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BAUDELAIRE, NATURE AND
THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY

Dissertation

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INTRODUCTION

Before beginning, I should like to give you a brief résumé into why I have chosen Charles Baudelaire to form a parallel with the Artist and his views. This is so that you may begin by reading this thesis knowing how closely connected Baudelaire is to Art and to the Artistic Ideal.

Many ignorant people, still to this day connect Baudelaire to the old image of him, which is one that conjures up

visions of Satanism, Black Masses, orgastic revelry and the unnatural practices of a decadent civilization. ¹

This reputation came about after his trial for obscenity.

Today his poetry is still widely read and studied, though often unfortunately by the curious, just interested in his erotic poems or 'pièces condamnées.' But for many, like myself, his poetry and critical writings have enriched our lives. It was George Saintsbury who mentioned a scholar at an English University who, every night on retiring, habitually read a sonnet of Shakespeare, and then goes on to say

If manuals of profane devotion become common among men of letters, I know of none that I should be tempted to adopt myself, and to recommend to others, in preference to the writings of Charles Baudelaire. ²

He is essentially known as a decadent poet, but that is not entirely true, as T. S. Elliot in *Essays Ancient and Modern* says

Baudelaire was engaged in an attempt to explain, to justify and to make something of passion, perversity and evil.

Yet he grew into an austere moralist concerned with the sin and temptation of mankind. His writings have been severely abused and misunderstood. He was admired by followers in that for them he was

Chiefly the sensuous poet of rare sensations, who had wished, in his poetry, to emulate the evocative power of music. ³

T. S. Elliot described him thus

He was insufferable, he had a perverse talent for ingratitude and unsociability, irritability, a mulish determination to make the worst of everything. He had the pride of a man who feels in himself great weakness and yet great strength. The morality of such a course may be a matter for endless dispute, but for him it was a way to liberate his mind and give us the legacy and lesson he has left. ⁴

Baudelaire died over a hundred years ago and yet his works still to this day contain relevant lessons for us. They are such, that they speak directly to us.

His mood harmonizes with our own, when the problems which confront us are those which preoccupied him and many of the values which we are questioning are those he had long ago discarded. ⁵

By reading his work today one can still find spiritual nourishment and a greater more profound insight into Nature and Art.

Jules Laforgue insists on his closeness to us.

He is not a distant figure communing with Nature. But a fellow citizen who is out of sympathy with a utilitarian age, a divided and tormented soul walking the streets. ⁶

He tried to express, and succeeded in expressing, the spiritual and emotional frustration of contemporary man. He was the first modern poet to relate his experience

in the subdued tones of the confessional and did not assume an inspired air. ⁷

He was the first to break the poetic tradition of addressing the public and depending on it.

Poetry will be something for the initiated. I am damned on account of the public. – Good – the public is not admitted. ⁸

Like many artists today he had to create conditions and seek his own material. In doing so he became the first modern poet to speak of Paris like an ordinary 'lost' capital. He saw that the society he was in, was showing signs of corruption, therefore he became an outsider and went about discovering a new order and revising values in the fashion of a 'true artist.'

His thesis is in his poetry. He is essentially concerned with duality, being the perfect homo duplex himself. He was aware of conflict in the universe and the union of the spiritual and material. This led him into a deep analysis of the theory of 'Correspondances' and Nature.

His concern for Beauty, L'Idéal and Nature draw an equal concern for parallels within this duality. He was profoundly influenced by Nature and places himself amongst

the sincere lovers of Nature, 9

within which he includes such artists as Corot, Daumier, Delacroix and Constantine Guys. It is through this understanding that his sympathy and insight has enabled him to see how the 'true artist' must attend to Nature and his surroundings.

He had a genuine insight into the workings of the Artist, probably because he had so much of the 'true artist' in himself, (he actually indulged in a small amount of drawing and painting himself!)

It was this insight that enabled him to become one of the most talented, sympathetic and understanding art critics of all time. Albert Skira in the foreward to History of Modern Painting; from Baudelaire to Bonnard said

Baudelaire, the first critic of modern painting, who sponsored with his prophetic pen the most daring aspirations of his contemporaries, inaugurated that fruitful collaboration between poets and painters which has meant so much to Art.

Indeed he has often been dubbed the Father of Modern Art-criticism.

Never has there been such a sympathetic, creative art critic. His greatness stems from the fact that he always goes refreshingly further than mundane criticism. He enters into a personalised realm never far from his poetry.

It is through Baudelaire's writings on Nature, Beauty and the Ideal in Art - not forgetting his Art criticism, which constitutes many of his theories on Art - that I shall attempt to draw a parallel with the Artists views, ideals and maxims (which are in effect my own). For I believe that through his findings, theories and his poetry we can draw a rich and spiritual knowledge of Nature and Art. And through his critical writings we can find a true and creative attitude towards painting and the Ideal which we all strive towards in our own Art and life.

CHAPTER ONE
THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY

L'ALBATROS

Souvent, pour s'amuser, les hommes d'équipage
 Prennent des albatros, vastes oiseaux des mers,
 Qui suivent, indolents compagnons de voyage,
 Le navire glissant sur les gouffres amers.

À peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches,
 Que ces rois de l'azur, maladroits et honteux,
 Laissent piteusement leurs grandes ailes blanches
 Comme des avirons trainer à côté d'eux.

Ce voyageur ailé, comme il est gauche et veule!
 Lui, naguère si beau, qu'il est comique et laid!
 L'un agace son bec avec un brûle-gueule,
 L'autre mime, en boitant, l'infirme qui volait!

Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées
 Qui haute la tempête et se rit de l'archer;
 Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
 Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.¹

THE ALBATROSS

Often, for their amusement, sailors catch albatross, those vast
 birds of the seas, indolent companions of their voyages, that follow
 the ship gliding across the bitter depths.

No sooner have the sailors stretched them out on the deck than those kings of the azure, awkward and ashamed, let their long white wings trail painfully by their side, like oars.

How ungainly, how contemptible the winged traveller becomes, how laughable and graceless, he who but a moment ago was so full of beauty. A sailor teases his beak with a pipe; another drags his foot to mimic the cripple who once soared through the air.

The Poet shares the fate of this prince of the clouds, who rejoices in the tempest, mocking the archer below; exiled on earth, an object of scorn, his giant wings impede him as he walks.

* * *

Before we can study the Artist in society, it is first necessary to look at the Artist himself. It is only through knowing the Artist and what his art means to him that we can study his position in society, what society feels towards him and he, towards it.

For most Artists their only loyalty is to themselves.

The Artist owes nothing to anyone but himself.

To future ages he holds out no promises but his

own work. He is a guarantor for no one but himself. ²

This is true, but in his allotted vocation, in the very act of being an Artist he is serving society and his fellow-man.

For the Artist, Art is a path, a means to finding oneself. It is also an indispensable means for

Merging the individual with the whole. ³

The Artist sees limitations in the 'individual', he wants to be more than just an individual. He rebels against having to be confined

within the transient limits of his own life, therefore he uses Art as a means of absorbing himself into the surrounding world and making it his own.

Art is a 'life substitute', a means of placing man in a state of equilibrium with the surrounding world. Perpetual equilibrium cannot exist, therefore Art is necessary.⁴

Art is also a means whereby the ties of life can be temporarily cast off. It becomes a privileged existence detached from all actuality, but necessary for the survival of the Artist. In this existence the Artist may retain innocence, the innocence that his fellow-man has lost in a society where knowledge and intellect are all-important. One must grow foul with 'knowledge' to be able to discard and disregard it and thereby retain ones innocence.

The Artist must strive to succeed in his media, for to fail as a painter the Artist fails as a man. Baudelaire sees the Artist's task in painting as a fundamentally spiritual one. He feels that every work of Art must be a means of coming to terms with the eternal world within the temporary world. That in ones painting, one must create the impression of the infinite within the finite world and this is possible because

it is the spirit in the Artist that creates Art₅ and not just the Artist himself. Baudelaire also supports the Artist in his belief that, in the use of imagery, of day to day life, one must elevate the image, so that it presents itself as it is, yet presents more of itself i. e. it must transcend itself. In this manner the work creates a mode of release and expression for the viewer and, most important, for the Artist himself. For just to imitate, is one of the

lowest crimes the Artist can commit. One must transcend imitation for one to gain satisfaction from ones work. Mere imitation lacks the magical quality, so necessary to Art. Painting must be considered a defensive mechanism whereby the Artist can investigate all the paths of the eternal and temporary world, Life and Nature.

Man must cling to the belief that the incomprehensible is comprehensible. Else we would give up investigating. 6

Nature became alien to man at the same time that the individual died in society. It therefore became necessary for the Artist to sever his ties with society so that he may retain his ties with Nature, as communication with Nature is vital to his survival as an Artist.

Society finds this 'severing of ties' difficult to understand as it places the Artist outside of its norms. Society now sees the Artist as an 'Outsider', as being unconventional in its eyes. This realisation now has to be understood by society. It has to reconcile this fact before the Artist can be re-accepted or acceptable again. To solve this problem society considers the Artist to live on a higher plane of reality. The Artist accepts this as his privileged existence, as it forms an image of him which allows him to rehabilitate himself in society's eyes. It also becomes a good cover for liberties taken and justifies his existence, as his peculiarities are now compensated for by the transcendental powers he now possesses. This acceptance of the Artist, by society, of rationalizing the situation, suits the Artist. He may now get away with being temperamental, eccentric and may now enjoy his privileged existence in peace.

He who has no temperament is not worthy of creating pictures. 7

The poem that heads this chapter, 'The Albatross', is a statement by Baudelaire on the plight of the Artist in society. He views the poet, painter and musician in the same category – that of 'The Artist'. In the poem he describes both the freedom that the Artist experiences outside of society and the humility he feels when exiled in society, as his fellow-men ridicule him. Baudelaire, draws the parallel of the Artist, most expressedly, with the Albatross. In the sky he is 'Prince of the Clouds', yet on earth (in society) , he becomes an object of scorn and ridicule.

This long tradition, in society, of placing, the Artist in the category of the 'eccentric' and the 'Outsider', stems from an inability to understand artistic creation. Yet society cannot function or survive successfully without the Artist and artistic creation. The Artists' fellow-man needs the Artist to unveil that which he cannot for himself perceive.

The Artists' task is to expound the profound meaning of events to his fellow-men,
 to solve for them the riddle of the essential relationships between man and nature and man and society.
 to entrance self-awareness.
 to liberate men, as they emerge from the security of a primitive collective.
 from the anxieties of an ambiguous fragmented individuality and from the dread of an insecure existence; to restore the lost unity of man. 8

The Artist is like Sundays Child, only he sees spirits. But after he has told of them appearing to him, everybody sees them. 9

It is in this very way that the Artist inadvertently serves society. He works for himself and allows society to take from his work what they will. He compromises by being the visionary for mankind, through his art, although he remains apart from society and its' norms. He realises that,

Art which turns away from all social contents,
tendencies and possibilities runs the risk of dying
of malnutrition, but so does Art which is viewed exclusively
as the performance of a social mission. 10

'Les Phares', (The Beacons,) is one of Baudelaire's most poignant comments on the Artist and his function in society. In this poem Baudelaire clearly states what the Artists' task is and how he feels towards his vocation as the visionary for society. It is one of his loveliest poems, dedicated to the Artist.

LES PHARES

Rubens, Fleuve d'oubli, jardin de la paresse,
Oreiller de chair fraîche où l'on ne peut aimer,
Mais où la vie afflue et s'agite sans cesse,
Comme l'air dans le ciel et la mer dans la mer;

Léonard de Vinci, miroir profond et sombre,
Où des anges charmants, avec un doux souris
Tout chargé de mystère, apparaissent à l'ombre
Des glaciers et des pins qui ferment leur pays;

Rembrandt, triste hôpital tout rempli de murmures,
Et d'un grand crucifix décoré seulement,
Où la prière en pleurs s'exhale des ordures,
Et d'un rayon d'hiver traversé brusquement;

Michel-Ange, lieu vague où l'on voit des Hercules
Se mêler à des Christs, et se lever tout droits
Des fantômes puissants qui dans les crépuscules
Déchirent leur suaire en étirant leurs doigts;

Colères de boxeur, impudences de faune,
Toi cui sus ramasser la beauté des goujats,
Grand coeur gonflé d'orgueil, homme débile et jaune,
Puget, mélancolique empereur des forçats;

Watteau, ce carnaval où bien des coeurs illustres,
Comme des papillons, errent en flamboyant,
Décors frais et légers éclairés par des lustres
Qui versent la folie à ce bal tournoyant;

Goya, cauchemar plein de choses inconnues,
De foetus qu'on fait cuire au milieu des sabbats,
De vieilles au miroir et d'enfants tontes nues,
Pour tenter les démons ajustant bien leurs bas;

Delacroix, lac de sang hanté des mauvais anges,
 Ombragé par un bois de sapins toujours vert,
 Où, sous un ciel chagrin, des fanfares étranges
 Passent, comme un soupir étouffé de Weber;

Ces malédictions, ces blasphèmes, ces plaintes,
 Ces extases, ces cris, ces pleurs, ces Te Deum,
 Sont un écho redit par mille labyrinthes;
 C'est pour les coeurs mortels un divin opium !

C'est un cri répété par mille sentinelles,
 Un ordre renvoyé par mille porte-voix;
 C'est un phare allumé sur mille citadelles,
 Un appel de chasseurs perdus dans les grands bois!

Car c'est vraiment, Seigneur, le meilleur témoignage
 Que nous puissions donner de notre dignité
 Que cet ardent sanglot qui roule d'âge en âge
 Et vient mourir au bord de votre éternité !

THE BEACONS

Rubens, river of oblivion, garden of idleness, pillow of cool human
 flesh whereon we cannot love, but where life endlessly flows and
 heaves, like the air into the sky, and the sea within the sea;
 Leonardo da Vinci, fathomless dark glass in which exquisite angels,
 their gentle smile all fraught with mystery, surge in the shadow of the
 glaciers and pines that mark the frontiers of their domain;

Rembrandt, drab hospital echoing whispered woes, furnished with
nought but a vast crucifix, where a weeping prayer sighs out of the
filth, and suddenly pierced by a winter sun;

Michelangelo, no-man's-land where one sees Hercules and Christs
together, and, rising stark upright, powerful phantoms who, in the
twilight, rend their winding-sheets and stretch their fingers out;

Puget, with boxer's fury and faun's immodesty, who could exalt the
beauty of the scum of the earth, that great heart swollen with pride,
that sickly, jaundiced man Puget, dour emperor of jailbirds;

Watteau, that carnival in which so many illustrious hearts wander
incandescent, like butterflies, in cool, frivolous settings, with
chandeliers pouring the garish light of madness on the swirling
dance;

Goya, that nightmare full of the unknown, foetuses roasted at witches'
sabbaths, old hags peering in their looking-glasses, immature girls
naked but for their stockings which they stretch neat to tempt hell's
demons;

Delacroix, that lake of blood haunted by fallen angels, with a dark
fringe of fir-trees, evergreen, where under a glowering sky strange
fanfares can be heard, like Weber's muted sigh;

These cures, blasphemies, lamentations, ecstasies, cries and tears
and Te Deums echo down a thousand labyrinths, a divine opium for the
hearts of men!

Theirs is a cry repeated by a thousand sentinels, an order passed on
by a thousand messengers, a beacon lit upon a thousand citadels, the
call of the huntsmen lost in the wide woods;

For truly, Lord, this is the best witness we can give of our human
dignity, this impassioned keening which endures down the ages, and
which shall die only on thine eternal shore !

This poem is a subtle evocation of the spirit of eight painters seen through Baudelaire's individual sensibility. It is an account of their individual, artistic vocations and themes. Here he expounds his theories that Art is a means of spiritual investigation, a plunging into the subconscious of suffering humanity. It is a means of making viewers communicate with and enter into a superior reality, which is the spiritual reality entered into only by the Artist himself. Here again we come to the Artist's privileged existence, his being 'the visionary' and 'Sundays Child' for society.

Baudelaire reveals that the Artist is the spiritual guide of humanity, like the beacon in life. It is the Artist that bears witness to man's restless longing, his pride and dignity. This is so because the Artist is more responsive to the needs of human nature. He becomes society's prophet and creator. Yet Baudelaire sees the Artist as being a sorrowful figure because he doesn't know whether he is reaching his fellow-man.

The poem is a testimony to humanism and to human creativity. It expresses the Artist's eternal questioning. The questioning, of the Artist, as to whether or not his role is to anticipate the spiritual needs of man and/or to communicate his interpretations to the higher order of God and Nature. His greatest fear is that his quest is in vain and that he is surrounded by an indifferent cosmos. In Baudelaire's poem 'Benediction' he expands this idea

BÉNÉDICTION

Lorsque, par un décret des puissances suprêmes,
 Le Poète apparaît en ce monde ennuyé,
 Sa mère épouvantée et pleine de blasphèmes
 Crispe ses poings vers Dieu, qui la prend en pitié:

-« Ah! que n'ai-je mis bas tout un noeud de vipères,
 Plutôt que de nourrir cette dérision !
 Maudite soit la nuit aux plaisirs éphémères
 Où mon ventre a conçu mon expiation !

« Puisque tu m'as choisie entre toutes les femmes
 Pour être le dégoût de mon triste mari,
 Et que je ne puis pas rejeter dans les flammes,
 Comme un billet d'amour, ce monstre rabougri,

« Je ferai rejaillir ta haine qui m'accable
 Sur l'instrument maudit de ta méchancetés,
 Et je tordrai si bien cet arbre misérable,
 Qu'il ne pourra pousser ses boutons empestés ! »

Elle ravale ainsi l'écume de sa haine,
 Et, ne comprenant pas les desseins éternels,
 Elle-même prépare au fond de la Géhenne
 Les bûchers consacrés aux crimes maternels.

Pourtant, sous la tutelle invisible d'un Ange,
 L'Enfant déshérité s'enivre de soleil,
 Et dans tout ce qu'il boit et dans tout ce qu'il mange
 Retrouve l'ambrosie et le nectar vermeil.

Il joue avec le vent, cause avec le nuage,
 Et s'enivre en chantant du chemin de la croix;
 Et l'Esprit qui le suit dans son pèlerinage
 Pleure de le voir gai comme un oiseau des bois.

Tous ceux qu'il veut aimer l'observent avec crainte,
 Ou bien, e'enhardissant de sa tranquillité,
 Cherchent à qui saura lui tirer une plainte,
 Et font sur lui l'essai de leur férocité.

Dans le pain et le vin destinés à sa bouche
 Ils mêlent de la cendre avec d'impurs crachats ;
 Avec hypocrisie ils jettent ce qu'il touche,
 Et s'accusent d'avoir mis leurs pieds dans ses pas.

Sa femme va criant sur les places publiques :

«Puisqu'il me trouve assez belle pour m'adorer,
 Je ferai le métier des idoles antiques,
 Et comme elles je veux me faire redorer;

«Et je me souûlerai de nard, d'encens, de myrrhe,
 De g nuflexions, de viandes et de vins,
 Pour savoir si je puis dans un coeur qui m'admire
 Usurper en riant les hommages divins !

«Et, quand je m'ennuierai de ces farces impies,
 Je poserai sur lui ma fr le et forte main;
 Et mes ongles, pareils aux ongles des harpies,
 Sauront jusqu'  son coeur se frayer un chemin.

«Comme un tout jeune oiseau qui tremble et qui palp te,
 J'arracherai ce coeur tout rouge de son sein,
 Et, pour rassasier ma b te favorite,
 Je le lui jetterai par terre avec d dain !»

Vers le Ciel, où son oeil voit un trône splendide,
 Le Poëte serein lève ses bras pieux,
 Et les vastes éclairs de son esprit lucide
 Lui dérobent l'aspect des peuples furieux:

-«Soyez béni, mon Dieu, qui donnez la souffrance
 Comme un divin remède à nos impuretés
 Et comme la meilleure et la plus pure essence
 Qui prépare les forts aux saintes voluptés !

«Je sais que vous gardez une place au Poëte
 Dans les rangs bienheureux des saintes Légions,
 Et que vous l'invitez à l'éternelle fête
 Des Trônes, des Vertus, des Dominations.

«Je sais que la douleur est la noblesse unique
 Où ne mordront jamais la terre et les enfers,
 Et qu'il faut pour tresser ma couronne mystique
 Imposer tous les temps et tous les univers.

«Mais les bijoux perdus de l'antique Palmyre,
 Les métaux inconnus, les perles de la mer,
 Par votre main montés, ne pourraient pas suffire
 À ce beau diadème éblouissant et clair;

«Car il ne sera fait que de pure lumière,
 Puisée au foyer saint des rayons primitifs,
 Et dont les yeux mortels, dans leur splendeur entière,
 Ne sont que des miroirs obscurcis et plaintifs !»¹²

THE BLESSING

When, by decree of the supreme Powers the poet enters this weary world, his horrified mother, full of blasphemies, clenches her fists against God, who takes pity on her:

"Ah," she cries, "I would rather have spawned a clutch of snakes than give suck to this mockery ! Cursed be the night and all its short-lived pleasures, when my womb conceived this, my atonement !

"Since you have chosen me of all women, for my sad husband's loathing, and since I cannot cast this stunted freak like a love-letter into the flames.

"I shall pass the hatred you have heaped upon me, on to this cursed instrument of your spite; so thoroughly will I twist this miserable tree that he'll never put forth his evil-smelling buds ! "

Thus she swallows her foaming hatred, and, without the slightest understanding of eternal designs, she herself prepares those pyres in the depths of Gehenna, which await the crimes of motherhood. And yet, under the unseen guidance of an Angel, the disinherited child drinks deep of the inebriating sun, discovering ambrosia and ruby nectar in all his food and drink.

He plays with the wind and prattles with the clouds; with rapture he sings the way of the Cross, while the Spirit who follows him on his pilgrimage weeps to see him happy as a woodland bird.

All those whom gladly he would love watch him with fear; or else, making bold of his calm bearing, vie with each other to draw a whine from him, abusing him with their cruelty.

They mix ash and filthy spit with the bread and wine destined for his lips; hypocritically they cast down what his hands have touched; they falsely blame themselves for following where he led.

His wife goes out and cries in public places : ' Since he finds me beautiful enough to adore, I shall follow the trade of those idols of olden days, and, like them, have myself covered with leaf of gold: " I will make myself drunk with nard, with incense and myrrh, with the bowing of knees before me, with flesh, and with wines, to find whether I can mockingly usurp the homage due to God alone, in whatever heart shall worship me:

"And when I tire of all these impious mockeries, I will lay my delicate but powerful hand upon him, and my nails, my harpy-like nails, will surely claw their way into his very heart;

"Yes, like a little bird that trembles and throbs I will tear the red heart out of his breast and throw it scornfully into the dust, to gorge my favourite beast ! "

But towards heaven, where his gaze beholds a splendid throne, the serene Poet raises his pious arms, and the great lightning-flashes of his lucid mind shut out the sight of the frenzied hordes of mankind:

"Be belssed, O God, " he cries, "who offer suffering as a divine balm for our impurities, suffering which is the best and purest essence for preparing the strong for those joys that only saints may know:

"I know that you set aside a place for the Poet in the happy ranks of the Holy Legions, and that you will invite him to share in the eternal feast of the Thrones, the Virtues, and the Dominations:

"I know that sorrow is the one nobility on which neither earth nor hell can lay its fangs, and that all ages and universes must be taxed for the tressing of my mystic crown:

"But the vanished jewels of ancient Palmyra, and metals as yet unknown to man, and all the pearls of the seas, even were they set together by your hand, would never be enough to complete this fair diadem, so dazzling, so bright:

"For it will be made of nought but pure Light drawn from the sacred source of the Sun's first rays, of which mortal eyes, even in all their splendour, are but dimmed and mournful mirrors. "

* * *

In this poem Baudelaire vividly lays bare all the Artist fears. His insight into what society feels towards the Artist is uncanny. He senses exactly how the Artist feels, he knows that he is the 'chosen one' and that his plight may seem in vain. Baudelaire seemingly draws a parallel with Christ, yet he was not a Christian as such,

Baudelaire discovered Christianity for himself ,
not assuming it as a fashion or weighing political
or social reasons. ¹³

The Artist senses eternal peace and acceptance at the end, after his struggle in the temporary world with society.

Finally, the Artist is the only communication society has between itself and 'the higher reality' or 'spiritual reality' that exists.

Humanity has exiled itself and only through the help of the Artist may it now glimpse at the Ideal and the infinite. Only through the Artist may it begin to understand Nature again. Only by going 'backwards' may society go forward and only the Artist may teach his fellow-man how to go back from whence he came.

CHAPTER TWO

NATURE: A PARALLEL BETWEEN BAUDELAIRE'S
VIEWS AND THE ARTISTS

CORRESPONDANCES

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

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'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
- Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.¹

CORRELATIVES

Nature is a temple, in which living pillars sometimes utter a babel of words; man traverses it through forests of symbols, that watch him with knowing eyes.

Like prolonged echoes which merge far away in an opaque, deep oneness, as vast as darkness, as vast as light, perfumes, sounds, and colours answer each to each.

There are perfumes fresh and cool as the bodies of children, mellow as oboes, green as fields; and others that are perverse, rich, and triumphant,

that have the infinite expansion of infinite things – such as amber, musk, benjamin, and incense, which chant the ecstasies of the mind and senses.

* * *

Art is a means of coming to terms with Nature's inexhaustible resources and of perceiving her true mystery. For the Artist she is a vast source, an invisible, yet visible sign to be penetrated and interpreted. Art is the magical tool used by man to decipher Nature and her symbols. She is a world of senses and Art is a reproduction of what the Artist's senses perceive in Nature through the spirit. In Nature there is what is in infinity, that which is within and beyond reach.

Nature is eternally extravagant, alive and prodigal

in her working to keep the infinite ever present. ²

The Artist holds the keys to Nature's symbols as he is equipped with a special sense, being more sensitive to the workings of Nature.

No arrogant man was allowed to see Nature in all

her Beauty. ³

Indeed no Artist is arrogant. He is Nature's humble interpreter, her translator and medium for mankind.

Baudelaire sees Nature as almost being a religion for the Artist. She is, for him, a source of morality. He sees Nature as a calm haven where Artists may retire to after his involvement with society, a tranquil refuge after the squalor and turbulence of urban civilization.

Goethe teaches us that

only Nature forms the greatest Artists. ⁴

Indeed all the great Artists used Nature as a

vast dictionary, ⁵

to be consulted and then transcribed in their own minds. Baudelaire believed that a painting must reproduce the Artists intimate thoughts and it must conceive Nature truthfully and simply. He says that although the Artist must

love Nature sincerely, ⁶

he must not think that he is now justified in imitating Nature. The Artists task is to convey Natures essential qualities and her elusive, surprising aspects. He must then impart, into his work, some of his own response to Nature i. e. something of his own nature.

Nature remains the ultimate guide and criterion
of artistic endeavour. ⁷

One must use Nature as a reference to draw from, as Gustave Moreau said to his students,

Do not be satisfied with going down to the
museum, but go down into the streets. ⁸

We must

observe and follow Nature closely, ⁹

but never imitate her.

The Artists primary concern should be with the 'whole', with the translation of Natures intentions into a simpler more lucid language for mankind to understand, so that they too may also partake of her mystery and beauty.

When Nature begins to reveal her manifest
mystery to man he feels an irresistible longing
for her worthiest interpreter : Art. 10

It has been said that modern Artists

have tried all too successfully to divorce
Nature from the feelings she inspires in man. 11

So it is all the more important for us to re-instill this inspiration in our works.

The Artist, Baudelaire tells us, must be willing to sacrifice detail, infact to go so far as inventing or expanding on ones subject, so that a painting can be seen as a struggle between Art and Nature and not merely as a photographic recreation or imitation of what is already before us.

Nature offers the Artist a vast treasure of infinite symbols to work from. She is his eternal mentor, his benevolent guide. Although being seemingly benevolent, Nature is a manifestation of contradictions and analogies. She is a vast world of parallels and intrigues, an ever changing conglomerate of infinite mysteries.

In Nature, animate as well as inanimate, we can perceive something manifesting itself, only in contradictions incapable for that very reason of being reduced to a concept, much less a word.



It is not divine for it seemed devoid of reason;
 not human for it lacked intelligence; not diabolical
 for it was benevolent; not angelic for it often
 manifested malicious pleasure. 12

Within these contradictions, Baudelaire sees Nature, not only as an inanimate expression in itself, but as an inter-relating force between man, (the Artist), and Nature and within Nature itself. He sees that it is only a matter of the Artist seeing these analogies between himself and Nature for the secrets of Nature to be revealed. Relation between the human and the supernatural must be achieved before insight into Nature is granted.

The function of the language of Art is to suggest. It is essentially creative, a 'magical operation' in which words cease to be mere signs and participate in the things that they present or evoke. It establishes 'correspondances'. 13

The understanding of the theory of 'correspondances', or 'correlatives', is essential to the understanding of Nature and the Artists relationship. The theory of 'correspondances' is a highly complex idea. It suggests, or states, that objects in the natural world have their counterparts, or parallels, in the supernatural world. And, that these objects have interrelationships between their counterparts as well as between themselves. i. e. in the horizontal and vertical sense. In the vertical sense natural objects have their reflections, or counterparts, in the supernatural world and in the horizontal sense, objects in the natural world have their own hidden relations between themselves.

Baudelaire does not separate the two worlds as it is important that they are a fundamental unity i. e. a single whole world.

The 'correspondances' express not a relationship between two worlds but a fundamental unity of a single world. 14

Each world constitutes a single vast unified system of interrelationships in which all mysterious things come together and 'correspond'. Within this endless 'reciprocal interplay' of all objects, this 'universal mirror', the elements of Nature 'communicate' with man who in turn reads them as symbols, to be interpreted. With the same properties that they talk to man they 'answer' and 'echo' one another. Correspondances embraces the whole complex of mans sensuous and spiritual experiences. Man is just one participant in the vast harmonious complex of all things in Nature. It is the continuity between the secret eloquence of Nature and the invisible interrelationships binding animate and inanimate things, that is important to the Artist. The Artists main preoccupation was to discover the inner pattern of this experience. Actual 'correspondances' suggests or indicates the nature of the discovery of Artistic revelation. It is through the Artist alone that this harmony can be consciously apprehended and recorded, by him alone can it be transcribed.

The poem that heads this Chapter is Baudelaires full and final declaration of 'correspondances'. It is an infinitely exquisite poem, an amazingly truthful and clear sighted representation of the description of his understanding of the workings of Nature – a sympathetic and profound statement on Natures mysterious ways.

In the poem man, (the Artist), walks through Nature. She is alive and sensuous, yet it is not always that man notices her as such. She is a forest of interrelating symbols communing with each other. On the rare occasion She solicits our attention, almost as if of her own violation. It is at these unique moments that the Artist is privileged enough to perceive her true mystery. The poem gives us an image of man wending his way through the obscurely eloquent forest of symbols. At times when these revelations are opened to the Artist they give him singularly clear images of Nature's workings. These revelations or unique moments are transmitted by Nature, to the Artist, by colour, sound, perfume and scent. There is a boundless amount of these mysterious properties that awaken our senses and reveal Nature in all her splendour.

The Artist is equipped with a special inexplicable sense, to interpret the 'confuses paroles' and 'regards familiers'. They expose themselves for the Artist to gain new ideas for his invaluable work. This supernatural state that the Artist is transported into when he senses these mysterious messengers of Nature is beautifully described by Baudelaire in his poem 'Elevation'. It is a sensation only experienced by the Artist on the rare occasion.

ÉLÉVATION

Au-Dessus des étangs, au-dessus des vallées,
Des montagnes, des bois, des nuages, des mers,
Par delà le soleil, par delà les éthers,
Par delà les confins des sphères étoilées,

Mon esprit, tu te meus avec agilité,
 Et, comme un bon nageur qui se pâme dans l'onde,
 Tu sillonnes gaiment l'immensité profonde
 Avec une indicible et mâle volupté.

Envole-toi bien loin de ces miasmes morbides;
 Va te purifier dans l'air supérieur,
 Et bois, comme une pure et divine liqueur,
 Le feu clair qui temple les espaces limpides.

Derrière les ennuis et les vastes chagrins
 Qui chargent de leur poids l'existence brumeuse,
 Heureux celui qui peut d'une aile vigoureuse
 S'élancer vers les champs lumineux et sereins !

Celui dont les penses, comme des alouettes,
 Vers les cieux le matin prennent un libre essor,
 - Qui plane sur la vie, et comprend sans effort
 Le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes ! 15

ELEVATION

Above the pools, above the valleys, the mountains, woods, clouds,
 and seas, beyond the Sun, beyond the expanses of ether, beyond the
 frontiers of the starry spheres.

Agile you move, O my mind, and as a strong swimmer swoons on the
 wavy sea, gaily you cleave the unfathomable vastness with ineffable,
 male, voluptuous joy.

Fly far away from this deadly slough; go, cleanse yourself in the upper air, and drink undiluted the nectar of the gods, that lucid fire that brims the limpid realms of space !

Behind all cares and vast chagrins that weigh upon our fogged existence, happy is he whose dauntless wing lifts him towards the luminous fields of peace;

he whose lark like thoughts soar free towards the morning skies, who rides high above life, swift to interpret the speech of flowers and inarticulate things.

* * *

This poem is a lucid description of the supernatural state reached when Nature reveals herself. The important thing is to understand the analogy between the appearance of the situation and its counterpart and not just to know its equivalent in the supernatural world. It is at this point in the Artists work that 'duende' is achieved and that he is 'effortlessly' able to comprehend 'les langage des fleurs et des choses muettes' which is so vital to his greatness.

The element of imagination is also an essential quality, necessary to the understanding of 'correspondances'.

It is more than the power of analysis or synthesis, more than sensitivity; it shows to man the hidden meaning of the visible world and is the creator of analogy and metaphor. And finally, decomposing the world we know, it creates a new one, giving to us the sense of something hitherto unknown. 16

Imagination crosses the bridge from the visible to the invisible and not only 'sees' but sees meanings of relevant things. It has been said that its concept has been enriched by the doctrine of 'correspondances'.

I have long maintained that the poet is supremely intelligent, that he is 'intelligence par excellence'— and that the imagination is the most scientific of faculties, because it alone understands the 'Universal Analogy' or what mystical religion calls the 'correspondances'. 17

Imagination is the essence of genius. Delacroix said that the finest works of Art are those which express the purest imagination of the Artist. 18

No really excellent work of art can exist without the Artist having struggled and in that struggle he must have attained 'duende' which is a mysterious power that everyone feels but that no philosopher has explained. 19

García Lorca, the Spanish poet, best explains it in his lectures given in Havana and Buenos Aires —

It is a power, a struggle. It surges up from the soles of the feet ... It is not a matter of ability. 20

Most great Artists have at some time or other passed through a stage in their work when 'duende' is attained. It is an elusive, essential quality in ones work that one continually strives for but seldom achieves

To help us seek the duende there is neither map nor discipline. All one knows is that it burns the blood like powdered glass, that it exhausts, that it rejects all the sweet geometry one has learned; that it breaks with all styles that it compels Goya, master of greys, silver,

and of those pinks in the best English paintings,
to paint with his knees and with his fists horrible
bitumen blacks. ²¹

Duende can never be repeated. It is required to find the Artistic truth. Like the Imagination, of which it is a part, duende presupposes radical changes on old structures. It creates a freshness and an unknown quality on all that it touches.

Encompassing all these concepts is the concept of L'Ideal which includes the elusive quality of the Infinite. Like the Imagination and the duende, L'Ideal

is an extreme sense of well being accompanied
by the heightening of the sensory and intellectual
perception. ²²

It too is an emotional state and experience, it has total understanding of 'correspondances'. Each Artist has to strive for his own Ideal in art, he must create his own idealized version of the forms of Nature. It has been asked what determines the nature of this personalized ideal ? Baudelaire answers that it is the Artists own temperament, his intuitive imagination in response to his chosen subject. The Artist is a personalized individual, each experience for him is as new and as fresh as each dawn or sunset. Yet all strive to attain 'duende', to understand

les langage des fleurs et des choses muettes. ²³

It is only through achieving this understanding, that the key to Nature herself is found.

CHAPTER THREE

BAUDELAIRE AND ART CRITICISM

One may learn from Baudelaire a method of criticism that does not wither or grow stale, a method that each one in his own measure may apply. ₁

I am including this Chapter on Art Criticism, with special reference to Baudelaire's technique of criticism, as it seems to me to be a relevant preliminary conclusion to this thesis. Art criticism, although severely maligned by many Artists, bridges the gap between the Artist, on his higher plane of reality, and society.

Society demands some 'come-back' from the Artist, almost a payment for his being on this higher plane. Baudelaire in his Salon of 1846 explains this in a chapter dedicated to the Bourgeois, saying that they demand of the Artist payment in the form of bodily, intellectual and imaginative enjoyment. ₂

The problem begins when society receives this payment, in the form of artistic creations, as they cannot always understand the Artist's work nor its message. Critics then, who tend to place themselves on a level between society and the Artist, try, almost always unsuccessfully, to bridge this misconception.

Baudelaire is the one exception. He was one of the most competent and revolutionary critics of all times. He succeeded in bridging the gap mainly because of his immense, profound understanding of the Artist and his vocation.

This sympathy stems from the simple fact that he had so much of the Artist in himself, because he was a poet.

Baudelaire, first critic of modern painting who sponsored with his prophetic pen the most daring aspirations of his contemporaries, inaugurated that fruitful collaboration between poets and painters which has meant so much to Art. ³

He also understood the Artists hatred of criticism; good, indifferent or bad as it

can teach nothing to the bourgeois, who wants neither to paint nor to versify, nor has it anything to teach Art, whose offspring it is. ⁴

He cynically adds,

and yet how many Artists of today owe to it alone their poor little reputations. ⁵

So once again, his insight into the problem in question is very lucid. He sees at once the Artists rejection of criticism and his need for it.

His aim was to call back the visual arts and give them back their true proportions. He strived to draw the public back into appreciating good art. In succeeding, he believed he would bring them closer to Nature.

He was living at a time when artistic anarchy and artistic puritanism were rampant, when the 'great tradition' had been lost and the new tradition had not yet been discovered. ⁶

His views on criticism were new, innovating and as refreshing as the new concepts he gave to L'Idéal, Beauty and Nature. His techniques were remarkably in keeping with his poetry, he reinstates and reiterates in his critical works, all his theories and views on Nature, Beauty and Correspondances. For him, all aspects of art are related, so that what he writes about in his poetry can naturally be carried further in his critical writings. In fact he used his Salons and other critical works to develop and expand upon his theories.

The fundamentals of Baudelaire's conception of beauty, of art, of criticism, seem to me to develop with remarkable coherence. ⁷ (In his critical writings)

He rejuvenated the old style of criticism, promoting a partial and passionate ₈ style of writing. A style which involved and demanded a highly individual and personalized manner of criticizing. He believed that the best criticism is one that

is entertaining and poetic, not a cold analytical type of criticism, which, claiming to explain everything, is devoid of hatred and love, and deliberately rids itself of any trace of feeling, but, since a fine painting is nature reflected by an artist, the best critical study, I repeat, will be one that is that painting reflected by an intellectual and sensitive mind. Thus the best accounts of a picture may well be a sonnet or an elegy. ₉

Baudelaire sincerely believed that the best critics were poets. Richard Wagner supported this belief by stating that,

all great poets naturally and fatally became
critics. ¹⁰

His criticism has always been personal and individual, and independent of tradition. When one reads his criticisms on the Salons of Paris, on the Universal Exhibition of 1855, on 'The Life and Work of Eugène Delacroix' and his, essay on 'The Painter of Modern Life', one has the feeling of being lead by an experienced and enlightened guide. He had a great sense of beauty, a sound technical knowledge and was a sure judge. Most of the painters he had admired and had brought to the notice of the public, still to this day are regarded with respect and reverence. Whereas many of his contemporaries, like Sainte-Beuve, misrepresented the talents of these Artists and tended to promote now forgotten talents.

His comments become at times poetic renderings of a painting in

half pictorial, half musical terms. ¹¹

He never bores his reader with professional art-critic jargon. He had a constant appreciation of the original, and severely slated those artists who had a lack of originality in their painting and tended to overplay their technical ability to cover up for their inadequacies. There was always an element of spontaneity, surprise and witicism in his writing. His work always comes across as youthful, vibrant and eager, yet underneath this aura of ease with which he wrote, he was well informed and well-read. He always had a vast store of new ideas, ideas that were

all logically related which are applicable
to paintings of all times. ¹²

Baudelaire's favourite artist, who he never tired of praising and criticizing, was Delacroix. For him this great artist symbolized all that was true and genuine in Art. He was the backbone of Baudelaire's critical art works. Delacroix was a profound influence on Baudelaire. From him, Baudelaire drew an endless source of inspiration. He never tired of promoting him even when the other critics were slating him. It is interesting to note that Delacroix never really acknowledged the extent to which Baudelaire's criticism promoted him. He did however acknowledge Baudelaire's praise of him after the Salon of 1859.

How can I ever thank you sufficiently for this further proof of your friendship? You came to my aid when I'm abused, and torn to pieces by a large number of serious critics – or who, at least, consider themselves as such. But having had the pleasure of pleasing you, I can now bear their complaints with equanimity. You treat me as only the illustrious dead are treated! You make me blush, even though you give me the greatest of pleasure !

Good-bye and publish more often ! You put something of yourself in everything that you write, and the admirers of your talent complain only of the rarity of your publications. 13

Baudelaire's most extensive study on Delacroix was his "The Life and Works of Eugène Delacroix", written as a homage to Delacroix after his death. In this article, Baudelaire extols the Artist's immense talent and delves into his genius, not forgetting Delacroix the man.

PLATE ONE

PORTRAIT OF JENNY LE GUILLION BY DELACROIX (oil on canvas)



Baudelaire always introduces a humane and personal touch to his discussion. He relates small, seemingly irrelevant anecdotes that endear the person in question to the public. Here he relates how Delacroix, proud and elegant, would stroll through the museum and galleries with his devoted servant, Jenny Le Guillion, and not be too aloof to explain to her the mysteries of Assyrian sculpture or discuss Machiavelli with her. He painted a moving portrait of her, which radiates humility and his regard for this woman. (see plate one)

Then Baudelaire launches into an intimate exploration of Delacroix's technique and attitude. To him the understanding of the Artist was of primary importance. It was most important to have a sympathetic understanding of the Artist's views and indeed of the Artist himself before one can study a painting of his in any depth. Baudelaire believed that this knowledge of the painter gave one a clear view to understanding his paintings.

I believe, that the important thing for me to do here is to search for, and to try and define, the characteristic quality of Delacroix's genius....

What is Delacroix? What role did he come into this world to play, and what duty to perform?

That is the first question that we must examine. 14

Another of the Artists that Baudelaire dwelt long on was Constantine Guys. He admired him for his originality and his eye for natural styling. He singles out Guys drawings which indeed is his strong point. They are loose renderings of Parisian Life and fashion (see plates two and three). Baudelaire moves the reader into such a pitch



TAKING THE AIR BY CONSTANTINE GUYS (pen and ink and watercolour)



of appreciation, through his sympathy and understanding of his subject, that has seldom been reached by any Art Critic, modern or ancient. Baudelaire has the ability for inspiring the reader into an almost emotional involvement with the essay on 'The Painter of Modern Life', Baudelaire again shows us how relevant it is to know the Artist and his past experiences.

Baudelaire's critical works are in a sense the climax of his artistic theories. They can be said to be the conscious revealing of all his thoughts on Imagination, Nature and Correspondances. It is here that he formulates his view point and gives it substance, rather like the creation of a painting. Baudelaire gives society his poetry and critical analyses, and the Artist gives society his paintings. They are in a sense one and the same thing.

* * *

PLATE THREE

THE BRIGHTON COACH BY CONSTANTINE GUYS (pen and ink and water-colour)



CONCLUSION

The Artist can regard Baudelaire as a touchstone, as so many of his ideals and maxims are the ideals and maxims of the Artist himself. He teaches us many invaluable secrets of the universe and his lucid rendering of their explanations give us a clear insight into its mystery. He believed that Art was the 'brainchild' of Nature's inspiration and that through its means and ways Nature's mysteries will be revealed to us. He fought against all that the modern-day Artist is still fighting against. He rebelled against society's false reasoning and its false morals. He became 'self-exiled' so that he could retain his individuality and reasoning.

Like the Artist, his most valuable quality was his spontaneity and inspiration, given to him when his spirit moved him. His poems stand complete in themselves and yet all have a mysterious quality binding them. Likewise our paintings must also stand complete, they must be an end in themselves, each with its own singular message and yet a unity must prevail throughout. We must strive for that eternal quality that is so obvious in Baudelaire's work.

He can be read today at the distance of a century
as if he had written for the present generation,
with a knowledge of its problems and interests.

His appeal is still vital because he was not fettered
by the fashionable opinions and evanescent whims
of his own age, and he made no concessions to the
spirit of his own time in order to gain popularity. 1

PLATE FOUR

HOMMAGE A DELACROIX BY FATIN-LATOUR

Baudelaire is seen on the extreme right.



Baudelaire teaches us that the most important thing is to find ones own path to the understanding of the universe and Nature. He tells us that ideals and standards were valuable only when we had formulated them ourselves from our own inner conviction and compulsion, that each of us must work out his own salvation and find his own harmony. 2

The Artist must travel his own way and choose his own standards, he must be prepared to be cast out by society so as to be able to take communion with Nature. He must learn to draw his own moral code and be prepared for the judgement that will be cast upon him. He must look to himself, but keep a wary eye on all aspects of Art and Nature, for one can learn from even the smallest experience.

The Artist can scorn nothing, he is not arrogant nor proud nor full of self-esteem. He is humble in the presence of Nature, realising her eternal and mystical qualities. He must learn to be guided by her inspirations and accept her bountiful offerings with grace. For only through Nature can the Artist hope to regain equilibrium and help to bring mankind back to her mighty realm.

LA RANÇON

L'homme a, pour payer sa rançon,
 Deux champs au tuf profond et riche,
 Qu'il faut qu'il remue et défriche
 Avec le fer de la raison;

Pour obtenir la moindre rose,
 Pour extorquer quelques épis,
 Des pleurs salés de son front gris
 Sans cesse il faut qu'il les arrose.

L'un est l'Art, et l'autre l'Amour.
 - Pour rendre le juge propice,
 Lorsque de la stricte justice
 Paraîtra le terrible jour,

Il faudra lui montrer des granges
 Pleines de moissons, et des fleurs
 Dont les formes et les couleurs
 Gagnent le suffrage des Anges. 3

THE RANSOM

Man has, with which to pay his ransom, two fields of deep, rich growth, which he must dig and cultivate with the blade of Reason. To nurse the smallest rose, to wring a few ears of corn from the earth, he must water them ceaselessly with the salt tears of his grey brow.

One is Art, and the other is Love. In order to propitiate the judge when the terrible day of strict justice comes, he will have to show him barns full of harvested crops, and flowers whose shapes and colours win the Angels' approval.

* * *

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