pretty, but beautiful.[65] The groupings remain a little awkward, as though that is how these people stand, or kneel, and yet there is no sense of an impressionistic 'slice of life': everything is still, and the rhythmic motion of the priestly procession is distanced as if in a dream. The result seems not so far from Gauguin's *Vision after the Sermon* (1888, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh).

That scarcely solves the problem about how religion and art practice are to be aligned; if anything, it introduces yet another set of possibilities for the complex relations that Legros's religious paintings enjoin their viewers to contemplate. The discussion does, however, suggest that it might not be so easy to make a clean break between a backward-looking religious genre and a forward-looking artistic style.

The Scandal of Tradition

Legros's move from a realism comparable to that of Courbet, and therefore interpretable without much effort for any art historian reasonably well educated in the Western canon, to something that appears much more accommodating towards the traditions of the past is the final sticking-point, or art-historical blind spot, that I want to explore.[66] As the 1870s and 1880s wore on, 'M. Legros' became 'Professor Legros' in criticism. He was genuinely a professor after he was appointed to that post at the Slade School of Fine Arts (University College, London) in 1876, but critics used the title more than strictly necessary.[67] Moreover, they continued to use the title after he relinquished the post in 1892, and it accompanied a marked deference towards the way his teaching maintained the standards and practices of the Old Masters. A good example is Walter Sickert's review of Legros's solo exhibition of 1897 at E. J. Van Wissenlingh's Dutch Gallery, which concludes:

> Professor Legros's exhibition is well-timed […] He may call [the more thoughtful students] back, by his example, to the traditions of the masters. May he have some influence in sending them from Bond Street and the Haymarket back to the National Gallery and the British Museum.[68]

The uncompromising realist and political radical was also the stickler for excellence. If he was anti-academic, in the sense that he objected to the teaching of the academies in both France and Britain, that was because he wanted a more rigorous art education and one more solidly based on the masters. As William Rothenstein put it in his memoirs, Legros 'had little respect for most of the Academicians, not because they were academic, but for the reason that they represented neither tradition nor scholarship; on this account he never encouraged his students to exhibit' at the Royal Academy.[69]

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Legros had been interested in the art of the Old Masters from the start, when he impressed his teacher, Lecoq de Boisbaudran, with his copy from memory after Holbein's *Erasmus*. Lecoq taught at the École Royale et Spéciale de Dessin et de Mathématique, familiarly known as the 'Petite École' and dedicated to free training for designers, less glamorous but no less rigorous than the 'grande' École des Beaux-Arts.[70] Lecoq's teaching emphasized the development of the student's visual memory alike for training the eye, in study of the Old Masters, and in rapid drawing from nature; his influential book, *L'éducation de la mémoire pittoresque* (first published 1848), explained the system and in later editions included illustrations of Legros's memory drawings after both Holbein's *Erasmus* and a cast of the antique *Discobolos*, viewed from an angle, below and to the rear, fiendishly difficult to draw.[71] It was perhaps Lecoq's unconventional teaching that instilled in Legros a special interest in art education, manifested in various forms throughout his career from his private tutelage of George Howard to his official posts at the South Kensington School of Art (where he taught etching) and the Slade.

For art historians in the 'high modernist' period of the 1960s and 1970s, allusion to the art of the past, on the part of a nineteenth-century artist, could seem a mark of irredeemable conservatism, automatically detracting from that artist's claim to originality, and Manet's seemingly incorrigible urge to experiment with such allusion occasioned considerable scholarly unease.[72] If that view now seems quaint, it is still the case that a scholarly interest in artistic allusion – particularly when it is focused

13 Alphonse Legros, *Prêtres au lutrin* [*Priests at the Choir Desk*], *c.* 1870. Oil on canvas, 91.4 × 116.8 cm. London: Tate. Photo: Tate.

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14 Titian, *The Concert*, *c.* 1510–12. Oil on canvas, 86.5 × 123.5 cm. Florence: Galleria Palatina di Palazzo Pitti. Photo: Immagina/ Bridgeman Images.

on the Western European canon – can seem uncomfortably close to traditional connoisseurship, that most reviled of art-historical practices for recent generations. Yet Manet's fascination with the art of the Old Masters, so far from being some kind of eccentricity, was widely shared among vanguard artists of his generation. Moreover, shared interests in particular Old Masters, in this age of museum creation and collection, mark the most visible and traceable points of contact between French and British artistic circles at this period, and Legros was at the centre of such contacts from the moment that he moved to London in 1863. Most conspicuous, perhaps, and most often mentioned by critics were the artists' new-found interest in Spanish art – Zurbarán, Ribera, and above all Velázquez – as well as the more established but persistent interest in the Italian primitives.[73] Those interests were shared between Paris and London, between the new and exciting collections of the National Gallery and those of the Louvre. Legros gave major works of his own to museums: *La vocation de saint François* to Alençon in 1862; and *Ex Voto* to Dijon in 1868, after contemplating giving it to the National Gallery in London.[74] Perhaps that anticipates the famous desire of Cézanne to make 'something solid and durable like the art of the museums',[75] but it is a singular thing to do for an artist who was struggling with real poverty, and it must also relate to a commitment (shared with Burne-Jones and Morris) to make art accessible to the people.

Legros's allusions to the art of the Old Masters are surprisingly diverse, for an artist whose personal style is singularly consistent. Like Manet's, they often cause popular and elite traditions to meet or commingle, but where Manet's combinations can seem ironic or challenging, Legros's are deeply serious, and deeply internalized.

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The multitude of left-facing figures that recur, as though in solemn procession from painting to painting, recall donor figures on the right wings of Renaissance altarpieces, or the figures recording their vows on naive ex-votos; they too often face left, with the divine apparition in a cloud or mandorla in the top left corner.[76] Perhaps the depicted ex-voto, in the painting of 1860 that takes its name from it, represents a first experiment with the idea: the vision of the Crucifixion is centralized, but there is a conspicuous left-facing figure, presumably the donor in swaggering costume, to the right. In this *mise-en-abîme* not only does the composition as a whole imitate that of an ex-voto; the depicted ex-voto, in all its hard materiality, occupies the top left corner, like a realist counterpart to the religious vision in a traditional ex-voto image. Nor does this exhaust the range of allusiveness that helps to deepen the meanings of this apparently simple subject, a group of women kneeling before a wayside shrine. The resonances of artists such as Holbein and the Le Nains, representatives of Northern and democratic traditions of realism, are at work alongside the bravura white-on-white of the dress and caps, the roughly painted surface of the ex-voto image, and a surprisingly atmospheric, deep blue distant sky that perhaps recalls Corot or adumbrates Whistler's Nocturnes of a decade later. It is important to emphasize that Legros is not calling on authoritative or established precedents, after the fashion recommended in academic art theory. He is exploring masters and traditions whose art-historical status, and in some cases even their visual or stylistic character, was not yet determined.[77] He imitates them to find out something not yet known – what their art was like; in the process he also works to find out what his own art might become.

The allusions in *Ex Voto* are diverse in time, place, and cultural level, but they are not eclectic: all of them are precisely motivated to support or extend the visual and intellectual meanings of the painting. At this date, they also operate within a primarily French

15 Frederic Leighton, *Golden Hours*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 91.5 × 122 cm. Private collection. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

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frame of reference (the exception might be Holbein, but the Louvre *Erasmus* gave him a distinctively French presence). Previous scholarship on Legros has tended to emphasize the continuing Frenchness of his work – his Breton peasant figures, his landscapes (in prints as well as painting) seemingly memories of the French countryside.[78] After his relocation to London, his new environment seems to have impact not so much on his subjects and motifs as on his range of artistic allusion, which expands to encompass the more Italianate repertoire of his new friends, the artists of what would come to be called the 'aesthetic movement'. By 1877 it seemed appropriate to Pater to name Legros (as well as Rossetti) in his essay 'The School of Giorgione', his meditation on the artist who, beyond all others, exemplifies the nineteenth-century process of revaluation, whereby positivistic evidence called into question all traditional reputations among the Old Masters.[79] The art of the Venetian Renaissance was a shared preoccupation – one might even say obsession – among British and French artists of the 1860s and beyond.

Above I asked whether Legros's *Cupid and Psyche* should be seen in a French or British context. In either case there are Venetian intermediaries. Legros's reclining nude looks like a stockier version of Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (*c.* 1510, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden), and it was made shortly after both Manet's *Olympia* (1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and Rossetti's *Fazio's Mistress* (1863, Tate, London), paintings in open dialogue, respectively, with Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (*c.* 1534, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) and *Woman with a Mirror* (*c.* 1515, Musée du Louvre, Paris).[80] The most important artistic contacts between London and Paris at this date may operate ineffably, like Legros's demonstrations to his students, by way of visual cross-referencing.

I have argued elsewhere that Legros's *Prêtres au lutrin* (*plate 13*), seen at the Royal Academy in 1870, was the crucial point of reference for Pater's discussion of Venetian painting, and the aesthetic questions that it raised for him, in 'The School of Giorgione', where it resounds with the Venetian painting of a *Concert* on which Pater dwells as a Giorgione, but which is now often attributed to Titian (*plate 14*).[81] A third point of reference may be brought into the discussion: Frederic Leighton's *Golden Hours* (*plate 15*), on view at the same Royal Academy exhibition as Legros's first contribution there, *Ex Voto*, in 1864. It is not impossible that the memory of Leighton's painting was still in Legros's mind – trained, of course, to remember pictures – when he painted *Prêtres au lutrin* later in the decade. One likes to imagine the two artists discovering a shared love of the Venetian *Concert* and talking it over – in French, of course – although it would be even more intriguing if it were Legros's painting of 1870 that revealed a hitherto unsuspected correspondence between the Leighton and the Titian. However that may be, the paintings evince a conversation, across time, among the three artists. The conversation is an ineffable one, though, one that can never be reduced to words, and that centres instead on listening for the sound of a chord. Not only that: a chord that does not yet sound, for if we look closely at both the Leighton and the Legros we see that the poised fingers do not depress the keys.[82]

The way that Leighton can make paint glow gold is a tour de force, and the painting is sumptuous throughout; his young man and woman are pretty as well as beautiful. Perhaps Legros's 'revision' is even more powerful, however, for refraining from the merely pretty to choose the beautiful.

Coda

The preceding discussions have offered criticism of the ideological presuppositions that have rendered Alphonse Legros virtually invisible to art historians throughout the period when the study of the nineteenth century has played a prominent, if not paradigmatic, role in the discipline – that is, since the publication of such key texts as

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Linda Nochlin's *Realism* and T. J. Clark's *Image of the People* in the early 1970s, half a century ago. Given the obvious suitability of Legros's realist and politically committed practice to art-historical treatment along the lines familiar in that half-century, his example calls attention, with uncomfortable or even painful efficacy, to the three art-historical blind spots that I have called 'scandals'. Legros's left political sympathies, and his lifelong dedication to an artistic project centred on the representation of the working classes, ought to have made him the darling of art historians from the generation that rose to prominence in the later twentieth century. That this did not happen suggests just how powerful the ideologies of Francocentric modernism, of nineteenth-century secularism, and of the ascendancy of modernity over tradition have been, throughout this half-century in the history of art history.

Perhaps the overarching ideology, however, is the presupposition – call it a hope, or a myth – that a virtuous politics aligns, necessarily, with artistic excellence (or whatever it is that makes an artwork or artistic practice worth studying). Legros and his art confound any such presupposition. Was Legros conservative or progressive, academic or avant-garde? His example demonstrates as well as any other, or better, the incoherence of those presumed dichotomies, which (admittedly in more nuanced forms) have exercised such tyranny over art-historical practice in the past half-century. On historicist criteria, there can be no question but that Legros was politically progressive and committed to a politically progressive artistic project. Yet in relation to each of the three scandals, Legros veers uncomfortably towards the side of a dichotomy that feels conservative to art historians trained within the past fifty years: 'Victorian' rather than French, religious rather than secular, respectful of artistic tradition rather than oppositional or ironic towards it. There is an unsettling sense of contradiction between what is known about the historical Legros and how his work stacks up against familiar art-historical criteria.

Times have changed, however, and in ways propitious to the future study of Legros. In the world of the internet and of global migrations of unprecedented scale, today's scholars are much more likely to be interested in 'connectivity' among artistic centres than in national schools. Since 9/11, it seems simply absurd to ignore or suppress discussion of religious belief as a powerful force in any society or culture – and still more so to pretend that it is a thing of the past. To go further: the old view of modernity as having cast off religious superstition now seems not merely a 'blind spot' (to borrow Crow's term), but offensive and exclusionary.

In some ways the hardest of the ideologies to combat is the one that taints any form of engagement with the Western artistic tradition with imputations of elitism or 'connoisseurship'. Yet it is precisely the depth and seriousness of Legros's study of the art of the past that enables him to turn a minor ethnographic practice, or episode of working-class life, into something with the weight and complexity of the greatest art, in Cézanne's term the art of the museums. Thus Sickert, who as an artist has found his way more easily into the modernist canon, had this to say of Legros in 1897:

> He is rare, in the intensity and perfection of his achievement; rare in his serene absorption; rare, again, in two respects: that he has great and holy things to say to us, and that he says them in the stately language that is tradition.[83]

Legros, the man, may have been inarticulate in the language of his adopted country; he may even have been semi-illiterate. Nonetheless, he was a genuine humanitarian – the father of nine children, the patriot who welcomed French refugees into his house and studio, the teacher beloved by artists of the next, modernist generation whose fame (at least for a century) eclipsed his own. That character may be the key to his art,

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always, in Pater's phrase, 'informed by an indwelling solemnity of expression'.[84] His paintings of humble people are not mere propaganda for the working class. Whether he depicts the wizened hands and faces of elderly worshippers in *Ex Voto* or *L'Angélus*, the naked adolescent girl of *Cupid and Psyche*, or the orphaned baby in *La Bénédiction de la mer*, he asks the viewer to give them the kind of attention they would pay to the Venuses of Titian and Giorgione, or Holbein's *Erasmus*. Legros's is a different project from Manet's historical allusiveness, less witty or urbane, but surer in its conviction that the art of the past matters to the people of the present. Today, when the discipline of art history is so often accused of elitism or irrelevance, that may be the most important lesson we can learn from the art of Alphonse Legros.

Notes

Picture titles are those of first exhibition at the Salon or Royal Academy (preserving the original language). Names of authors of anonymous reviews, where known, are given in square brackets. I thank Sophie Aymes, Stephen Bann, and Bénédicte Coste for inviting me to give an early version of this research at the 'Colloque international Alphonse Legros' (Université de Bourgogne and Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon, 2017); Simon Goldhill for the opportunity to develop the material for a workshop in the project 'Religious Diversity and the Secular University' (Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge, 2018, with a thought-provoking response from Ayla Lepine); and Susannah Walker, Hugo Chapman, and Kim Sloan for inviting me to give the keynote lecture in the Alphonse Legros Study Day (British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, 2019). Thanks also to Rowan Bain, Anna Gruetzner Robins, Margaret MacNamidhe, Charles Martindale, Nicholas Shaddick, Richard Thomson, and Timothy Wilcox.

1 The main published source on the artist is still the exhibition catalogue by Timothy Wilcox, *Alphonse Legros 1837–1911*, Dijon, 1987 (referenced hereafter as 'Wilcox (Dijon), *Alphonse Legros*'). Two dissertations remain unpublished: Timothy John Wilcox, 'Alphonse Legros (1837–1911): Aspects of his Life and Work', MPhil dissertation, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1981; Alexander Seltzer, 'Alphonse Legros: The Development of an Archaic Visual Vocabulary in 19th Century Art', PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1980. Both draw on unpublished biographical material collected by the Dijon journalist and friend of the artist, Michel-Hilaire Clément-Janin, and his son Noël Clément-Janin, now held at the Bibliothèque de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art collections Jacques Doucet, Paris.

2 *The Communion*, signed and dated 1865, was first exhibited at Ernest Gambart's French Gallery, Pall Mall, in 1866, and again at the Royal Academy in 1867. At that exhibition Whistler also exhibited a work originally signed and dated in 1865 but he brushed in a numeral '7' over the '5' so that the picture appeared newly minted; both numerals are now clearly visible on the picture surface (*Symphony in White, No. III*, Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham). Characteristically, Legros refused to dissemble and left the date on his painting intact, which permitted critics and audiences to infer that it had remained unsold for two years.

3 Only one of Legros's nineteen Royal Academy exhibits from 1864–69 had a French title (*Le lutrin*, 1865; see note 21 below).

4 Repr. in Christina Rossetti, *Poems and Prose*, ed. Jan Marsh, London, 1994, 251–274. See Emma Mason, '"A Sort of Aesthetico-Catholic Revival": Christina Rossetti and the London Ritualist Scene', in *Outsiders Looking In: The Rossettis Then and Now*, ed. David Clifford and Laurence Roussillon, London, 2004, 119–120.

5 On French religious practices in the period see, for example, Michael Paul Driskel, *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France*, University Park, Pennsylvania, 1992, 19–58 and passim.

6 This is a houseling or communion cloth, used to prevent the host from falling to the ground if inadvertently dropped, and to catch any crumbs. I thank Ayla Lepine for pointing this out.

7 The catalogue record at the William Morris Gallery lists only two exhibitions after its first London appearances: *Art Loan Exhibition*, Brighton, 1884, and the monographic show held at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon in 1987–88 (Wilcox (Dijon), *Alphonse Legros*, cat. no. 34).

8 Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, Chicago and London, 1996, 186.

9 See Marie-Pierre Salé, 'Fantin, Legros, Whistler: la Société des Trois', in *Fantin-Latour, Manet, Baudelaire: L'Hommage à Delacroix*, ed. Christophe Leribault, Paris, 2011, 13–28. The Société postdates by a decade the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, well-known in France and possibly a conscious precursor.

10 Bridget Alsdorf, *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting*, Princeton and Oxford, 2013, 33–35, 39, 50, 128.

11 Allen Staley, *The New Painting of the 1860s: Between the Pre-Raphaelites and the Aesthetic Movement*, New Haven and London, 2011; Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting*, New Haven and London, 2008.

12 Melissa Berry, *The Société des Trois in the Nineteenth Century: The Translocal Artistic Union of Whistler, Fantin-Latour, and Legros*, New York and Oxford, 2018, 58 and notes 25–27 on pp. 70–71.

13 Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'Alphonse Legros: Migrant and Cultural Ambassador', in *Impressionists in London: French Artists in Exile 1870–1904*, ed. Caroline Corbeau-Parsons, London, 2017, 115–119.

14 Typical of many examples are the reviews posted by Jonathan Jones ('Impressionists in London Review – How Not to Tell the Origin Story of Modern Art'), *Guardian*, 30 October 2017 (accessed 17 April 2019), and Laura Cumming, *Observer*, 5 November 2017 (accessed 17 April 2019). It would be unfair to lay too much weight on press criticisms, never intended as scholarly interventions, and Jones's antipathy to Victorian art is notorious; see his more recent book, *Sensations: The Story of British Art from Hogarth to Banksy*, London, 2019. Nonetheless, the reviews of *Impressionists in London* demonstrate how entrenched the dominance of the French modernist canon remains.

15 Jones, 'Impressionists in London Review'.

16 'The Royal Academy', *Art-Journal*, 1 June 1864, 166. The critic is likely to have been Joseph Beavington Atkinson.

17 Notable examples from Legros's first year as a Royal Academy exhibitor include [F. T. Palgrave], 'The Royal Academy of 1864: First Notice', *Saturday Review*, 14 May 1864, 593; W. M. Rossetti, 'The Royal Academy Exhibition', *Fraser's Magazine*, 70: 415, July 1864, 58, 67; [F. G. Stephens], 'The Royal Academy', *Athenaeum*, 1907, 14 May 1864, 683; [Tom Taylor], 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy: Second Article', *The Times*, 5 May 1864, 8.

18 W. M. Rossetti, 'Art-Exhibitions in London', *Fine Arts Quarterly Review*, 3, October 1864, 30.

19 See Edward Morris, *French Art in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, New Haven and London, 2005, 262–264.

20 Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 185–261, on 'The Generation of 1863'. On the Salon des Refusés see, for example, Daniel Wildenstein, 'Le salon des

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refusés de 1863: Catalogue et documents', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 66: 1160, 1965, 125–152; Ian Dunlop, *The Shock of the New: Seven Historic Exhibitions of Modern Art*, London, 1972, 11–53.

21 *Le lutrin* (reworked and re-exhibited Royal Academy, 1865, and Salon, 1868; now Petit Palais, Paris) and *Discussion scientifique* (untraced).

22 On Fantin's flower paintings see most recently Laurent Salomé, 'La vie avec les fleurs', in *Fantin-Latour: À fleur de peau*, ed. Laure Dalon, Paris, 2016, 40–47 (45 on 'le goût anglais').

23 See *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler, 1855–1903*, ed. Margaret F. MacDonald, Patricia de Montfort and Nigel Thorp, on-line edition, University of Glasgow, http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence, Whistler to Henri Fantin Latour, 4 January–3 February 1864, PWC 1/33/15; GUW 08036 (2019-04-18); Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, 19 February [1864], PWC 1/33/16; GUW 11478 (2019-04-18). Cf. Christophe Leribault, '"Le Romantisme, c'est le véritable art moderne." La fabrique de l'*Hommage*', in *Fantin-Latour, Manet, Baudelaire: L'Hommage à Delacroix*, ed. Christophe Leribault, Paris, 2011, 64. See also Rossetti's letter to Fantin-Latour, 7 September 1864, in *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, vol. 3, ed. William E. Fredeman, Cambridge, 2003, 190 (letter 64.126.2).

24 Robin Spencer, 'Manet, Rossetti, London and Derby Day', *Burlington Magazine*, 133: 1057, April 1991, 228–236. Spencer documents these events with extracts from letters among Manet, Fantin, and Edwin Edwards (their London associate, also close to Legros), 234–236. One of these letters records thanks to David Wilkie Wynfield, the painter and photographer whose photographic portrait of Manet can accordingly be dated to this visit; for this and Wynfield's related photographic portrait of Legros see Juliet Hacking, *Princes of Victorian Bohemia: Photographs by David Wilkie Wynfield*, Munich, 2000, 25–26, 80, and plates 37, 39. Legros was also photographed in Rossetti's garden by Lewis Carroll on 6 October 1863 (National Portrait Gallery, NPG P1273(20a)). Throughout his life, Legros was a favourite portrait subject for painters, sculptors, photographers, and printmakers; notable examples by Félix Bracquemond, Jules Dalou, Charles Holroyd, Frédéric Regamey, Auguste Rodin, William Rothenstein, Charles Haslewood Shannon, William Strang, George Frederic Watts, and others are documented on the National Portrait Gallery website.

25 Gruetzner Robins, 'Alphonse Legros', 118–119.

26 In the first exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery (1877), Legros showed nine works including a portrait of Thomas Carlyle (Scottish National Portrait Gallery, PG 940). Perhaps this was intended as a 'realist' rejoinder to Whistler's portrait of Carlyle as an *Arrangement in Grey and Black* (1872–73, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow). If so, Whistler rose to the bait: he added his (earlier) portrait of Carlyle to the Grosvenor exhibition after initial installation, so that it appeared, ex-catalogue, in the entrance hall (separately from Whistler's seven catalogued exhibits in the West Gallery, where Legros's works were also hung); see Oscar Wilde, 'The Grosvenor Gallery', *Dublin University Magazine*, 90, July 1877, 124–125. The complicated relations between Whistler and Legros are beyond the scope of the present essay but they are of more than biographical significance. The episode involving the Carlyle portraits adds a new chapter to the story of rivalry between the two artists; it may have exacerbated the controversy that erupted around the Grosvenor exhibition of 1877 and led to the notorious lawsuit between Whistler and Ruskin; it may even help to account for the willingness to testify against Whistler of Burne-Jones, a friend of Legros's since the 1860s.

27 AAB (photographer), 'Interior of the west picture gallery in the New Gallery', 1888, Bedford Lemere and Company, English Heritage National Monuments Record, ref. BL08777. I am grateful to Debbie Innes for calling this photograph to my attention.

28 William Orpen, *Group associated with the New English Art Club*, c. 1904, pencil, black chalk (or charcoal), pen, ink, and watercolour, 22.5 × 41.5 cm, NPG 6345.

29 See, for example, Walter Sickert, *The Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Anna Gruetzner Robins, Oxford, 2000, 155–157; Léonce Bénédite, 'Alphonse Legros', *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne*, 7: 38, May 1900, 335–358; Léonce Bénédite, 'Alphonse Legros, Painter and Sculptor', *Studio*, 29: 123, June 1903, 3–22. Roger Fry's anonymously published notices in the *Athenaeum* (1901–05), often waspish, include extravagant praise for Legros's works in all media and a variety of venues; for references see Donald A. Laing, *Roger Fry: An Annotated Bibliography of the Published Writings*, New York and London, 1979, nos C36, C37, C102, C104, C209, C215, C279, C428, C440. For a quotation from Fry on Legros see note 82 below.

30 Alison Smith, *Exposed: The Victorian Nude*, London, 2001, 88.

31 Burne-Jones made multiple versions of these two compositions, which makes it difficult to identify exactly which were exhibited in 1867; for descriptions see [F. G. Stephens], 'Society of Painters in Water Colours', *Athenaeum*, 2062, 4 May 1867, 595. The watercolour illustrated here (as plate 8) is not securely dated but the composition is that of *Cupid Finding Psyche*. For further information on Burne-Jones's explorations of the Cupid and Psyche legend see Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer*, New York, 1998, 119–128.

32 For example, 'The Royal Academy', *Art-Journal*, 1 June 1867, 138–139 (probably by Joseph Beavington Atkinson: 'in its style … an anomaly in an English gallery'); [F. G. Stephens], 'Royal Academy', *Athenaeum*, 2064, 18 May 1867, 667; [Tom Taylor], 'The Exhibition of the Royal Academy: Third Notice', *The Times*, 14 May 1867, 6.

33 Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, 'Gustave Courbet's *Venus and Psyche*: Uneasy Nudity in Second-Empire France', *Art Journal*, 51: 1, Spring 1992, 38–44. The painting is untraced; an oil sketch of the figure of Venus is in Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1949P1). One wonders whether the subject would have fared better with the Salon jury if Courbet had retained the classical reference, although in that case the objection might have been that there is no such scene in the classical source for the tale, Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (or *Golden Ass*, second century AD). In any case the episode demonstrates that the British 'Victorians' did not have a monopoly on prudishness in this period.

34 See 'The Cupid and Psyche Frieze by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, at No. 1 Palace Green', *Studio*, 15: 67, October 1898, 3–13; Bill Waters, 'Painter and Patron: The Palace Green Murals', *Apollo*, 102: 165, November 1975, 338–341; Katharina Wippermann, 'The Cupid and Psyche Series for 1 Palace Green', in *Edward Burne-Jones: The Earthly Paradise*, ed. Christofer Conrad and Annabel Zettel, Ostfildern, 2009, 85–95.

35 Wilcox (Dijon), *Alphonse Legros*, 73, 78–80; Wilcox, 'Alphonse Legros', 43–46; Seltzer, 'Alphonse Legros', 179–181. See also Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society*, New Haven and London, 1999, 84–85, 92–93. For George Howard's drawings of Cupid and Psyche subjects from the later 1860s see Julian Hartnoll, *Victorian Art: Sacred & Secular*, London, 1979, nos 9–12 (thanks to Dennis Lanigan for drawing this catalogue to my attention); one of these is now in York Art Gallery as *Venus and Cupid* (YORAG 2006.17).

36 Sidney Colvin, 'Pictures at Palace Green', *Magazine of Art*, 7, 1884, 83–88. A drawing, also from the Howard collection, for a figure in *Scène de barricade* is in Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle; see Wilcox (Dijon), *Alphonse Legros*, 87–88. Letters of 1912 between Rosalind, Lady Carlisle and Charles Holroyd, then Director of the National Gallery, discuss the gift of *Le repas des pauvres* to the national collection and their mutual admiration for Legros's work (Castle Howard Archive; I am grateful to Jeanne Nuechterlein for drawing these to my attention).

37 On the distinctive conjunction of politics and aesthetics in Swinburne's essay see Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 65–69.

38 *The Diary of W. M. Rossetti 1870–1873*, ed. Odette Bornand, Oxford, 1877, 48 (entry for 25 February 1871). Interestingly the exhibition also included works by some of the Old Masters who were most important for Legros and other contemporary artists, including Velázquez (lent by the Duke of Wellington) and William Etty's copy of the Louvre *Concert champêtre* (attributed to Titian or Giorgione), lent by Lady Eastlake. See 'Exhibition for the Relief of the French Peasantry', *The Times*, 22 December 1870, 4.

39 Gruetzner Robins, 'Alphonse Legros', 117.

40 Theodore Child, 'A Pre-Raphaelite Mansion', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 82: 487, December 1890, 81–99. For a photograph showing a painting by Legros on the staircase, see Linda Merrill, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography*, Washington, DC, 1998, 178 (fig. 4.29).

41 Dakers, *Holland Park Circle*, 129 (Smith), 133–135 (Benzon), 85–86 (Airlie).

42 Cosmo Monkhouse, 'The Constantine Ionides Collection', *Magazine of Art*, 7, 1884, 36–44 ('From David to Millet'), 120–127 ('The Realists'); Legros's pictures are noticed on 120, 123–125. See also Julia Ionides, 'The Greek Connection – The Ionides Family and their Connections with Pre-Raphaelite and Victorian Art Circles', in *Pre-Raphaelite Art in Its European Context*, ed. Susan P. Casteras and Alicia Craig Faxon, Madison,

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NJ, 1995, 170–172. On Legros and Rodin see Tomoko Ando, 'Rodin's Reputation in Great Britain: The Neglected Role of Alphonse Legros', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, 15: 3, Autumn 2016, http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn16/ando-on-rodin-reputation-in-great-britain-neglected-role-of-alphonse-legros (accessed 22 April 2019).

43 Leighton House Museum, *Closer to Home: The Restoration of Leighton House and Catalogue of the Reopening Displays*, London, 2010, 42–43, 76.

44 Lene Østermark-Johansen, *Walter Pater and the Language of Sculpture*, Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT, 2011, 166 ('might have' because it is unknown when Pater acquired the prints).

45 His address is given in Royal Academy catalogues as 1 Victoria Grove Villas (1865–69), then 41 Addison Gardens (1870–74), then at University College in Gower Street (his work address).

46 Julius Bryant, 'The Careers and Character of "J.L.K."', in *John Lockwood Kipling: Arts & Crafts in the Punjab and London*, ed. Julius Bryant and Susan Weber, New Haven and London, 2017, 52. I am grateful to Tim Barringer for calling this to my attention.

47 Walter Pater, 'The Aesthetic Life', Houghton Library bMS Eng 1150 (7), 24–25; the date of the MS has been disputed but internal evidence strongly suggests *c.* 1875 or slightly later.

48 See, for example, Thomas Okey, 'Alphonse Legros: Some Personal Reminiscences: II', *Burlington Magazine*, 20: 107, February 1912, 275.

49 Charles Holroyd, 'Alphonse Legros: Some Personal Reminiscences: I', *Burlington Magazine*, 20: 107, February 1912, 274.

50 Algernon C. Swinburne, *Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1868: Part II*, London, 1868, 32 (in Swinburne's section of a pamphlet published jointly with William Michael Rossetti).

51 Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 1–9.

52 This way of understanding the aesthetic is indebted to Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters* (1795), and the writings of Walter Pater. See Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art 1750–2000*, Oxford, 2005, 40–47, 124–155 and passim. Because the free play can only be experienced by the subject, and is not a property of the object under contemplation, I switch to the first person when I call *Le Chaudronnier* beautiful.

53 *Les Anges au tombeau du Christ* (plate 4) and *Jésus insulté par les soldats* (1865, Art Institute of Chicago).

54 Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 71–99.

55 Michael Fried, the only major critic to deal with Legros at any length, treats *Ex Voto* as though it were a picture of the rural poor, and largely ignores the religious context. This leads him, oddly, to endorse the critic Edmond Duranty's account of the figures as uniformly old and poor; they clearly represent a variety of ages, and while none of them are fashionable Parisiennes they are also varied in prosperity, as indicated in their dress. Similarly, Fried's bravura account of the ex-voto itself, divided in structure between an illusionistic top scene and a flat lower section, fails to acknowledge the relationship between its religious imagery and the scene as a whole (discussed in the third section of the present essay). See Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 186–188, 192–197. Fried reprints and translates Duranty's article, 'Ceux qui seront les peintres' (1867), an important source for Legros's reputation at this date (*Manet's Modernism*, 438–444).

56 Thomas Crow, *No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art*, Sydney, 2017, inside front cover; see also Crow's fuller discussion of the 'blind spot obscuring full apprehension of past art in the West', 5–14. Other recent books which have proposed new approaches to theology, religion, or spirituality in relation to art history include T. J. Clark, *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come*, London, 2018; James D. Herbert, *Our Distance from God: Studies of the Divine and the Mundane in Western Art and Music*, Berkeley, 2008; Charles Palermo, *Modernism and Authority: Picasso and His Milieu around 1900*, Oakland, 2015. It is notable that these authors are well known for their work on French modernism of the nineteenth or early twentieth century, although a feature of the new intellectual directions they explore (with the exception of Palermo, whose project centres on a particular historical moment) is a willingness to range more widely in historical frame of reference than the social history of art, with its commitment to precise historicism, permitted. These books do not, however, deal with nineteenth-century art; perhaps the religious element is still more difficult to acknowledge in this stronghold of the social history of art. See also Ayla Lepine's review article 'Heaven, Earth, and Art History's Theological Turn', *Art History*, 43: 4, September 2020, 862–869.

57 Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités Esthétiques, L'Art romantique et autres Oeuvres critiques*, Paris, 1962, 331–335 ('Salon de 1859'), 401–402 ('L'Exposition de la galerie Martinet en 1861'), 405–406 ('L'Eau-forte est à la mode', 1862), 410–413 ('Peintres et aqua-fortistes', 1862). For Pater's references to Legros see notes 47, 60, 61, and 79 in the present essay. The two critics' shared interest in Legros is noted briefly in David Carrier, 'Baudelaire, Pater, and the Origins of Modernism', *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 14: 1, 1994, 40.

58 'J'ignore si MM. Legros et Amand Gautier possèdent la foi comme l'entend l'Église, mais très certainement ils ont eu, en composant chacun un excellent ouvrage de piété, la foi suffisante pour l'objet en vue. Ils ont prouvé que, même au XIXe siècle, l'artiste peut produire un bon tableau de religion, pourvu que son imagination soit apte à s'élever jusque-là' (Baudelaire, *Curiosités Esthétiques*, 331).

59 'tout ce petit monde vêtu de velours, de coton, d'indienne et de cotonnade que l'*Angelus* rassemble le soir sous la voûte de l'église de nos grandes villes, avec ses sabots et ses parapluies' (Baudelaire, *Curiosités Esthétiques*, 332).

60 Walter Pater, 'Art Notes in North Italy', first published in *New Review*, November 1890, repr. in *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays*, London, 1910, 96. Pater is aptly citing two works in the National Gallery, now demoted to the 'Milanese School'; National Gallery, nos 779 and 780; I am grateful to Susanna Avery-Quash for identifying these works.

61 Review of Ferdinand Fabre's *Norine*, first published anonymously in *The Guardian*, 12 June 1889, repr. in Walter Pater, *Essays from 'The Guardian'*, London, 1910, 134.

62 Driskel, *Representing Belief*, 12 (Diagram 1).

63 A second diagram shows a later phase towards the end of the nineteenth century, when progressive painting took over the hieratic mode, and features Paul Gauguin and Aimé Morot; again, Legros's work does not fit this diagram. See Driskel, *Representing Belief*, 14 (Diagram 2).

64 For a parallel argument see Stephen Cheeke, 'What Did Rossetti Believe?', in *Transfiguration: The Religion of Art in Nineteenth-Century Literature Before Aestheticism*, Oxford, 2016, 161–185.

65 For the distinction between 'pretty' and 'beautiful' I draw on Kant's terms, *angenehm* and *schön*, often translated 'agreeable' and 'beautiful'. See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith, Oxford, 1952, §§3, 5, 7 and passim.

66 Alexander Seltzer's PhD thesis concentrates interestingly on Legros's use of 'archaic modes of representation', but sees this as leading eventually to the 'reactionary' (Seltzer, 'Alphonse Legros', 2). See also Alex Seltzer, 'Alphonse Legros: Waiting for the Ax to Fall', *Arts Magazine*, 62: 5, January 1988, 40–45.

67 Charles Aitken, 'The Slade School of Fine Arts', *Apollo*, 3, January 1926, 1–11. Legros was supported for the Professorship by a formidable list of the great and good: Leighton (shortly to become President of the Royal Academy), Frederick Burton (Director of the National Gallery), E. J. Poynter (first Slade Professor at University College London, later President of the Royal Academy and Director of the National Gallery), and G. F. Watts. His students included Henry Scott Tuke, Thomas Cooper Gotch, Charles Wellington Furst, William Strang, Charles Holroyd (later Director of the National Gallery), and several woman artists well known in their own generation although subsequently forgotten. See Charles Holroyd's entry on Legros, *Dictionary of National Biography*, Supplement 1912 (Wikisource contributors, 'Legros, Alphonse (DNB12)', Wikisource, https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Special:CiteThisPage&page=Legros%2C_Alphonse_%28DNB12%29&id=4546453, accessed 22 April 2019).

68 Sickert, *Complete Writings*, 157 (reprinted from *The Speaker*, 10 April 1897).

69 William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein 1872–1900*, London, 1931, 26. As Frederick Wedmore put it, 'I am tired of calling Legros what I have called him so often, "a belated Old Master." But is there anything else that one can call him as truly?' (*Memories*, London, 1912, 190).

70 See Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, 'Lecoq de Boisbaudran and Memory Drawing: A Teaching Course between Idealism and Naturalism', in *The European Realist Tradition*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg, Bloomington, 1982, 242–289. For an interesting recent discussion of teaching at the Petite École, see Jo Briggs, 'Condemned to Sparkle: The Reception, Presentation, and Production of Léon Bonvin's Floral Still Lifes', *Oxford Art Journal*, 38: 2, 2015, 255–258.

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71 Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, *L'Éducation de la mémoire pittoresque et la formation de l'artiste*, Paris, 1913, plates IV, IX.
72 See Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 3–5, 23–184. For a wider discussion see David Carrier, 'Manet and his Interpreters', *Art History*, 8: 3, September 1985, 320–335.
73 See Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters: The Art of Imitation from the Pre-Raphaelites to the First World War*, New Haven and London, 2017, 178–209 (on Spanish art), 98–177 (on the early Renaissance).
74 William Michael Rossetti, *Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870*, London, 1903, 318 (from William Michael Rossetti's diary, 12 July 1868).
75 'quelque chose de solide et de durable comme l'art des Musées', quoted by Maurice Denis, 'Cézanne' (first published *L'Occident*, 70, September 1907), repr. in Maurice Denis, *Le Ciel et l'Arcadie*, Paris, 1993, 136.
76 The left-facing figure, which can perhaps be traced back to Legros's first significant encounter with Holbein's *Erasmus*, and is also found in Whistler's key work of 1871, *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), deserves further analysis.
77 For context see Stanley Meltzoff, 'The Revival of the Le Nains', *Art Bulletin*, 24: 3, September 1942, 259–286.
78 See, for example, the interesting essay by Monique Geiger, 'Alphonse Legros et la France', in Wilcox (Dijon), *Alphonse Legros*, 12–24.
79 Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione' (1877), in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald L. Hill, Berkeley, 1980, 106, 114.
80 Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 211–218.
81 Prettejohn, *Modern Painters*, 224–228.
82 This or a similar painting of clerical figures, exhibited briefly at the Carfax Gallery in 1903, drew a particularly perceptive response from Roger Fry, writing anonymously in the first years of his critical career: 'Now Mr. Legros's work is based primarily on linear design. This is brought out with the utmost care; then, with a view to a richly decorative effect, every detail of the pattern of an embroidered vestment and a brocade hanging is clearly defined, so that throughout the picture every edge is as definite and precise as a fine pen line, and yet, merely because the paint is put on with a truly scientific understanding of its properties, the illusion of a possible reality is maintained: the eye passes through the canvas to the imaged objects behind. Among modern paintings we know of very few which have attained so completely as this to the full possibilities of expressive imagery which painting allows. The picture is, moreover, in spite of its detailed rendering of form, large and massive in its total effect, and soberly sumptuous in colour. The drawing of the hand alone would proclaim it a masterpiece' ('Mr. Sargent at the Carfax Gallery', *Athenaeum*, 3943, 23 May 1903, 665).
83 Sickert, *Complete Writings*, 155.
84 Pater, 'School of Giorgione', 106. The contemporary criticism of Legros's work, neglected in recent scholarship along with his art, deploys a remarkably consistent vocabulary with emphasis on words such as 'solemn', 'serious', 'severe', 'gravity', and 'simplicity'; these texts would repay further study. In addition to the articles cited in previous notes, notable examples include [W. E. Henley, published anonymously], 'Contemporary Portraits: New Series – No. 26: M. Alphonse Legros', *University Magazine* (Dublin), 5: 26, February 1880, 198–206; W. E. Henley, 'Alphonse Legros', *Art Journal*, 1 October 1881, 294–296; Cosmo Monkhouse, 'Professor Legros', *Magazine of Art*, 5, 1882, 327–334; Charles Ricketts, 'Legros', *Saturday Review*, 83: 2164, 17 April 1897, 406–407.

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The Scandal of M. Alphonse Legros

Elizabeth Prettejohn

This essay asks why the art of Alphonse Legros (1837–1911) remained inconspicuous in the art history of the past generation, when the study of the nineteenth century played such a prominent role in the discipline. Legros's realist and politically committed practice is eminently suited to the art-historical methods that dominated that period. He was an associate of Courbet and Whistler, and his work attracted comment from Charles Baudelaire, Walter Pater, and Roger Fry. Why, then, has he remained virtually invisible to art historians? The essay explores three 'scandals', or art-historical blind spots, which have made Legros's art difficult to interpret: his decision to abandon Parisian modernism and 'become British'; his choice of subject matter involving religious observance; and his lifelong commitment to the art of the past. It argues that Legros's example offers fresh insights into these three areas of growing concern to the art history of the future.

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