

Nordic and Merovingian inspiration in late nineteenth-century French opera

Vincent Giroud

Northern Europe and Scandinavia figure only very rarely among the sources of inspiration for French opera during the first two centuries of its history, dominated by Greco-Roman mythology and, more generally, the Mediterranean world. The only exception was Philidor's *Ernelinde, princesse de Norvège*, premiered at the Académie Royale de Musique in 1767. The libretto, set in semi-legendary Norway in the fifth century AD, was adapted by Poinsinet from Francesco Silvani's *La fede tradita e vendicata*, set to music by Gasparini in 1704 and subsequently by various other Italian composers, including Vinci and Vivaldi. The choice of this Nordic environment, wholly unprecedented at the Académie Royale, coincided with the first wave of pre-Romanticism and the beginning of the vogue for Ossian, echoed by Goethe in *Werther* (1774). Once Napoleon had adopted Ossian as his 'official' poet, what had by then become the Académie Impériale de Musique was obliged to play host to Celtic mythology as recreated by the Scots writer James Macpherson from undeniably authentic sources: even if it did not survive the Empire, and is now remembered mainly thanks to Ingres, Le Sueur's *Ossian ou les Bardes* (1804) was nevertheless one of the great successes of the period. Another Ossianic opera, Méhul's *Uthal*, premiered at the Théâtre Feydeau in 1806 with less success, had the unusual feature of seeking to convey the chill mists of Caledonia in its scoring, from which violins were omitted.

The Romantic era proper considerably amplified this search for new sources of inspiration in a northerly direction, at the expense of the

traditional classical models. Although Ossian had fallen from fashion, the prestige of medieval Scotland was enhanced by the Europe-wide craze for Walter Scott's novels, which stimulated historians' interest in previously neglected periods, as demonstrated in France by the success of Augustin Thierry's *Récits des temps mérovingiens* (1840). The *Nibelungenlied* was translated into French in 1839, and again in 1852, under the title *La Fin tragique des Nibelons ou Les Bourguignons à la cour d'Attila*. The Scandinavian Edda, known in French since the 1780s thanks to the Genevan scholar Paul-Henri Mallet, enjoyed new partial translations published in 1838, 1844, 1853 and 1858. These different fields of interest are linked, even if we may note a certain confusion between bards and druids or Celtic and Norse mythology. But, as Philippe Van Tieghem pithily put it, 'these Scandinavians who were Celts, that is to say brothers of the Gauls, while also being Germans, of whom the Franks were a tribe, are doubly our kinsfolk, and almost our ancestors'. That bond is particularly evident in the output of the Flemish economist and scholar Émile de Laveleye, who, after having written a *Histoire des rois francs* in his youth, published between 1861 and 1866 French versions of the *Nibelungen nôt* and, under the title *Sigurd et les Eddas*, of the verse Edda known as the *Edda of Saemund the Learned*. Unlike their predecessors, these translations were widely acclaimed and helped to popularise a mythology that had previously been little known.

As Joël-Marie Fauquet has pointed out, a serious misunderstanding as to its originality developed around Ernest Reyer's *Sigurd* from the time of its triumphant premiere in Brussels in 1884, followed by its first performance at the Palais Garnier the following year. In fact, although Wagner had conceived and written the libretto of his *Ring des Nibelungen* between 1848 and 1853, the text, published in German in 1853 and then in 1861, had had very limited circulation. Reyer could therefore state in all good faith that he knew nothing of Wagner's project when, probably as early as 1862, Alfred Blau offered him the scenario which he had drawn, it is thought, from Laveleye's translation. A beginner as a librettist (his other major contribution to opera was to be Massenet's

Esclarmonde), Blau had enlisted the help of Camille Du Locle, a friend of Reyer's and the influential nephew of Émile Perrin, then director of the Paris Opéra. This connection perhaps explains why *Sigurd* was prematurely announced for the Opéra in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* in 1867 when even the poem was far from completed – Du Locle's attention had been monopolised by Verdi's *Don Carlos*, as he had taken sole responsibility for its libretto after the death of Joseph Méry. Far from seeking to compete with Wagner, Reyer and his librettists remained resolutely within the French tradition of *grand-opéra* on a chivalric and fantastical theme, like *Armide* or *Robert le Diable*, but gave it a new setting, that of a Burgundian court in the first half of the fifth century. This precisely defined historical and geographical background (the action takes place in Worms and Iceland, and the text mentions the threat posed by Attila's armies in the east) contrasts sharply with the purely mythical Rhineland of the *Ring*: if there is a Wagnerian reference here, it would be to the Wagner of *Lohengrin*. In any case, Reyer was not a composer in a hurry, and when *Sigurd* was finally staged at La Monnaie in Brussels in 1884, then in Paris the following year, it could no longer lay claim to originality. Nevertheless, the opera enjoyed a brilliant career at the Palais Garnier, passing the total of 250 performances in 1935, and César Vezzani continued to be applauded in the role of Sigurd on the stages of the leading provincial opera houses until he retired from singing in 1948.

While *Sigurd* was still pursuing its slow gestation, a veritable craze for Nordic cultures had begun to make itself felt in France. Before Ibsen and Strindberg, who conquered Paris, thanks to the advocacy of André Antoine and Aurélien Lugné-Poë, only in the 1890s, Bjørnson was translated as early as 1865, in a volume of short stories also containing stories by Magdalene Thoresen (stepmother of Suzannah Ibsen). Édouard Schuré devoted a study to Bjørnson, which César Franck read in the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1870; the writer lived in Paris from 1882 to 1887, and died there in 1910. The Norwegian virtuoso and composer Johan Svendsen, dedicatee of Grieg's Violin Sonata no. 2, had visited the French capital in 1868-69 and played the sonata with Saint-Saëns at the piano. He returned

in 1878, and his concerts, notably at the Exposition Universelle, were a great success. Grieg himself was admired by the younger generation of composers, Debussy and Ravel in particular, and enjoyed considerable prestige in France well before his visit to Paris in 1889, during which he met Franck. The latter's student Pierre de Bréville had travelled to Bergen in the summer of 1887 and met Grieg there. According to Bréville's diary, Grieg chiefly admired the 'craftsmanship' of French musicians, even those he disliked, such as Massenet, or found 'cold', such as Saint-Saëns. He seems to have reserved his harshest words for Ambroise Thomas, which might seem unfair when one considers that the French composer had introduced into the Mad Scene of his *Hamlet* (1868) an authentic Scandinavian melody, which poignantly haunts its postlude. Joël-Marie Fauquet sees Thomas's masterpiece as the starting point for the 'process of Scandinavian impregnation of French music'.



In this highly propitious context, it is not surprising that one of the finest French operas of the 1880s, Chabrier's *Gwendoline*, should be Nordic in inspiration. The setting is not Scandinavia, however, but Anglo-Saxon England in the eighth century. Catulle Mendès soberly described his libretto as 'conceived and written in the spirit of the new music-dramatic school'. Unlike *Sigurd* and *Hulda*, it is not based on any known literary source, although the tragic reversal of the denouement – a marriage that becomes the occasion for a massacre – may bring to mind the myth of Hypermnestra as treated by Charles-Hubert Gervais in his opera *Hypermnestre* and Salieri in *Les Danaïdes*, or even the fifth act of Verdi's *Les Vêpres siciliennes*. However, as Steven Huebner has pointed out, it is difficult not to note certain Wagnerian echoes, particularly of *Der fliegende Holländer*: does not Gwendoline's dream recall Senta's Ballad? Does not the love she foresees and later feels for the fierce Danish 'king of the seas' Harald bring to mind that of Daland's daughter for the Dutchman? And is that mutual love, which can only find fulfilment in a shared death, not

the Wagnerian theme par excellence? Huebner has also noted analogies (some of them purely musical) with *Lohengrin* and *Die Walküre*, and even with *Götterdämmerung*, not to mention *Tristan*. All of this is hardly surprising if one remembers that Mendès was an early Wagnerite and that the libretto of *Gwendoline* is contemporary with his important study of Wagner, published in 1886 – even though, like so many others, he had distanced himself from the Master of Bayreuth after the publication in 1873 of the latter's anti-French pamphlet, *Eine Kapitulation*. This return to Wagner in the form of a detour via Anglo-Saxon England and Denmark (a country humiliated by Prussia in the Second Schleswig War of 1864, just as France was to be a few years later) could therefore be interpreted as at once a reconciliation and a farewell, since Mendès would thereafter devote himself to promoting French or Mediterranean sources of inspiration.

From a formal point of view, the libretto of *Gwendoline* is almost classical in its concision, which contrasts with the brutality of the subject: two acts (at least in the original structure), three main characters and two secondary ones. Chabrier's exuberant personality shines through in the charm of the melodic inspiration, the invariably delightful orchestral colours, the richness and originality of the harmony and the constant level of inspiration, from the dazzling overture to the gripping final *Liebestod*. Only the unusual difficulty of the two principal roles can explain why the work, first performed at La Monnaie in 1886 and given at the Opéra in 1893, near the end of the composer's life, has not yet conquered the place it deserves in the repertoire.

Although Édouard Lalo wrote a *Rapsodie norvégienne*, the first version of which is contemporary with the Svendsen concerts, he chose to turn to Brittany for his magnum opus, *Le Roi d'Ys*. Nevertheless, the fact that this opera, initially subtitled 'legend of the Breton wars in the fifth century', is rooted in 'Celtic antiquities' suggests that it should be associated with the Nordic movement in the broad sense. Its librettist, Édouard Blau, cousin of Alfred and nine years his junior, was Louis Gallet's colleague at the Assistance Publique in Paris and collaborated several times with him; he also worked with Georges Hartmann and Paul Milliet on

the libretto of *Werther*. Much more than Chabrier, who was fundamentally a free spirit, Lalo feared the shadow of Wagner and sought every possible means to break free of him as a model, in both choice of subject (which nevertheless takes place in the theoretical period of the *Nibelungenlied*) and form, which is more closely related to the model of *grand-opéra*. Hence, although Lalo considerably shortened the work when he revised it, it shares with almost all the operas discussed here a spectacular element that had become a speciality of the Paris Opéra; *Le Roi d'Ys* had been conceived for that institution, even though it was ultimately premiered at the Opéra-Comique (then situated in the place du Châtelet) in 1888. The opposition between a virtuous couple (Rozenn and Mylio) and an evil one (Margared and Karnac) may remind one of *Lohengrin*, but equally of *Euryanthe*, while the use of supernatural Christian elements gives it a naivety reminiscent of tales and legends which is part of its appeal. This aspect is further reinforced by folkloric touches, more or less authentic (one of the themes mentioned is a famous *noël* originally from the Île-de-France region, not Brittany), but which help to place additional distance between the work and the overpowering model of Wagner.



Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910), who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1903, was less famous outside his own country than Ibsen, but achieved his international breakthrough before his great rival; incidentally, the two families ended up conjoined, since one of Bjørnson's two daughters was to marry Sigurd Ibsen, son of the playwright, and later Norwegian Prime Minister in Stockholm in his own right. Introducing Bjørnson to the French public in 1870 (when Ibsen had still only published two of his great masterpieces, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*), Édouard Schuré, who saw the European literature of his century as marked above all by the 'awakening of the genius of the races', called him the leading writer of modern Norway. And here is how he described the character of Hulda when he

summarised ‘the first and perhaps the most remarkable drama of the poet’, *Halte-Hulda* (1858), from which he quotes several passages:

In her, the robust Scandinavian genius is unleashed and breaks the dykes like a magnificent Alpine torrent. Hulda has the blood of a sorceress and a Valkyrie in her veins; her concentrated passion is born in her innermost soul and erupts into the fury of the senses by means of volcanic explosions. Her crimes are but the proud outbursts of a powerful nature that suffers no obstacle.

Schuré mentions only briefly the rest of Bjørnson’s dramatic output, most of which was still to come.

Franck, who in 1883 had produced a vocal score of Philidor’s *Ernelinde* for the series ‘Chefs-d’œuvre de l’opéra français’ issued by the Parisian publisher Michaëlis under the general editorship of Arthur Pougin, was obviously attracted to the figure of Hulda, whose bloodthirsty character might seem to be at the opposite pole from his aesthetic temperament. The author of the libretto, the Franc-Comtois poet Charles Grandmougin (1850-1930), had written several sacred dramas (including Massenet’s oratorio *La Vierge*) as well as the text of Benjamin Godard’s dramatic symphony *Le Tasse*. In addition to *Hulda*, his interest in northern literature was manifested in the ‘légende scandinave’ *La Fiancée de Frithiof*, based on a poem by Esaias Tegner (1782-1846), which was set to music by Clémence de Grandval in 1891. In adapting Bjørnson’s play, he transposed the action from the thirteenth century to the eleventh, the period of the Christianisation of Norway, making Hulda’s mother (who does not appear in Bjørnson’s play) a Christian while her daughter is a pagan. This change of era has the effect, as Joël-Marie Fauquet has pointed out, of removing ‘the religious ambiguity that gives the subject part of its meaning’. Grandmougin has also been criticised, apart from the mediocrity of his style, for reorganising the structure of the work, leaving as its key focus the striking characterisation of his maleficent heroine, who has traits in common with Margared in *Le Roi d’Ys*.

The fact that Franck, having also considered setting a Breton legend to music, chose a Merovingian subject for *Ghiselle*, his final operatic project, is indicative of the relationship between these different sources of inspiration. One might apply the adjective ‘Gothic’ to them, not in its architectural usage (which was initially a term of contempt), but in the sense that, as Schuré’s article on Bjørnson reminds us, Swedish Romantic poets such as Tegner and Geijer had laid claim to the word, in its original meaning (of or related to the Goths; barbarous, uncivilised), in order to distance themselves from French and German influences. In France itself, Leconte de Lisle’s ‘barbarous’ poems (*Poèmes barbares*), which first appeared under that title in 1862 – and some of which were actually inspired by Scandinavian sources – proceed from the same spirit.

If Charles Van den Borren is to be believed, Franck had already read Augustin Thierry’s *Récits des temps mérovingiens*, apparently on the advice of d’Indy; he initially sought the subject of a symphonic poem in the book, before meeting Gilbert Thierry (1843-1915), nephew of Augustin Thierry and himself an amateur historian alongside his duties as auditor at the Conseil d’État. He therefore asked the younger Thierry to conceive a libretto in the tradition of Scribe and Meyerbeer that would depict an episode from the life of Fredegund, Queen of the Franks in the late sixth century and wife of Chilperic I, King of Neustria. Fredegund is the dominant figure in the *Récits* of Augustin Thierry, who gave her the same almost demoniac character portrayed by her enemy Gregory of Tours: in other words, in her Franck had a protagonist reminiscent of Bjørnson’s Hulda, yet darker still.

He was not the first composer to take an interest in this colourful heroine. That honour belongs to Hervé, whose *Chilpéric*, premiered with great success at the Folies-Dramatiques in 1868 with the librettist-composer in the title role and Blanche d’Antigny as Frédégonde, presented a burlesque portrayal of her rivalry with her sister-in-law Brunhilda (Brunehaut in Hervé’s *opéra-bouffe*), wife of King Sigebert I of Austrasia. As early as 1879, the year of the premiere of *Étienne Marcel*, the libretto of which he had written for Saint-Saëns, Louis Gallet had suggested the

rivalry between the two queens as an operatic subject – Saint-Saëns was then planning a series of operas illustrating episodes from French history. But, distracted by other obligations, the composer did not follow up the project, originally entitled *Brunehilda*, and again turned down the offer when Gallet renewed it in 1887. It was therefore Ernest Guiraud who inherited the libretto, leaving the work unfinished at his death in May 1892. The following year, Saint-Saëns, out of loyalty to the memory of his ‘comrade in arms’, agreed to complete the opera, entrusting the young Paul Dukas, a former student of Guiraud, with the orchestration of the three acts, which Guiraud had completed in short score except for the ballet and the last scene of the third act. Saint-Saëns himself took on all the remaining music, composing it in late 1894-early 1895 on the ship that took him from Port Said to French Indochina and completing the orchestration on the voyage home.

Renamed *Frédégonde* to avoid any confusion with the heroine of the *Ring* and of *Sigurd* (a parallel briefly outlined by Augustin Thierry himself), the opera of Guiraud and Saint-Saëns achieved only a *success d'estime* in December 1895, while the Théâtre des Variétés took advantage of the situation to revive *Chilpéric*, whose composer had died three years earlier.

Gallet's libretto is skilfully adapted from the third of Augustin Thierry's *Récits*, which recounts the love affair between Brunhilda (Brunehaut in the libretto), widowed after the assassination of Sigebert, and her nephew Merovech (Merowig), son of Chilperic and his first official wife, followed by the implacable vendetta against the young prince pursued by Chilperic and Fredegund until Merovech's death. For obvious theatrical reasons, the action is tightened up and Gallet's Merowig is spared the long and pathetic manhunt recounted by Thierry, finally committing suicide in the presence of his father and his triumphant persecutor Frédégonde.



Whether or not Franck (who died in November 1890) and Gilbert Thierry were aware of Guiraud's project, they adopted a completely different strategy for the libretto of *Ghiselle*. Instead of drawing on one of the episodes related in the *Récits des temps mérovingiens*, they used the historical personage of Fredegund as a starting point and invented an imaginary episode from her career. Hence the action takes place during the regency of Frédégonde, at the start of the reign of her son Clotaire (Chlothar) II. The queen regent has fallen in love with the Neustrian chieftain Gonthram (Guntram), but the latter loves Ghiselle, an Austrasian captive of Frédégonde, whom she has promised to her ally Theudebert. After a duel in which Gonthram, who has eloped with Ghiselle, is left for dead, Ghiselle is condemned to the cloister, but Gonthram, saved by the sorceress Gudruna, rescues her just as she is about to take the veil. The two lovers find refuge in the cottage of Gudruna, who recognises Ghiselle as her daughter. She then offers them the poison which alone will enable them to escape Frédégonde's persecution by opening the doors of Odin's paradise to them. An odd libretto, reminiscent of the most muddled plots set by Verdi, while also making room for scenes of malediction à la Meyerbeer, such as the one in which Bishop Ambrosius pronounces anathema on Ghiselle and Gonthram! Comparison with *Gwendoline*, in which the two dying lovers also see Odin's paradise open up before them, only serves to underline the skill and tact of Mendès, who avoided all the pitfalls into which the inexperienced Thierry plunged headlong: the main one is to permit the triumph of the forces of evil, represented by Frédégonde and her Christianised Franks, with the moral advantage left to the paganism embodied by the Germans. Franck left a complete short score at his death, but had orchestrated only the first act. The work was therefore completed for the posthumous 1896 premiere in Monte Carlo by his disciples Bréville, Coquard, d'Indy and Samuel Rousseau. (It should be noted that Rousseau had won the Concours de la Ville de Paris with a *Mérowig* also based on Augustin Thierry, which had a short-lived run at the Eden-Théâtre in 1892.)

However far the mountains of the Cévennes may seem from the landscapes of Scandinavia, d'Indy himself derived his principal operatic work,

Fervaal, from a Nordic source too, even though the libretto bears no trace of the fact. In the late 1870s he had considered making a direct adaptation of *Axel*, a narrative poem by Esaïas Tegner published in 1820. The Swedish poet depicts a young officer in the service of Charles XII, who has taken refuge with his army in Bender, in present-day Moldova, after being defeated by Peter the Great at Poltava. Instructed by the monarch, whom he idolises, to carry a message to Stockholm, Axel is ambushed and gravely wounded. He is taken in by a young Ukrainian woman who nurses him back to life; though he falls in love with her, he leaves her to accomplish his mission. Later he finds her, dying, on the battlefield, where she has joined the Russian side against the Swedes. These elements recur in the *drame lyrique* written by d'Indy some ten years later, even if the Cévennes setting and the period (the time of the Saracen invasions) are remote from Tegner's poem. Charles XII is replaced by the Druid Arfagard, who has raised Fervaal in the cult of purity; Marie becomes the Saracen woman Guilhen, whom Fervaal abandons in order to follow his mission, and whom he finds dying after having himself been defeated by the Saracens. The end of the opera, where Fervaal, carrying Guilhen's body, climbs the mountain in order to die with her, seems curiously to foreshadow Ibsen's last play, *When We Dead Awaken*, although this was written after *Fervaal* had its premiere at La Monnaie in 1897. By another odd coincidence, which would certainly not have pleased d'Indy, the hymn *Pange lingua* which accompanies Fervaal's final ascent, heralding a new, Christian world, is also quoted in *Frédégonde*, where it is associated with the character of Bishop (Venantius) Fortunatus, who in fact wrote the text of the hymn (or at least its first version).

Ibsen's reputation in France had soared in the 1890s, thanks to the efforts of Antoine and Lugné, to the point of relegating Bjørnson to relative obscurity. It is not surprising, therefore, to detect Ibsenesque influences in d'Indy's second mature opera, the 'action lyrique' *L'Étranger*, conceived and written between 1896 and 1901 and premiered in Brussels in 1903. At that time, the plot of the libretto, written by the composer like that of *Fervaal*, seemed above all to evoke *Der fliegende Holländer*: Vita,

betrotted to the customs officer André, as Senta is to Erik, falls in love with the mysterious Stranger who appears in their fishing village, and follows him to his death. But parallels have also been drawn with Ibsen's *Brand* (1866), in which Agnes leaves her husband, the painter Eijnar, in order to follow the uncompromising pastor, and the latter, like the Stranger, sails out to sea in a storm, risking his life out of a sense of duty. Equally significant are the links with *The Lady from the Sea* (1889) where, as in d'Indy's libretto, the heroine's attraction to the sea and her passion for a mysterious stranger are intertwined. Similarly, the beginning of Act Two of *L'Étranger*, in which the stranger takes leave of Vita while symbolically betrothing her by offering her his emerald, which she throws into the waves, irresistibly evokes the exchange of rings, similarly cast into the sea, in the backstory of Ibsen's play.



In conclusion, we should briefly discuss two operas on an Arthurian theme, which are also connected to the 'Gothic' movement we have just been looking at. It is worth recalling that the Quimperlé-born philologist and folklorist Théodore de La Villemarqué (1815-95), Édouard Blau's source for the libretto of *Le Roi d'Ys*, had combined the romances of the Round Table and old Breton tales in his influential 1860 collection *Les Romans de la Table-ronde et les contes des anciens Bretons*. Ernest Chausson had a copy of it in his library, which Jean Gallois tells us contained some sixty volumes on Celtic legends. As Steven Huebner has pointed out, to emphasise the Breton aspect of the Arthurian legend, as Joseph Bédier did with the story of Tristan in preparing his version of the Old French romance published in 1900, was a way of breaking free of Wagnerian influence by moving away from Germanic sources towards a French cultural heritage, or even a Franco-British one – Chausson may have been inspired to write *Le Roi Arthur* by Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, published in Francisque Michel's French translation in the 1860s. However that may be, he showed an interest in this subject matter from the age of twenty and was enthralled

by it all the rest of his life, as is shown by the symphonic poem *Viviane*, the first version of which dates from 1882.

Chausson wanted not only to make King Arthur the central figure of his opera (as its title indicates), but also to present him as the supreme embodiment of the chivalric ideal. In polishing his libretto during the ten years he devoted to the work, from 1885 to 1895, he therefore tried to shield this ideal figure as much as possible from the blemish of adultery. To that end, he accentuated Lancelot's feelings of guilt and gave Genièvre (Guinevere) an aggressive, possessive personality, inventing a final suicide for her that does not exist in the original sources.

Victorin Joncières took a very different approach in his *Lancelot*, which was first performed at the Palais Garnier in 1900, whereas the posthumous premiere of *Le Roi Arthur* (in Brussels) had to wait until 1904. After the success of his *Dimitri* (1876), adapted from Schiller's unfinished *Demetrius*, Joncières had turned to the pre-Carolingian Middle Ages with *La Reine Berthe*, but that work, premiered in late December 1878 at the Palais Garnier, where it succeeded Gounod's *Polyeucte*, was booed off the stage by the audience after just three performances. The mediocrity of Jules Barbier's libretto was blamed for the feeble musical inspiration. Joncières had regained public favour with *Le Chevalier Jean*, a *drame lyrique* in four acts first performed at the Opéra-Comique in 1885 with Emma Calvé in the role of the woman falsely accused of adultery; although set in medieval times, the libretto by Louis Gallet and Édouard Blau does not belong in our survey, given its setting in Silesia and its Italian source (a novella by Matteo Bandello). The same authors wrote the libretto for *Lancelot*, which was premiered at the Opéra in February 1900 with a cast including Marie Delna as Guinèvre, Albert Vaguet as Lancelot and Maurice Renaud as Arthur. Blau and Gallet introduced an additional complication into the love affair between the queen and her lover and trivialised the figure of Arthur, who is reduced to the role of the deceived husband. Guinèvre is confined to a convent, and Lancelot is abandoned to fury of the jealous Markhoël (the equivalent of Chausson's Mordred), who seriously wounds him. Nursed and saved by the gentle Élane, from

whom he conceals his identity, Lancelot is re-united with Guinèvre, who forgives him but decides to consecrate herself to God; Élainé, for her part, does not survive the revelation of her lover's duplicity. Could this libretto, deemed 'old-fashioned' by the *Annales du théâtre et de la musique*, have prompted anything but conventional music? In any case, the work's failure seemed to indicate, at the dawn of the new century, that new sources of inspiration would be welcome.



Charles Grandmougin, after a drawing by his wife, 1888.
Columbia University, New York.

Charles Grandmougin, d'après un dessin de sa femme, 1888.
Columbia University, New York.