

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire
D. Parmée
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

SELECTED CRITICAL STUDIES OF
BAUDELAIRE

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire

D. Parmée

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire
D. Parmée
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

SELECTED
CRITICAL STUDIES
OF
BAUDELAIRE

EDITED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY

D. PARMÉE

*Fellow of Queens' College and Lecturer in French
in the University of Cambridge*



CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1949

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire
D. Parmée
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107486959

© Cambridge University Press 1949

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1949

First paperback edition 2015

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-48695-9 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
Pierre Dupont	i
Les Drames et les Romans honnêtes	12
L'Ecole païenne	18
Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie, et ses œuvres	25
Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe	50
<i>Madame Bovary</i> par Gustave Flaubert	70
Théophile Gautier	79
Le peintre de la vie moderne	107
Richard Wagner et <i>Tannhäuser</i> à Paris	140
Victor Hugo	165
Pétrus Borel	178
Auguste Barbier	182
Théodore de Banville	187
<i>Les Martyrs ridicules</i>	195
L'œuvre et la vie d'Eugène Delacroix	202

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire

D. Parmée

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FOREWORD

Apart from the two studies on Poe, the articles here reprinted and edited have all been chosen from those which, first appearing together in 1868 under the title of *L'Art Romantique*, with one or two exceptions had previously appeared as scattered articles over a period of years in various periodicals. As for the Poe articles, Baudelaire himself planned to reprint, during his lifetime, these two prefaces to his Poe translations, in a collection of his critical works, the proposed title of which was *Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains*; and some of the articles intended for this collection were themselves later reprinted in the posthumous *Art Romantique* of 1868.¹ This project of Baudelaire provides sufficient justification—were any justification required—for reprinting here with the selections from *L'Art Romantique*, these Poe articles which are of such importance in the development of Baudelaire's aesthetic principles.

Two main principles have governed the selection of these articles. In the first place, it has been assumed that the reader of this selection will be primarily interested in literature; that the articles on Guys or Delacroix will not be read with the chief purpose of learning more about their painting or drawing, nor the Wagner article with a view to better appreciation of his music; but that all three will be read chiefly as throwing light on certain general aesthetic problems, with particular reference to Baudelaire's attitude towards them. This first principle explains the omission, particularly in the Guys and Wagner articles, of certain passages which seemed of importance less for literary, or

¹ For a complete account of the various stages in this project of reprinting certain of Baudelaire's critical articles during his lifetime and the final constitution of *L'Art Romantique*, see the invaluable Conard edition of *L'Art Romantique*, with an introduction and notes by J. Crépet (Paris, 1925), particularly pp. 429–39.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire
D. Parmée
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

even general, critical principles than specifically for art or music criticism. Thus is also explained the omission from this volume of the highly interesting but often rather particularly specialised articles of art criticism written by Baudelaire, from his *Salon* of 1845 to that of 1859; though fortunately, passages from this last and most important study are quoted in another article of Baudelaire's which is here reprinted.

The second principle governing the selection of articles has been the assumption that the reader's chief interest will be to acquire a greater understanding of Baudelaire himself as a critic, as a prose-writer and as a man, and that the actual subject of the article, while obviously not without importance, is, generally, of secondary interest. Thus, in spite of limitations of space, endeavour has been made to omit none of the articles from *L'Art Romantique* which throw light on Baudelaire's views and character, even to the extent of including articles on writers of doubtful intrinsic worth, to the exclusion of articles on writers of perhaps greater merit (e.g. on Marceline Desbordes-Valmore) if the former articles serve better to enlighten us on Baudelaire's own opinions.

The articles, with one or two exceptions which are discussed in the introduction, have been arranged in chronological order of printing, which generally follows the order of writing closely enough to enable the development of Baudelaire's critical ideas to be made clear. It is particularly important to be enabled to do this when considering the articles written before 1859, but of much less consequence in later articles, when he had reached his final viewpoint and complete mastery of his expression.

Apart from general works on Baudelaire by Miss Starkie, MM. Blin, Crépet, Pommier, Vivier, etc., particular mention must be made of *L'Esthétique de Baudelaire*, by André Ferran (Paris, 1933), *Baudelaire the Critic*, by Margaret Gilman (New York, 1943), and *The Cult of Beauty in Charles Baudelaire*, by S. A. Rhodes (London, 1929).

INTRODUCTION

In his article on Banville, Baudelaire quotes the view that to penetrate to the soul of a poet, to recognise his dominant preoccupation, the critic must look for the word or words which most frequently recur, while Proust in his preface to his Ruskin translation, states that the first task of the critic is to enable the reader *à être impressionné par les traits singuliers, placer sous les yeux les traits similaires qui permettent de les tenir pour les traits essentiels du génie d'un écrivain*; and these two precepts combined provide a most helpful guide in reading Baudelaire's criticism. His essential preoccupation can, in fact, be found not only in certain words—*correspondances, imagination, passion*—recurring throughout the articles, but also in certain passages which seem to have the heightened intensity that reveals a sudden, more active participation and sympathy of Baudelaire, as he writes of certain topics. It is thus possible, in these articles, to follow closely the elaboration of his aesthetic principles, to detect important aspects of his life, both mental and material, and finally, to relate his life and personality with his aesthetics.

In the Dupont article which appeared in 1851,¹ the interest lies chiefly in a paradox: Baudelaire is discovered writing in defence of a strictly utilitarian conception of poetry; the only time he was to sustain such a role, and a role, too, which he was not long to sustain.

An explanation of his adoption of such a standpoint is worth seeking. In the first place, he knew Dupont and was something of a friend of this *poète populaire*. Though this is no decisive explanation, it is interesting to remember that, in another article here reprinted—that on Gautier—Baudelaire seems again to indulge in somewhat exaggerated praise of a friend's work. In

¹ As an introduction to *Chants et Chansons* by Pierre Dupont.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire

D. Parmée

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

INTRODUCTION

the second place, Dupont wrote many of his songs and poems in support of the 1848 Revolution, of which for a short time Baudelaire was himself an enthusiastic supporter and may, indeed, have taken an active part on the barricades, though he was not long in disavowing this democratic enthusiasm and in moving to a very different standpoint.¹ In fact, in a later article on Dupont, he endeavours to slide over the role that Dupont played in 1848 and expresses his satisfaction that revolutionary activity had not completely misled him. He is, too, at that time, more severe, if still less severe than might have been expected, in his judgment of Dupont's tendency towards *les catégories et les divisions didactiques*.

One explanation of Baudelaire's adherence, in this first Dupont article, to utilitarian principles in poetry may well, therefore, be his personal liking for Dupont and his sympathy, at the time, with the political principles in which he himself had, very temporarily, believed. A more complete explanation can, however, be achieved if we consider the common factor of both Baudelaire's and Dupont's literary dislikes of the time; and these are found quite plainly in Baudelaire's article on *l'école païenne*,² where he attacks the revival of pseudo-classicism, the attempt to ignore the achievements of romanticism and return to an artificial pseudo-pagan mythological style. It is significant that in the later Dupont article, Baudelaire specifically attacks such a conception and compares such neo-classics to a horde of locusts; and the article on *l'école païenne* is equally vigorous and biting. He states that, on the moral plane, even assuming that it were possible, it would be criminal and stupid to deny the whole tradition of Christian thought which underlies our civilisation.

¹ In his diary, *Mon cœur mis à nu*, written probably between about 1862 and 1864, Baudelaire, examining the nature of what he calls his intoxication in 1848, sees in it nothing more nor less than *goût de la vengeance, plaisir naturel de la démolition, ivresse littéraire* and finally *souvenir des lectures* though he still had a condescending good word for the idealistic aspect of the venture.

² First published in *La Semaine théâtrale*, 22 Jan. 1852.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire

D. Parmée

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xi

Such an understanding and appreciation of Christian values is not rare in Baudelaire, though the extent of his own belief, particularly in his early years, is most doubtful and his religious faith was certainly both intermittent and, at all times, of an extremely personal nature.¹

However this may be, Baudelaire condemns here any attempt to deny Christian values as a dangerous blasphemy and states that any refusal by an author to belong wholeheartedly to his age, even if only in violent reaction from it, will lead inevitably to art that is a sterile pastiche. Here first appears the theory which, as may be seen in the *Guys* article, was to become a central point of his aesthetics, that beauty must contain elements, either physical or mental, of the epoch which gives birth to it. The neo-classic, by deliberate abstraction of his personality and the exclusion of any contemporary reference, will become concerned solely with external forms and his art will be a meaningless play devoid of both passion and reason, completely materialistic.

It is thus Dupont's freshness, sensitiveness, topicality which appeal to Baudelaire in contrast to frigid pseudo-classicism. But Baudelaire had at this time, as at all times, a hatred for another form of art which, indeed, surpassed that which he felt for *l'école païenne*. This form was art based on *la morale bourgeoise* and his hatred comes out most clearly in his article on *les drames et les romans honnêtes*,² which, although published before the article on *l'école païenne*, represents a more mature view on the nature of the relationship between art and morality and may perhaps have been written after the other article.

Baudelaire's hatred in this article is directed particularly against the comic author Augier, in whom he sees the representative of a whole movement which he calls *l'école du bon sens*. Here again there are connecting links with Baudelaire's article on

¹ One may perhaps see something of his own attitude or of his own hopes in this sentence of *l'école païenne*: *ce que la bouche s'accoutume à dire, le cœur s'accoutume à le croire*; a very Pascalian reflection.

² First published in *La Semaine théâtrale*, 27 Nov. 1851.

l'école païenne. In the first place, *l'école du bon sens* was in reaction against the romantic movement, as also were the neo-classics (and an author such as Ponsard, for example, offers characteristics of both these groups); it was a rationalising and an anti-poetic movement, although its plays often appeared in the dullest and most platitudinous verse. This rational morality—well exemplified in the allusion, which Baudelaire quotes, to Malthusianism in Augier's *Gabrielle*¹—was as deeply offensive to his moral philosophy (so often Catholic in tendency) as was neo-paganism. The romantic dislike of the insipid bourgeoisie (strikingly shown in Gautier's preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, to which Baudelaire later refers) combines with Baudelaire's religious sense to cause him to condemn an art representative of those who, in Dante's words,

Visser senza infamia e senza lodo;

to condemn, in fact, a materialistic morality which, as Baudelaire points out, begins by telling people that if they are good they will succeed in life and inevitably ends by suggesting that the only people who are good are those who have, in fact, achieved success in life.

Finally one finds in this article Baudelaire's invincible dislike of *l'école du bon sens*, because he is convinced that such a movement can only lead to inferior art. Already, in such an aesthetic judgment, he may be seen feeling his way to a personal synthesis of art and morality and, repelled both by purely utilitarian and purely formal conceptions of art, he is beginning to consider that art, by taking into its purview and transposing all elements of life without exception, can provide, incidentally, the highest of moralities; that, in fact, only art that is capable of doing this can be great art. He still had some way to go on this path, however, and in his two articles on Poe there may be discerned a certain temporary dissociation of art and morality on his part.

¹ P. 13.

INTRODUCTION

xiii

Baudelaire had started concerning himself with Poe's work about 1847 and continued to do so more intensively in 1848, when his first translation of Poe appeared. The extent to which one may speak of an influence of Poe on Baudelaire is a matter of considerable speculation. Certainly the initial impact of his work on the Frenchman was immense, as is shown by the latter's correspondence; at the same time, it seems that this impact was so great precisely because Baudelaire found in Poe a twin soul, someone whose work appealed to him because they had a similar approach to art and were both thinking on the same lines. It must also not be forgotten that he had already written a considerable number of his *Fleurs du Mal* before discovering Poe's work and must have meditated on his own art. Perhaps the safest and likeliest assumption is that Poe acted on Baudelaire as an admirable catalytic agent; and in this capacity, the American's importance is certainly capital. On this assumption, also, it is better to refrain from too ready an accusation of plagiarism when we discover, in Baudelaire's second article on Poe, considerable passages taken almost literally, though somewhat rearranged, from Poe's article on the poetic principle; indeed, Baudelaire admits having recourse to this article, though he does not indicate the full extent of his debt.

Baudelaire's article on *Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses œuvres* appeared, in the form here reprinted, as a preface to his translation *Histoires extraordinaires*, first published in 1856. This article was itself a considerably altered version of an earlier one published in the *Revue de Paris* for March and April 1852. As an historical account of Poe's life it has blemishes, but nowhere, applying the principle mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, can there be found passages of a greater intensity and, it may be supposed, of more personal sympathy than those in which Baudelaire speaks of the difficulties of Poe's life and of his relation to society. He speaks with special sympathy of Poe's material difficulties, which were in so many ways similar to those against

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire

D. Parmée

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

INTRODUCTION

which he himself had continually to struggle. Developing a theme which was already implicit in his article *Les drames et les romans honnêtes*, he dwells at length on the unhappy and lonely fate of a poet of genius, who is not only a man of penetrating intelligence and thus able to see through the falseness of the idea of automatic progress—which Baudelaire calls *une extase de gobe-mouches*—but a man, too, of exquisite sensibility tortured by the hurly-burly of a modern materialistic civilisation, based on democratic standardisation and completely unconcerned by any values that are not monetary. A significant mention is that of Joseph de Maistre, the ultramontane philosopher and defender of aristocratic principles of authority in politics and religion, who had had a great influence in forming Baudelaire's ideas along these lines; and he writes elsewhere (in *Mon cœur mis à nu*): *De Maistre et Edgar Poe m'ont appris à raisonner.*

Baudelaire does not at this stage say much about Poe's work, although he makes mention of certain of their general aspects, in particular of their spirituality, their gentle melancholy and dignity; and merely hinting at what he was later to consider one of the central points of Poe's and of his own poetry, namely the ability to infuse spirituality into what he describes as *la Nature dite inanimée*. Far more stimulating and more typical of Baudelaire's attitude in this article is the paradoxical way in which, having insisted on Poe's excessive refinement of feeling and desire for perfection, he defends Poe's habit of deliberate drunkenness, not only as an endeavour to escape the unfeeling industrial civilisation which surrounded him, but also as a means of evoking and correlating memories of past sensations and feelings; in fact, as a poet's method of inducing *rêverie* and combining visions and conceptions into relationships, thus giving a new significance and emphasis to the most immaterial ideas as to the most sensuous impressions. There is, in fact, a considerable adumbration not only of that section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* entitled *Le Vin* but also of the theory of the mysterious equivalence and relationship of

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire
D. Parmée
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xv

sense-data and mental states, which plays so great a part in Baudelaire's later aesthetics. Nor should his defiant and paradoxical apology for suicide be left unnoted, as evidence both of his originality (with undoubtedly a touch of the adolescent bravado of his earlier so-called 'Satanic' period) and as revealing the depth of his sympathy for the distress of the sensitive poet condemned to live in a materialistic society. He was later to condone in a similar manner the suicide of Gérard de Nerval in a very strongly worded article on Hégésippe Moreau, written as one of a series of articles on *les Poètes français* projected for publication by Eugène Crépet in 1861 and 1862; an article so strongly worded that it was not finally published until after Baudelaire's death.

In this Poe article there is seen the first of the important critical studies (which culminate in the articles on Guys and Wagner and Delacroix) in which Baudelaire, while paying the closest attention to the individual characteristics of each of his subjects, reveals at the same time in general observations the basic principles of his conception of the nature and purpose of art. His general method, too, first becomes clear in the Poe article: with a consideration of Poe's life and character, there is combined a study of the ambient civilisation and particular milieu, before the author turns to general and particular considerations of theme and treatment in the works themselves; a pattern which appears with certain omissions and alterations, in his later major article.

In this first Poe article, too, is found another characteristic which became a familiar, and most stimulating and personal, mark of Baudelaire's criticism, and which may be best described as his capacity for constantly creating by-products from his central theme, digressions on various topics which seem at times perhaps more connected with Baudelaire's own ideas than explanatory of the art or character of his subject. Such digressions, in the first article, are his apologies of suicide and

drunkenness; and the second article which appeared in 1857 as a preface to a further translation from Poe, *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, opens with a similarly brilliant passage attacking academic criticism—which was also going to suffer at his hand in the *Bovary* article.

In this Poe article he attacks as anthropomorphic and *simpliste* the use of the term ‘decadent’ in literary criticism. He shows, by the example of the United States, that the analogy implied in the use of such terms as childhood, youth, maturity and decadence applied to literature is false and points out that it is possible in literature to proceed from a so-called complicated ‘decadent’ style to a more straightforward and simple style in which (using the same vocabulary) one may equally well discern a ‘youthful’ freshness.

But such quasi hors-d’œuvre, refreshing and penetrating as they often are, do not constitute the main interest of this most important article: this interest lies in the presence here of the earliest of the chief expositions of Baudelaire’s central aesthetic principles. It is true that succeeding articles will diversify and elaborate the principles; essentially, however, they will remain unchanged until Baudelaire’s final criticisms and it is therefore appropriate to consider these principles here while taking these later elaborations into account.

In the first place, Baudelaire states his conviction that the essence of reality is not material but spiritual; and that it is through a feeling for the beautiful that man is made aware of this spiritual essence, this soul existing in everything: *c’est cet admirable, cet immortel instinct du beau qui nous fait considérer la terre et ses spectacles comme un aperçu, comme une correspondance du Ciel; le principe de la poésie est strictement et simplement l’aspiration humaine vers une beauté supérieure*. External nature has, therefore, by itself and in itself no sort of interest or importance: in a vivid phrase quoted from Delacroix in his critical article on the *Salon* of 1859 (appearing, therefore, some two years after this second

INTRODUCTION

xvii

Poe article), and which we find him quoting again in his article on Delacroix reprinted here, Baudelaire compares external nature to a dictionary. The words of this dictionary, therefore, must be selected and arranged before they can be expected to have any coherent significance or beauty; and it is in this selection and arrangement that the creative artist shows his genius.

The faculty that an artist uses for this selection is the imagination, which Baudelaire calls *la reine des facultés* and which he takes care to distinguish from mere superficial fancy and from sensitivity which does not possess the co-ordinating power which Baudelaire attributes to the imagination. Imagination is, in a word, an almost divine faculty capable of seizing the spiritual reality which is both represented and masked by external appearances; of perceiving, not philosophically by the use of reason or deduction, but directly, *les rapports intimes et secrets des choses, les correspondances et les analogies*. As externals are all linked with the one spiritual reality of the universe, they must also stand in some relation to each other; and thus the senses, by means of which we perceive these externals, are not only complementary, but may, in some mysterious fashion, represent equivalents. This idea, one of the most original of all Baudelaire's aesthetic discoveries, was never better stated than in these lines from his sonnet *Correspondances*.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
 Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
 Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
 Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.
 Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfant,
 Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies...

This conception of external nature as a representation of a *soul* already shows in this article signs of an amplification which was to become far more marked at a later date: the tendency to see nature not merely as a representation of a spiritual essence but as a *déformation* of that spirit. This tendency is, in this Poe article,

b

revealed by his insistence on the fundamental evil of human nature and in his approval of Poe's aristocratic and disdainful attitude towards all democratic principles based on assumption of man's natural goodness, principles which, as already mentioned, he had already seen condemned by one of his own favourite authors, Joseph de Maistre. This approval of Baudelaire develops into a thoroughgoing attack, reminiscent of the first article, on socialism and all ideas of automatic progress, ideas which, by a typical paradox, Baudelaire sees merely as an invention by civilised man to console himself for having lost so many primitive virtues without acquiring anything other than false advantages in return.

Baudelaire also returns to a consideration of the problem of the relationship of art and morality and endeavours to solve it by use of Poe's distinction of the three orders of judgment: pure intellect, taste and moral sense, which Poe suggests are completely separate. This complete separation does, however, represent something of an aberration in Baudelaire's thought, because he had already been working towards a synthesis of these spheres, and even in this article, while repeating that the idea of utility is the most hostile of any to the idea of beauty and speaking of *l'hérésie de l'enseignement*, he hints at the possibility of a *beau moral*. At the same time, Baudelaire is undoubtedly carried by his admiration for Poe rather farther than was really consistent with his own conception and temperament, when he seems to quote with approval Poe's dictum that beauty, as an *excitation de l'âme* must exclude *l'ivresse du cœur*, since passion, as a natural feeling, is incompatible with the spirituality of pure beauty, which falls solely within the competence of taste. Baudelaire had already expressed, in *l'école païenne*, his belief that the exclusion of reason and passion from poetry would result in a purely material and formal beauty and his later articles, particularly that on Delacroix, show quite clearly that this was his fundamental conviction, from which Poe, as a much less

INTRODUCTION

xix

sensual poet than Baudelaire, here temporarily tended to seduce him.

Finally this Poe article reveals the importance Baudelaire is already giving to technical considerations in poetry; and here his attitude is categorical and was not to change. Poe (and one cannot doubt that Baudelaire is speaking with him) recognised the necessary part of inspiration; but Baudelaire adds, *la part étant faite au poète naturel, à l'innéité, Poe en faisait une à la science, au travail et à l'analyse, qui paraîtra exorbitante aux orgueilleux non-érudits*. But when assessing the undoubted influence of Poe on Baudelaire in this respect, it is interesting to remember that in an article entitled *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs*, published in *l'Esprit public* in April 1846, Baudelaire had already written: *l'inspiration est décidément la sœur du travail journalier*. Poe does not despise inspiration; in fact, Baudelaire has already expressed his approval of Poe's use of alcoholic stimulus to revive past sensations and moments of inspiration; but it is but one part of poetic genius.

Baudelaire goes into some detail of Poe's conscious craftsmanship and composition of which he clearly has a high opinion. Its main aspects are the careful choice of rhyme, the importance attached to rhythm (which Baudelaire speaks of as *l'instrument le plus utile dans un but de beauté*) and the use of all sorts of repetition of sound, word and phrase as alliteration, assonance and refrain. These are all (and particularly the last, which was a novel pre-occupation in post-Renaissance French poetry) important elements of Baudelaire's own technique. Most original, too, is Baudelaire's approval of Poe's refusal to allow the long epic or narrative poem, in view of the fact that a poem is primarily an exaltation of the soul, which must by its very nature be fugitive. Poetry is thus reduced to lyrical poetry in the completest sense of the word and Baudelaire is engaged, in fact, on the road which leads finally to the conception of poetry as merely beautiful single lines of verse. Similarly Baudelaire is found praising the short story for the intensity of its effect; though he admits that

b 2

the short story contains a variety of tone—humorous, sarcastic, *raisonneur*—which his excessive poetic puritanism of the moment caused him to condemn as unsuitable for lyrical poetry.

In this article, *Madame Bovary*, which appeared in *L'Artiste* on 18 Oct. 1857, there is found less generalisation on aesthetic principles than application of a critical sense now well developed by reading, meditation and practice. Apart from the masterly pages in which Baudelaire places himself, imaginatively, in the situation of Flaubert in the process of choosing such a subject and such a form (with a passing sneer at the vulgar conception of *réalisme* as a pettifogging attention to unimportant incidentals) perhaps the most interesting passage is his exposition of the way in which Flaubert has incorporated into the character of Madame Bovary certain qualities which Baudelaire considers as masculine—an attribution which is evidence of his view of the limitations of feminine character, which are given more prominence in later studies. These masculine qualities are her imagination (as opposed to instinct); her energy and decisiveness in action; her combination of passion and reason; her desire to please and to dominate; her sensitive reaction not so much to her husband's specific and visible imperfections as to his complete absence of genius, his spiritual inferiority; and finally, her eagerness, reaching almost to hysteria (and Baudelaire may well be thinking of himself) to extract the greatest possible enjoyment from life. In all, an interesting and significant catalogue of what constitutes for Baudelaire certain typical—and, he suggests, on the whole, admirable—masculine virtues.

As far as the actual re-creation by Baudelaire of Flaubert's thought processes in *Madame Bovary* is concerned, the only commentary required is a quotation from a letter dated 21 Oct. 1857, sent to Baudelaire by Flaubert: *Votre article m'a fait le plus grand plaisir. Vous êtes entré dans les arcanes de l'œuvre, comme si ma cervelle était la vôtre. Cela est senti et ompris à fond.* Better proof of Baudelaire's critical mastery could scarcely be given.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire
 D. Parmée
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xxi

Baudelaire's sincerity in writing his article on Gautier, which first appeared in *L'Artiste* on 13 March 1859, has been called into question.¹ It is true that, having known Gautier over a period of some years and having dedicated to him, a couple of years previously, the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire might reasonably be suspected of showing partiality in his criticism of a poet on whose support he counted. At the same time, his poetic debt to Gautier was not inconsiderable² and his admiration of his poetry was sincere. However that may be, evidence that Baudelaire was not completely at ease in the writing of it may be found in the fact that he had recourse, not only to long quotation from his own second Poe essay, but also to his *Salon* of 1859, apart from certain other reminiscences, notably of his article *Les drames et les romans honnêtes*. There is a patchwork effect.

The article itself contains a certain number of penetrating remarks, particularly in his discussion of Gautier's fear of death; but it also contains judgments that seem less acute and authoritative than others of his critical pronouncements. It is difficult, for example, to understand his praise of Gautier for having consistently introduced into his octosyllabic verse the majesty of the *alexandrin*, if we are aware of the statement by Gautier in his *Histoire du Romantisme*, where, speaking of his desire, in *Emaux et Camées*, *de traiter sous forme restreinte, de petits sujets*, he continues: *l'alexandrin était trop vaste pour ces modestes ambitions et l'auteur n'employa que le vers de huit pieds*. Even without this statement, it seems clear that the only way to introduce majesty into octosyllabic quatrains would be by considerable and consistent *enjambement* not only from line to line (which, if introduced throughout a complete octosyllabic quatrain, would still only provide the metrical equivalent of just over two and a half

¹ For a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the writing and publication of this article, see the Conard edition of *L'Art Romantique*, pp. 480 *et seq.*

² See *Dans les chemins de Baudelaire* by J. Pommier (Paris, 1945).

alexandrines) but also from stanza to stanza; and this was at no time Gautier's practice.

Baudelaire's long and brilliant article on Constantin Guys was probably largely written by 1860, although it was not published until 1863 in the *Figaro* of 26 and 28 Nov. and 3 Dec., in fact a few days after the article on Delacroix, though this article was certainly of a later origin than that on Guys. In spite of the probable date of writing, which in fact places this article before that on Wagner, *Le peintre de la vie moderne* is, with the articles on Delacroix and Wagner, perhaps the most significant of all Baudelaire's critical writings.

Baudelaire probably first met Guys in 1859, although he must certainly have known his work before; one may assume that, having found once more a twin soul, Baudelaire did not delay in becoming intimate with Guys and they spent much time together in 1859–60.¹

Baudelaire's article, therefore, was written under the influence of an intimate personal contact and a considerable enthusiasm; and excellent as some parts of the Gautier article are, the general difference in quality and mastery of the subject is striking.

In this article, where every section is of capital importance for an understanding of Baudelaire's aesthetics and temperament, perhaps the most important, as is indeed indicated by the title, is that part devoted to a consideration of the role played by the element of modernity in the composition of the beautiful. We find here the most complete statement of Baudelaire's conception of the beautiful, which he divides into two parts, in opposition, as he says, to *la théorie du beau unique et absolu* which had seemed to be his conception at the height of his enthusiasm for Poe's poetic principle. There is still an invariable, eternal, transcendental element in beauty; but there is also a relative element, *qui sera*, says Baudelaire, *tour à tour ou tout ensemble, l'époque, la mode, la morale, la passion*; and both these elements must be present for

¹ See Ferran, *L'Esthétique de Baudelaire* (Paris, 1933), pp. 475 *et seq.*

INTRODUCTION

xxiii

beauty to be complete. With this definition, which introduces a relative element into beauty, Baudelaire is at the same time justifying his own personal definitions of beauty, which we find particularly in his correspondence and his diaries. He is justifying, also retrospectively, those passages of his criticism in which, somewhat in spite of the rigidity of his earlier conception of beauty, he had spoken of the personal element, of the element of strangeness as belonging to beauty.¹ *L'irrégularité, c'est-à-dire l'inattendu, la surprise, l'étonnement, sont une partie essentielle et caractéristique de la beauté*; or: *J'ai trouvé la définition du Beau, de mon Beau. C'est quelque chose d'ardent et de triste, quelque chose d'un peu vague.... Le mystère, le regret sont aussi des caractères du Beau.* These phrases from his diary *Fusées* now fall naturally into his aesthetics: the beautiful now includes the full expression of the individual temperament—a point to which Baudelaire gives particular emphasis in the Wagner article.

In *Guys*, this particular temperament shows itself in various ways, which Baudelaire examines. Most important of these is the continual curiosity for contemporary life,² the urge to see and analyse what is happening around him, in as many varied aspects as particularly interest *Guys*' own temperament; and here one is reminded of the great attention that Baudelaire himself had paid to scenes and aspects of Parisian life in *Les Fleurs du Mal* and his *Poèmes en Prose*. The necessary and most important quality required for such a curiosity for contemporary life is freshness and keenness of observation; this quality Baudelaire considers *Guys* to possess to an exceptional degree. To characterise this sensitiveness of impression Baudelaire coins his brilliant definition of genius as *l'enfance retrouvée à volonté*, as the faculty of absorbing the details of the visible world, through senses which have not been blunted, with eyes that, in fact, each time they

¹ 'Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe', p. 68.

² Mention of *le beau moderne* is actually found in as early an article as his *Salon* of 1846, and in his Wagner article he mentions the composer as the truest representative of modern life.

have an object before them, see it for the first time. But this faculty would, in itself, not be enough to give more than a purely materialistic or, in modern terms, a photographic view of the world. The genius of Guys is that, while his eyes have this power of fresh vision, his mind has the power of remembering these past sensations and thus, by the aid of a co-ordinating imagination, of striking a balance between a general sense of form and colour thus developed and the detail of the form and colour of the actual object or person to be represented. Thus Baudelaire explains and justifies the paradox that Guys, with all his sensitiveness to impression, yet usually drew from memory. The literary application of this theory, so close in many ways to 'emotion remembered in tranquillity', needs no emphasis.

The ideal of the dandy was a constant preoccupation with Baudelaire from an early age and there may be found in the section in which he talks of Guys' drawings of dandies, as much or more of himself than of his subject. It was an age of dandies; Musset had been one; Barbey d'Aurevilly was one and had published a study of dandyism in 1845; Baudelaire, himself, was also, in his external appearance, a dandy in his own peculiar way, although it was the moral implication of dandyism which most interested him. The dandy is, first of all, rich and thus has leisure to develop his own originality unhampered by any external contacts not of his own choosing; he is an aristocrat, able to work out his own moral problems without reference to others. The idea of the solitariness of genius was always strong in Baudelaire, as strong indeed as in an early romantic such as Vigny. In *Mon cœur mis à nu*, we read: *l'homme de génie veut être un, donc solitaire*; and then: *c'est par le loisir que j'ai, en partie, grandi. A mon grand détriment, car le loisir, sans fortune, augmente les dettes, les avanies résultant des dettes. Mais à mon grand profit, relativement à la sensibilité, à la méditation et à la faculté du dandysme et du dilettantisme.*

This may seem an essentially selfish attitude; it must, however, be remembered that Baudelaire considered that the only possible

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire

D. Parmée

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xxv

progress for mankind lay in the perfecting of the individual by the individual himself; and this perfecting, on the moral plane, is considered by Baudelaire to lie *dans la diminution des traces du péché originel*, and, particularly, in work and prayer—*puisque, tout bien vérifié, travailler est moins ennuyeux que s’amuser*. One may therefore justifiably see in this ideal of the dandy a great spiritual pride; but it is a pride that accepts considerable disciplines and duties which are perhaps all the greater for being self-imposed: *être un grand homme et un saint pour soi-même, voilà l’unique chose importante* is a sentence also found in *Mon cœur mis à nu* and which must also be remembered when talking of Baudelaire’s ideal of a dandy.

There is, however, the other side of dandyism which springs not so much from pride as from vanity; the desire not only to be different from others but to show that one is different. This is a common romantic characteristic and one which partakes not only of a feeling of defiance and bravado but also of uncertainty and lack of self-assurance; a knowledge of one’s own worth which, one fears, may not be recognised. The dandy is thus forced into the paradoxical position of despising the crowd and, at the same time, wishing to impress it. It is the way in which the dandy tries to impress the crowd which is the crucial point of his value, however, and the central point of Baudelaire’s conception of dandyism; and his ultimate ideal of the dandy is *la distinction*, which, as far as the perfection of dress is concerned, shows itself in Baudelaire’s words, in *la simplicité absolue*; and this is, to his mind, the best way of distinguishing oneself. And so, by a typical paradox, we find that Baudelaire himself expressed his dandyism by being immaculately dressed in a sober but carefully tailored dark suit and a white shirt, with only the neck-tie to give a touch of colour; a very different figure from the long-haired and pink-waistcoated Gautier at the *bataille d’Hernani*.¹

¹ Although it is worth recalling that in his early Paris days Baudelaire had himself been seen in a bright blue suit with golden buttons; see Starkie, *Baudelaire*, p. 62.

Dandyism is, therefore, a desire for perfection and originality, contained within certain strict limits; it contains certainly, as Baudelaire says, a considerable stoical element and even, he thinks, a religious element which gives it something in common with the strictness of monastic rules. One of its chief characteristics is the desire to suppress emotion or at least the expression of emotion, the continual control of the will over the instinct, the triumph of artificiality over nature, and by this transition we are led to the brilliant sections of this article in which Baudelaire talks of nature and of women.

Baudelaire's conception of the neutral role of nature in art, as a storehouse of incoherent images or a meaningless list of words, has already been mentioned. He now moves to the attack. Nature has been praised by some as the source and type, not only of all beauty but of all goodness: but the opposite is true; not only does nature teach us nothing, or practically nothing, except self-preservation; it urges us to murder, to torture and even to eat our neighbour. *Tout ce qui est beau et noble est le résultat de la raison et du calcul.* Virtue and beauty are something specifically artificial, the creation of which requires not only continual effort by man's reason but aid and support by supernatural means.

Applying the principle to women, Baudelaire sees in the habit of making-up an obscure desire on the part of woman, the most natural of beings, towards a spiritualisation of her beauty, in order to appeal to the superior sense of beauty of the male. Baudelaire then goes on to analyse and characterise the various types of women whom Guys depicts. Here, and in the article on Delacroix, Baudelaire retains a certain reserve in his statements on women, perhaps because he feels that a full expression of his opinions might cause an uproar. Yet, in spite of this reserve, there is no difficulty in discerning his opinion which, indeed, follows logically from his conception of sin and of nature and to which he gives unrestrained expression in *Mon cœur mis à nu*, in

INTRODUCTION

xxvii

such statements as: *la femme est le contraire du Dandy. Donc, elle doit faire horreur.... La femme est naturelle, c'est-à-dire, abominable.* It is true that both in this article on Guys and in that on Delacroix, he admits the irresistible charm of woman and the part she plays as an inspiration to the poet and the artist; but it is *through* women rather than for women that this art is created; and her charm and seductiveness is that of the devil: *l'éternelle Vénus (caprice, hystérie, fantaisie) est une des formes séduisantes du diable.*

The Wagner article was first published on 1 April 1861 in the *Revue européenne*. If the tone is at times aggressive (though less truculent than in the Gautier article); if Baudelaire makes rather too free use of quotation from other sources (and it is not unjustifiable, in view of his own lack of technical musical knowledge, that he should, for example, call upon Liszt to help him to express the novelty and the significance of Wagner's *leitmotif*), it is none the less true that Baudelaire shows here a faculty of empathy that he was not to surpass. It was, at the time he was writing, still an originality to admire Wagner; Judith Gautier, Mallarmé and others had not yet made him a cult. It was also Baudelaire's first and was, indeed, to be his only excursion into music criticism. His article is thus all the more remarkable, particularly if it is remembered that his chief, if not his sole qualification for writing about music was that he liked it. That this liking for music was deep is shown both by references in his critical writings which suggest a familiarity with other composers such as Beethoven, Berlioz and Weber and by a number of some of the best poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* written on themes connected with music, perhaps the best known of which begins with the unforgettable line:

Souvent la musique me prend comme une mer!

It is clear that, in Baudelaire's conception of art in general as the expression of one fundamental spiritual reality, music was but one facet of art which is universal. It is, therefore, natural

that a poet such as Baudelaire, who considered the relationship between the various senses as being of the highest importance, was inevitably attracted to Wagner, one of whose endeavours was to produce on the stage a work capable not only of affecting simultaneously the senses of sight and hearing but also of appealing (through the singing of poetry intended to be valid as poetry even apart from its song) to the reason and imagination of the spectator.

But Baudelaire does not only reveal a sympathetic and reasoned understanding of Wagner's theory of the music-drama, which he has taken the trouble to study in Wagner's own writings. He shows besides a profound appreciation of the music as such and of the character, purpose and method of its composer. As far as the appreciation of the music itself is concerned, the paragraph in which he endeavours to give verbal expression to the states experienced on first hearing the prelude to *Lobengrin* is an example of evocative and suggestive writing, which may perhaps best be compared with some of Proust's pages in which Marcel is also trying to capture and translate into words the mingled impressions suggested by listening to music.

But perhaps the most important aspect of this article is the way in which Baudelaire now completely accepts into his aesthetics the part to be played by passion. Baudelaire sees in Wagner on the one hand what he calls *l'homme d'ordre*, the man capable of consciously and critically reasoning out the principles of the art which he bears intuitively within himself and applying these principles with strength of will and purpose; *je plains les poètes que guide le seul instinct*, says Baudelaire; *je les crois incomplets*: an obvious analogy with his dandy ideal. On the other hand, it is in the passionate nature of Wagner's art that he sees his fundamental quality, that quality essentially *sui generis*, which all great artists must possess. It is this passion which enables Wagner to express with equal force not only the mystical qualities of man but those that are demoniac and carnal. He is thus able to

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire
 D. Parmée
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xxix

express with the greatest intensity that struggle between good and evil which Baudelaire considers as the constant preoccupation of Wagner's music and which was, of course, an equally constant preoccupation of Baudelaire's poetry; and it is in the intensity of that struggle that Baudelaire now sees the most essential character of genius. He was to restate this belief in the necessity for disciplined passion in the artist very forcibly in his Delacroix article.

The article on Hugo first appeared on 15 June 1861 and was the first of a series of articles, the major parts of four of which are here reprinted,¹ published in that year in the *Revue Fantaisiste*, a short-lived enterprise of the poet Catulle Mendès, for some time Gautier's son-in-law, later co-founder of *Le Parnasse contemporain* and who at one time came near to wresting the (at least unofficial but widely acknowledged) leadership of the Parnassian school from Leconte de Lisle. Other articles of this series included one on the poetess Marceline Desbordes-Valmore; and further studies on Théophile Gautier and Pierre Dupont.

The articles are, on the whole, short and are more interesting as showing Baudelaire applying his critical method than as indicating any development in that method. His remarks on Hugo are penetrating, if a good deal kinder than some of his opinions had been; as when, for example, he had written of Hugo in *Fusées*: *cet homme est si peu élégiaque, si peu éthéré, qu'il ferait horreur même à un notaire*; or: *Hugo, sacerdoce, a toujours le front penché—trop penché pour rien voir, excepté son nombril*; although it must not be forgotten that these opinions probably date from the early 1850's. It is also rather surprising to find Baudelaire, in great detail and with some emphasis, applying his theory of *correspondances* integrally to Hugo, even although the pages in which he does so give one of the best accounts of the intrinsically

¹ The article on Cladel's book does not belong to this series although it was first published in the *Revue Fantaisiste* on 15 Oct. 1861. The following are the dates of publication of the other articles reprinted here: 'Pétrus Borel', 15 July; 'Auguste Barbier', 15 July; 'Théodore de Banville', 15 August.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-48695-9 - Selected Critical Studies of Baudelaire
 D. Parmée
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xxx

INTRODUCTION

mysterious nature of these *correspondances* which may be found anywhere in Baudelaire's criticism. Nor has Baudelaire's opinion of Auguste Barbier as a great poet been generally accepted, although his reservations with regard to his 'greatness' will find few dissenters. Here again it is the application of Baudelaire's own aesthetic principles, now thoroughly mature, which is interesting.

The article on Pétrus Borel offers an interesting glimpse of a writer whose peculiar personality and work had not been without importance for Baudelaire at the time of his youthful *bohème*; but on the whole it is the article on Banville which is the best of the series. Baudelaire had known Banville quite well in his early days in Paris and, although over some period of time they had been estranged, Baudelaire could not have failed to appreciate Banville's literary integrity even if some of his strictures on neo-classicism in the article on *l'école païenne* certainly could have been applied to Banville. Baudelaire now makes his position on this point quite plain: the use of classical mythology by Banville seems to him to represent a genuine spiritual reality in that poet and, further, a proper use of Greek mythology in this way now seems to him completely compatible with the principle of *correspondances*. In these pages, Baudelaire goes unerringly to the central point of Banville's poetry to discover that quality *sui generis* which, as he had already stated in his Wagner article, he considered as essential in any great writer. With a lightness of touch which shows excellently his power of adapting his tone exactly to the subject he was treating, he speaks in a few pages most penetratingly on Banville's lyrical gift. Nor does the article lack that hall-mark of all Baudelaire's best criticism: the sudden perspective revealing, succinctly yet most suggestively, his own moral and aesthetic preoccupations—in this case the passage in which he states his reasons for considering modern art as an essentially demoniac one, obsessed by the prince of evil, Lucifer.

This same principle is also clearly emphasised in his article on *Les Martyrs ridicules* of Léon Cladel. This study, first published