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THE PASSAGE OF BUDDHA IN THE WORK OF ODILON REDON

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THE PASSAGE OF BUDDHA IN THE WORKS OF ODILON REDON

By

Yunn-Ling Peng

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

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ABSTRACT

THE PASSAGE OF BUDDHA IN THE WORK OF ODILON REDON

By

Yunn-Ling Peng

Although the complex variety of Redon's subjects has been characterized as syntheticism of religious subjects, there exists no adequate study of how the imagery of Buddha and Buddhist concepts were expressed in his art and writings. This thesis argues that the tenets of Buddhism provide a valuable framework for his stylistic transition from his dedication to black and white images to color.

The Introduction summarizes the role of the Buddha imagery in the creation of Redon's mysticism. Chapter one traces the introduction and the development of Buddhist studies and activities in the late 19th-century France ranging from the scholarly to the popular. Chapter two studies Redon's early lithographs of Buddha images in his "noir" style as they related to the pantheism presented in Gustave Flaubert's Temptation of Saint Anthony. Chapter three links the change in Redon's interest in color to his contacts with the young generation of artists known as the Nabis and Theosophical idea through the study of his later images of Buddha. The conclusion notes that the personal path of Redon's art parallels that which the artist understood the Buddha to have taken.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Ru and John, whose extraordinary amount of support and encouragement have made all of my educational endeavors possible.

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Introduction

The art of Odilon Redon is considered mysterious, enigmatic, visionary and suggestive, which expresses his spiritual meditation through personal symbols. Stephane Mallarme praised Redon as "a seeker of a mystery."¹ Maurice Denis claimed that "c'est la pensee de Redon...qui determina dans un sens spiritualiste l'evolution d'art en 1890."² For Maurice Denis, what Redon brought to the artists of 1890—particularly the Nabis—was "an element of the mystic or esoteric."³ In his own words, Redon explained his notions of mysticism on art: "The sense of mystery lies in always being in the equivocal, in double and triple aspects, in the surmised aspects (images within images), forms which will come into being, or which will exist in accordance with the state of mind of the spectator."⁴ According to Redon, the subject matter of a picture was to be suggested rather than understood. Forms were not intended as concrete signs of ideas or emotions, but rather as ambiguous evocations of them. All forms or images were thus to be intriguingly transformed into private symbols of an artist who sought to evoke an inner spiritual depth. Flowers, severed heads, disembodied eyes as well as mythological and religious figures were among the objects that Redon transformed into private symbols and repeated throughout his career.

¹Sven Loevgren, The Genesis of Modernism, (Bloomington/ London: Indiana University, 1971) p.33

²Roger James Mesley, "The Theme of Mystic Quest in the Art of Odilon Redon," (Univ. of Toronto, 1983) p. 1

³Richard Hobbs, "Odilon Redon," (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977) p. 84

⁴Robert Goldwater, "Symbolism," (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) p. 115

Among the complex variety of Redon's subjects, I have chosen to focus on his images of Buddha which he explored intensively during the 1890s and 1900s. In fact, Redon was among the earliest artists to introduce Buddhist subjects to Western audiences in the late 19th century. However Redon avoided traditional iconography of Buddha. Instead, his portrayal of Buddha as a human being was invested with personal metaphors and introspection. Redon was clearly intrigued by the subjective implications of Buddha so much so that he explored it in different media, from black-and-white lithographs, such as the grotesque type of Buddha (1896) for the third lithographic series of Temptation of Saint Anthony, to colorfully calm and delightful pastels, of which Buddha Wandering Among Flowers (1905) is an example. Alfred Percy Sinnette has defined Buddhism as "a religion of mysticism"⁵ which indicates why many aspects of Buddhist ideologies may correspond to Redon's esoteric aesthetics in one way or another. It is my intention to focus on Redon's images of Buddha and explore the concepts beneath them and place them in his aesthetics of mysticism.

Those who know Redon's art may have all been struck by the fact that during the 1890s his style underwent a dramatic transition, in terms of media and subject matter. Not only did his stylistic expression change from the grotesque, sinister, black-and white lithographic works of his early 'noir' style to the colorful, joyous, and meditative works in pastel or oil of his late works, he also evidently increased his interest in religious subjects. The religious works which he produced after 1890 include at least 12 images of Buddha, as well as a number of western religious or mythological figures, such as Christ, Orpheus, Apollo and Saint Sebastian, most of them in the form of pastels and oil paintings, and occasionally of black and white lithographs of the "noirs" style.

⁵Nancy Wilson Ross, *Hinduism, Buddhism, Zen: An introduction to their Meaning and their Arts*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1966) p.37

These representations of religious figures are regarded by most art historians as demonstrating that Redon was very much a symbolist in favor of religious syncretism. The young Nabi painter, Paul Ranson, for instance, juxtaposed image of Buddha with Christ under the title of Christ and Buddha (1890-1892). The Dutch Symbolist painter Jan Toorop also included a Buddha-like idol in the background of The Sphinx with other religious symbols. There is no doubt that each Symbolist focused his own idea of syncretism deriving it from various sources. In the case of Odilon Redon, scholars such as Michael Wilson, have attempted to relate Redon's religious syncretism to Theosophy, with special emphasis on the impact of Edouard Schure's Great Initiates (1889). While some scholars, like Ariane Durand, limit their attention to the influence of Redon's mentor, Armand Clavaud, who introduced him to a variety of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic literature, as well as other literary and philosophical sources from the West between the years 1860-1880. It is apparent that from this the images of Buddha that Redon produced can not be isolated from his other works and the ideas that inform them. With this in mind I will consider Redon's art in the light of both Eastern and Western esoteric thought, in order to discover what might be the Buddhist spirit in his works.

This study will begin with an introduction of the development of Buddhist studies and activities in France in the late 19th century, including scholarly researches, the establishment of the Guimet Museum and its Oriental collections, and the basic knowledge of Buddhism conceived by contemporary French writers and artists, that contributed to Redon's personal understanding of Buddhism. Chapter two deals with Redon's early lithographs of Buddha images in the 'noir' style, including two versions of the lithograph Buddha (1895), the lithograph Buddha for Flaubert's third album Temptation of Saint Anthony (1896), and the color pastel Buddha's Enlightenment (Idol) around 1900. I will discuss these Buddha images in the light of Gustave Flaubert's pantheism presented in the Temptation of Saint Anthony (Paris, 1874). Other possible sources for ideas of Buddhism that Redon received through reading, from his friends and

patrons, will also be included. Chapter three treats Redon's post-1900 Buddha imagery in terms of his involvement with occultism, theosophy and the Nabi circle. I will argue that the stylistic transition of Buddhist motifs from the early works to the later productions, corresponds with Redon's spiritual passage from an ascetic mysticism to an optimistic mysticism. I will also compare the Buddha images with other religious and mythological figures, such as Christ, Orpheus, Apollo and Saint Sebastian, in the light of symbolic synthetism. Conclusion is devoted to the overall analysis of Buddhist themes and concepts in Redon's art.

In this study, Redon's twelve Buddha images will be analyzed plate by plate, in the light of religious syncretism. One work, Death of the Buddha of 1900, unfortunately, remains unknown to me, however all others are illustrated and discussed.

Chapter One: Buddhism and France in the 19th century

Before 1800, French cultural historians showed little interest in Buddhism. Between 1800 and 1880, the knowledge of Buddhism gradually increased, but remained limited to a small group of scholars who were interested in Oriental mysticism. Three versions of Indian, Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist texts began to be studied and translated. However, the major contribution to Buddhist research during this period was the systematic and scientific study of ancient Indian languages in Pali and Sanskrit, especially the publication of grammars and dictionaries, which provided the fundamental materials for scholars to refer to in the following years. Eugene Burnouf, the French orientalist, was the most important pioneer at this field.

E. Burnouf (1801-1852), a professor of the College of France, devoted his life to the study of ancient Indian Buddhist manuscripts. In his best known book, Introduction to Indian Buddhist History (Paris, 1884), Burnouf stressed that Indian Buddhism had to be studied on the basis of Sanskrit texts from Nepal and the Pali texts from Ceylon.⁶ He translated Mahayana Sanskrit texts into French and worked on Pali grammars. The first Pali grammar in French was written by him in 1862, with the cooperation of the German orientalist, Christian Lassen (1800-1876), under the title Essai sur le Pali.⁷ His contributions to the translations of texts and grammar paved the way for later scholars to pursue on the subject of Buddhism.

⁶J.W.de Jong, "A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America," (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1987) p.20

⁷Willian Peiris, "The Western Contribution to Buddhism," (Delhi:Montilal Banarsidass, 1973) p.162

The abundant collections of Pali manuscripts gathered by P.Grimblot, the French consul in Ceylon from 1859-1863, made Indian Buddhist texts accessible to European scholars.⁸ The first scholar to use the manuscripts was I.P. Minaev (1840-1890). In 1872, Minaev published a Pali grammar which acquired world-wide recognition and was translated into French and English.⁹ Three years later, the first Pali dictionary was published in 1875, written by Robert Caesar Childers (1838-1876): A Dictionary of the Pali Language.¹⁰

There were a few scholars who were dedicated to studying Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese sources of Buddhist literature. The first French translation of a Tibetan text, Lalitavistara, was published in 1847-1848 and written by Philippe Edouard Foucaux (1811-1894).¹¹ As to the Chinese sources of Buddhism, two versions of the popular legends, Fo-kow-chi and Hsi-yu-shi, were translated into French respectively in 1863 and 1857-1858, which focus more on the imaginary aspects of Buddhist legends.¹²

From 1880 onwards, the translations and the interpretations of Buddhist Pali and Sanskrit texts increased. The increased number of scholars devoted themselves to Buddhist studies resulted in some disputes between them. Scholars, like Emile Senart, tended to assimilate both historical and mythic aspects of Buddhism; while others, like Hermann Oldenberg, focused on the comparison between Buddhism and other ancient Indian religions, such as Brahmanism, Yoga and Vedism. These diverse arguments undoubtedly deepened and extended the knowledge of Buddhism.

Emile Senart was one of the leading scholars in Buddhist studies at that time. In Essai sur la legende du Buddha (1882), he explained the myth of the Buddha as a product of

⁸Jong, p.18

⁹Jong, p.18

¹⁰Jong, p.19

¹¹Peiris, p.163

¹²Jong, p.22

India, and its religious concepts contained both legendary and historical elements. Senart's method was distinguished from the current popular ideas which tended to identify Buddhist gods with naturalistic phenomena, such as the sun, clouds, and lightning, regardless of any historical evidence.¹³ However, Senart also adopted certain popular ideas by relating the Buddha to the solar hero, "the luminous example of all earthly heroes" – before the Buddha's birth he was the supreme god, and he descended from heaven as a luminous god.¹⁴ In this way he explained all twelve episodes of Buddha's life. Senart's interpretations of Buddha basically derived from Sanskrit Mahayana.¹⁵ In his edition of the Mahavastu, Senart also pointed out that a popular Buddhism aimed to heighten the happiness in this world in order to be reborn in heaven after death, rather than to achieve Nirvana or to meditate on the casual chain. His notions of Buddhism were close to the essence of Mahayana, popular in China, Korea and Japan.

On the other hand, the German orientalist Hermann Oldenberg (1854-1920), took a rather "comparative" approach to Buddhist studies. Unlike Senart's sources from Sanskrit Mahayana, he tended to adopt the concepts from the Pali text. He was convinced that Guatama Buddha was a real human being. He tried to prove it by the comparison of sources.¹⁶ In The Buddha, His life, His Doctrine, His Community (Berlin, 1811), Oldenberg stressed the relations between Branmanism and Buddhism.¹⁷ He pointed out some similarities between Brahman and Buddhist ideas, such as desire, the dualism between the sufferings of human existence and deliverance, the resolution of opposites,

¹³Jong, p.25-26

¹⁴Senart identified the Buddha as the Mahaourusa, the Cakravartin, cited from Jong, p.26

¹⁵Peiris, p.163

¹⁶Peiris, p.93, Ordenberg tended to adopt the ideas from the Pali tradition

¹⁷Unlike Senart, Ordenberg paid less attention on the legendary aspect of the Buddha. see Peiris, p.93

the doctrine of karman, the ascetic way of life and nirvana.¹⁸ Oldenberg asserted that the true nature of Buddhism lies in self-salvation and nirvana, in contrast with the universal salvation of Mahayana.¹⁹ Oldenberg's idea was close to the other brand of Buddhism, Hinayana, popular in Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia and Thailand. His book was a great success. It is published in seven editions and translated into French by A. Foucher in 1894.²⁰

Besides debates on the relations between Brahmanism and Buddhism, many scholars participated in the analysis of Buddhist relations with Yoga, Vedism, and other Hindu religions. Some scholars reduced Buddhism to a branch of those old Indian religions, as did Sernart; while others did not. Chinese sources of Buddhist texts were also analyzed. In 1881 Max Muller published one of the most famous texts of Mahayana Buddhism, Vajracchedih. Two years later he published the sacred texts of the Pure Land School in China and Japan. However, the intensive studies of Mahayana Buddhism had to wait until the early 20th century.

The discovery of Buddhist sacred scriptures in Central Asia at the turn of the century sped up the studies of the Mahayana Buddhism. A number of Buddhist expeditions to Central Asian were organized by Western scholars during the first two decades of the 20th century: three British expeditions during 1900-1916, four German expeditions during 1902-1914, a French expedition led by P. Pelliot in 1906-1908, and three Russian expeditions during 1898-1915.²¹ Owing to these expeditions, Buddhist manuscripts in Sanskrit, Kuchean, Agnean, Khotanese, Sogdian, Uigur, Tibetan, and Chinese arrived in great numbers in Paris, London, Berlin and St. Petersburg. A variety of Mahayana schools became the most focal point of Buddhist studies. The French scholar Sylvain

¹⁸Jong, p.31-32

¹⁹Jong, p.35-36

²⁰Peiris, p.94

²¹Jong, p.38-39

Levi declared the Chinese and Tibetan sources were indispensable for the study of Buddhism.²² Louis de la Poussin also stressed that without the study of Chinese sources no definite conclusions could be reached.²³

The last two decades of the 19th century not only witnessed a progress on scholarly research into Buddhism, but more and more collectors, writers and artists began to turn their eyes to Oriental religions as an alternative way of thinking. The scholarly research of Buddhism was mainly known to a handful of scholars in this specific field, while growing enthusiasm in Japanese culture in the second half of 19th century brought the knowledge of Buddhist art to wider European audiences. This was due to the contributions of the publication of encyclopedia on Japanese religions edited by Hoffman, the public exhibition of Buddhist arts in the Guimet Museum, and the Universal Exposition of Paris in 1878 and 1889.

The first encyclopedia on Japanese civilization was edited in 1832 by Siebold under the title Nippon: Memoires pour servir a la description du Japon.²⁴ However, the subject of Japanese religions was not edited until 1851 when Hoffman, a successor of Siebold, published Pantheon von Nippon, which included a very important iconographical interpretation of Japanese Buddhism of the 17th and 18th century.²⁵

The opening of the Japanese market to the West marks an important turning point for the dispersal of Japanese culture in Europe. In 1858, the United States, England and France negotiated with Japan to sign the commercial treaties one after another. Following these commercial exchanges between Japan and European countries became frequent. Along with the luxurious products, such as porcelain and lacquer, a variety of

²²Jong, p.40

²³Jong, p.43

²⁴ Jean-Francois Jarriage, "Le pantheon bouddhique au Japon-collections d'Emile Guimet," p.18, introduction to the Guimet Museum

²⁵Jarriage, p.19

Buddhist arts including woodcut prints and sculptured statues were also brought back by merchants and travelers in an effort to expand existing knowledge of Japanese religions. Once these Buddhist works of art were displayed in public exhibitions, they became very valuable sources for the enthusiasts to appreciate the styles and iconography.

One of the most important collectors to bring back and introduce Buddhist art to France is Emile Guimet (1836-1918). Guimet was an wealthy industrialist who was fascinated by the art and religions of the Far East. In 1876, he was charged with a mission from the Ministry of the Public Instruction to study Far Eastern religions overseas. He traveled to Japan, passing through China and India, collecting hundreds of Buddhist works of art from the countries he visited. The Buddhist collection acquired from that voyage was mainly from the 18th-and-19th century, with a few from the 17th century, including "plus de trois cents peintures Japonaises religieuses, six cents statues divines et une collection de plus de mille volumes-ceux-ci, depuis lors, ajoute-t-il, soigneusement catalogue's en chinois et japonais ou en francais".²⁶ In 1879 Guimet established an Oriental art museum in Lyons, exhibiting the religions objects he had collected. In 1885 the major holdings were transferred to Paris, where it remains today.

The introduction to Notice explicative, stated that the goals and the contents of the Guimet Museum. In short, the Museum was aimed to "compose d'objets religieux, representations divines, ustensiles servant aux cultes, manuscrits sacres...."²⁷ It contained religious objects from India, China, Japan, Egypt and Greece. A variety of deities, such as Siva, Confucius, Buddha, Isis, Zeus and Osiris, were all counted in Guimet's collections. In addition, the museum also included a library containing works of "sanskrits, tamouls, singalais, chinois, japonais et europeens traitant particulierement les questions religieuses"²⁸, and a place where Asian students could study French, and

²⁶Jarriage, p.26

²⁷Jarriage, p.33

²⁸Jarriage, p.33

the European could study the Oriental languages. Guimet's collection and its educational facilities provided a opportunity for the public to appreciate and understand Buddhist art from different countries and periods, in various styles hitherto unknown.

A selection of the religious works from Guimet Museum was exhibited in the Japanese section at the Universal Exposition of Paris in 1878. A number of Japanese paintings and sculptures on Buddhist subjects were displayed, including a facsimile of a mandala of Kobo-Daishi at Too-ji (toji), some scrolls depicting religious legends and priest portraits, and religious kakemonos depicting Kannon and the six Rakans²⁹, such as the God kannon floating on the sea, and Twelve Rakans, Disciples of Buddha.³⁰ A few religious paintings and sculpture from China, India, and Southeast Asia were also represented. In addition, the Guimet museum also provided a catalogue listing the works, which was compiled and published under the direction of the Japanese commission.³¹ Although Japanese art was the focal attraction in the 1878 World Fair, some Buddhist paintings, Kano, Toso, and Rimpa screen paintings, and Nanga scroll and album painting were included. These received rather cool and reserved responses, compared to that received by Japanese collection.³²

In the 1889 International Exhibition of Paris, Japanese art was again represented. The products while similar to those in previous exhibitions were of an inferior quality.³³

Other than scholars and collectors, those who were most keenly interested in Oriental religions were writers and artists. Partly because of the dissatisfaction with the materialist

²⁹Elisa Evett, "The Critical Reception of Japanese Art in the late Nineteenth Century Europe," (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research Press, 1982) p.12

³⁰P.Floyd, "Japonesme" in context: documentation, criticism, aesthetic reactions," vol. 1, p.118

³¹see P.Floyd, appendix E for a summary of the pictorial works exhibited in Guimet's display

³²see Evett, p. 11, according to Ray Isay in his "Panorama des expositions unisierselles": "L'Exposition apparut comme un prodigieux, un prestigieux voyage en Asie."

³³P.Floyd, vol. I PT.1 p,122

Positivist view of the world, and partly because of the religious uneasiness of the time since the traditional Christian beliefs were no longer seen as a self-evident dogma, those writers and artists turned to Oriental religions as an alternative way of thinking. This so-called Fin-de Siecle period witnessed two general reactions of spiritual phenomenon among literary and artistic circles. The first reaction was to return to orthodox Catholicism in the guise of aestheticized idealism as a solution for the prevalent decadent air, exemplified by J. K. Huysmans.³⁴ The other was to synthesize the Western and Eastern religions as an ultimate salvation for the soul, which was the goal of Theosophy.

J. K. Huysmans, the so-called "decadent" writer in Symbolist literature, was a crucial figure in the first reaction. He once claimed: "It was through a glimpse of the supernatural of evil that I first obtained insight into the supernatural of good, The one derived from the other."³⁵ It was after he ended his struggle with Satanism that he found his inner peace in orthodox Catholicism. As to the visual arts, the Salon de la Rose+ Croix, a new group founded by Sar Peladan during 1892-1897, served as an art exhibition for the Rosicrucian occultists to promote a kind of art with mystical and Catholic themes in 1890s. In fact before Peladan's establishment of Salon de la Rose+ Croix in 1892, the original Rosicrucianism supported by Stanislas de Guaita was unorthodoxical and maintained its Buddhist and Freemason orientation.³⁶ The Peladan's 1892 separation exposed the tension between two different approaches among Catholic believers-one insisted on orthodox Catholicism; the other tried to integrate other religions into Catholic

³⁴In 1884, J.K.Huysmans published his novel under the title A Rebours. This book reflected many aspects of Symbolist concepts. It also described the current decadent tendency in both literature and visual art at the beginning of the 1880s. Of the decadent artists, Redon's works were mentioned. see Loevgren, p.27-29

³⁵Loevgren, p.54

³⁶Edward Lucie-Smith, "Symbolist Art," (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p.109-126

concepts for solution. Many symbolist artists, such as Maurice Denis, Emile Bernard, Paul Serusier, and others, experimented with various religions in their search for ultimate Truth but all experienced a religious crisis, and eventually converted to Catholicism.

The second reaction was to search for a kind of synthetic religion as an expression of a vague form of religious feeling, usually heavily imbued with mysticism. According to this point of view, the inner unity lies beneath the esoteric diversity of human religions from the West and the East, and the mystery of reality can be intuited only by the soul. Theosophy was the most notable in this field. Theosophy was established by H. P. Blavatsky in New York in 1875, and quickly spread to European countries in the following decades. As the counterpart to the indigenously orthodox Catholicism of Rose+Croix occultism, theosophists tried to reconcile the entire religious tradition of the East and the West into a single system of thought in order to reach the final harmony of human spirituality. To this end, the Oriental religions, of Buddhism, Hinduism and Egyptian myth, were much discussed in Mme Blavatsky's Secret Doctrine of 1888, in the light of esoteric religious syncretism. Blavatsky considered Buddha as 'the Enlightened', the highest degree of knowledge, which can be acknowledged by passing through an evolutionary process from the lowest inert matter, insect, and animal, to the human and finally to Buddha. In order to reach the highest stage of the evolution as a Buddha, one has to break through the bondage of senses and acquire a complete perception of the Real Self through meditation. In addition, many Buddhist symbols and metaphors were assembled and compared with those of other religions, such as the meanings of circle, the sacred number, etc.³⁷ To a certain extent, Blavatsky's stress on the aspect of spiritual transcendence and evolution, and on its comparative role of religion became the essential notion for the later Theological Buddhists.

³⁷Welsh, "The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985," (New York: Abbeville), p.66

After a successful reception in the United States and England, the French branch of Theosophical society was established in 1884, which followed Mme Blavatsky's doctrine of integrating Eastern and Western religions experience into a whole universal world religion. A large number of Theosophical publications and journals were issued soon after, which made the essentials of Theosophy available to the French audience. The Theosophical view of Buddhism was widely circulated. Alfred Percy Sinnette's Esoteric Buddhism, for instance, had been published in eight editions between 1883-1903, and translated into French, German, and other languages. Edouard Schure, the most influential theosophist for symbolist writers and artists, had also published two important articles about Buddhism in Revue des deux mondes in 1880s, which focused on Buddha and his legend.³⁸

Influenced by the religious syncretism of Theosophy, a number of writers and artists, especially those of symbolists, were drawn their attention to Eastern mysticism. Flaubert was one of the exceptional literary pioneers who integrated Oriental deities, such as the Buddha, Hindu goddesses and Isis, into his pantheist thinking to be formed in Temptation of Saint Anthony (Paris, 1874) which predicts the spread of Theosophy in Europe. The literary figures like Stephane Mallarme, and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, as well as the composers Debussy and Satie, were all associated with the Theosophical group and drew upon Oriental thought and tales.³⁹ Edwin Arnold's poem about the Buddha, The Light of Asia (1879) also received a world wide popularity.⁴⁰ As for the visual arts, Paul Gauguin, Paul Ranson, Paul Serusier, and others, synthesized the Eastern and the western religions thought into their works. Of all the artists of the period, Odilon Redon was the one who most devoted to Eastern mysticism. He was not only involved in Theosophy

³⁸"La Legende de bouddha" and "Le bouddha et sa legende", in *Revue des deux mondes*, respectively published in July 1.1885 and 1886

³⁹Chicago Catalogue, p.222

⁴⁰Willia Peiris, p.xxiv

and the Symbolist circle but sought to touch the mystic enlightenment of Buddha through the portrayal of Buddhist images and other Oriental deities in different media.

The foregoing summery makes it obvious that the interest in aspects of Buddha in the late 19th century France ranged from the scholarly through the esoteric to the popular. Redon was also aware of this new movement. He not only owned several Buddhist books, but was familiar with Hindu literature, such as Ramayana and Bhagavad-Gita. His interest in Flaubert's novel drew him to create his first Buddha images in lithograph in the last decade of 19th century. However, his involvement in Theosophy and the Symbolist circle brought him to seek a synthetic type of religious subject, which is evidenced in his colorful Buddha images created in the early twenty century.

Chapter Two: The Buddha Imagery and Related Works in Redon's "Noir" Period

Redon's Buddhist subjects first appeared in the 1890s while he struggled with a stylistic transition from his "noir" style to color. Three lithographs and one color pastel are our works that fall in this period. They are: two versions of lithograph Buddha in 1895 (figs.1 & 2), a lithograph Buddha in 1896 for the third series of Temptation of Saint Anthony (fig.3), and a color pastel Buddha's Enlightenment (Idol) around 1900 (fig.4). Although the last one was painted in color, these four works all shared similarities in their composition, monster-like appearance, and sinister mood, in correspondence with his "noir" style in general.

These four images of Buddha were all inspired by Gustave Flaubert's novel, Temptation of Saint Anthony, from which the captions for two prints are quotations. In fact, when Redon produced his first Buddha lithograph in 1895, he admitted that his knowledge of Buddhism was still scant. In a letter of 1895 to his friend and collector Maurice Fabre, he confessed that he did not read much about Buddha and admitted: "I have books on Buddhism that I have not yet read."⁴¹ The books Redon referred here are L'Evangile de Bouddha by Paul Carus (1895) and Buddha: a Drama in Twelve Scenes (1897) by Sadakichi Hartmann.⁴² Since Redon admitted his deficient knowledge of Buddhism at that time, Flaubert's Temptation of Saint Anthony would appear to be the primary source for the Buddha images of his "noir" style.

⁴¹letter from Redon to Maurice Faber, 24 July 1895; cited from Roseline Bacou, p.36 (1990)

⁴²Chicago Catalogue, p.229 and note 52

Flaubert's Temptation of Saint Anthony was one of Redon's favorite books. When his friend Emile Hennequin introduced him to the novel in 1882, Redon immediately expressed his great admiration for the book. In a letter to Hennequin that same year, he extolled: "je vous remercie de m'avoir fait lire la Tentation de Saint Antoine, une merveille littéraire et une mine pour moi."⁴³ Redon then prepared forty lithographs in three series to illustrate the novel that he considered to be a veritable "mine"; the amount was about one-quarter of his total lithographic output. In addition, the captions he quoted from the text for the print also demonstrated his fascination with Flaubert's literary expression and ideology. He claimed that "except in the case of Flaubert or Baudelaire", all captions for his album were his.⁴⁴

Since Redon was so fascinated with the Temptation of Saint Anthony and devoted so much effort to the novel, it is necessary to examine the affinities between their works, in terms of religious imagery and ideologies. First, I will focus on how Flaubert integrates Buddhism into his overall concepts and then explain how Redon might be effected by it.

In Temptation of Saint Anthony, Flaubert portrays Anthony as a confused and anguished hermit who is tormented by religious uneasiness: he is uncertain in his Christian faith, wondering about the meaning of his ascetic way of life, and seeking other ways of being, living and believing. In a hallucinated state, after encountering tempting visions of the Seven Mortal Sins, Anthony is brought by Hilarion, his former pupil, into the religious scenes of the early Christians and other ancient gods, including the Buddha, three Hindu goddesses, Isis, Orannes, Apollo, Venus, Jupiter, Bacchus, as well as some unnamed gods and others. By confronting the parade of these ancient gods, Anthony learns the intriguing truths that there are religions which have nothing to do with Christianity, but share much with it, and which are also appealing. Then, Anthony is

⁴³cited from Redon's letter to Hennequin (31 March, 1883) published by Auriant op.cit. from Roselin Bacou (1956), p. 77-78

⁴⁴Chicago Catalogue, p. 180, see chapter on Odilon Redon: The Image and the Text

brought to the winged Devil who sweeps him into the heavens so he can look down on the whole universe. He questions what is the purpose of all this and the scientific marvels produced by man, and the Devil responds: "There is no purpose." Anthony is now in despair but then realizes that, of the two basic approaches to religion, intellect and intuition, the former can not provide any definitive answer. After a long procession of temptations, Anthony then closely observes the minute forms of life: animals merge into plants, and plants into the mineral world. When he sees the process of the birth of life and the beginning of movement, he realizes there is no longer a distinction between the animate and the inanimate, He feels no fear and responds with joy an ecstasy. Then, with his education complete: he sees the risen sun with Christ's face at its center: "God accepted as present throughout his creation", and Anthony finds peace in this pantheistic vision.

In the book, Flaubert is searching for his own religious truth and this is the driving force behind the temptations and the message. His despair, his dream, and his temptations all reveal in the text. "Instead of Saint Anthony," he claimed, "I am there; the temptations was mine and not the readers."⁴⁵ Redon was deeply moved by this literary marvel", not only in a way of his hallucinatory and suggestive descriptions of imagery, but also in his desperate searching for ultimate faith with which Redon always had a deep compassion. On the one hand, Flaubert's "love of indefinite words"⁴⁶ echoed Redon's ideal of art as "...My drawings inspire, they do not define...They place the spectator, just as Mallarme does, in the works of the indeterminate."⁴⁷ On the other hand, Redon transformed many mythological, religious, and monstrous figures from Flaubert's text into his works, including Buddha, Isis, the Sphinx, the Chaldean Oannes, Christ, and many others. In fact, the "agnostic pantheism", as Hennequin characterized

⁴⁵see Flaubert's letter of 1850, cited from Mead Museum Monograph, p.12

⁴⁶Chicago Catalogue, p.96

⁴⁷Jean Seznec, p.281

Flaubert's comparative religion, touched Redon with something that were already part of his mental world. As Flaubert was torn between his fascination with all religions and his inability to accept any one of them, Redon rendered all forms of deity in his works, yet refused to let his subject become "the propaganda of a belief or a cult."⁴⁸, or to be classified to any organized religion.⁴⁹ It is through the processions of gods, monsters, and superstitions of the ancient world, that finally led Anthony (or Flaubert, or Redon) to the solution of his spiritual dilemma, as well as to penetrate into the mystery of God, man and the universe.

As to the Buddha, in Flaubert's text, he was one of the varied ancient gods in procession. Flaubert portrayed the Buddha, with his grand charity, as a savior of all mankind. In order to free the world, he wished to be born among men. He was born a noble prince with all wisdom and wealth. But the sight of man's suffering and world's misery turned him away from pleasure. He indulged himself in the Brahman scripture and lived a secluded and ascetic life. Then after conquering the temptations of the Demon, he was able to live with virtue in all circumstances, and "penetrated into the four spheres of the invisible world".⁵⁰ This was at the heart of his enlightenment.

"Intelligence became mine! I became the Buddha!"⁵¹ He preaches the law to all of people, and his mission is completed.

In this short five-page description of the Buddha's story, Flaubert put emphasis on the legendary and moral aspects of the Buddha, which corresponds with some of the contemporary Buddhist studies. E. Burnouf's Introduction a l'histoire du Bouddhisme

⁴⁸Chicago Catalogue, p.234

⁴⁹When Mauris Denis invited Redon to participate in an exhibition of Catholic artists in 1911, Redon refused. see Chicago Catalogue, p.234

⁵⁰Gustave Flaubert, "Temptation of Saint Antony," translated by Kitty Mrosovsky, p.170

⁵¹Mead Museum Monograph, p.7 or "Understanding was mine. I became the Buddha" in Kitty Mrosovsky's translation, p.170

Indien (Paris, 1844) was the most important reference for Flaubert.⁵² In Burnouf's book, the moral, practical system of Buddhism is compared with the metaphysical speculation of Brahmanism. Learned from Burnouf, Flaubert also stressed the merciful and compassionate characters of the Buddha who searched for spiritual enlightenment and aimed to free all beings from sufferings.

From the captions of Redon's two Buddhist lithographs produced in 1895 and 1896, we can get close to the basic ideas that attracted Redon to Buddhism. The caption of the first version of the Buddha lithograph of 1895: I was taken to schools. I knew more than the scholars, implied the Buddha as a sophisticated, knowledgeable, and intelligent seeker who searched for spiritual truth. The caption of Buddha of 1896 for his third album of the Temptation of Saint Anthony: Intelligence became mine! I became the Buddha, heightened the moment when the Buddha achieved Enlightenment, *Nirvana*. Although his captions only intended to create a sort of enigmatic beauty without any absolute definition⁵³, the two captions of Buddhist lithographs which Redon quoted from Flaubert's text suggest that Redon was more concerned about the intellectual and enlightened aspects of the Buddha and regarded him as a spiritual seeker.

Fascinated by Flaubert's powerfully suggestive descriptions of the imaginary deities, Redon's four images of Buddha produced during 1890s echo the one Flaubert created in his text. In Temptation of Saint Anthony, the Buddha first appeared to Anthony as a naked man:

"Poised behind him, a large halo quivers. The small curls of his hair, black with blue lights, cluster symmetrically around a protuberance on top of his skull. His very long arms run straight down his sides. His two hands rest, palms up, flat on his thighs. The undersides of his feet offer

⁵²Kitty Mrosovsky's introduction, p.42

⁵³Chicago Catalogue, p.180. Redon warned Mellerio not to overinterpret his captioned prints, claiming that the only purpose of these captions was to "produce in viewers an...attraction for the obscure and cerebral world of the indeterminate-and to prepare their mine..." see a 1898 letter to Mellerio

the image of two suns; and he stays complete still-facing Anthony and Hilarion, with all gods arranged in echelons around him on the rocks, as if on the steps of a circus." (Flaubert, p.167)⁵⁴

The sinister contours, the monstrous appearance, the mysterious vagueness and the atmosphere of hallucinatory anxiety seen in Redon's Buddha images of 1890s all echo Flaubert's paragraph with its disquieting visionary suggestiveness. Besides, some elements from the text also appeared in Redon's prints in one way or another, such as the sun, the long straight arms and the hand flat on the thighs.

However, Redon was an unyielding defendant for his absolute artistic independence. He never literally followed the words from the text, but knew well how to transform the literary source into his own visual language. He explained that the relation between his visual image and the literary was better to be described in the term "transmission", or "interpretation", instead of "illustration".⁵⁵ It is true that the visual imagery and the literary always interacted in an ambiguous and intriguing way in his art. The visual metaphor may correspond to the literary to a certain extent but never necessarily the same. The central issue of his pictorial strategy is to create a sense of mystery and equivocation. "All I wanted to do", he said, "was to create a sort of diffuse, but imperious, attraction toward the dark world of the indeterminate, as a way of predisposing the spectator to think."⁵⁶ In short, the literal material only served to fit to his own mystic quest of suggestive imagination.

As a result, many visual elements of Redon's four Buddha images produced in 1890s correspond with Flaubert's text, but some are altered or omitted. The large halo, for instance, is transformed into a sun-like disk in the versions of 1895, and into the radiant sun in the later two prints. The image of two suns in Flaubert's text is transformed into a

⁵⁴Kitty Mrosovsky' translation, p.167

⁵⁵see Chicago Catalogue, the chapter on Odilon Redon: The Image and the Text, p.194

⁵⁶see Jean Seznec, "Odilon Redon and Literature," p.287, in "French Nineteenth-Century Painting and Literature," edited by U.Finke (Manchester), 1972

white disc rimed by black circle suspended in his cloak and only appears in the versions of 1895. Buddha's hands are palm-up, flat down on the thighs in the 1895 versions as indicated in the text; while in the 1896 print and the pastel before 1900, his hands are palm-down instead. The protuberance on his head is omitted in all these works. The subtle differences between the works and source, differences between the works themselves, demonstrate that Redon was inspired by the source but imaginatively transformed it for the sake of visionary suggestiveness. Redon explained what he called "suggestive art" by saying "...but I have also made it mine by a combination of disparate elements juxtaposed and of forms transposed or altered which, free of any contingencies, nevertheless have a logic of their own."⁵⁷ So the visual ambiguity of Redon's images may first seem absurd and confused, but there are "logical" associations beyond the imagery that need to be explored.

While Flaubert's Temptation of Saint Anthony was the major inspiration for Redon's imagery of Buddha, it definitely was not the only source. In a letter of 1895 to Maurice Fabre, Redon admitted that he did not know much about Buddhism at the time, but he had been acquainted with ancient Indian religions since 1860s, especially Hinduism, which share many ideologies with Buddhism. So in order to extend or intensify Redon's notion of the Buddha as a spiritual seeker as the captions implied, we need to examine his understanding of Indian religions for further iconographical associations of his Buddha images.

Redon's awareness of ancient Indian religions was initiated by the biologist Armand Clavaud as early as 1860s at the time when French translations were rarely available. As a close friend and intellectual mentor, in addition to Spinoza's pantheism, Darwin's evolutionary theory, and contemporary literature of Edgar Poe and Baudelaire, Clavaud also introduced Redon to Hindu source of religious thought and poetry. In Redon's

⁵⁷Goldwater, p.115

Confidence d'artiste of 1897-1889, he recalled of Clavaud: "...Il me parlait des poemes indous, qu'il admirait et adorait pardessus tout..."⁵⁸ Among those Indian literary texts, Ramayana and Bhagavad-Gita attracted him most and inspired him to produce the works like The little Abbot Reading the Ramayana (1883) and Sita (1893). Francis Jammes, one of Redon's friends, praised him as "sage de l'Inde".⁵⁹

Fascinated with Indian religions, Redon often integrated Oriental concepts into his whole esoteric system, especially embodied in his 1891 album Songes as a memorial to Clavaud who had hanged himself the previous year. Ariane Durand relates the album with Clavaud's interest in Oriental esotericism and his life and death. She deciphered many pictorial symbols in Songes identifying them with the doctrines of Brahmanism and other Eastern beliefs. Based on Durand's research, the oriental references in Songes may provide further insights into Redon's Buddha image. For instance, the long cloak of the Buddha in 1895 print resembles the Tibetan garb of the archer in An Yonder, the Astral Idol, the Apotheosis (fig.5), the second plate of the album. In the latter plate, the archer with the Tibetan garb and oriental features is identified as Sagittarius, a spiritual seeker, who is "a cosmic symbol expressive of the complete man—he who is at once animal, spiritual and worthy of his divine origin."⁶⁰ Sagittarius, the symbol of 'the complete man', becomes the link between earth and heaven, implying a state of tension embodied by its symbolic expression in the arc. According to Indian or Japanese tradition, the arc symbolizes the achievement of spiritual illumination.⁶¹ As a result, in And Yonder, the Astral Idol, Apotheosis, Sagittarius' holding the arch, seated in the broken globe floating over "the water of the Prakrti,"⁶² implies that he has went through earthy suffering and

⁵⁸Mesley, p.212

⁵⁹from Francis Jammes "Oeuvres vV. Genmeva 1978", see Mesley, p.2

⁶⁰Mesley, p.224

⁶¹Arian Durand 1974, p.247-249 "...dans les traditions indiennes et japonaises, l'arc joue un role primordiale dans l'atteinte de la realisation spirituelle." see Mesley, p.223

⁶²Mesley, p.223

attains the astral real of the primal divine light.⁶³ While in 1895 Buddha lithograph, instead of being in the astral divine globe which now transforms to an overlapped sun-like disk hanging over his head, the Buddha's lower body is immersed in water, suggesting his earth bound nature.

However, the haunted look of the Buddha in 1895 is closer to the figure in The man was solitary in an night landscaped, the second plate of Night (1886) (fig.6). Both of them also wear a similar long cowl garment. Seen in isolation, the plate and its caption are very ambiguous and enigmatic. But when these captions are viewed in the relation to the whole, they take on a continuous significance. In fact, in this album, the captions were all written by Redon in a kind of prose poem, which revealed the artist's early concerns:

In old age,/ the man was solitary in a night landscape./ The lost angel then opened black wings./ The chimera looked at every thing with terror./ The priestesses were waiting,/ and the seeker was engaged in infinite searching.

Here, the main theme is the searching for unknown truth. However, the man alone in a night forest in the second plate seems still haunted by this world of darkness, in correspondence to the sinister darkness of the Buddha. In the Buddha, the only light source comes from the bright sphere rimed by the dark circle, which seems to be drawn to the swirl of his cloak. Unlike the abstract flatness of the divine disk over his head, the sphere looks three-dimensional, solid, and 'real'. The same type of the sphere also appears in The breath which leads living creatures is also in the Spheres (fig.7), the fifth plate from To Edgar Poe (1882). In this work, a universe is filled with spheres within which float a human bust and 'celestial eyes', suggesting that the 'divine breath' or spirit is permeated in all existence of the universe, and the mystery of universe is to be explored

⁶³Mesley, p.227

by the 'eyes' of the soul.⁶⁴ As a result, illuminated by the light of the sphere, Buddha seems to embrace the mystery of the universe, echoing the caption of plate, I was taken to schools. I knew more than the scholars. However, the head of the Buddha is still shadowed without the illumination from the divine light which is rimed by a dark circle, implying that he is not yet initiated. In the second version of the print, his head is totally immersed in darkness, which strengthens the 'dark night of the soul' of the Buddha who is in his 'highest stage of physical evolution'.⁶⁵ In short, in two versions of the 1895 lithograph, the Buddha's engaging in the spiritual searching corresponds to the overall theme of the Night. However without a sense of loss and fear seen in Night, the Buddha shows the way toward the spiritual by embracing the wisdom of the universe.

Compared with the darkness of the previous version, the Buddha of 1896 for Flaubert's third album, now comes into light. The divine disk is transformed into the radiant sun shining on the top of his head. Illuminated by the divine light, his face becomes intense and piercing, unlike the trance looking in the previous print. The sphere disappears and he no longer seeks to embrace anything in his cloak. Moreover, unlike the weighty body in the 1895 version, the Buddha now seems rising up, and his cloak sweeps off like a snake coil. The serpent-like form is usually associated with the symbols of death, evil and chaos, which recalls the image of the Death in Death: my irony exceeds all others from the 1889 album To Gustave Flaubert. (fig.8) However, the difference between the two images is that while the Death is still immersed in darkness, the Buddha's has touched the light of the divine Sun which symbolizes his attainment of Enlightenment as the title Intelligence became mine! I became the Buddha indicates. So the Buddha, giving his lower serpent-like body and the enlightened face, becomes in itself a union of opposites, death and life, earth and heaven, dark and light. His ultimate attainment of

⁶⁴Chichago Catalogue, p.224 and Mesley, p.143,

⁶⁵Mesley, p.261

Enlightenment signifies the triumph of spirit over matter, death, and the evil of darkness; the theme will repeat again and again in his later Buddha images.

The tension between the duality of death and life, evil and divinity always fascinated Redon. The significance of the 1896 Buddha image stands out as a subtle transition from his early nihilistic pessimism to his late positive optimism. In the early 1880s the half-man and half-animal Centaur is the one to struggle with serpent, and the battle between the two always results in vain victory, as seen in There are struggles and vain victories, the sixth plate of Origins (1883) (fig.9). The theme implies that the attempts of those who without the divine spirit struggle with the serpent, or evil, are futile, and they are to be mired in the cycle of darkness and illusion. However in his late color works, instead of Centaur, the Sun God Apollo appears as a victorious warrior who reins his four horse-chariot as it rushes upward; while the serpent, or Python, remained bound to the ground, as seen in Chariot of Apollo (1912) and Day (1910-1911) (figs 10-11). Apollo's heroic triumph over Python implies that those who with divine Spirit will eventually conquer the evil of earthy darkness, breaking the cycle of rebirth, and ascends to the realm of 'Spiritual Eternity'. The human-serpent image of the Buddha seems to embody the battle between Apollo and Python, by bridging the symbols of heavenly light (divine sun on the top) and of earthy darkness (serpent coil of his lower body). His head reaching to the Sun as a sign of Enlightenment signifies his spiritual triumph over matter and death, as Apollo's triumph over Python. However, unlike Apollo as a divine god, the Buddha, as a human being, needs to penetrate the mystery of the universe in order to touch the 'divine breath' or spirit as the previous version implies. His sunken cheeks and skinny shape emphasize that the ascetic suffering is a necessary approach toward Enlightenment, *Nirvana*. The emphasis on the ascetic suffering by sacrifice of physical and sensual pleasure is embodied in Redon's choice of black as a means to eliminate any sensual

stimulation. In a letter of 1913, he remarked: "Black must be respected. Nothing adulterated it. It does not give pleasure to the eyes and awaken no sensuality."⁶⁶ The elimination of the sensual stimulation and physical pleasure reminds Burnorf's concept of *Nirvana* as "absolute nothing".⁶⁷

In the pastel Buddha's Enlightenment of 1900, the color counterpart of the 1896 Buddha, the light is even brighter and more splendid. The grim menace of darkness in the previous works is moderated in favor of brilliant light and startling colors. Illuminated by the blazing of Divine Light, the message that Buddha as a spiritual seeker who attains Enlightenment is manifested. The new representation of the 1900 Buddha while derived from his earlier lithograph is clearly part of Redon's colorful and peaceful late style.

⁶⁶Hobbs, p.26

⁶⁷Peiris, p. 169

Chapter Three : Buddha Imagery after 1900

From the Buddha images produced during 1890s, we saw a subtle transition from the melancholy suffering and sinister darkness of Buddha of 1895 and 1896 to the colorful vividness of Buddha of 1900. After 1900, all of his Buddha images embrace color and take on an optimistic mood. The monstrous look of the Buddha is replaced by a calm and meditative monk, reading or walking in fanciful woods clothed with colorful flowers. The works from this period include: Living Buddha (1903-1904), two versions of Buddha in His Youth (1904 and 1905), Buddha (Sacred Heart) (1906), Buddha Wandering among Flowers (1905), Buddha (before 1906), and an unknown work Death of the Buddha (1900). These post-1900 images of Buddha not only represent a shift from the 'noirs' to color but reveal a progression in his understanding of Buddhism.

After 1890 onwards, Buddha is one of a variety of religious and mystic subjects which increased in number, either in "noir" or in color. Three lithograph series of 1890s, for instance, were all associated with religious or mystic messages in either implicit or explicit way, such as Hinduism in Songes of 1891, pantheism in Temptation of Saint Anthony of 1896, and Christianity in Apocalypse de Saint Jean of 1899. At the same time, the religious or mythological deities, like Christ, Orpheus, Apollo, Pegasus and Buddha began to be explored in great number in oil and pastel, such as Sacred Heart of Christ (1895, Pastel) and Chariot of Apollo (1912, oil on canvas). The conversion to color gives to his treatment of Buddha and other religious and mythic figures a glorious appeal.

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Two involvements in the 1890s contributed to Redon's choice of religious subjects and the change of his style. The first of these was Redon's involvement with the young painters who called themselves Nabis, founded in 1889. The Nabis, as Hebrew word for "prophet", were dedicated to spiritual and mystic issues, and were also fascinated by the color and stylistic innovations of Gauguin. Paul Serusier (1863-1927), Paul Ranson (1864-1909), Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940), and Maurice Denis (1870-1943) are the best known of this group. The admiration between the Nabis and Redon was mutual. The young Nabi artists admired Redon for his "very pure plastic substance and very mysterious expression."⁶⁸ With Gauguin far way in Tahiti, they looked to him as the leader of their generation, as Maurice Denis praised him: "the ideal of the young Symbolist generation—Our Mallarme."⁶⁹ By being drawn into the group, Redon had his eyes opened to the possibilities of color and forms, and shared with them the idealistic and concepts of mystical synthetism, as focused in the works of Gauguin, Serusier, and Ranson.

Buddhism was part of their shared interests in synthetic religions. Gauguin, for example, was the one who constantly shared his Oriental enthusiasm with Redon. According to Merete Bodelsen, Gauguin had been interested in Oriental art since 1888. It was said that after he visited the Paris World Exposition of 1889, he was so impressed by the arts of Cambodia and the Far East that he began to integrate the symbolic elements from Hindu and Buddhist philosophies into his works, such as the Buddhist gesture in Idol with a Pearl (1892) (fig. 12) and Nirvana (1890) by making use of Buddhist terminology in the title.⁷⁰ "All of the Far East", Gauguin wrote about the Exposition, "the great philosophy written in letters of gold in all their art, all that is worth

⁶⁸Hobbs, p.84

⁶⁹Hobbs, p.83

⁷⁰Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk, "Paradise Reviewed: An Interpretation of Gauguin's Polynesian Symbolism," (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research, 1983), p.19

studying..."⁷¹ Redon knew Gauguin since the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886 and kept contact afterwards. When Gauguin was considering leaving for Oceanic island after the Exposition, Redon exchanged opinions with him.⁷² Around the same time, another Nabis artist, Paul Ranson also included a Buddhist image in his synthetic religious subject Christ and Buddha (1890-1892) (fig.13). Although there is no written documentation to indicate that Redon had seen any Buddhist art in 1889 World Fair, it is more than likely that he saw the Oriental exhibition as he was in Paris at the time and would have been drawn to it by discussions with his friends who were fascinated by Oriental arts, like Gauguin and Ranson.

Edouard Schure's Great Initiates, a theosophical book published in 1889, provided Redon and the Nabis a theoretical foundation for synthetic religion from the West and East, and was an important inspiration for them to look more closely at Buddhism and other Oriental religions. Like other theosophists, Schure sought to synthesize all types of religious thought throughout history in an attempt to understand the esoteric meaning of inner truth. In addition to western religions, Hinduism and Buddhism were discussed in length in his book, as well as other articles. Redon's close friends, Paul Serusier and Paul Ranson were professed in Theosophy and the avid fans of Schure's. Though Gauguin would not consider himself as a theosophist, he nevertheless revealed certain parallel concepts with theosophical doctrine in some of his works, such as We Hail You, Mary.⁷³ While there is no direct evidence that Redon was acquainted with Schure's theosophical ideas,⁷⁴ the above noted interest in the work by his friends and the fact that Redon was

⁷¹Teilhet-Fist, p.10

⁷²Teilhet-Fist, p.10

⁷³Teilhet-Fist, p.37

⁷⁴see Mesley chapter Eighth about Redon's possible knowledge of Schure and his works.

commissioned to create a stage design for Schure's play Vercingetorix in the Theatre d'art makes it more than likely.⁷⁵

The second important event which contributed to Redon's Oriental religious subjects arises from his involvement with Edmond Bailly's occult circle in the early 1890s. Edmond Bailly's book shop was one of leading occult center in the late 19th-century Paris. His shop, the "Librarie de l'art independant", which combined a store, publishing house, and exhibition hall, became a meeting place for literary figures, such as writers Huysmans, Mallarme, Victor Emile Michelet, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, the artists Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Felicien Rops, and for the composers Debussy and Satie.⁷⁶ Many of Redon's friends and patrons belonged to the circle, and he also allowed a group of pastels, drawings, and lithographs to be exhibited and sold there in March-April 1893.⁷⁷ Edmond Bailly, who was also a theosophist, published the journal Le Lotus Bleu as well as a number of other occult magazines and books. These occult journals and books were aimed at promoting the Theosophical brand of synthetic mysticism. Claude Emile Schuffenecker, a close friend of Redon and Gauguin, was also interested in the Theosophical writings of Mme Blavatsky and Annie Besant. His cover design for theosophist magazine Le Lotus Bleu (fig. 14), portrayed an oriental sage sitting beneath the tree, demonstrates the importance of Indian philosophies for Theosophy.

In 1890s, through the exchange of occult ideas in Bailly's Library and contact with Gauguin and the younger members of the Nabi group, Redon became familiar with Theosophical doctrines and the Oriental mysticism. Around the same time, his friends, critics, and patrons like Huysmans, Maurice Denis, Emile Bernard, Paul Serusier, Francis

⁷⁵Hobbs, p.88

⁷⁶Peter Collier and Robert Lethbridge eds. *Artistic Relations: literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France*. (New Haven and Londo: Yale University Press. 1994), p.49

⁷⁷Peter Collier and Robert Lethbridge eds, p.88

Jammes, were all experiencing a religious crisis and eventually converted to Catholicism. Redon must have been aware of this but he did not follow them in becoming an orthodox monotheist. Instead, he continued to struggle with the relationship between world religious as a means of discovering an ultimate truth common to the carried doctrines. The Indian philosophy undoubtedly amused him most. When his Bordeaux friend and collector Gabriel Frizeau was uneasy about his faith, Redon recommended him to read Baghavat-Gita for consolation.⁷⁸ Under those circumstances, it was understandable why Buddhist motifs and other religious subjects became so important in his works after 1890s.

Redon's interest in Theosophy coincided with a number of personal crises which probably contributed to a change in his attitude toward life and art in the end of the century. For instance, those who most had been significant to his early career died within the span of 15 years. These included Rodolphe Bresdin in 1885, Emile Hennequin in 1888, Clavaud in 1890, Mallarme in 1898, and Mme. Chausson in 1899. The sale of the family house, Peyrelebadé near Bordeaux where he spent his lonely childhood, in 1897 would also cut off his link with the past. Redon's son later recalled that the event had been for Redon "a sort of deliverance: the rupture with the entire past of distress and anguish, the end of a nightmare, a bewitching spell."⁷⁹ The loss of his past with all of its psychological torment and isolation was accompanied by the discovery of a younger generation of artists and friends who, like him, sought to go "beyond the object, illuminating or amplifying it and lifting up the spirit into the region of mystery, into the troubled zone of the unsolved and its delicious disquiet...."⁸⁰ His early career had taken him through religious anxiety and satanic haunting imagery, but now he transformed it

⁷⁸Chicago Catalogue, p.229 & 407

⁷⁹Machael Wilson, "Nature and Imagination: The Works of Odilon Redon," (Oxford: Phaidon, 1978) p.52

⁸⁰Barbara T. Martin, "Prints by Redon and the Nabis," p.25

into the realm of colorful exultation and spiritual calmness. "In ceaselessly making myself more objective I have since learned," he recalled in 1913, "with my eyes more fully open on all things, that the life that we unfold can also reveal joy. If the art of an artist is the song of his life, a grace or a melody, I must have sounded the note of gaiety in color."⁸¹ All of Redon's Buddha imagery after 1900 reflected the new interest in color.

Although Redon was careful not to identify himself with any one religious group, there are many parallels between contemporary Theosophical concepts and his works. For instance, the religious syncretism that the theosophist Edouard Schure proposed may have inspired the fusion of Buddhist and Christian themes in some of Redon's late work, such as the similarities between Sacred Heart of Christ (fig. 15) and Sacred Heart (Buddha) (fig. 16). In his point view, Schure considered the Buddha as one of great initiates, but he did not include the Buddha in his chapters of Great Initiates. The reason was because of the special plan of the book. He explained that he only choose the reformer, or initiate who represented 'the doctrine of the Mysteries in a different aspect and at another stage in its evolution.'⁸² To him, the Buddha was overshadowed by Pythagoras and Jesus Christ. On the one hand, he thought that the Buddha needlessly repeated "the doctrine of reincarnation and evolution of souls" which he had already developed in his discussion of Pythagoras.⁸³ On the other hand, the Buddha offered nothing different from "Jesus Christ, who promulgated for the West as well as the East, the ideal of universal Brotherhood and Love."⁸⁴ While the Buddha was a minor figure in the Great Initiates, he emphasized the connection between the Buddha and Jesus Christ in his article La Legende de Bouddha and claimed that "the more one penetrates the hidden

⁸¹see Wilson, p.54 and Chicago Catalogue, p.305

⁸²Edouard Schure, "Great Initiates: A Study of the Secret History of Redligions," (1889) translated from the French to English by Gloria Rasberry, (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) p.509-510

⁸³"Greart Initiates," p.509-510

⁸⁴"Grand Initiates," 509-510

teachings of esoteric Brahmanism and Hinduism, the more one realizes the close connections between Buddha and Christ."⁸⁵ Paul Carus' Gospel of Buddha, one of the Buddhist references which Redon owned, was also written in a manner similar to Schure's syncretic approach by proving a systematic comparison between teachings of Buddha and Christ.⁸⁶

Like Schure, Redon also fused the images of Buddha and Christ in Sacred Heart of Christ (1895) and Buddha, around 1906. In fact the latter was initially called Sacred Heart, and then renamed Buddha.⁸⁷ The Buddha repeats the basic features of Sacred Heart of Christ, though in a more sober and softened form. But the throne has completely disappeared in Buddha. A conspicuous addition is a purple and yellow lotus-like flower shining at the lower left. Fred Leeman pointed out the striking similarities between Buddha and the passage about the Jesus' "first great revelation" in Schure's Great Initiates: Jesus climbed over the hill of Nazareth, meditation upon the world around him, and then he became aware of "the sovereign truth of his inner world."

"This truth was dawning in his innermost self as a luminous flower that emerges from a dark pond. It looked like a growing radiance that originated in himself when ever he was alone and meditated. Then men and objects, near or far, seemed transparent in their secret essence. He read thoughts and beheld souls."⁸⁸

Here, the scene of Jesus' spiritual awakening is represented. In this moment of Enlightenment, Jesus' awareness of "his inner most self as a luminous flower..." is correspondent to Redon's remark of the Buddha who is "with violet flowers at the left, radiance at the heart."⁸⁹ The lotus-like flowers, as a sign of glowing heart, thus seems to imply the blossoming of Buddha's inner awareness and his spiritual illumination.

⁸⁵see Schure's "La Legende de Bouddha" in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, July 1, 1885

⁸⁶Chicago Catalogue, p.88

⁸⁷Chicago Catalogue, p.229

⁸⁸see "Great Initiates," p.430 & see Chicago Catalogue, p.229

⁸⁹Chicago Catalogue, p.229

Moreover, the lotus flower, according to Buddhist iconography, symbolizes "the essential nature of all human beings and all things, in principle unpolluted by the mud of the *samsara* sphere, or by Delusion, and realized by attaining Enlightenment."⁹⁰ The notion reinforces the spiritual purity and richness of Buddha.

The closed eyes, quiet meditation and introspective mood seen in Redon's pictures also relates to Schure's account of Jesus' spiritual awakening: "He (Christ) closes his eyes; the external world disappears. The seer contemplates the Truth by the light with floods his being, making of his intelligence a flowing furnace."⁹¹ "Intense and sensitive souls need silence and peace in order to blossom."⁹² Seen in this light, in the moment of quietness and meditative serenity, Redon's seer with eyes closed, either Christ or Buddha, is immersed in his inner world in a state of spiritual tranquillity in order to be united with the divine Truth. Such pictorial representation is typical of Redon's religious motifs, especially for those initiates.

By pictorially fusing the figures of Buddha and Christ, Redon sought to demonstrate the common characteristics between the two great spiritual teachers. The fusion of the Western and Eastern religious figures corresponded to the universal spiritual which the contemporary Theosophists promoted. For example, Schure found that the establishment of the universal brotherhood was the ultimate goal shared by Christ and Buddha. According to Schure, Christ was represented as a great initiate whose mission was to give "his disciples a secret teaching which explained the first, revealing its inner meaning, penetrating to the depths of the spiritual truths which he had gained from the esoteric tradition of the Essenes and from his own experience."⁹³ With his "sublime compassion

⁹⁰Seckel Dietrich, "The Art of Buddhism," translated from the German by Ann E.Keep, (New York: Grown) p.279

⁹¹"Great Initiates," p.446

⁹²"Great Initiates," p.428

⁹³"Great Initiates," p.454

for humanity", he wanted to heal and save mankind from sufferings, and bring hope and life to all his brothers. To establish an ideal community of universal brotherhoods was his final goal for the mission, which had been taught by the tradition of the Essenes. The Essenes were the schools of prophets founded by Samuel—that is the Nabis—who saw with "inner eyes" and "were always kind, peaceful, and of the highest food faith in their relations."⁹⁴ Instead of fulfilling his wish of the establishment of the brotherhood community, the greatness of his love and compassion was culminated by sacrificing himself on Crucifixion for the salvation of all human being. The Crown of Thorns in Redon's Christ motifs thus can be understood as the symbol of Christ's loving suffering. In short, it is the self sacrifice for "the ideal of the universal brotherhoods and love" that Schure associated Christ with Buddha. Given his friendship with the Nabis of 1890s, Redon might have been aware of and transformed these characters into his Christ and Buddha imagery. So Redon, like Theosophists, also tended to bring the world religions as one in order to find the inner unity beneath the esoteric diversity of human religions.

In his letter to Denis in 1911 as a response to the misunderstanding that Denis had made of some of his religious subjects, Redon explained his synthetic subjects explicitly. He replied:

"Because you insist on my sending what you call a "subject." and you specially assign to me an interpretation of the fugue of Christ, of some lines from the Apocalypse, I cannot participate in the exhibition that you outlined for me. I want no misunderstanding,...above all [I do not want] people to forget the total neutrality I have always maintained as far as the meaning and implications of all my work are concerned-whenver their designation was not specially asked for. Art has on other end or purpose than art itself, and the best of mine is undetermined. Art can never specially support the propaganda of a belief or a cult, or for that matter, the realization of a social idea. I have sometimes made a Venus, or an Apollo without wanting people to become pagan; I have also represented Buddha; and that image, and its symbol, still move the hearts of an

⁹⁴"Great Initiates," p.418,421 & 437

innumerable part of mankind, and those subject (if one can call them subjects) are as sacred to me as the other."⁹⁵

Thus, Redon's syncretism was based on a belief in "equality of human religious convictions."⁹⁶ To him, all religious subjects were equally sacred. In his works, the deities, or initiates might appear in different forms and names, but the purpose remained the same: to serve "Art" itself by evoking the deepest emotion of human soul. In this aspect, Redon's synthetic type of religious subject recalled the ultimate goal of Theosophy in the sense that they both aimed to reveal the esoteric doctrines of all religions in order to penetrate the secret of human spirituality, as Schure stated: "Those great prophets, those powerful figures whom we call Rama, Krishma, Hermes, Moses, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato and Jesus, appeared before me in a homogeneous group. How diverse in form, appearance and color! Nevertheless, through them all moved the impulse of the eternal word. To be in harmony with them is to hear the Word which was in the Beginning. It is to know and experience the continuity of inspiration in history as an historical fact."⁹⁷

In the light of religious syncretism, Living Buddha (1903/1904) (fig.17) and the second version of Buddha in his Youth (1905) (fig.18) echo those with similar pictorial presentation, especially those of Orpheus motifs, in the sense that they all present an idealized spiritual seeker with closed eyes meditating among flowers. The pictorial similarities between Buddha and Orpheus suggest that there are some underlying essences shared by two initiates.

In Living Buddha and Buddha in his Youth, both show Buddha in profile surrounded by flowers. They close their eyes in serene contemplation, with an aura of spiritual awareness, as seen in Sacred Heart. However, there are some differences between them.

⁹⁵Chicago Catalogue, p.234

⁹⁶Chicago Catalogue, p.234

⁹⁷"Great Initiates," p.17

In Living Buddha, the figure tends to smell the flowers beside him, and the flowers are rendered quite realistically and recognizable. While in Buddha in his Youth, the figure is isolated from the floral background, which is explored into the colorist explosion without any specific flower. These distinctions will lead to different interpretations between the two works.

In a variety of Orpheus motifs, Orpheus of 1905 (fig. 19) is among the few that show the figure in profile with eyes closed and the flowers rendered realistically, the same visual treatment as seen in Living Buddha. According to Schure, Orpheus represented an aesthetic initiate, the ideal poet and musician. He characterized Orpheus as "father of mystics, musical savior of men... sovereign Orpheus, immortal and thrice-crowned, in hell, on earth, and in heaven...the great initiator of Greece, the ancestor of poetry and music, conceived as revealers of eternal truth."⁹⁸ Orpheus became the symbol of aesthetic inspiration and harmony. His music pacified animals and animated trees and flowers; his art was an expression of the harmony of the universe. Through his music and poetry, Orpheus revealed sacred mysteries of universal Truth to all beings: joy, love and beauty.⁹⁹ In Orpheus of 1905, the musician with his lyre floating in the sky seems to spread his enchanting voice throughout the world and stimulate the blossoming of the flowers. The consonance of music and nature is stressed. As the emphasis on the aural enchantment in Orpheus, Buddha's smelling of flowers in Living Buddha shows another kind of sensory evocation—scent. Most importantly, the theme by smelling flowers also implies that the pictorial art depends on a correspondent sort of sensory stimulation—color. To Redon, flowers serve to evoke the sensory beauty of color and light, as he described them as "fragile scented beings, admirable prodigies of light."¹⁰⁰ This explains why in his late decorative paintings, the flowers became the dominant element.

⁹⁸"Great Initiates," p.223-224

⁹⁹"Great Initiates", p.259

¹⁰⁰Hobbs, p.139

Moreover, Buddha's smelling of flowers, as the artist's embracing color and light, symbolizes the harmonious unity of pictorial art and nature. It is clear that the Buddha is no longer an ascetic seeker in the "noir" style to reject the sensual pleasure, but now knows well how to appreciate the sensory beauty out of this world of nature. The notion is also shared by Schure's Orpheus when the initiate encourages the disciple to "penetrate the sources of life and light."¹⁰¹ However, the closed eyes of Buddha and Orpheus suggest that the seeker has to transcend the sensory stimulation by turning oneself into the spiritual meditation so that the eternal Truth will be initiated in the inner light.

On the other hand, in Buddha in his Youth, the figure no longer has the contact with flowers as seen in Living Buddha, but keeps himself away from floral surroundings. The profile figure in a monk-like garb resembles to the one in Monk Reading (Alsace) (1905-1909) (fig.20). The 'worldly' costume indicates their earth bound youth. Besides, both pictures show the floral background which is fused into colorist patches. In Monk Reading, the book with Alsace printed on it results in some speculations between scholars.¹⁰² Roger James Mesley assumed that the book referred to some mystic writings around 1890s.¹⁰³ Seen in this light, the contemplative monk with eyes closed suggested that he has removed from the reading to be absorbed in his mystic meditation. The colorist patches of the background without any specific floral implies that his thought is beyond the earthy things into cosmic realms, as the set of steps to the right of the figure which leads to the blue sky suggests. If we view Buddha in his Youth as a succession of Living Buddha, the former will take on the same significance as that of Alsace. Surrounded by the suggestive mist of the floral background, the young Buddha with eyes closed seems to remove himself from external surrounding into his aesthetic or spiritual contemplation which leads to mystical union with the eternal Truth. The scene

¹⁰¹"Great Initiates," p.246

¹⁰²Durand related the title to the fate of Alsace during World War I, see Mesley, p.490

¹⁰³Mesley, p.490

thus echoes the moment of Christ's spiritual awakening: "when closed his eyes, the external world disappears. The seer contemplates the Truth by the light with floods his being, making of his intelligence a flowing furnace."¹⁰⁴

As a result, in Buddha in his Youth and Living Buddha, the release from physical confinement into the spiritual realm is essential for the young Buddha's meditation, so as Orpheus' and Christ's. However, the severed head of Orpheus which Redon presented in most of his Orpheus paintings indicates that it is only in death that the musician could be released from physical imprisonment and merge his spirit with the universe, as seen in Orpheus with Closed Eyes (1900) and Orpheus (after 1913) (figs.21 & 22). In Greek myth, Orpheus' death was due to the madness of the Bacchantes who were jealous of his eternal love. His death thus becomes the triumph of his music and love because when he does die, he escapes the cycle of rebirth and becomes immortal. Schure's Orpheus does say that it is through love that "I searched death to find life; and beyond life I saw the limbus, the souls, the transparent spheres and the ether of the gods."¹⁰⁵ Orpheus also foresees his death: "But the hour for confirming my mission by my death is come. Once more I must descend into Hell to ascend into Heaven."¹⁰⁶ Apollo, the god of the intellectual and the aesthetic, to whom Orpheus' music was dedicated, also manifests the triumph of the creative spirit and aesthetic over matter and chaos by his conquest over Python, the evil of darkness. As Redon finds in the victory of Apollo the triumph of spirit and aesthetic, in the death of Orpheus the triumph of music and love, as well as in Christ's Crucifixion the triumph of the universal compassion, Buddha's spiritual triumph will manifest in other three works, the first version of Buddha in his Youth (1904), Buddha Walking Among Flowers (1905), and Buddha (1906).

¹⁰⁴"Great Initiates," p.446

¹⁰⁵"Great Initiates," p.258, this refers to Orpheus' entrance to Hell to look for Eurydice

¹⁰⁶"Great Initiates," p.258

In these three works, the Buddha with floral motif recurs. The figure is either sitting or walking among the abundant landscape of flowers and woods. While these are more elaborately decorative; they are also narrative, and iconographically complex.

In the first version of Buddha in his Youth (1904) (fig.23), Redon portrayed Buddha as a seated monk-like sage meditating under the tree along the stream to the left. According to Buddhist legends, after Gautama realized that the ascetic life could not ensure the final Enlightenment, he decided to return to a more natural life. He first accepted the meal from a village maiden. Then he bathed in a nearby river—a symbol ceaseless flowing occurrence— and greatly refreshed in body and spirit. With a new insight and determination, he meditated under a nearby fig tree (later called Bodhi tree as Tree of Wisdom or Enlightenment) in a cross-legged lotus posture. After conquering the temptations from demon by the virtue of his charity and wisdom, he attained Enlightenment.¹⁰⁷ The stream, the tree, the cross-legged posture, all appear in Redon's painting. However, the narrative scene and the profile human-like Buddha are so different from the traditionally formalized icon of the Buddha as an idol-like deity that again demonstrated the literary sources only serve as imaginary inspiration. It is through his apt fusion of Buddhist doctrines with his own personal visual metaphors that the Buddha image was aimed to evoke a kind of spiritual suggestiveness.

Unlike the colorist mist of landscape in the 1905 version, Buddha in his Youth of 1904 shows a recognizable landscape. The tree landscape presented in the 1904 version can be traced back to his early landscape drawings. As early as in the middle 1860s, the Hermit in Landscape (1866) (fig.24) shows a solitude reading beneath the tree. The Woman Sleeping at the Foot of a Tree (1871) (fig.25) portrays a sleeping woman under the tree. The Enchanted Forest (1875) (fig.26) shows a mysterious figure holding a scroll who

¹⁰⁷Nancy Wilson Ross, "Hinduism, Buddhism, Zen: An Introduction to their Meaning and their Arts," (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p.88

stands besides the tree at the edge of the river. In these early drawings, the natural phenomena, the tree, grass, rock, and water, were all treated naturalistically. It is said that the possible sources for landscape were at Peyrelebadé or Barbizon.¹⁰⁸ However, the originality of Redon, in his own words, is to consist "in bringing to life in a human way improbable being and making them live according to the laws of probability, by putting, as far as possible, the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible."¹⁰⁹ To Redon, the natural landscape presented in these works, is to evoke an imaginary world of the visionary enchantment. In these landscapes, tree is an indispensable element. Beneath the tree, Redon's figures read, sleep, or meditate. No matter how the themes vary, the tree is always treated vertically and is cut off at the top by the frame. The tree becomes the link between earth and sky, the physical world and the spiritual realm. In a letter of 1894, Redon wrote to his patron Andre Bonger concerning the tree and his life in Paris:

"Le soir meme j'ai quitte Paris fatigue d'un sejour en ville trop long. Qui saura jamais les efforts que j'ai faits depuis trente ans pour y vivre loin des arbres et de la nature inconsciente!...Mais enfin, il fallait bien faire socialement quelque chose, et sans un doute, Paris a du bon: nus en disons du mal, mais il donne a l'artiste la direction de l'effort, l'analyse de son moi."¹¹⁰

From the letter it is clear that Redon associated the tree or nature with the unconscious, freedom, the creative spirit, in contrast with the analytical consciousness of earthy life. On the one hand, the tree embodied the primitive force of nature. On the other hand, the tree became the metaphor of spiritual aspiration and transcendence. Its duality embodied the evolution of humankind's consciousness. In Woman Sleeping at the Foot of a Tree, the sleeping woman in her unconscious state seems to sink back into the unconscious

¹⁰⁸Hobbs, p.18

¹⁰⁹Michael Wilson, p.31

¹¹⁰cited from Mesley, p.279

life of nature embodied by the tree.¹¹¹ While, the figure reading or holding the sacred scroll beneath the tree, as the counterpart of the sleeping woman, represents the subsequent moment of human spiritual evolution through the possession of nature's secret, as seen in Hermit in Landscape and Enchanted Forest.¹¹² In any case, beneath the tree each figure seems to search the way towards spiritual illumination.

In Buddha in his Youth, the tree is treated as naturally as it is in the earlier works. In fact, it is the most naturalistic thing in the painting; its top is again cut off by the frame. The natural treatment of the tree reminds the fact of reality; while its reaching to the sky implies the link to spirituality. The seated Buddha meditates beneath the tree, as if he communed with the mystery of nature, the dawn of consciousness. While the flowers were rare in the early landscape drawings, the Buddha is now surrounded by a burst of flowers. There are two types of floral in the painting, the fantastic and the natural. The lower the more recognizable and natural; the higher the more fantastic and ethereal. Like the tree, the two types of floral also associated with the evolution of consciousness. In his early works, the flower growing from the earth, is usually superimposed with a sad human face, implying its consciousness of being bound to the earthy darkness, as seen in March Flower. A Human and Sad Face (fig.27). Such head-flower symbolized the soul evolving from matter.¹¹³ However, to those hovering flowers, they look more fantastic and buoyant, as the vapor of the soul. In another Buddha pastel, Death of the Buddha, Redon wrote: "Sous un arbre d'ou tombent des fleurs lunaires, le Bouddha est tombe; ces fleurs vont a lui comme une jonchee lumineuse."¹¹⁴ To Redon, these fantastic flowers, or 'fleurs lunaires' as he called, represent a joyful and spiritual state of pure nature which

¹¹¹Chicago, p.82

¹¹²Chicago, p.165

¹¹³Mesley, p.137-138

¹¹⁴Ralph Metzner, "Maps of Consciousness," p.48. cited in *Orangerie*, no.100, from Mesley, p.302

is "the soil of art itself, the good earth of the real, harrowed and tilled by the spirit."¹¹⁵ The fantastic floral hovering up to the sky symbolizes their breaking from the earth confinement into the astral realm. The contrast of the two types of flowers thus evokes the visionary metaphor of a correspondent sort—the Buddha's releasing from earthy darkness into the astral realm of spirituality. Immersed in the visionary color of spiritual surrounding, the Buddha with eyes closed seems absorbed in inner awareness in a state of spiritual bliss and attends Enlightenment, *Nirvana*. The Buddha's seated posture reinforces his attainment of Enlightenment. His spreading legs and palm-down hand are most specific and believable, in the manner close to traditional Buddhist enlightenment gesture. According to Buddhist iconography, the palm-down gestures, so-called earth-Touching mudra, refers to the Buddha's Enlightenment by pointing his fingers to the ground as a symbol to call for Earth as witness that he has attained Enlightenment after conquering the temptations of Demon, as seen in one Buddhist statue from Thailand (fig.28).¹¹⁶ However Redon did not strictly follow the traditional standard of Buddha imagery; instead, his portrayal of Buddha's Enlightened posture in profile only to evoke a sort of spiritual suggestiveness through aptly fusing of Buddhist and personal metaphors. It is in the Buddha's Enlightenment scene that Redon again demonstrated his personal optimistic faith, the triumph of spirit over matter, evil and death. Besides, the possible sources of the Earth-Touching mudra might come from his friend Gauguin who had applied this mudra to his works like *Idol with a Pearl* (1892). Dietrich assumed that Gauguin could have seen this mudra in photographs of the Borabadur frieze.¹¹⁷

The significance of Enlightenment scene is that in the intrinsic nature of the enlightened Buddha, Redon found an ideal model as a merciful intermediary between man and the world of nature, as well as between spirituality and reality. Every detail in

¹¹⁵Odion Redon, "To Myself," p.99

¹¹⁶ see E.Dale Saunders, "Mudra," (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1960) p.80-84

¹¹⁷Mesley, p.302

the painting serve to evoke these complex relationships. In terms of style, the tree and the figure are rendered naturalistically. Some flowers are fantastic, while some are more natural. The Buddha, seated under the tree with the Earth-Touching mudra, implies that the accomplishment of his spiritual quest has to be done in this world of reality. The Buddha portrayed as a monk-like figure, stress the potential of the human soul for spiritual illumination. The fusion of Buddha with a visionary floral echoes the harmonious consonance of Buddha with all beings in a state of spiritual bliss. In short, the theme points to the fact that the spiritual peace should not be excluded from the natural world; it occurs in the presence of the natural world, in the presence of reality. Once one realizes how to transcend material being into spiritual perfection by virtue of meditation and inner vision (as closed eyes imply), the Enlightenment is achieved. The notion of the unity of the material and the spiritual which Redon stressed in his picture, on the one hand, well corresponds to one of the Buddhist famous doctrines: "the only remedy for evil is healthy reality."¹¹⁸ On the other hand, the spiritual transcendence of human's consciousness echoes Schure's account of Pythagoras' philosophy that divine perfection is at once the cause of involution and the goal of evolution: "divine insight which allows one to see the spheres of life and of the science in a concentric order, to understand the involution of the mind in matter through universal creation, and its evolution, or its reascent to unity through this individual creation, which is called the development of consciousness."¹¹⁹ The concept of "evolution of souls" is the shared character which Schure links Buddha and Pythagoras.

The landscape not only appeared in Buddha's motif, but became the dominant element in Redon's late religious themes. Two versions of Saint Sebastian, of 1910 and 1914, are among them (figs.29 & 30). In both paintings, the Christian martyr is posed in front

¹¹⁸Mesley, p. cited by Dietrich, A Study of Symbolism in the Tahitian painting of Paul Gauguin, 1891-1893, p.153

¹¹⁹"Great Initiates," p.278

against the tree. They both treat the tree naturalistically with cut off of the top, implying the like between the earth and the spiritual, like Redon's other works. While, the distinction between the two is the different treatment of flowers. Compared with the 1910 version, the floral in the 1914 painting becomes more decorative and fanciful. The flowers are no longer a number of small dots spreading on the ground as the previous one did, but transformed into the visionary color hovering around the Saint. If the ground-spreading floral and the ominous sky in the 1910 version stress the martyrdom of the saint, the floating of the fantastic floral and the ornamental colors suggest that the spiritual now surrounds the saint, freeing him from earthy suffering, and leading him to unite with divine light. The tree metaphor and the contrast of the two types of floral again take on the same spiritual significance as in Buddha in his Youth, which help to understand the underlying meaning of Redon's works.

In comparison with the emphasis on Buddha's spiritual awakening in Buddha in his Youth (1904), Buddha's compassion for human kind and his devotion to a teaching mission were stressed in Buddha Wandering among Flowers (1905) (fig.31) and Buddha (1906) (fig.32). Basically, the two pictures share composition and figural elements. In both paintings, Buddha appears as a monk-like figure walking in a floral landscape. The 'Walking Buddha' also appears in Buddhist art, as a wanderer and missionary teacher, like the one from Thailand (fig.33).¹²⁰ Compared with the early study for the Walking Buddha motif in 1890-1895 (fig.34), the monk-like figure in the post-1900 versions look more Oriental, and 'humanized'. In the early drawing, the Buddha with open book walking in the woods implies that the laws of nature had been revealed to him. A grand halo on the head indicates his sublime divinity and the perfection of his wisdom, as the Christ image seen in Sacred Heart of Christ. While in the later versions, the figure lets the suggestive gestures to make the point. The left gesture is most ambiguous and

¹²⁰Rose, p.105

curious: the hand raising up with palm outward and fingers straight except the junction of the index with the thumb. Does this gesture has any specific metaphor? Is this gesture used to suggest the perfection of Buddha's wisdom and the spiritual, by a joining circle of the thumb and the index, the form of complete and perfect? Or it refers to the Buddhist teaching mudra, *An-I-In*, (fig.35), as a symbol of the accomplishment of his teaching?¹²¹ No matter what, the staff in his right hand suggests his long teaching journey.

However, the two paintings also show the striking differences. The pose of the Buddha remains the same, but the face is different. In the 1905 version, the face is calm, content and smiling, while in the 1906 version, the face becomes more serious and solemn. The stereotype of tree remains, again as a symbol of spiritual aspiration and transcendence, but the location is different. The earlier version shows that Buddha is not far away from the tree behind him. The bloom of that tree implies his spiritual richness. It is as if Buddha had risen from his meditative pose seated beneath the tree to begin his walking and teaching. Surrounded by the dense, fantastic color and blossoms, the Buddha with serene smile seems content with the benefit he had brought to all beings surround him by releasing them from earth darkness into pure spirit. On the other hand, the latter version shows the figure and the tree set apart on each side of the picture. The luxurious floral landscape disappears. Instead, in front of him is a rather barren landscape except a couple of plants on the ground. A cloud of visionary floral forms hovering over his head represented as the sign of the divine spirit which he is going to bring to this lost land to save it from death, decay and the cycle of *samsara*. The link of the tree in bud with the ethereal floral suggest the potential for the spiritual transcendence of all beings. As a result, even though the pictorial presentations are different, both paintings suggest that the Buddha after he has already seen *Nirvana*, still

¹²¹see Alistair Shearer, "Buddha: The Intellegnet Heart," (London: Thames and Huston, 1992), p.50

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remains on earth in order to teach the Law to all beings. His great compassion recalls the concept of "ideal of universal brotherhood and love" which Schure connects Buddha with Christ.

In his late Buddha works, we have seen repeatedly that Redon infused Schure's theosophical ideas with his own beliefs and symbols. The fusion of Buddha and other religious or mythological figures in his works was correspondent with Theosophical syncretism. However, the Buddha images undoubtedly embodied certain distinct characteristics, which draw Redon to choose this Oriental initiate as a subject. According to Schure, the greatness of the Buddha resides "in his sublime charity, in his moral reform and in the social revolution he brought about through overthrowing the ossified castes"¹²² But in terms of theoretical contribution, he declared that Buddhism add nothing to the esoteric doctrine of the Brahmins; it only revealed certain parts of the latter. "Its psychology is fundamentally the same," he claimed, "though it follows a different path."¹²³ Redon had long been familiar with Brahman doctrines since Clavaud introduced him to Hinduism in 1860s and he also had the same sources as Schure, such as Ramayana and Bhagavad-Gita. The Buddhist doctrines, like karma, nirvana, dharma (the law), samsara (the endless round of existence), and others, which derived from Brahmanism, would also be known to Redon. However, it was the recognition of the 'different path' between Brahmanism and Buddhism that would effect the whole outlook and perspectives of his Buddhist works after 1900s.

The distinction between Hinduism and Buddhism which Schure indicated stemmed from a different approach toward *Nirvana*. In The Voice of the Silence (1889), Blavatsky had articulated explanations on this point. Generally speaking, in both Hinduism and Buddhism, Nirvana means to attain the highest state of spiritual bliss by

¹²²"Great Initiates," p.509

¹²³the concepts were elaborated in Schure's article "La legende de Bouddha", in "Review des Deux Mondes", July 1, 1885, cited from "Great Initiates", p.509

the effort of escaping from the wheel of reincarnation (*samsara*). However, in the Hinduist point of view, in order to attain *Nirvana*, the individual soul (Atman) has to free itself from all forms of existence, including all passions and desires, and identify itself with the Absolute, "Supreme Divine Spirit" in the state of absolute annihilation. When this state of spiritual transcendence is reached, the passionless peace of Nirvana is attained. However, to absorb in Absolute, one has to make endless effort of meditation leading to right action, such as the emancipation of Hinduism doctrines (the way of Knowledge) and the practicing of the ritual activities (the Way of Work).¹²⁴ At this point, the emphasis on the emancipation of knowledge and physical suffering to reach the spiritual as seen in Redon's four "noir" works was closer to Hinduism.

On the other hand, for Buddhists, to achieve Nirvana is something more than 'right knowledge' and 'right ritual activities'. The Buddhist point of view is that everything is in a state of endless 'becoming' and there is no eternal 'Being' or 'Absolute' as Brahman called it. To stop the wheel of rebirth, it is *karma* not the soul that matters. All that passed over into the next birth was the *karma* that had been collected in this life; living in compassion and charity was the way to collect the good *karma* in this life. As a result, the Buddhists refused to commit themselves to the doctrine of annihilation, as Blavatsky declared that Buddhism "is the very opposite of personal annihilation."¹²⁵ For Buddhists, the wisdom to attain *Nirvana* must first start with this world of reality, then transcend the visible into the realm of the invisible Divine spirituality, and remain there for ever in the state of spiritual bliss; "that is the end of his participation in the universe, at least in this inconceivable cosmic cycle."¹²⁶ The Buddha in his Youth and Living Buddha are

¹²⁴E.O. James, "History of Religions," (London: The English Universities Press) p.70-79

¹²⁵Joscelyn Godwin, "The Theosophical Enlightenment," (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1944) p.325-326, Blavatsky's Buddhism belongs to Mahayana since she had friends from China which is her sources of Buddhism

¹²⁶Godwin, p.331

examples for this aspect since they both emphasize that spirituality illumination is achieved by transcending the sensory evocations of this world. The other alternative is to renounce *Nirvana* and be content with reincarnation again and again until the end of the cycle, in order to benefit all beings. The great sacrifice of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas was the example of this kind, who reincarnated again and again in order to preach the Law for human salvation, as seen in Buddha Walking Among Flowers and Buddha of 1906. However in the early study, the walking Buddha implied that the Law is that of Nature or the Nature of Humanity. As a result, Redon's Buddha imagery corresponded what the contemporary theosophist H. P. Blavatsky called the Buddha of Compassion the very incarnation of wisdom and love, the two greatest elements in the universe: wisdom, which is the supreme vision, knowledge from recollections of the past and forms part of Nature's law; and love, impersonal and majestic, leading to the sacrifice of self even when on the very threshold of nirvana.¹²⁷ It is in Buddha that Redon or Blavatsky found in a self-sacrifice of the human being the highest spiritual evolution on earth for his embracing of wisdom and love which makes him so holy and exalted. This was the ultimate goal that both Redon and Blavatsky were longing for. Moreover the comprehension of Buddha as a compassionate living initiate explained why Redon portrayed Buddha as human monk in his post-1900 works, in contrast to the monstrous-look in his early "noir" works. To add a subtitle Idol for Buddha about 1900 is an evidence. Seen in this light, Redon's Buddha imagery after 1900 is not for worship, like the idol-like Buddha statue in traditional Buddhist works, but a human being with great compassion and wisdom aims to free all beings from the cycle of *Samsara* into the light of *Nirvana*.

¹²⁷Purucker, p.519

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters that the essential theme of Redon's images of Buddha is that of a mystic quest for the spiritual. By deliberately employing the esoteric sign in his works, each image, though enigmatic, takes on its own significance. When these images are viewed in the relation to the whole, they also represent a continuous theme. In the 1895 version, it showed that the Buddha as a seeker who sought to embrace the wisdom of universe for initiation. In 1896 version, the Buddha embodied the duality between spirit and matter, evil and divine, dark and light, death and life. He struggled to free himself from evil of darkness and eventually to rise toward union with a divine spirit. Buddha's spiritual triumph thus ended up the nightmarish anguish of the 'noir' style. The pastel Buddha's Enlightenment about 1900 preluded the colorful decoration of post-1900 Buddha imagery. In The Living Buddha of 1903/1904, the theme by evoking the sensory stimulation of floral implied the fact that to awaken all the senses and transcend them to a total aesthetic experience. The Buddha in his Youth of 1905 reinforced the point that through inner meditation, let it be spiritual or aesthetic, will lead to mystical union with eternal divinity. In the first version of Buddha in his Youth of 1904, at the dawn of spiritual consciousness, the Buddha attained Enlightenment. The early study of Walking Buddha showed that the Buddha who with his perfect wisdom acquired the law of nature, had been crowned with the light of divinity. The Buddha Walking among Flowers presented Buddha as a compassionate savior who was content to be reincarnated again and again in order to benefit all beings by preaching the Law. The Buddha of 1906 showed his determination to save the

desolated world from suffering, illusion and samsara. To Redon, it is in the perfect wisdom and the sublime compassion that Buddha had accomplished the highest spiritual evolution on earth. From the series of Buddha images, it is as if the passage of Buddha's searching for spirituality from an ascetic seeker to the enlightened one was also Redon's who pursued his own personal passage towards Enlightenment, through the forms of artistic expression from "noir" to color.

However, Buddha was not the only spiritual model for Redon. In The Sacred Heart of the Buddha of 1906, by symbolic fusing of Buddha and Christ images, it demonstrated the synthetic approach in Redon's thought and works, which had affinities with contemporary Theosophy's mystic unity of world religions as one. Like theosophists, in the diversity of religious subjects, Redon sought to reconcile the entire religious tradition of the East and West into a single system of thought in an attempt to reach the esoteric meaning of human spiritual. However, as Flaubert's Saint Anthony had gone through a period of confusion and anguish by confronting the parade of world religious figures, and at the end found the peace in the pantheistic vision, Redon also searched for unity and resolution to his internal conflicts through the diversity of religious subjects which eventually ended up the sense of loss and bewilderment prevailing in his early "noir" works. It is through the sense of profound despair and pain that both Redon and Flaubert found their impulsive force to what was indeed an inextricably harmonized unity. In another words, it is through the deep pessimism that an idealized hope of radically renewed existence was emerged—such idealism was typical for those decadent Symbolists in the Fin-de-Siecle period.¹²⁸ But instead to explicitly express their pain or hope, both Flaubert and Redon invested the personal symbols to evoke the suggestive

¹²⁸ The subjective idealism derived from the profound pessimism was shared by most Symbolist writers and artists, such as Huysman's "A Rebour" and Baudelaire's "Les fleurs du mal". see John R. Reed, "Decadent Style," (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985) p.1-18

ambiguity, especially those of the opposite tension between despair and hope, matter and spirit, evil and divine, unconsciousness and consciousness, death and life; but the spiritual was the ultimate triumph. The subjective idealism toward ultimate truth, thus corresponded to contemporary theosophist Schure's motto— "Soul is the key to universe."¹²⁹

In Redon's religious subjects, to release from the physical imprisonment the light of spirit has to be initiated in the tranquillity of inner vision. As a result, the introspective mood, the closed eyes, the quiet meditation, the serene calmness, are all the shared characteristics by Redon's initiates, like Christ, Orpheus, and Saint Sebastian.

Although the initiates shared some similarities, each of them also showed the distinct characteristics. Each religious or mythological figure represented a different ideal for his spiritual quest. For instance, in death, Orpheus reached the triumph of music and love. Apollo's victory over Python symbolized the triumph of spirit and aesthetic over matter, evil and death. The Buddha with his compassion and love was a savior of all beings, which at this point was synthesized with Christ. While Christ sacrificed himself on Cross, the Buddha gave up nirvana and was contented to be reincarnated again and again in order to benefit all beings. To establish an ideal society of brotherhood was the ultimate goal for Christ and Buddha, so as Theosophy, Nabis and Redon. However in Redon's point of view, the distinction between Buddha and Christ is that the Buddha asserted to live in this world of reality and transcend the sensory stimulation into the mystic union with the eternal spiritual after he realized that the ascetic life and the elimination of sensual pleasure could not ensure the Enlightenment. Redon's stylistic transition from his early nightmarish pessimistic "noir" style to the late optimistic color works shows the similar passage towards spirituality as that of the Buddha.

¹²⁹"Great Initiates," from the preliminary page of Dedication

Through the diversity of religious subjects, Redon was searching for his own faith. Each initiate mirrored the different path towards the spiritual. There seems little doubt that Redon saw his own works of art as a minor version of the spiritual passage, and his ultimate mission as that of combining Eastern and Western wisdom to penetrate the mystery of the soul.

FIGURES

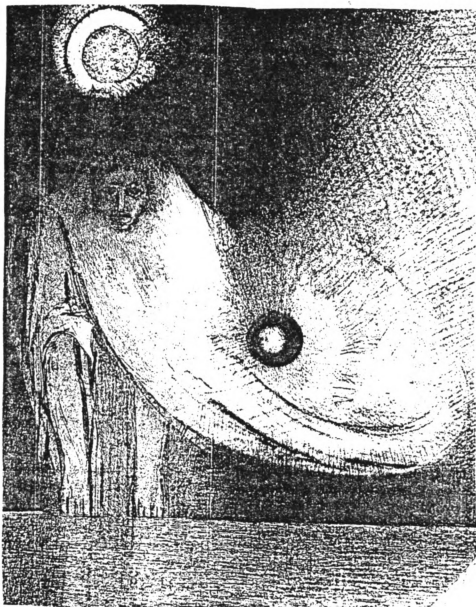


figure 1. Odilon Redon. Buddh: I was taken to schools. I knew more than the scholars.
lithograph. 1895

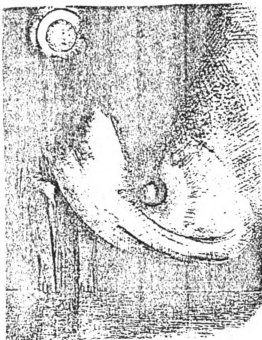


figure 2. Odilon Redon. second version of Buddha: I was taken to schools. I knew more than the scholars. lithograph. 1895 .



figure 3. Odilon Redon. Buddha: Intelligence became mine! I became the Buddha.
lithograph. 1896



figure 4. Odilon Redon. Buddha's Enlightenment (Idol). pastel. before 1900

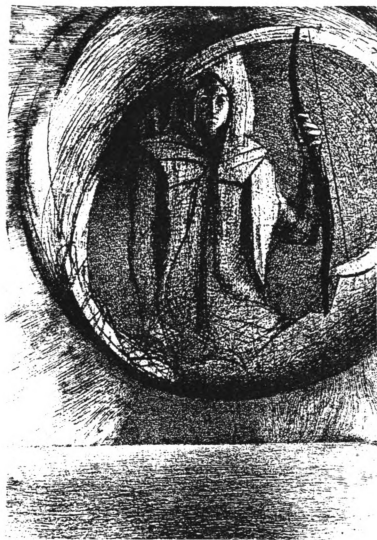


figure 5. Odilon Redon. And Yonder, the Astral Idol, the Apotheosis. lithograph. 1891

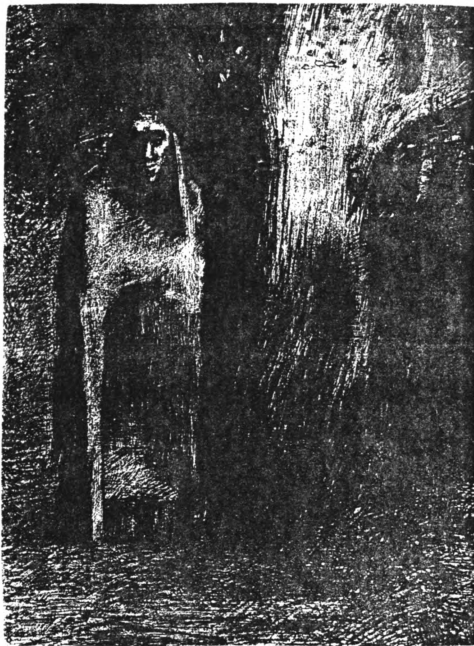


figure 6. Odilon Redon. The man was alone in a night landscape. lithograph. 1886



figure 7. Odilon Redon. The breath which leads living creatures is also in the Spheres.

lithograph. 1882



figure 8. Odilon Redon Death: My irony surpasses all others. lithograph. 1889



figure 9. Odilon Redon. There were struggles and vain victories. lithograph. 1883



figure 10. Odilon Redon. Chariot of Apollo, oil on canvas. 1912



figure 11. Odilon Redon. Day (detail). distemper on canvas. 1910-1911



figure 12. Paul Gauguin. Idol with a Pearl (front view) 1892 (?)



figure 13. Paul Ranson. Christ and Buddha. 1890



figure 14. Claude Emile Schuffenecker. cover illustration for Le Lotus Bleu. 1887



figure15. Odilon Redon. Sacred Heart of Christ. pastel. 1895 or 1906



figure 16. Odilon Redon. Sacred Heart (Buddha) pastel. 1906



figure 17. Odilon Redon. Living Buddha. pastel. 1903-1904



figure 18. Odilon Redon. Buddha in his Youth oil. 1905



figure 19. Odilon Redon. Orpheus. pastel on paper fixed to canvas mount. 1905

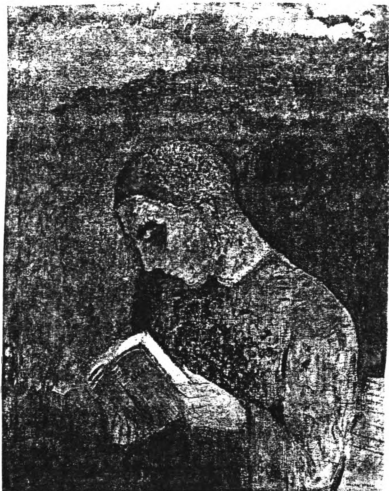


figure 20. Odilon Redon. Monk Reading (Alsace). oil on canvas. 1905-1909



figure 21. Odilon Redon. Orpheus with Closed Eyes. 1900



figure 22. Odilon Redon. Orpheus. pastel. after 1913

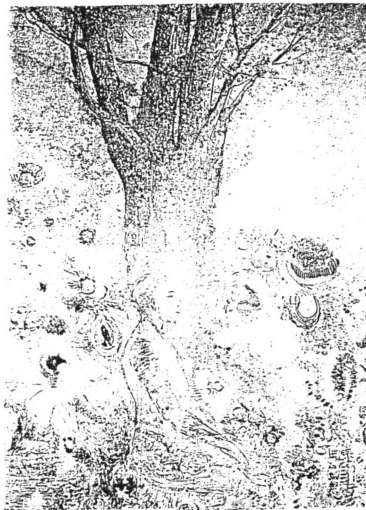


figure 23. Odilon Redon. Buddha in his Youth. distemper on canvas. 1904



figure 24. Odilon Redon. Hermit in Landscape. pen and ink. 1904



figure 25. Odilon Redon. Woman Sleeping at the Foot of a Tree. charcoal. 1871



figure 26. Odilon Redon. Enchanted Forest, charcoal and white gouache. 1875

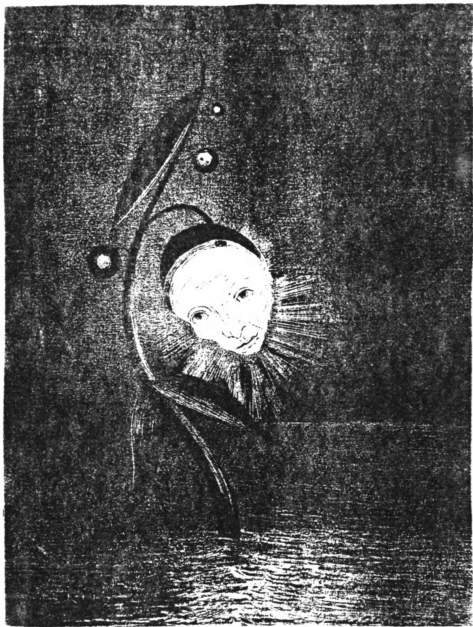


figure 27. Odilon Redon. March Flower: A Human and Sad Face. lithograph. 1886



figure 28. Buddha with Earth-Touching Mudra from Thailand



figure 29. Odilon Redon. Saint Sebastien. pastel. 1910



figure 30. Odilon Redon. Saint Sebastian. oil on canvas. 1914



figure 31. Odilon Redon. Buddha Wandering among Flowers. pastel and oil. 1905



figure 32. Odilon Redon. Buddha. pastel. before 1906

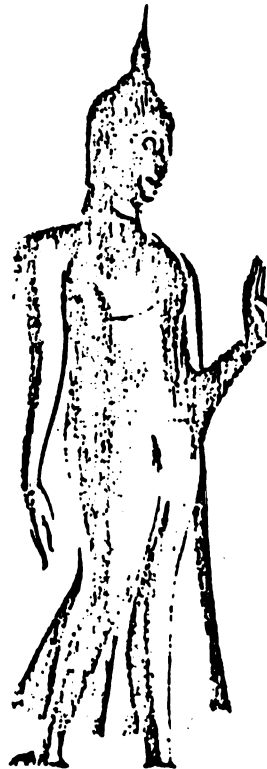


figure 33. Walking Buddha from Thailand. 6th-7th centuries A.D.



figure 34. Odilon Redon. study for Walking Buddha. 1890-1895

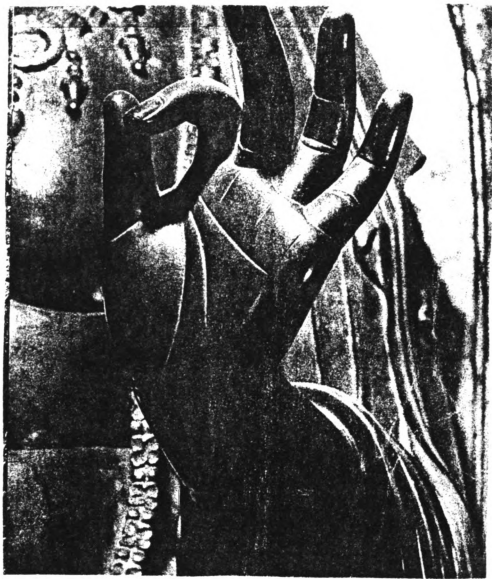


figure 35. Buddhist Teaching Mudra "*An-l-in*." Detail of Yakushi. Japan. 7th century A.D.

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