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Landscape and the Imagination: Expressive Aesthetics in French Romantic Poetry

Quandt, Karen

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LANDSCAPE AND THE IMAGINATION:
EXPRESSIVE AESTHETICS IN FRENCH ROMANTIC POETRY

Karen Frances Quandt

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Abstract

Landscape and the Imagination examines how French romantic poets represent the creative imagination as an aesthetic process. This study does not consider the landscape in poetry as an ekphrastic phenomenon, but instead looks at how the poet's perception, memory, and mental faculties form a productive medium that transforms immediate experience.

Starting with Lamartine's *Méditations poétiques* (1820) and their debt to German Idealist theories of art, I show how the poet's appropriation of melody dematerializes the landscape to free the lyric voice. Though Lamartine later critiqued the imagination's lack of boundaries by turning to the physical experience of nature in the *Nouvelles méditations poétiques* (1823), he sealed readers' perceptions of romantic poetry as vague and limitless, prompting Victor Hugo to bolster an ephemeral lyric by incorporating the immediate experiences of history and visual media. By examining contemporary theories of painting, vision, and color, my second chapter traces Hugo's developing formulation of the visual imagination in the *Odes et Ballades* (1822-1828) and its subsequent representation as a diorama in *Les Orientales* (1829). More than picturesque fantasies of the East, Hugo's exotic landscapes refer back to the poet's filtering eye, which mediates between immediate experience and invention.

My final chapter considers how Baudelaire aimed to preserve this tension between expansion and contraction in his lyric poems. By distilling various theories of the imagination and centering the work of art on the cognitive processing of memory and experience, Baudelaire undermined what had become the post-exilic Hugo's universalizing and expansive impulse. Drawing from theorists who stressed the role of

the “real world” in the work of art (Goethe, Sainte-Beuve, Stendhal), as well as from Edgar Allan Poe’s conception of art as the product of inductive analysis, Baudelaire compressed the imagination into the conflicting impulses of the brain. My reading of the “Tableaux parisiens” *(Les Fleurs du mal*, 1861) relates the critical story of how Baudelaire not only features the imagination as a process, but extracts its cerebral essence as he eliminates the subterfuge of romantic tropes, metaphysical systems, and material disturbances.

Contrary to jaded contemporary readings of romantic lyric poetry as idealistic or escapist, or as reflecting a melancholic “sentiment de la nature”, each of these poets acknowledges the imagination’s combative dynamic. Far from being a motif, the imagination appears in each volume as a cogent and carefully developed contribution to the history of its idea.

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Finally, this dissertation was written in loving memory of my grandmother, Doris F. McKiever, whose hybrid passion for birds and books I inherited, but whose heart of gold I could never hope to possess.

Le rosignox chante tant
Que mors chiet de l'aubre jus;
Si bele mort ne vit nus,
Tant douce ne si plaisant.
Thibaut de Champagne, "La Mort du rossignol"

Fled is that music: - Do I wake or sleep?
John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale"

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Introduction

> Je suis de ceux qui sentent très-grand effort de l'imagination. Chacun en est heurté, mais aucuns en sont renversez. Son impression me perse. Et mon art est de luy eschapper, non pas de luy resister.
>
> Michel de Montaigne, "De la force de l'imagination", *Essais*

i. The Horizon of French Romantic Landscape

Near the turn of the nineteenth century in France, the definition of 'romantic' depended on the landscape:

> ROMANTIQUE. Il se dit ordinairement des lieux, des paysages qui rappellent à l'imagination les descriptions des poèmes et des romans. Situation romantique. Aspect romantique. (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, 1798)[1]

As empirical theories flourished in Europe in the eighteenth century and loosened the hold of classical models and metaphysical systems, the landscape, traditionally categorized as a work of art with a restrictive form and a single point of view,[2] came to be understood as a living and three-dimensional slice of nature that produced physical and emotive effects on the viewer.[3] A "romantic" landscape was defined as inviting this

[1] Cited in Michel Collot, *Paysage et poésie du romantisme à nos jours* (Paris: José Corti, 2005): 26. Collot's introductory chapters are indispensable for a discussion of questions surrounding the function of the landscape in modern (French) literature, as well as for a thorough bibliography pertaining to the subject.

[2] The entry for "Paisage" in the *Dictionnaire universel de Furetière* (1690) reads: "aspect d'un pays, le territoire qui s'estend jusqu'où la veüe peut porter". Cited in Chenet-Faugeras, "L'Invention du paysage urbain".

[3] The landscape, which traditionally served merely as background or decoration, did not emerge as a genre of its own until the Renaissance. Kenneth Clark, in his seminal study *Landscape into Art* (1949), has located the Western artist's increasing interest in the "real world" in the Northern countries, where devotional books such as *Les très riches heures* (Limbourg brothers, 1409-1415) or Albrecht Dürer's watercolors of natural landscapes demonstrate "the curiosity about the precise character of a particular spot". However, in Italy (with the exception of Venice), painters and theorists instead scrutinized nature as obeying a universal formula. Leon Battista Alberti's treatise *On Painting* (1435), to take the most notable example, is, in short, a manual that trains the painter to see mathematically. Alberti defines the painting as "the intersection of a visual pyramid at a given distance, with a fixed centre and certain position of lights, represented by art with lines and colours on a given surface" (no. 12). Nicolas Poussin (1594-1664), who held indomitable influence in French art not only in his period but well into the nineteenth century, worked for a large part of his career in Rome and inherited this tradition. However, in a departure from Alberti, who does allow somewhat for the role of experience and an individual way of seeing, Poussin's model of beauty is purely abstract: "L'idée de beauté ne descend dans la matière qu'elle n'y soit préparée le plus

experience. Jean-Jacques Rousseau devotes an entire book in his autobiographical *Confessions* to explaining how he came to choose Vevey as the site of his novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). The influence of the role of nature on his fictional account is twofold: first, his creativity is inspired by walks in his natural surroundings at the Hermitage (a cottage on the property of his protector Mme d'Epinay in the valley of Montmorency): "car n'ayant rien jamais pu écrire et penser à mon aise que *sub dio* [en plein air], je n'étais pas tenté de changer de méthode, et je comptais bien que la forêt de Montmorency, qui était presque à ma porte, serait désormais mon cabinet de travail".[4] Second, it is inspired by his recollection of experienced landscapes that "contain" personal memories. Though his natural tendency is to lose himself to 'chimères', the author makes a concerted effort to situate his novel in a real lake reminiscent of both his mother and youth. The imagination, then, recalls impressions and feelings more than it creates, reflecting a faculty that produces a natural representation from memory more vivid and thrilling than a work of fantasy:

> Les vallées de la Thessalie m'auraient pu contenter, si je les avais vues ; mais mon imagination, fatiguée à inventer, voulait quelque lieu réel qui pût lui servir de point d'appui, et me faire illusion sur la réalité des habitants que j'y voulais mettre. Je songeai longtemps aux îles Borromées, dont l'aspect délicieux m'avait transporté ; mais j'y trouvai trop d'ornement et d'art pour mes personnages. Il me fallait cependant un lac, et je finis par choisir celui autour duquel mon cœur n'a jamais cessé

---

possible. Cette préparation consiste en trois choses: l'ordre, le mode et l'espèce ou forme" ("De l'idée de beauté"; in *Lettres et propos sur l'art*, ed. A. Blunt, 1989). The rise of empirical philosophy in the eighteenth century would contest this severance from the material world, and Rousseau's and Diderot's reflections on experiencing nature would lead to studies in 'plein air' that began to play an integral role in French landscape art at the turn of the nineteenth century. See Philip Conisbee, "The Early History of Open-Air Painting", *In the Light of Italy: Corot and Early Open-Air Painting* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996): 29-47. Conisbee, in an art historical vein, specifically cites Roger De Piles' *Cours de peinture* (1708) – a "modern" treatise that privileged the role of color and landscape in art – as influencing early 'plein air' painters such as Claude-Joseph Vernet, whom Diderot champions in the *Salon de 1767*.

[4] Vol. 2, Book IX. Ed. Michel Launay (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968).

> d'errer. Je me fixai sur la partie des bords de ce lac à laquelle depuis longtemps mes vœux ont placé ma résidence dans le bonheur imaginaire auquel le sort m'a borné. Le lieu natal de ma pauvre Maman avait encore pour moi un attrait de prédilection. Le contraste des positions, la richesse et la variété des sites, la magnificence, la majesté de l'ensemble qui ravit les sens, émeut le cœur, élève l'âme, achevèrent de me déterminer […].

In Denis Diderot's writings on landscape painting, the painter's 'génie' similarly depends on his or her ability to evoke as fully as possible nature's accidents and metamorphoses in order to arouse the viewer's psychological and emotional responses. No matter how much freedom is afforded to the imagination, the successful landscape artist above all gives the impression of having 'been there'.[5] Casanova, a painter of battle scenes, fails in this respect: " O les belles mœurs! ô la belle poésie! il faut avoir vu, soit qu'on peigne, soit qu'on écrive. Dites-moi, Mr Casanove, avez-vous jamais été présent à une bataille ; non. Eh bien, quelque imagination que vous ayez, vous resterez médiocre. Suivez les armées. Allez, voyez et peignez " (*Salon de 1767* 278).[6] Diderot's extensive and poetic entry on the painter Claude-Joseph Vernet in the same *Salon*, which prominently features landscape painting, anticipates the romantic ideal of the seamlessness between art and nature : "C'est une vue romanesque dont on suppose la réalité quelque part" (184).[7] In Diderot's rendering of landscape, the painting breaks out

[5] In the entry 'Paysage' by the Chevalier [Louis] de Jaucourt in the *Encyclopédie* (vol. 12; Paris: Briasson, 1751-1765), two styles of landscape painting are featured: heroic and pastoral. The ideal landscape merges the two, which allows the painter the freedom to represent all aspects of nature and how they respond to the viewers' passions while at the same time safeguarding the classical tradition of achieving a certain monumental grandeur. The bias, nonetheless, seems to be in favor of a natural representation that resists the notion of art as artifice: "Dans le style champêtre […] la nature est représentée toute simple, sans artifice, & avec cette négligence qui lui sied souvent mieux que tous les embellissements de l'art" (212).

[6] *Ruines et paysages: Salon de 1767*, ed. Else Marie Bukdahl, Michel Delon and Annette Lorenceau (Hermann, 1995).

[7] The passage on Vernet is a long and very significant one (174-237). In a letter from 1765, Vernet expresses a 'plein air' approach to painting: "You must do exactly what you see in nature; if one object is confused with another, be it in form or in color, you must render it as you see it; for, if it is good in nature it will be good in painting" (*In the Light of Italy*, catalog entry on Vernet: 112). The collapse between art and nature is the running theme of Diderot's *Essais sur la peinture*, which appeared two years before the *Salon de 1767*: "Ce n'est pas au Salon, c'est dans le fond d'une forêt, parmi les montagnes que le soleil ombre et

of its frame and unfolds into a living drama that incorporates nature, emotions, conversation, and human action.[8] The question of how to achieve the 'beau idéal' is moot, since it does not exist and cannot be experienced in nature: "Quand vous faites beau, vous ne faites rien de ce qui est, rien même de ce qui puisse être" (67). Though Diderot had by no means been extolled or even recognized by his French Romantic inheritors, his Salon writings correspond to the ideal of art that Victor Hugo would proclaim in his preface to *Cromwell* (1827), a romantic manifesto that stresses the effects of an all-encompassing and ever-varying role of nature on the modern dramatist in contrast to fixed models or systems:[9] "Il n'y a ni règles, ni modèles ; ou plutôt il n'y a d'autres règles que les lois générales de la nature qui planent sur l'art tout entier, et les lois spéciales qui, pour chaque composition, résultent des conditions d'existence propres à chaque sujet" (88).[10] Hugo's landscape in the poem "Pluie d'été" (*Odes et Ballades*, 1828), not unlike Diderot's presentation of each landscape painting as a microcosm

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éclaire, que Loutherbourg et Vernet sont grands" (684). In *Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier frères, n.d. [1959]).

[8] In *Absorption and Theatricality* (1980), Michael Fried explores how Diderot, who was a vocal proponent of the established anti-Rococo movement in the middle of the century, heightened genre painting to the now lapsed status of history painting: "For example, he suggested that Greuze and Joseph Vernet, both of whom were officially classed as painters of genre subjects, ought instead to be considered history painters because of their mastery of the representation of action. More generally, he proposed reducing the traditional multiplicity of genres to a single basic opposition, between works that imitated a 'nature brute et morte' to be called genre painting, and works that imitated 'la nature sensible et vivante', to be called history painting" (75).

[9] Stendhal served as an important intermediary between Diderot and the French Romantics: "Chaque artiste devrait voir la nature à sa manière. Quoi de plus absurde que de prendre celle d'un autre homme et d'un caractère souvent contraire?". *Histoire de la peinture en Italie* (1817); ed. V. Del Litto (Paris: Gallimard, 1996): 160.

[10] *Cromwell* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968). The opening of Diderot's *Essais sur la peinture* clearly anticipates Hugo's famous incorporation of the 'laid' into the work of art: "La nature ne fait rien d'incorrect. Toute forme, belle ou laide, a sa cause; et, de tous les êtres qui existent, il n'y en a pas un qui ne soit comme il doit être" (665). Like Hugo's, Diderot's point is to free art of the 'beau idéal' : "Nous disons d'un homme qui passe dans la rue, qu'il est mal fait. Oui, selon nos pauvres règles ; mais selon la nature, c'est autre chose. Nous disons d'une statue, qu'elle est dans les proportions les plus belles. Oui, d'après nos pauvres règles ; mais selon la nature ?" (667). The English painter John Constable, whose landscape paintings were of critical importance to French Romantic painters (especially Delacroix), was more terse on the matter: "I never saw an ugly thing in my life" (cited in Clark, Chap. 5).

teeming with realistic details, movement, and the powerful suggestion of nature's forceful dynamic, is a secularized and personalized version of the Biblical deluge. The poem, set in the outskirts of Paris, has all the elements of a history painting in its emphasis on drama and action, with the exception of the close-to-home and literally down-to-earth view:[11]

> La pluie a versé ses ondées;
> Le ciel reprend son bleu changeant ;
> Les terres luisent fécondées
> Comme sous un réseau d'argent.
> Le petit ruisseau de la plaine,
> Pour une heure enflé, roule et traîne
> Brins d'herbe, lézards endormis,
> Court, et, précipitant son onde
> Du haut d'un caillou qu'il inonde,
> Fait des Niagaras aux fourmis !
>
> Tourbillonnant dans ce déluge,
> Des insectes, sans avirons,
> Voguent pressés, frêle refuge !
> Sur des ailes de moucherons ;
> D'autres pendent, comme à des îles,
> A des feuilles, errants asiles ;
> Heureux, dans leur adversité,
> Si, perçant les flots de sa cime,
> Une paille au bord de l'abîme
> Retient leur flottante cité ! (11-30)

The fuller incorporation of nature's movements paradoxically meant that the artist or writer became further removed from the act of copying details. The landscape was not a picture –

[11] The definition of 'Romantic' in Samuel Johnson's English dictionary in 1798, in comparison to the French Academy's, was associated more with the genre of 'romance' ("A military fable of the middle ages; a tale of wild adventures in war and love"), and, by extension, to falsity and general unruliness. Like the French definition, the English one explicitly refers to a landscape, but it is a distinctly wild one:

> 'Romantick' [from 'romance']: 1. resembling the tales of romances; wild. 2. Improbable; false. 3. Fanciful; full of wild scenery.

Johnson's definition was no doubt more colored by Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime from the earlier part of the century, but the French version of the romantic landscape is more tempered and "realistic".

On voit seulement sous leurs voiles,
Comme d'incertaines étoiles,
Des points lumineux scintiller, (35-37)

– but the reflection of the creative imagination as it was directly confronted by nature's forces.[12]

The Romantics' dissociation of nature from fixed ideals and forms is a familiar story, but the French Romantics, with few exceptions, have typically been passed over when it comes to the questions of freedom and creativity. The construct of the French romantic imagination, while certainly loosening the hold of the artist's subservience to memory, abstract rules, and the passive daydream, did not have its aim in transcendent ideals: "L'esprit français repoussera surtout le galimatias allemand que beaucoup de gens appellent *romantique* aujourd'hui," Stendhal commanded in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823). I make the case that the French romantic imagination is rife with a fraught but productive tension that lies in the conflicted impulses of expansion and contraction: "De la vaporisation et de la centralisation du Moi. Tout est là" (Baudelaire).[13] French romantic poets, as their verbal representations of landscape demonstrate, show the artist both expanding *and* limiting the imagination's boundaries. Even Lamartine's distant stars are grounded by a strong sense of physicality:

Vois-tu ce feu lointain trembler sur la colline?
Par la main de l'amour c'est un phare allumé ;
Là, comme un lis penché, l'amante qui s'incline

[12] Collot: "Le paysage n'est pas le pays, mais une certaine façon de le voir ou de le peindre comme 'ensemble' perceptivement et/ou esthétiquement organisé: il ne réside jamais seulement *in situ* mais toujours déjà aussi *in visu* et/ou *in arte*. Sa réalité n'est accessible qu'à partir d'une perception et/ou d'une représentation. Dès lors, pour comprendre ou évaluer un 'paysage' artistique ou littéraire, il importe moins de le comparer à son référent éventuel (une 'étendue du pays') que de considérer la manière dont il est 'embrassé' et exprimé" (*Poésie et paysage* 12).
[13] *Journaux intimes*; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Gallimard, 1975-1976).

Prête une oreille avide aux pas du bien-aimé. ("Ischia" 33-36)[14]

This model of the imagination is productive, I argue, in the way that it hovers at a horizon and resists the infinite:

> Au gré du divin souffle ainsi vont mes pensées,
> Dans un cercle éternel incessamment poussées.
> Du terrestre océan dont les flots sont amers,
> Comme sous un rayon monte une nue épaisse,
> Elles montent toujours vers le ciel, et sans cesse
> Redescendent des cieux aux mers. (Hugo, "Dicté en présence du glacier du Rhône" 48-54)[15]

In his study on the function of the horizon in French romantic poetry, *L'Horizon fabuleux* (1988), Collot examines the uneasy status of what is supposed to be a clear line of demarcation between earth and sky: "Lieu qui est non-lieu, utopie du désir, qu'aucun déplacement dans l'espace ne permet de rejoindre. C'est peut-être parce qu'il est pour le mouvement un but inaccessible, qu'il devient pour la parole un objet privilégié: faute de pouvoir s'y transporter, le poète essaye de l'approcher par méta-phores" (I:18). While Collot, in his later study *Poésie et paysage*, focuses on how the poet dematerializes the landscape to foreground this abstract process, Malcolm Andrews moves from the ground up to consider the more concrete operation of first seeing the landscape as land, taking into account "a more reflective and complex response to the natural world" (9).[16] My study also considers the phenomenon of seeing and experiencing natural or urban

[14] *Nouvelles méditations poétiques* (1823).
[15] *Les Feuilles d'automne* (1831).
[16] *Landscape and Western Art* (New York: Oxford, 1999). Part of Andrews' aim is to "modernize" Clark's canonical study on landscape painting. Instead of seeing landscape as material waiting to be manipulated by the artist, Andrews, informed by Ernst Gombrich's famous definition of seeing as a cultural construct in *Art and Illusion* (1960), considers the landscape as something that is already mediated by what the viewer brings to it: "I began by implying that land rather than landscape is the raw material, and that in the conversion of land into landscape a perceptual process has already begun whereby that material is prepared as an appropriate subject for the painter or photographer, or simply for absorption as a gratifying aesthetic experience. The process might, therefore, be formulated as twofold: land into landscape, landscape into art" (3).

surroundings, and the imagination's subsequent and almost simultaneous filtering of this experience, as playing an essential role in examples of French poetry that have traditionally been read as transcendent or non-mimetic:

> Alors, éléphants blancs chargés de femmes brunes,
> Cités aux dômes d'or où les mois sont des lunes,
> Imans de Mahomet, mages, prêtres de Bel,
> Tout fuit, tout disparaît : - plus de minaret maure,
> Plus de sérail fleuri, plus d'ardente Gomorrhe
> Qui jette un reflet rouge au front noir de Babel !
>
> C'est Paris, c'est l'hiver. (Hugo, "Novembre" 19-25)[17]

Before detailing how I plan to explore this problematic relationship between the eye and the mind's eye in the poetry of Lamartine, Hugo, and Baudelaire, I will first briefly outline the history of the concept of the imagination in France to show how what was once a physiological and moral question of the imagination's potential to lead astray both body and reason was applied to aesthetic theory at the outset of the romantic period. I will then consider the phenomenon of poetic, or verbal, representations of landscapes, and how the poem's inherently constrained movement reflected best an uneasy but generative model of the imagination.

ii. The Imagination's Roots and Offshoots

In the Aristotelian tradition, which carried great importance throughout the eighteenth century due to John Locke's emphasis on the deduction of ideas based on experience in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), imagination is synonymous with "sense-illusion", or the recollection of sensory impressions: "imagination must be a movement resulting from an actual exercise of a power of sense"

[17] *Les Orientales* (1829).

(*De Anima* 589).[18] In this model, the tendency for the imagination to err is great; the further removed the original impression, the more the mind becomes "eclipsed". Though the imagination's movement is similar to a beam of light (truth),[19] human contingencies impede a full, revivifying mental illumination; animals, in this respect, have stronger imaginations than humans:

> And because imaginations remain in the organs of sense and resemble sensations, animals in their actions are largely guided by them, some (i.e. the brutes) because of the non-existence in them of mind, others (i.e. men) because of the temporary eclipse in them of mind by feeling or disease or sleep. (Ibid)

French thinkers inherited this uncomfortable construct of the imagination, a faculty that is neither sense nor intellect. In a reversal from Aristotle's emphasis on the imagination's weakness that nonetheless still stresses its tendency to occlude vision (the strongest and thus "truest" of the senses), Montaigne paints a dramatic portrait of the imagination's violence.[20] It preys on the weak and "common people" who forget about experience in the face of fear, or in their zeal for supernatural phenomena:

> Il est vray semblable que le principal credit des miracles, des visions, des enchantements et de tels effects extraordinaires, vienne de la puissance de l'imagination agissant principalement contre les ames du vulgaire, plus

[18] In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001).
[19] "As sight is the most highly developed sense, the name *phantasia* (imagination) has been formed from *phaos* (light) because it is not possible to see without light" (Ibid).
[20] John Lyons' preface to *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau* (2005) accounts for a gap in the study of the imagination throughout the seventeenth century in France (1580-1680), which tends to be dismissed as anti-imaginative (that is, in our post-romantic understanding of the term as designating creativity or originality). Aside from providing an engaging and much-needed analysis of the concept of the imagination in this period, and its roots in classical and Medieval thought, Lyons explores how Montaigne and his inheritors (Descartes, Pascal, and other major literary figures of the time) were influenced not only by the Aristotelian or Platonic traditions, but in particular by the Stoic model of the imagination. For Lyons, Montaigne's study of knowledge amounted to the study of imagination: practicing control over the images that pass through the mind prepares the self for difficult situations, even death. Such practice, symptomatic of a "crisis of confidence in established institutions" (32), removes death from the abstraction of ideas and presents it as an immediate, concrete experience. See chapter 1, "The Return of the Stoic Imagination".

> molles. On leur a si fort saisi la creance qu'ils pensent voir ce qu'ils ne voyent pas. ("De la force de l'imagination" 145)[21]

The tendency for the human imagination to stray became of particular concern to Protestant thinkers, and in France, to Jansenist or quietist figures in the Augustinian tradition who scorned baroque, Catholic, and royal excesses. In *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne* (1994), Annie Becq's extensive analysis of the slow emergence of the creative imagination in France demonstrates how a rationalist Cartesian epistemology persisted even throughout the empiricist eighteenth century.[22] Even nature, let alone fantasy, was a tremendous source of doubt, and the danger of the imaginative faculty, as Becq describes it when considering Pascal's *Pensées*, consisted "moins dans la possibilité d'un égarement, à la faveur de la création d'une seconde nature qui double la première et qu'on peut prendre pour la vraie, que dans la possibilité du soupçon, à la faveur de la duplication en tant que telle, qu'il n'y a pas de 'vrai' réel, de 'vraie' nature" (131).[23] In yet another twist on the Aristotelian model that incorporates the Christian tenet of original sin, and in what was undoubtedly a direct response to Montaigne, Pascal targets the learned and how they profit from humans' aberrant tendency to imagine at the

[21] *Essais*, vol. 1 (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1969): 143-152. To illustrate his point, Montaigne refers to several accounts in which apparently imminent or miraculous events are in fact the result of the imagination taking over the physical body. Some die just at the thought of being executed – "Et celuy qu'on debandoit pour luy lire sa grace, se trouva roide mort sur l'eschafaut du seul coup de son imagination" (143) – while others receive scars when contemplating God: "Les uns attribuent à la force de l'imagination les cicatrices du Roy Dagobert et de Sainct François" (144). Lyons cites Descartes' second 'Discours' when illustrating the taut relationship between the imagination and the senses that defined Western thought until the dawn of the romantic period: "imagination is nothing other than contemplating the figure or image of a bodily thing" (xii). Imagining something that is 'not there' would thus amount to pathology or disease.

[22] *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne: De la Raison classique à l'Imagination créatrice 1680-1814* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994; 1st ed. 1984). According to Descartes, Becq explains, "l'imagination n'a que le statut d'accident du moi" (117).

[23] In his first chapter on landscape painting, Clark relates the account of Petrarch's solitude in the Vaucluse as a "reawakening of the imaginative faculty" that did not represent a monastic retreat, but a desire for experiencing nature's pleasures. However, when Petrarch climbs Mont Ventoux, his reading of Augustine's *Confessions* reminds him, as Clark puts it, that "nothing is wonderful but the soul, which, when great itself, finds nothing great outside itself".

expense of reason and common sense. Anticipating modern censure of totalitarian regimes and their promotion of propagandist images, he refers to elaborate or official-looking garb as an example of the imagination's inherent deceit:

> Nos magistrats ont bien connu ce mystère. […] La majesté de ces sciences serait assez vénérable d'elle-même, mais n'ayant que des sciences imaginaires il faut qu'ils prennent ces vains instruments qui frappent l'imagination à laquelle ils ont affaire et par là en effet ils s'attirent le respect. (*Pensées* 505)[24]

In the domain of art, which is artifice or deceit itself, a prominent solution for controlling the imagination throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was, in both the Cartesian and empirical models, to promote nature as subject matter. Though history painting represented the undisputed summit of all genres of painting, scenes and figures in Poussin's and Claude's canvases nevertheless appear miniscule against an all-encompassing landscape. The ideal was to shed Renaissance ornamental and mannerist tendencies and recuperate a simpler, classical aesthetic that was not blind to experience: "Jamais de la nature il ne faut s'écarter" is a refrain in Boileau's *Art poétique* (1674).[25] Alexander Pope, a follower of Boileau in his emulation of Horace's call for simplicity and naturalness, ushered in an era of descriptive poetry with a considerably less heavy-handed approach. Any pretense or conceit, which would include a vagrant imagination as well as a methodological ordering of the world ("Horace still charms with graceful negligence, / And without method talks us into sense"), must succumb to Nature:

> Poets, like painters, thus unskilled to trace
> The naked nature and the living grace,

[24] In *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Louis Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1963). The entry is entitled "Imagination" (44-82).
[25] Ed. Jean-Pierre Collinet (Paris: Gallimard, 1985). However, Boileau, like Poussin, stressed a Cartesian ordering of this nature. He extols Malherbe for his exactness and a priori approach to poetry:

> Enfin Malherbe vint, et, le premier en France,
> Fit sentir dans les vers une juste cadence,
> D'un mot mis en sa place enseigna le pouvoir,
> Et réduisit la muse aux règles du devoir. (Chant I: 131-134)

> With gold and jewels cover every part,
> And hide with ornaments their want of art.
> True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;
> Something whose truth convinced at sight we find,
> That gives us back the image of our mind.
> As shades more sweetly recommend the light,
> So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit;
> For works may have more wit than does them good,
> As bodies perish through excess of blood. (*An Essay on Criticism* 293-304)[26]

Though Pope's call for following Nature was not literal, but respected general laws gleaned from experience, his influential *Essay* was seen as calling for the direct study and imitation of nature. The landscape, as it became increasingly removed from its pictorial and decorative function (stasis), became the subject of poetry (movement). One of the most prominent examples is John Thomson's *Seasons* (1730); here, the eye is the poet's indispensable tool that, by concentrating on minute details and the smallest of movements, also shuns caprice:

> Drear is the state of the benighted wretch
> Who then bewildered wanders through the dark
> Full of pale fancies and chimeras huge;
> Not visited by one directive ray
> From cottage streaming or from airy hall. ("Autumn" 1145-1149)[27]

The French poet Saint-Lambert, who saw himself as introducing the poetic representation of nature for the first time in France by publishing his own *Saisons* (1769), respects the ebb and flow of nature's movements and does not seek more: "Plus agir que penser, plus sentir que connaître: / Tel est l'état heureux du citoyen champêtre" ("L'Hiver").[28]

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[26] First published in 1711. In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: Norton, 1993; 6th ed.): 2217-2233.
[27] Excerpt in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 1 (op. cit.): 2450-2452.
[28] Paris: Salmon, 1823. Becq traces how this Lockean model increasingly took hold in eighteenth-century France, and how nature's instability reflected the human condition and, as a result, the work of art. "Uneasiness" was, for Locke, the "instabilité fondamentale de l'homme qui est la source de son activité" (262).

Though these important romantic precursors rejected art as a process of mathematical ordering, they also shunned the unleashing of the artist's free fancy. Pope reinforced Horace's between-the-extremes approach that the pre-Romantics in turn cultivated: his *Essay*, despite appearances, does not call for the direct representation of the senses' experience of nature, but for the mediated representation of the mind's images: "Something whose truth convinced at sight we find, / That gives us back the image of our mind". Diderot and Rousseau both stress the earnest but anguished workings of the mind and the anxiety surrounding the situation of the self as it interprets reality. The problem of the imagination appears clearly at the end of the famous fifth promenade in Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782; posthumous), where the author's contemplation of a lake's movement mirrors the movements of his mind. The imagination at first appears to be an agreeable and morally redeeming supplement that harmonizes the figure with the landscape, or that realizes his vision of things, but it turns out to be just as transient as nature:

> […] à l'attrait d'une rêverie abstraite et monotone, je joins des images charmantes qui la vivifient. Leurs objets échappaient souvent à mes sens dans mes extases, et maintenant plus ma rêverie est profonde, plus elle me les peint vivement. Je suis souvent plus au milieu d'eux, et plus agréablement encore que quand j'y étais réellement. Le malheur est qu'à mesure que l'imagination s'attiédit, cela vient avec plus de peine et ne dure pas si longtemps. Hélas ! c'est quand on commence à quitter sa dépouille qu'on en est le plus offusqué ! (87-88)[29]

The imagination weakens over time, and thus the "douce rêverie" cannot be sustained.

[29] Ed. Marcel Raymond (Geneva: Droz, 1948). Another example, amusing but poignant, appears in the seventh promenade: "[…] j'oubliai la botanique et les plantes […] je me mis à rêver plus à mon aise en pensant que j'étais là dans un refuge ignoré de tout l'univers […] je me comparais à ces grands voyageurs qui découvrent une île déserte, et je me disais avec complaisance : sans doute je suis le premier mortel qui ait pénétré jusqu'ici. Je me regardais presque comme un autre Colomb. […] Tandis que je me pavanais dans cette idée, j'entendis peu loin de moi un certain cliquetis que je crus reconnaître [et] j'aperçois une manufacture de bas". (119-120)

My study demonstrates how romantic poets inherited this sense of angst and even absurdity, and how art's striving for naturalness – what Diderot calls a "tâtonnement" – was utopian. [30] His ideal artist interprets reality and attempts to transfer this unique view onto the canvas, which he presents as a product of the intense labor of both mind and hand. The only fantasy involved here would be the artist's claim that he could realize this objective:

> Cela vient apparemment de ce que mon imagination s'est assujettie de longue main aux véritables règles de l'art, à force d'en regarder les productions; que j'ai pris l'habitude d'arranger mes figures dans ma tête, comme si elles étaient sur la toile; que peut-être je les y transporte, et que c'est sur un grand mur que je regarde, quand j'écris; qu'il y a longtemps que, pour juger si une femme qui passe est bien ou mal ajustée, je l'imagine peinte, et que peu à peu j'ai vu des attitudes, des groupes, des passions, des expressions, du mouvement, de la profondeur, de la perspective, des plans dont l'art peut s'accommoder; en un mot que la définition d'une imagination réglée devrait se tirer de la facilité dont le peintre peut faire un beau tableau de la chose que le littérateur a conçue. (*Salon de 1767* 153)

Intimacy with nature taxes rather than bolsters the imagination, and consequently does not heal the rift between the self and its surroundings. Rousseau muses on this irony in the *Confessions*:

> C'est une chose bien singulière que mon imagination ne se monte jamais plus agréablement que quand mon état est le moins agréable, et qu'au contraire elle est moins riante lorsque tout rit autour de moi. Ma mauvaise tête ne peut s'assujettir aux choses. Elle ne saurait embellir, elle veut créer. Les objets réels s'y peignent tout au plus tels qu'ils sont ; elle ne sait parer que les objets imaginaires. Si je veux peindre le printemps, il faut que je sois en hiver ; si je veux décrire un beau paysage, il faut que je

[30] Pope stresses nature's, and by extension, the imagination's limits:

> Nature to all things fixed the limits fit,
> And wisely curbed proud man's pretending wit.
> As on the land while here the ocean gains,
> In other parts it leaves wide sandy plains;
> Thus in the soul while memory prevails,
> The solid power of understanding fails;
> Where beams of warm imagination play,
> The memory's soft figures melt away. (*Essay* 52-59)

> sois dans des murs ; et j'ai dit cent fois que si j'étais mis à la Bastille, j'y ferais le tableau de la liberté. (I: 208)

For Kant, the artist's incapacity to represent the infinite power of the mind is more of a consolation than a disappointment; it is enough to know in advance that the artist can only chase an ideal:

> We need not worry that the feeling of the sublime will lose [something] if it is exhibited in such an abstract way as this, which is wholly negative as regards the sensible. For though the imagination finds nothing beyond the sensible that could support it, this very removal of its barriers also makes it feel unbounded, so that its separation [from the sensible] is an exhibition of the infinite; and though an exhibition of the infinite can as such never be more than merely negative, it still expands the soul. (*Critique of Judgment* 135)[31]

Hence, for pre-romantic figures, the lush representation of nature in Rococo landscapes and in picturesque (as opposed to "natural") poetry, which represented closed and "satisfied" models of art, did not capture the dramatic but natural landscape that mirrored the conflicting impulses of the mind.[32]

To heal the rift between self and nature, the Jena Romantics in the wake of Kant postulated the harmony between the imagination and the landscape. In *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling claims that the work of art has the power to render the subjective objective:

> The fact that the interplay between conscious and unconscious produces something intelligible which cannot be reduced to a law-bound explanation is […] the basis of Schelling's claim that the aesthetic tells us more about reality (the "absolute") than could ever be scientifically or

[31] First published in 1790. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).
[32] Of Boucher, the head court painter to Louis XV, Diderot disparages his adept but false stylization: "Je vous défie de trouver dans toute une campagne un seul brin d'herbe de ses paysages" (*Salon de 1765*). In *Œuvres esthétiques*: 454.

> philosophically explained. (Andrew Bowie, "German Idealism and the Arts")[33]

German Idealists did not consider the reality of natural phenomena a hindrance, and their aesthetic was accordingly less "uneasy": "A. W. Schlegel rejects the organic, natural, unconscious origin of art implied in Kant's aesthetics and in strong opposition insists on the highly conscious, intentional, and reflective character of artistic creation" (Behler 81-82).[34] The Schlegels embraced the fragment or sketch as serving as a unified whole: "In poetry, too, all that is whole might be only half-done, and yet all half-done might actually be a whole" (F. Schlegel).[35] The growing plant - an appropriate metaphor that reflects the early romantics' interest in botany and earth science (Rousseau, Bernardin de Sainte-Pierre, Goethe) - came to represent the process of the imagination, and romantic theorists saw the artist's creative faculty as free to generate new offshoots. Malcolm Andrews explains how the romantic artist's accounting for time and change led to an expanding point of view, and argues that landscape painting now not only suggested human drama, but the earth's own drama and history. The romantic landscape captures all layers of sedimentation:

> The experience of nature as process rather than picture depends on shifting the emphasis from 'landscape' to 'environment'. Landscape is an exercise of control from a relatively detached viewpoint. Environment implies a mutually affective relationship between the 'organism' and its environing 'current field of significance'. (193)

The mind was seen to reflect the earth's unhindered dynamic, and on this score, A.W. Schlegel made no question of the matter: "Le paysage en tant que tel n'existe que dans

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[33] In *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).
[34] *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993).
[35] *Literary Aphorisms*, Trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1968): 122. The aphorism itself reflected this philosophy: "An aphorism ought to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world like a little work of art and complete in itself like a hedgehog" (143).

l'œil de son spectateur" (*Die Kunstlehre*).[36] In an important aphorism from the *Athenaeum* (1798), Friedrich Schlegel claims freedom for the romantic work of art by noting its state of perpetual evolution:

> The Romantic type of poetry is still becoming, indeed, its peculiar essence is that it is always becoming and that it can never be completed. It cannot be exhausted by any theory, and only a divinatory criticism might dare to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, as it alone is free; and as its first law it recognizes that the arbitrariness of the poet endures no law above him. (*Literary Aphorisms* 141)

Even the classically minded Goethe suggests an ideal of landscape representation that calls for the artist's unique point of view: "when I reflect on the depth and thoroughness with which you investigate organic structure and the vividness and accuracy with which you characterize it, I can only wonder that, with such objectivity, you reveal yourself to be so profoundly versed in matters that appear to belong wholly to the subjective realm" (79).[37] In England, William Wordsworth and, to an even greater extent, Samuel Taylor Coleridge inherited this philosophy of art in which the mind reflected not so much the created universe, but a perpetually creating one:

> And what if all of animated nature
> Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
> That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
> Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
> At once the Soul of each, and God of all? ("The Eolian Harp" 44-48)[38]

This flowering model of the romantic imagination, traced most notably by M. H. Abrams, is one that for long persisted in the critical imagination, to the point where it has persisted as an abused trope.[39]

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[36] Cited in Collot (*Paysage et poésie*): 38.
[37] Letter to Carl Gustav Carus, 1822. In Carus, *Nine Letters on Landscape Painting*. Trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002).
[38] 1817 version, though a similar version of the poem first appeared in 1795. *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (London: Penguin, 2004).

iii. The French Romantic Imagination: Back to Earth

Due to the cataclysmic events spurred by the French Revolution, which above all took the form of destabilizing shifts in power throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the first generation of French nineteenth-century thinkers and writers did not inherit this optimistic ideal of a harmonizing art. Far from it, they were skeptical of art's capacity to serve as anything but a tool for promoting political, religious or neo-classical doctrine in a society in great need of law and order. Implicitly comparing recently converted "Savages" to the current post-Terror populace, Chateaubriand casts the imagination as primitive and unenlightened, in other words, as something to be left behind: "La mort de l'imagination, c'est la connaissance de la vérité" (*Essai sur les révolutions* I.XXXVII: 388).[40] The imagination thus had little place in what for him was supposed to be a more evolved nineteenth-century art, and this accounts for Chateaubriand's upholding of a classical 'belle nature' in a story set in "wild" (romantic) landscapes and mainly preoccupied with capturing interior passions and sentiment: "On doit toujours savoir gré à un écrivain qui s'efforce de rappeler la littérature à ce goût antique, trop oublié de nos jours" (Preface to *Atala*).[41] It has thus been customary in modern literary criticism to dismiss the role of the creative imagination in French romanticism. In the preface to his history of the idea of the imagination from Hobbes to

[39] Paul de Man: "Critics who speak of a 'happy relationship' between matter and consciousness fail to realize that the very fact that the relationship has to be established within the medium of language indicates that it does not exist in actuality » (8). "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image", *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984). Part of the point of Lyons' *Before Imagination* is to deflate the "Romantic […] way of thinking as a kind of panacea" (xi), which has informed modern stereotypes of the imagination, in order to present a neutral and non-anachronistic history of the idea.
[40] Ed. Maurice Regard (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).
[41] In *Œuvres romanesques et voyages*, ed. Maurice Regard, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

Coleridge, James Engell alludes to the "special case" of French writers when explaining why he leaves them out of his study:

> It is inevitable that this book center on Britain and Germany, including exchanges between poets and critics of these countries. […] France, as several distinguished scholars of the period have pointed out, faced a different set of circumstances. Its literature and criticism, while in the highest sense imaginative, did not originate or develop the idea of the imagination in the same fashion nor to the same extent as that of England, Scotland, and Germany. (ix-x)[42]

This is not to say that Engell should have included French writers and theorists, since no study can claim to be exhaustive, but rather to underscore the generally accepted exclusion of their work in most histories of literature.

To my knowledge, there are few studies in English that aim to redress this customary omission. I argue that even the early French romantics were, in fact, highly preoccupied with the question of a freer and more creative faculty that at the same time incorporated the senses and mental processes. Early nineteenth-century French theorists and writers certainly did not embrace the radically free and visionary works of Novalis or William Blake, but they also recognized that their nation's "official" didactic form of poetry was no longer viable.[43] Becq claims: "Une grande effervescence théorique caractérise cette période, souvent représentée au contraire comme un temps mort ou vain dans l'histoire des idées" (789).[44] But while Becq's study is a synoptic account of the

[42] *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981).
[43] As late as 1806, France's most recognized poet of the Empire, Jacques Delille, presents a portrait of the imagination that moderately embellishes the reality of things and hardly calls for the freedom of the artist: "C'est trop peu d'être libre, il faut, d'un soin prudent, / Fixer par le travail un cœur indépendant" ("L'Imagination, poëme"). In 2 vols. (Paris: L.G. Michaud, 1825).
[44] Claude Millet, in her monograph *Le Romantisme* (2007), notes how all elements of the concept were "there" at the turn of the century and waited to be galvanized: "En France, il a été pour ses contemporains un point d'interrogation, l'objet d'une discussion qui a envahi le débat public, et, du moins sous la Restauration et les premières années de la monarchie de Juillet, un cri de guerre" (11). She also considers how romantic thought was not an overarching theory, but existed in different forms from the Consulate to the appearance of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* (1857).

issues of creativity, classicism, the 'beau idéal', and even the role of the bourgeois class in determining aesthetic models, mine is a focused study of certain poetic texts that span a period of forty years. My dissertation traces, from the early beginnings of French romanticism until its decline, the central question of how far the poet could allow the creative imagination to transform the landscape. While Becq and others (Behler, Didier, Bowman) have accounted for the significance of the Coppet group and their transmission of German theory into France, or still others the importance of Victor Cousin's assimilation of German thought into French philosophy, or of Nerval's translations of German texts, I show how this "circumstantial evidence" is reflected in specific examples that take place within particular cycles of poems. Lamartine, Hugo, and Baudelaire all incorporate and represent the imagination in very specific ways that are often passed over for the sake of generalization (Lamartine is "musical", Hugo is "visionary", Baudelaire is "decadent"). But their representation of the imagination, I argue, reflected a much more nuanced question of the artist's self-conscious imposition of limits rather than an outright revelry in freedom. Despite their apparent rejection of eighteenth-century thinkers, whose cultivation of "Enlightenment" they blamed for leading France into ruin, French Romantics continued in the uneasy but creatively productive vein that the preromantics had tapped into: "comme Milton aveugle, je suis tenté quelquefois de chanter ce soleil que je ne vois pas" (Hugo, "Sur un poète apparu en 1820").[45]

Though readers have tended to pass off early French romantic poetry and art as religious or neo-classical, or, at best, as "in between" classicism and romanticism, a closer and more sensitive examination shows a high level of experimentation, direct and

[45] In *Littérature et philosophie mêlées* (1834). The article, which first appeared in 1820, is a review of Lamartine's *Méditations poétiques*.

dramatic confrontations with nature, and the ironic use of clichés and traditional rhetoric for the sake of their undoing. Even the early poetry of Lamartine and Hugo reflects the restless artist in Diderot's Salons, whose vibrant "palette" forms the chaotic movements in nature into a discernable and unified, but unique, impression. Lamartine describes the conditions under which he wrote "L'Isolement", one of his most famous poems, and there is nothing traditional or contrived about it:

> Je lisais, je rêvais, j'essayais quelquefois d'écrire, sans rencontrer jamais la note juste et vraie qui répondit à l'état de mon âme; puis je déchirais et je jetais au vent les vers que j'avais ébauchés.
> […]
> Je brûlais d'essayer l'effet du timbre de ces vers sur le cœur de quelques hommes sensibles.[46]

Other critics, resisting historical models of literary criticism and trying to formulate more sensitive and fuller readings of early French romantic poets, have instead made the case that they indeed inherited Rousseau and Diderot's melancholic "sentiment de la nature". By proffering psychoanalytic readings, they have detached these poems from reality in their emphasis on the unconscious unfurling of the dream.[47] However, Lamartine's resigned but earnest turn to real and intimate landscapes and Hugo's incorporation of his real experience of sunsets in otherwise artificial exotic landscapes suggest a different story, one that brings them closer to Baudelaire's disillusioned encounters in Paris than has been recognized.

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[46] In *Méditations poétiques,* ed. A. Loiseleur: 73-75.

[47] Gaston Bachelard compares water's flow to the flow of unmediated language that "fills up" the barren landscape (reality): "les voix de l'eau sont à peine métaphoriques, le langage des eaux est une réalité poétique directe, que les ruisseaux et les fleuves sonorisent avec une étrange fidélité les paysages muets […] il y a en somme continuité entre la parole de l'eau et la parole humaine" (*L'Eau et les rêves : Essai sur l'imagination de la matière* : 22). Georges Poulet in turn presents Lamartine's landscapes and poetics as formless due to this liquification and eventual vaporization: "By an imaginative process whose chemistry is far from clear, it appears that the world, in vanishing, has become truly divine. As solids become liquid in order to next become gases, this dematerializing matter becomes soul, to push on its substantial refinement to a state similar and perhaps identical with that of divinity" (128-129). In *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1967).

iv. "ut poesis, pictura non erit"

But why poetry, when the landscape is a visual medium? Can the landscape be verbal? In *Poétique du paysage* (1980), Micheline Tison-Braun shows how description, once a classical element of rhetoric that placed painting in harmony with poetry, became literary in its own right in the later part of the eighteenth century, citing as an example Rousseau's fifth promenade in the *Rêveries*. Rousseau, she points out, makes "aucune tentative pour communiquer directement le visuel" and, through the suggestion of the water's movement, foregrounds an underlying mystery that no image could capture: "Le langage réussit où la peinture échoue" (10). Collot goes further and argues that poetry, more than prose, leaves even more potential for the description of mind over matter: "Alors que la description romanesque tend à mettre en général l'accent sur les éléments visibles du paysage, l'évocation poétique donne moins à voir qu'à imaginer et à entendre le retentissement intérieur du spectacle extérieur" (15).

In their own time, Rousseau and Diderot engaged, albeit less straightforwardly, in the 'ut pictura poesis' debate. Rousseau does not hide his disappointment when, in the *Confessions*, he divulges Diderot's comments (which he apparently shared in a letter) on *La Nouvelle Héloïse*: "*Il [Diderot] trouva tout feuillu, ce fut son terme; c'est-à-dire chargé de paroles et redondant.* Je l'avais déjà bien senti moi-même : mais c'était le bavardage de la fièvre ; je ne l'ai jamais pu corriger" (Book IX – emphasis mine). For Diderot, more persuaded by the sensualist theories promulgated by the Abbé Du Bos in *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), a visual medium demanded more imagination of the painter than of the writer. The challenge of the painter was greater due to the compression of action to one moment, as well as to the simultaneous

objective of capturing movement to evoke naturalness. It is this very challenge that makes the painting's effects more stimulating than the poem's or novel's. Painting, in Diderot's ideal form, can best evoke both the impression of having been there as well as the chaotic but stimulating "dialogue" between the eye and the mind. As a critic he took pride in the fact that his painter acquaintances lauded his painterly eye, which he considered a direct channel to his imagination: "Chardin, La Grenée, Greuze et d'autres m'ont assuré, et les artistes ne flattent point les littérateurs, que j'étais presque le seul d'entre ceux-ci dont les images pouvaient passer sur la toile, presque comme elles étaient ordonnées dans ma tête" (*Salon de 1767* 152). When referring to those who attempt to illustrate Saint-Lambert's *Saisons*, Diderot may seem to give preference to poetry ("Ils ont dans la tête, Ut pictura poesis erit; et ils ne se doutent pas qu'il est encore plus vrai qu'ut poesis, pictura non erit. Ce qui fait bien en peinture, fait toujours bien en poésie, mais cela n'est pas réciproque" Ibid 150), but he is in fact making the case that painting needs to avoid the crutch of poetry in order for the imagination fluctuate freely. For him, Rousseau's prolix prose left little room for the mind to work.

Though he privileges the power of painting over that of verbal description to stimulate the imagination, the irony remains that Diderot's Salon writings in themselves suggest that an effective landscape painting needs the supplement of language in order to capture best the movement of nature and of human feeling.[48] As Edmund Burke had

[48] Note, for example, the lengthy titles that Turner gave to a number of his paintings: *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the Ariel Left Harwich* (1842). By stressing ongoing action in the form of an anecdote, Turner suggests that the painting on its own does not do justice to his experience of the view of nature in question. In "reading" this painting alongside of Turner's *Morning Amongst the Coniston Fells, Cumberland* (when exhibiting these canvases, Turner quoted from Thomson and Milton, respectively), Andrews suggests that Turner explicitly turned to poetry to help him express the movement of time: "The quotations from Thomson and John Milton (1608-74) are not simply decorative extensions to the picture's caption – verbal ormolu around the painting – they are functionally essential to the experience of the

claimed only a decade earlier in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) - where he argues against Du Bos' predilection for the power of the image over the word - the "obscurity" of description (writing) more than the "clarity" of painting allows the viewer's imagination to be better stimulated. Ironically, a supplementing imagination was what made the work of art more real. For Burke, the faithful visual representation of the landscape does not matter as much as how it stimulates the viewer's physical responses and mental processes:

> It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it *affecting* to the imagination. If I make a drawing of a palace, or a temple, or a landscape, I present a very clear idea of those objects; but then (allowing for the effect of the imitation which is something) my picture can at most affect only as the palace, temple, or landscape would have affected in the reality. On the other hand, the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give, raises a very obscure and imperfect *idea* of such objects; but then it is in my power to raise a stronger *emotion* by the description than I could do by the best painting. This experience constantly evinces. The proper manner of conveying the *affections* of the mind from one to another, is by words; there is a great insufficiency in all other methods of communication […]. (II.IV: 55-56)[49]

These comments are suggestive of Gottfried Lessing's problematizing of the traditionally literal interpretation of Horace's 'ut pictura poesis', although Lessing is preoccupied with the aesthetic "affections" left on the viewer rather than those of natural phenomena. Poetry has the upper hand in his *Laocoön* (1766) because the reader's task of compensating for what is not there is a pleasant one: "Homer, who so assiduously refrains from detailed descriptions of physical beauties, and from whom we scarcely learn in passing that Helen had white arms and beautiful hair, nevertheless knows how to convey to us an idea of her beauty which far surpasses anything art is able to accomplish

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landscape. They help to do what painting finds hard to do in a single picture: convey movement and process in one frozen moment" (190).

[49] Ed. Adam Philips (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

toward that end" (111).[50] Protestant-inspired thinkers in particular emphasized an "iconoclastic" view of the imagination: the less that is seen, the more the inner faculties are inspired to work. In his discussion of the sublime, which is directed against Burke, Kant refers to the commandment "thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" when stressing that the sublime is not found in nature outside of us (our view, or received image, of nature), but "becomes interesting only because we present it as a might of the mind to rise above *certain* obstacles of sensibility by means of moral principles" (*Critique of Judgment* 132). This "might of the mind" is the imagination, as it works with the understanding (the judgment of the beautiful) or reason (the judgment of the sublime). In either case, the imagination is an a priori faculty, the "subjective purposiveness of the mental powers". It is thus not surprising, since he defines beauty as "the expression of aesthetic ideas", that Kant privileges poetry; leaving no trace of the sensible, "poetry is the art of conducting a free play of the imagination as [if it were] a task of the understanding" (190). When Hegel later set out to "overcome Kant's deficiencies" in his *Aesthetics* (1835; posthumous) by transcending the mediating function of judgment and claiming art as absolute, he nonetheless also made the claim for the primacy of poetry because of its power to unite the infinite space of the poet's idea with a sense of time inherent in sound: "Poetry is the universal art of the spirit which has become free in itself and which is not tied down for its realization to external sensuous material…art now transcends itself, in that it forsakes the element of the reconciled

[50] *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1962).

embodiment of the spirit in sensuous form and passes over from the poetry of the imagination to the prose of thought".[51]

v. Argument and Chapter Outline

French Romantic poets, I argue, also made the case for the primacy of poetry, but by accentuating or manipulating its traditional forms and by borrowing from other media or discourses. They did not make claims for the absoluteness of their art, but for its greater capacity to reflect the fluctuations of the filtering mind: "La poésie a existé, s'est affirmée la première, et elle a engendré l'étude des règles. Telle est l'histoire incontestée du travail humain" (Baudelaire).[52] My studies of Lamartine, Hugo and Baudelaire will aim to show that each poet, in a self-critical gesture, set limits to the creative imagination in order to strengthen the efficacy and contemporary relevance of the lyric voice. These poets, as my analyses of their journal entries, correspondence, critical essays, and poems reveal, struggled to preserve their consciousness and sense of artistry as they assimilated certain strands of the romantic imagination into their aesthetic. It is curious that both Collot and Tison-Braun, even though the words 'poésie' or 'poétique' appear in the titles of their studies, cite only examples from prose. While they both emphasize the literariness of the landscape, suggesting that the temporal media of music or prose suggests the 'profondeur' or the 'insaisissable' of the artist's creative faculty, mine looks at the poetics of the landscape and claims that for French romantic poets what was more at stake were formal landscapes that reflected the imagination's conflicted dynamic. The poet had the unique position of working in the medium of language (the temporal) while at the same time resisting this movement through the form of the poem. While romantic

[51] Vol. 1: Introduction. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 2 vols., trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975).
[52] "Richard Wagner et Tannhaüser à Paris" (1861); in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Gallimard, 1975-1976).

poets moved away from eighteenth-century descriptive models of poetry that were subservient to the role of seeing and the static form of the painting (what Burke called "clarity"), they also positioned themselves against the contemporary sweeping tide of ocular-centric and verbose prose that dominated their century. The great success of Lamartine's *Méditations poétiques* in 1820, for example, was due in part to the fact that he had translated Chateaubriand's descriptive prose into the more evocative form of musical verse. Poetry, in negotiating this tension between the real and ideal, between inventiveness and form, best captured the drama of the French romantic imagination bent on resisting complete abandon to an absolute ideal.

Each chapter in my study, which looks closely at the particular process by which each poet used his inner faculties to transform landscapes, refuses to take the imagination for granted. The "originality" of the poets in question, I argue, does not stem from their sense of claiming new ground as much as their complex filtering of contemporary aesthetic models. Pinpointing specific volumes and placing them into the general literary context of their period, I trace these poets' attempts to achieve an ideal romantic imagination that they in turn proceed to frustrate.

Chapter one begins with the most famous of French romantic landscapes, Lamartine's "Le Lac", to show how the apparently free function of melody in fact obeys a principle of harmony that requires the song to go back to where it started. Despite an appearance of formlessness and abandon, there is an operative "idée fixe" in the *Méditations* that undercuts the ideal of the infinite and returns the poet to his originary, sensuous perception of lush and vibrant landscapes. Casting Lamartine as a modern poet who is seduced by but wary of the ideal, I relate a critical story – via his own readings of

Mme de Staël, which have been overlooked as a vital source of influence – that emphasizes the poet's self-conscious practice of an aesthetic that belies his figural persona as that of a passive lyre. His "lake", a meeting point of the real and ideal, is not just the means for expression; it is the source of poetic invention.

My second chapter considers how Victor Hugo explicitly responded to Lamartine's aesthetic, which in his own time was viewed as vague and nebulous, by buttressing song with image. Drawing heavily from visual media – history novels, monuments, painting – Hugo presents his imagination as a prism, the meeting place of eye and mind, that intensifies his view of reality. My readings of his Preface to *Cromwell* (1827) and two of his "monument" poems in the *Odes et Ballades* (1822-1828) show how the *Orientales* (1829) grew out of these texts to form a diorama showcasing an imagination that is at once fixed (the eye, the aperture) and dynamic (the image that unfurls on the screen). Hugo's emphasis on the form of the poem, which he manipulates to represent movement itself, illustrates to an extreme point the clash between the constraints of harmony and the mobility of music. The actual workings of the eye - the dilation and contraction of the pupil - represent this controlled but dramatic imagination, and I consider the role of optics and theories of vision in the formation of Hugo's poetics during the course of my analysis.

The third and final chapter begins with a detailed analysis of how, from the start of his career in the early 1840s, Baudelaire aligned himself with more sensibility-minded French Romantics who stressed the 'sturm und drang' of modern life (Sainte-Beuve, Stendhal, Balzac) in order to resist what had paradoxically become a formulaic romantic aesthetic. Hugo may have been universally acknowledged as the representative French

romantic poet of the period, but these important literary contemporaries saw him losing sight of the unique workings of the individual poet's eye and mind, and Baudelaire followed suit in his early Salon writings by expunging him from questions of modern art. I then turn to *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) to demonstrate how Baudelaire contains and revives the vital "push and pull" dynamic of Hugo's 1830s poetics that had heightened the tension of the imagination in its processing of intimate landscapes of personal memory. Baudelaire's melancholy is not a pathological nostalgia for an earlier form of romanticism, but a genuine reflection on how the work of art can once again reflect "l'histoire du cerveau individuel" ("Richard Wagner et *Tannhaüser*"). Tracing how Baudelaire developed his theory of the imagination and gradually shed its common associations ("rêverie", the infinite, grandeur), I consider how his readings of Edgar Allan Poe turned his focus to the function of mental processes. By the 1850s, there was much more at stake for the artist who sought to resist universalizing impulses (industry, technology, democratization, Realism), and Baudelaire purged all elements of art to the unmediated point of the artist's cerebral "essence". Presenting nature as a romantic cliché and utopian construct that Hugo had exhausted, Baudelaire's ironic application of an authentic romantic imagination to the urban landscape in the "Tableaux parisiens" (1861) exposes the tortured energy of the brain as it strains to process memory, sensory impressions, and violent, fleeting encounters into the compact but potent form of the sonnet.

Throughout, my study aims to demonstrate that French romantic poets' acute sense of uniqueness and self-conscious experimentation with lyric form mandates their

inclusion within the broader and so-called canonical histories of European romantic literature.

Chapter 1

Lamartine's *Méditations*: The Imagination in Retreat (1820-1823)

D'autres rêvent leur ciel, mais moi, j'ai vu le mien!
Lamartine, *Jocelyn* (V)

Introduction.

The *Méditations*: Revolution, renovation, or innovation?

Literary critics have long considered 1820 - when Lamartine first published his *Méditations poétiques* - to be a watershed year, a precise moment when French poetry became something different from verse made up of neo-classical clichés. In his preface to the eleventh edition of the *Méditations* (1824), Charles Nodier left no room for doubt as to the revitalization spurred by the book's appearance: "Dès ce moment la poésie fut retrouvée". In an ode he addressed to Lamartine, Victor Hugo will famously say: "Ton bras m'a réveillé" ("A M. Alphonse de L.", *Odes et Ballades*, 1826); and Sainte-Beuve, as late as 1865, will remind a skeptical Verlaine: "Notre point de départ est là" (Lanson, *Méditations*: cxxxi).[53] The impact of Lamartine's first book of poems remains as unambiguous to many modern critics as it was in Nodier's time. In his commentary on the *Méditations* (2004), for example, Nicolas Courtinat refers to the slim volume as a "première manifestation éclatante du Romantisme poétique en France" (13), and in her introduction to a more recent edition, Aurélie Loiseleur invokes "La révolution des *Méditations*" (Livre de poche, 2006). Other critics, however, have questioned that Lamartine's first volume of poetry sprang out of nowhere. Gustave Lanson's critical edition of the *Méditations*, first published in 1915 and still invaluable for situating the collection in its historical and literary context, deflates the myth of the "newness" of these elegies by insisting on the connections between Lamartine's use of verse form and

[53] Lanson, *Méditations*: cxxxi.

that of his predecessors. The result of such philological efforts points to a broad array of literary influences that is decidedly neo-classical.[54] Lamartine also borrowed themes and motifs from more recent, preromantic sources, and some critics even seem to suggest that his success was due not so much to the poems themselves as to the way they provided a translation of Chateaubriand's prose into verse:

> Cet original cheminement de pensée et cette élévation d'esprit attirèrent aux *Méditations* un succès immédiat auprès des lecteurs, séduits aussi par une musique des vers inentendue depuis longtemps; comme l'a noté excellemment M. Levaillant, "si elles furent accueillies avec une sorte de délire universel, c'est qu'elles apportaient la poésie dont la prose du *Génie* et de *René* avait suscité l'attente" (Letessier, *Méditations*: xxxiii).[55]

Lamartine himself bluntly stated the same thing: "Je taille ma plume pour mettre *Atala* en vers" (*Correspondance* 1 Mar. 1816).[56] Courtinat complicates his own claim that the *Méditations* were revolutionary by writing:

> S'il est vrai que les "premières" *Méditations* ont fait souffler un " vent nouveau " sur la littérature post-impériale, comme on nous l'a si souvent répété, elles sont également, d'un point de vue stylistique, aussi peu novatrices et révolutionnaires que possible, et appartiennent sous bien des rapports à la tradition rhétorique la plus purement classique. (15)

In highlighting the modern aspect of Lamartine's lyric (specifically, the predominant role of sentiment), Loiseleur also observes that the *Méditations* do not enact a revolution as much as the *feeling* of one. She explains that Lamartine's lyric voice, like refrains of music, modulates continuously, evocative more of fleeting suggestion than of declaration. If the poet is doing something new here, it is not in a manifestly subversive manner:

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[54] All genealogies of French romantic poetry, or editions of the *Méditations*, remark on the presence of the classical or "pseudoclassical" in Lamartine's elegies. Marius-François Guyard's article "La survivance du style et des formes classiques dans la poésie de Lamartine" goes even further and highlights the persistence of the classical in Lamartine's later work.

[55] Levaillant's observation, echoed by Letessier, was nothing new. Emmanuel Barat's *Le Style poétique et la révolution romantique* (1904) said the same thing : "Ce qu'il est plus intéressant d'étudier, c'est la façon dont Lamartine décrit et celle dont il traduit en vers Chateaubriand" (75).

[56] All references to Lamartine's correspondence are from *Correspondance d'Alphonse de Lamartine*, ed. Christian Croisille (Paris: H. Champion, 2000-).

"Aussi le mystère d'une harmonie encore 'inouïe' ne tient-il pas à la mise en œuvre d'un langage subversif ou à l'invention formelle, mais à une esthétique globale du poème qui fait porter l'accent sur l'effet d'ensemble pour remotiver le signe et le fait poétique" (*L'Harmonie selon Lamartine* 140).

Given their heavy reliance on neo-classical forms of expression, as well as their understated suggestiveness, the *Méditations* may not be an obvious starting point for a study of French romantic poetry. Nevertheless, the borrowings from past and present into what I see as a consciously developed poetics of hybridity in Lamartine's first book of poems deserves careful analysis. When describing this entanglement, Lanson puts it best: "Rien ici n'était nouveau, si l'on veut; mais si l'on veut aussi, tout était nouveau, ou renouvelé" ("Le romantisme de Lamartine" 181). As the poem "Souvenir" (*Méditations poétiques*) demonstrates, Lamartine cultivated a hesitant poetics. What is new about a poem in which the first three stanzas emphasize tropes (the oak tree's fading leaves, the head "blanchi par le temps"), a formulaic octosyllabic meter, and Ossianic imagery ("Du zephyr l'amoureuse haleine / Soulève encor tes longs cheveux", or "cette onde qu'enchaîne / Le souffle glacé des autans")? Moreover, the poem evokes the narrator wandering "triste et solitaire" and praying in his natural surroundings, as from a scene out of *Atala*:

> C'est ta main qui sèche mes pleurs,
> Quand je vais, triste et solitaire,
> Répandre en secret ma prière
> Près des autels consolateurs. (57-60)[57]

[57] One example from *Atala* that resonates with "Souvenir" shows Atala "à genoux devant un vieux pin tombé, comme au pied d'un autel" (48). All citations from Lamartine's poetry are taken from the Pléiade edition of his *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. Marius-François Guyard (1963). All citations from *Atala* and *René* are from Maurice Regard's edition (*Œuvres romanesques et voyages*), vol. 1 (op. cit.).

More than *Atala* or *René*, with their emphasis on melancholy, solitude, and alienation, Chateaubriand's *Essai sur les révolutions* (1797) offers a revealing source for the aesthetics of the *Méditations*. Well aware that he is at a threshold, Lamartine makes new assertions in a careful, deliberate manner. Chateaubriand's suspicion of the dangers of philosophical systems and abrupt changes in political models was not lost on Lamartine when it came to the current state of poetry. Poetry was in crisis, but a rash turn to the new that refused the buttresses of the past would only exacerbate its fragile status. Lamartine was acutely aware of writing in an in-between period, and as a letter to his closest confidant Aymon de Virieu reveals, he made the effort to sustain the paradoxical tension between the classicism of a 'beau idéal' and the modern emphasis on expressive sentiment for the sake of a productive *conciliation*:

> Il y a dans la société une atmosphère dans laquelle on ne peut s'empêcher de respirer. Nous y respirons tout autre chose que dans les siècles précédents, et nous passons sans intermédiaire d'une éducation antique dans le monde tel que vous le voyez. Ce saut est trop fort, on perd la tête, et on devient ce que vous voyez encore. Notre malheur est d'être nés dans ce maudit temps où tout ce qui est vieux s'écroule et où il n'y a pas encore de neuf. (19 Aug. 1819)[58]

Lamartine inhabits this tension in a way that complicates historical readings that consider the *Méditations* an obvious transition from the old to the new. At the same time, the claim that Lamartine places modern sensibilities in a classical mold perpetuates normative readings of what are highly original poems.[59] Lamartine does not merely

[58] Aymon de Virieu was Lamartine's closest friend and steadfast critic. The letters exchanged between the two are crucial for following the development of the first *Méditations*, and for tracing the formation of Lamartine's aesthetic.

[59] A notable example of this type of reading, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, comes from the editor of Lamartine's *Œuvres poétiques* (Pléiade) : "Le genre 'Méditation' et l'harmonie du vers suffisent à établir l'originalité; mais la nouveauté n'est pas radicale (cela explique d'ailleurs le succès immédiat), car le poète qui l'apporte respecte, sans gêne apparente, les lois et les conventions du langage et du style nobles. Ce

provide a way to connect the dots between neo-classical poets of the first Empire and a romantic Hugo of the late Restoration (historical readings are especially "guilty" of casting Lamartine as an in-between poet); he was an original artist in his own right, and highly aware when publishing the *Méditations* that he was cultivating a new poetic style. As such, the *Méditations* are a self-conscious affirmation, not a logical stage in literary evolution.[60] As Hugo would, in the "Préface de *Cromwell*" (1827), stress a liberated language of poetry, Lamartine here declares the freedom of the poet's vocation. Realizing that the time for a new aesthetic has come, but hesitant to express it ("Je frémis d'une sainte horreur")[61], Lamartine appropriates a lyrical voice that hides its agenda. A metapoetic commentary on the unique situation of the early nineteenth-century poet, Lamartine's meditation "Chants lyriques de Saül, imitation des Psaumes de David" presents a voice that adopts the form of a prayer:

> Je répandrai mon âme au seuil du sanctuaire,
> Seigneur; dans ton nom seul je mettrai mon espoir;
> Mes cris t'éveilleront, et mon humble prière
> S'élèvera vers toi comme l'encens du soir! (1-4)

Although this prayer is humble, it resounds ("Mes cris t'éveilleront"); and though the self is caught at a threshold ("au seuil du sanctuaire"), it has a clear destination (God) in mind. The device of the psalm – lyric poetry that is sung, or enunciated – serves as an active mediating agent. The song, symbolized by the formless but charged medium of incense, was for Lamartine the invisible but potent link between the terrestrial and the

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novateur n'a rien d'un révolté: *il innove presque malgré lui*, en écrivant comme Parny ou Fontanes, quand ce n'est pas comme Thomas ou Leonard" (333 - emphasis mine ; M.-F. Guyard, "La Survivance du style et des formes classiques dans la poésie de Lamartine", *Stil-und-formprobleme in der Literatur*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1959).

[60] Sainte-Beuve, who would always remind later hostile critics of the aesthetic significance of Lamartine's first publication, would comment: "Rien ne saurait donc être plus achevé *en soi* que ce premier volume des Méditations" (cited in Lanson, *Méditations*: cxxv).

[61] The line is from "L'Enthousiasme", which is Lamartine's exemplary poem regarding his bitter struggle to look forward as opposed to the comforts of looking back: "Heureux le poète insensible!" (41).

divine. Lamartine designed the *Méditations* to allow the reader to experience how this poeticized music could operate.

Much has been said on the subject of Lamartine and music. Since the appearance of the first edition of the *Méditations*,[62] readers have been quick to point out their emphasis on rhythm, voice and harmony. The young Victor Hugo was one of them; in his review of the volume, he asks: "Entendez-vous le chant du poète?" (*Le Conservateur littéraire*, 15 Apr. 1820).[63] A reviewer for the *Journal des débats* (1 Apr. 1820) perhaps put it most eloquently: "On voit dans ses conceptions le *mens divinior*, et dans les expressions et les images, dont il les revêt, l'*os magna sonaturum*, qui selon Horace constituent le poëte". Lamartine's 'os magna sonaturum', his great sounding voice, did not go unnoticed by later critics, either.[64] To take recent examples, Aurélie Loiseleur has provided an extensive study of Lamartine's appropriation of the trope of harmony as an effective means of communication, and Laurence Tibi has looked at how Lamartine's lyric poetry expresses an intimate, interior voice.

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[62] Since Lamartine revisited, rearranged and added to his poems so many times throughout his long career, it is difficult to come across a modern edition that respects the original. However, I choose to do so here for two reasons: 1) I would like to highlight the originality and "shock value" of these twenty-four poems, which initially stirred a whole generation of readers, but was later bogged down by the later editions, and 2) I would like to distinguish, as this chapter will show, between the *Méditations poétiques* and the *Nouvelles méditations poétiques* (1823). Out of all of the editions of the *Méditations*, Marius-François Guyard's (*Œuvres poétiques complètes*, op. cit.) best respects the chronology of the poems as well as Lamartine's original intentions; this is the edition used here.

[63] The journal that Hugo published with his brothers Abel and Eugène, *Le Conservateur littéraire* (1819-1821) was an obvious tribute to Chateaubriand's journal *Le Conservateur* (1818-1820). All issues of the *Conservateur littéraire* appear in Jules Marsan's edition (Paris: Hachette, 1922).

[64] Barat even declares: "Il est le premier poète qui ait *chanté*, et toute sa poésie est chantante" (82). Charles Bruneau says the same, and with the same emphasis: "La grande nouveauté de la poésie de Lamartine: c'est la musique du vers" ("L'Epoque romantique", in *Histoire de la langue française*, vol. 12). Lanson is less categorical, but nonetheless presents music as the certain 'je ne sais quoi' of the *Méditations*: "c'est une certaine intensité, ce sont de certaines vibrations de sentiments, traduites par une certaine musique des mots et de certaines cadences des vers" ("Le Romantisme de Lamartine" 192).

The present study - which takes music as a metaphor for Lamartine's aesthetic, rather than the use of music in the *Méditations,* or the specific ways in which Lamartine could be described as "musical" - is more concerned with how Lamartine's focus on voice and sound symbolizes a new imagination at work in French poetry. Lamartine's imagination actively works to extract the invisible out of the material and the 'déjà dit'. "Il pillait avec indifférence le magasin des thèmes et des clichés : tout lui était bon qui l'aidait à traduire en mots sa poésie intérieure" (Lanson, "Le Romantisme de Lamartine" 184). Accordingly, Lamartine erases the landscape in order to show, so to speak, this invisibility. Doing away with the image was a way to hear the song better: "Le paysage devenant poème de la parole fait fléchir la vieille esthétique de la plénitude exprimée par la métaphore picturale" (Mary Ellen Birkett, "Paysage poétique et métaphore musicale chez Lamartine").[65] The recuperation of lyric poetry during the romantic period, starting with Lamartine, is acknowledged in most literary histories. However, Yves Vadé reminds us what a struggle it was to resolve the contradiction of a music that had to be put into verbal form:

> On dira que depuis l'âge classique des "chants" lyriques étaient produits sans être chantés et que chacun s'en contentait. Mais les romantiques veulent faire plus. Ils portent à son comble la tension entre une énonciation lyrique exploitant toutes les ressources de l'écriture et la volonté d'une présence autrefois réservée à la performance orale, c'est-à-dire à une parole incarnée dans une voix et dans un corps. ("L'Emergence du sujet lyrique" 12-13)[66]

Lamartine's song, in other words, does not passively obey the flux of inspiration or sentiment, but reflects the faculty of an imagination that actively creates out of absence.

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[65] While I agree with Birkett's thesis, I disagree with her resulting argument that the "collaboration" between music and poetry in Lamartine did not take shape until the *Nouvelles méditations*. In fact, as this chapter will reveal, I hold that the opposite is the case: music not only played a role, but was consecrated in the *Méditations*.

[66] In *Figures du sujet lyrique*, ed. Dominique Rabaté (1996).

Given his appropriation of voice and his erasing of the image, it comes as no surprise that readers have been quick to adopt the terms "vague" and "vapoureuse" when describing Lamartine's poems. But it is precisely Lamartine's intentionally nebulous aesthetic, which, I will argue, he reflects through his particular treatment of landscape, that responds to the crisis that poetry was facing in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Lamartine's innovation in lyric poetry is his erasure of the descriptive and the pictorial, which were hallmarks of eighteenth-century didactic, neo-classical poetry and which would play no small role even in Chateaubriand's romantically charged prose narratives.[67] Lamartine translates and transposes more than he represents. His poems were meant to be composed songs, not a series of pictures: "Le chant subsume toutes les autres formes d'art" (Tibi 91). The poet's aversion to description places him squarely within an important romantic discourse in which the imagination flees the image, a paradoxically image-less imagination that is meant to leave room for the unique and suggestive voice of the poet.[68] Literary critics in 1820, at least those receptive to the

[67] Chateaubriand himself emphasized the important role of description in *Atala*: "Il n'y a point d'aventures dans *Atala*. C'est une sorte de poème, *moitié description*, moitié dramatique : *tout consiste dans la peinture* de deux amants qui marchent et causent dans la solitude ; *tout gît dans le tableau* des troubles de l'amour, au milieu du calme des déserts et du calme de la religion" ("Préface" - emphasis mine).

[68] In *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought* (1927), Murray Wright Bundy provides a history of the word 'imagination', and how, in its most basic sense, it meant 'to be an image of': "The nearest Greek equivalent of 'imagination', εἰκασία, is derived from ἔικω, 'to be like', or 'capable of being compared.' From ἔικω comes the noun εἰκών, indicating the state of being like, an image, or copy, or likeness" (Chap. 1). It was not until Plato, Bundy claims, that the imagination was understood as being a thought process. Closer to Lamartine's time, German theorists (Kant, Hegel) emphasized the imagination's role, not as a reflector of images, but as a conveyor or presenter of feelings or concepts. In the case of Lamartine, who inherited and adopted this iconoclastic imagination, his voice precedes the world it describes. Throughout his letters in 1818 to 1819, as he was working in earnest on the *Méditations* and undergoing a "crise morale", Lamartine increasingly emphasized the "homme intérieur" and the "homme pensant" as being the source of his elegies. The interior faculty "washes out" the image. The coincidence of a fading nature and the assertion of the poet's voice is palpable particularly in "L'Automne": "Oui, dans ces jours d'automne où la nature expire, / À ses regards voilés je trouve plus d'attraits" (9-10). Lamartine begins the poem with an almost violent "Salut" (and repeats it in the third line), which pierces an already fragile nature ("Salut, bois couronnés d'un reste de verdure!" 1).

Méditations (and that would be the majority of them), insisted on the revitalization of this song as being representative of Lamartine's originality and his rejuvenation of French poetry. Charles Loyson, making the distinction between the 'faiseur de vers' and the poet, describes how Lamartine preoccupied himself solely with translating his inner voice. Everything else falls by the wayside:

> On aurait beau revêtir les plus jolis lieux communs de boudoir de la friperie mythologique la plus fraîche et la mieux conservée, orner d'hémistiches pompeux et sonores un grand événement ou des sentiments élevés, étaler dans des vers artistement tournés une sorte de Panorama de la nature, prés, ruisseaux, forêts, montagnes, et le ciel et la mer, et le jour et la nuit, les mœurs et les paysages des quatre parties du monde; avec de l'esprit, de la mémoire, de l'élégance, on ferait ainsi des tableaux agréables, on ne ferait pas de poésie. (*Le Lycée français*, vol. IV, 1820)[69]

Loyson's distinction prompts another crucial one: that of poetry as 'tableau' as opposed to poetry as song. The poet who paints uses artificial means for a contrived end, while the poet who sings expresses his inherent creativity: "le poète chante comme l'oiseau, sans songer qu'on l'écoute, mais parce qu'il en éprouve le besoin, et qu'il est fait pour chanter".

I would argue that Lamartine's rejection of description was not inherent, but part of a larger and historical shift in early nineteenth-century aesthetics in which an imagination that had depended on the eye and memory (the objective) now became the determining agency in the creative process. In other words, the imagination was an agent, not a tool. The "weak spot" in theories of imitation, as M.H. Abrams puts it, was music: "German critics, therefore, tend to use music as the apex and norm of the pure and

[69] Reprinted almost in full in Loiseleur (*Méditations* 540-542).

nonrepresentative expression of spirit and feeling" (*The Mirror and the Lamp* 94).[70] But more than just enabling the expression of feeling, Lamartine's intentional erasure of the natural landscape leaves room for the free play of the *inventive* faculty of the creative imagination. Samuel Coleridge would refer to this faculty as an "esemplastic power" in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817): "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead".[71] This secondary imagination, the one that creates, is an agent of the primary imagination: "The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (Ibid). Adopting this model of an imagination that precedes and even occludes the senses - one that Lamartine would have inherited not directly from Coleridge, but from Mme de Staël's discussion of German philosophy and aesthetic theory in *De l'Allemagne* (both, in turn, are profoundly inspired by Kant) - Lamartine asserted, through the erasure of the landscape, a poetic imagination that knows no limits. This refusal of the material leads him to trade the image (the concrete, the finite) for music, the most "invisible" but creative and expansive of media. Complementing this expansiveness, however, is the poet's intense self-consciousness. Lamartine's elegies, despite their emphasis on intangibles (the infinite, silence, night), are carefully composed in such a way as to communicate.[72] Lamartine

[70] In this particular section ("Expressive Theory of Germany: Ut musica poesis"), Abrams refers to Mme de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* as having "informed the French" of this shift, specifically in the chapter "De la poésie". Mme de Staël, as I will show, will serve as an important figure in the shaping of Lamartine's musically informed aesthetic.

[71] Vol. 1: 202. Ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols. London: Oxford UP, 1939.

[72] In *Poetry and the Romantic Musical Aesthetic* (2008), James H. Donelan looks at "the relationship between the highly abstract discourse of philosophy and the concrete works of poetry and music". Poetry and music, he argues, articulated the abstract; the self "can only come to consciousness through an articulate voice" (xvi). Beethoven, who achieves an absolute music (non-descriptive), is thus the musical

not only provides the song, but, in the process of erasing the landscape, he shows the reader how he gets to the song: "C'est moins sur le contenu du spectacle qu'on devra s'arrêter (sur ce que le poème donne à voir) que sur le processus qui conduit à ces architectures des mots-images, à ces simulations perceptives spectaculaires-sonores que sont les poèmes (Jean-Marie Gleize, *Poésie et figuration* : 19). The poem provides music with the language it lacks: "La musique ne parle qu'un langage. L'intelligence ne la comprend pas. On peut donc s'en fatiguer et s'en dégoûter bien vite, au lieu que la poésie parle à l'âme tout entière" (to Virieu, 30 Mar. 1822).

In a preface that he included in the 1849 edition of the *Méditations*, which explores the qualities that a poet should possess, Lamartine seems to reduce the imagination to memory:

> J'étais né impressionnable et sensible. Ces deux qualités sont les deux premiers éléments de toute poésie. Les choses extérieures à peine aperçues laissaient une vive et profonde empreinte en moi ; et, quand elles avaient disparu de mes yeux, elles se répercutaient et se conservaient présentes dans ce qu'on nomme *l'imagination*, c'est-à-dire la mémoire, qui revoit et qui repeint en nous.[73]

But it is clear, from what Lamartine says next, that much more than the retrieval of images is at stake in the development of the *Méditations*.

> Mais de plus, ces images ainsi revues et repeintes se transformaient promptement en sentiment. Mon âme animait ces images, mon cœur se mêlait à ces impressions. J'aimais et j'incorporais en moi ce qui m'avait frappé. […] De là à chanter ce cantique intérieur qui s'élève en nous, il n'y avait pas loin. (50)

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articulation of Kant. In a similar vein, I am arguing that Lamartine's poetry attempts to articulate, and not merely evoke or allude to, the infinite through the form of lyric poetry and the internal faculty of the imagination.

[73] 'Première préface des *Méditations*' (49). All citations from the prefaces of the *Méditations* and *Nouvelles méditations* are from Aurélie Loiseleur's edition. See pages 49-69.

Though he does not say so explicitly, Lamartine abandons one model of the imagination for another one entirely. Music, as Mme de Staël presented it, is the mark of a distinctly creative imagination. If "l'imagination est la qualité dominante de l'Allemagne artiste et littéraire" (I : 61), this is because the German people are inherently musical: "on s'aperçoit aisément de cette vie intime, de cette poésie de l'âme qui caractérise les Allemands" (I : 58).[74] German peasant women, for example, make up for their lack of fancy dress by ornamenting themselves with flowers: "Les paysannes et les servantes, qui n'ont pas assez d'argent pour se parer, ornent leur tête et leurs bras de quelques fleurs pour qu'au moins l'imagination ait sa part dans leur vêtement" (I : 59). The imagination, then, is a creative power that strives to supplement. In his landscape poems, Lamartine provides both the lack and the supplement: he erases the physical impression of the landscape to allow for the creative act. The liberty that Lamartine affords to the creative imagination leads us to consider the *Méditations* as a testament to the free reign of the lyric poet: [75]

> Loin que la priorité nouvelle donnée à l'intime conduise, selon l'idée reçue, à une hypertrophie du moi, la poésie romantique ne cesse de jouer avec une liberté inconnue jusque-là, d'énonciateurs variables et d'allocutaires multiples, transgressant sans la moindre peine l'opposition de l'animé et de l'inanimé, comme de l'abstrait et du concret. (Vadé 20)

And yet, Lamartine's attempt at transfiguration by way of the creative imagination would ultimately fail. The *Méditations* seem never to reach their aim, however far they may seem to go. The volume's "bookend" poems reveal that the poet is

[74] *De l'Allemagne*. 2 vols. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968.
[75] "Tout cela sans manifestation révolutionnaire, sans affichage de doctrine, sans tapage. Victor Hugo, quelques années plus tard, proclamera 'la liberté dans l'art'. Lamartine, dès 1820, l'a réalisée. Ses *Méditations* sont une magnifique leçon de liberté artistique" (Lanson, "Le romantisme de Lamartine": 185).

left waiting in the end, despite all thrusts toward harmony and unity. While the narrator in "L'Isolement" wondered if a connection with the divine was even possible ("Mais peut-être au-delà des bornes de sa sphère, / Lieux où le vrai soleil éclaire d'autres cieux, / Si je pouvais laisser ma dépouille à la terre, Ce que j'ai tant rêvé paraîtrait à mes yeux?" 37-40), "La Poésie sacrée" tells us that this revelation has still not taken place:

> Sur mes os consumés ma peau s'est desséchée ;
> Les enfants m'ont chanté dans leurs dérisions ;
> Seul, au milieu des nations,
> Le Seigneur m'a jeté comme une herbe arrachée. (221-224)

While the poet of "L'Isolement" waits to be carried up and away, the one in "La Poésie sacrée" is violently tossed back down to earth. The song may have been sung, but it is experienced by the poet as not going anywhere: "En vain ma voix s'élève, il n'entend plus ma voix" (217). The *Méditations*, then, remain a proposition or invitation more than an achieved project. Yet it is precisely this failure to 'go somewhere' that constitutes the newness of Lamartine's verse, as it represents the perpetual fall back to his own "place" of creative origin (the self). In fact, the very constraints of song require just such a trajectory. The end of the song, in its respect for harmony, must always refer back to where it started. The poet, navigating both a century in flux and an uncertain aesthetic somehow had to remain stable. Contrary to our reading of Lamartine as a dying poet (a myth which, to be fair, he relished cultivating), or as one who ascends and trades the earth for the stars, the poet always affirms his presence, no matter what horizon he has reached. While closing his eyes is a means to another world -

> Quand mon œil fatigué se ferme à la lumière,
> Tu viens d'un jour plus pur inonder ma paupière ;
> Et l'espoir près de toi, rêvant sur un tombeau,
> Appuyé sur la foi, m'ouvre un monde plus beau. ("L'Immortalité" 21-24)

- he accepts in advance that his song will never fully disengage from the one where he lives: “Sur les mondes détruits je t’attendrais encore!” (94). The song’s inefficacy remains an essential feature of the creative process. In the last line of the poem, the poet waits for the words that might actualize the infinite, but leaves with the impotent injunction: “réponds-moi!” (152).

While Lamartine never satisfied his ambition, he nonetheless formulated an ethereal yet vaguely discernable landscape for poetry that gave voice to the personal song of the subject rather than to a universal and prescriptive ‘beau idéal’. The suggestive use of this landscape alone would be sufficiently ‘revolutionary’ for the rehabilitation of the French lyric. The creative imagination, despite its limitations, had at least become an operative faculty. Instead of taking Lamartine’s “vague” landscapes for granted, as if they simply make sense in the context of a subject-centered romantic poetry, I will examine the process by which the inner faculty actually mediates these landscapes.

This chapter will first consider the situation of poetry in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in France to see how Lamartine’s resistance to the empirical and to the representation of images represents a significant departure from a persistently didactic and descriptive poetry. Relying in no small part on Mme de Staël’s *De l’Allemagne*, Lamartine allowed for German romantic tenets with their focus on the infinite and the subjective to play a role in French poetry. While earlier French philosophical and aesthetic traditions had viewed the creative imagination with suspicion, Lamartine instead understood its potential to revitalize a dying genre.

The chapter will next turn to the *Méditations poétiques* and consider the specific ways in which Lamartine developed an aesthetic - based on the principle of harmony in which a song must go back to where it started – that inevitably failed in its quest to attain the infinite. My reading of the *Méditations*, which takes us from an intimate, concrete landscape ("Le Vallon") to an ethereal and fully imaginary one ("Dieu") will demonstrate how this paradoxical thrust is the frustrated 'idée fixe' behind the book.

I will end with a look at a few of the supposedly *Nouvelles méditations poétiques*, which as a whole are emblematic of Lamartine's aesthetic. While the ambition of the first *Méditations* had at least supposed the possibility of contact with the divine, the *Nouvelles méditations* step back and reject any such ideal. The poet no longer moves toward the horizon, and, denied of creative agency, contents himself with the echo of presence as he merges bodily with his immediate surroundings. Lamartine trades his signature lake ("Ne pourrons-nous jamais sur l'océan des âges / Jeter l'ancre un seul jour?") for the ocean, submitting himself to the ceaseless but non-directional repetition of the waves ("Ah! berce, berce, berce encore").[76] The lyric voice is threatened by extinction. To prevent his complete annihilation, the poet is led to sacrifice the creative imagination as he re-immerses himself in the landscape of a thoroughly finite existence.

Part I.

Literary Landscapes of Influence: Situating Lamartine

> …de nos jours, le langage est pur, mais l'imagination est en défaut.
>
> Mme de Staël, *De l'Allemagne* (1813)

§I. The French Resistance to the Imagination

[76] "Le Lac" 3-4 (*Méditations poétiques*) and "Adieux à la mer" 21 (*Nouvelles méditations poétiques*).

The year 1820 is a late date for the assertion of the role of the creative imagination in poetry. French critics were on the whole resistant to German and, by extension, English writings on poetry and aesthetics.[77] William Wordsworth's remark that "Throughout, objects…derive their influence not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects"[78] provides a striking contrast with the French poet Jacques Delille's overarching concern, not for the intimate relationship between subject and object, but for an objective "goût".[79] Delille's landscapes,

[77] The potential of the imagination of straying from reality to "bizarrerie" was one of the main reasons that French critics were resistant to new theories of its role in art and poetic expression. French "classics", who insisted that the cultivated poetry of the Romans served as the ultimate model for art, saw the influence of contemporary German philosophy and literature (as well as the contemporary interest in Shakespeare) as an intrusion of "barbarie" on a French literature of "bon goût". In a particularly acerbic analysis of Sismondi's *De la littérature du Midi de l'Europe* (1813), the critic Dussault sputters: "Mais d'où viennent ces doctrines? Sont-elles nées parmi nous ? Non: ce sont des fruits étrangers; fruits dangereux, véritables poisons, qui ne peuvent que hâter l'extinction totale dont notre littérature est menacée : c'est des bords du lac de Genève, c'est du fond de l'Allemagne, que de nouveaux docteurs ont proclamé ces théories, dans un français mêlé de germanismes" (*Journal des débats*, 29 Sept. 1813). Republished in a compilation of Dussault's articles in the *Annales littéraires* (1818), this rhetoric was still fresh when Lamartine was writing his *Méditations*.

[78] Cited by Abrams: 54.

[79] And to take a visual example, there is the striking contrast between Caspar David Friedrich's emblematic *Wanderer Above the Sea of Mist* (1818) - the product of the subjective "eye" - and the universalizing and already informed "eye" of the classical artist in Achille-Etna Michallon's *Démocrite et les Abdéritains*, which received the prix de Rome for *historical* landscape painting ("le paysage historique") only a year earlier in 1817. Friedrich's view of nature, with its sublime ocean waves and almost anthropomorphic rocks, endows the sole contemplator in the painting with an imagination that reaches out to what may lie beyond the seascape. Michallon's representation, on the other hand, while containing stylistic elements that point to the pre-romantic rococo of Watteau, is nevertheless steeped in the seventeenth-century tradition of Claude or Poussin, replete with a formalized view of nature and the depiction of a Greek philosopher who lived in the fifth century B.C. The landscape, in other words, has nothing to do with nature itself; it is the "moral of the story" that the viewer is expected to weed out from the vegetation of the canvas, in order for Democritus to be admired for his devotion to the study of human intelligence. While English and German philosophers and writers on aesthetics had made the move to an expressive theory of poetry and painting, a theory that depended on an imagination that *strove* to synthesize nature and subject, French landscape painting was still subservient to the abstract ideals of history painting. The painter Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, in his *Eléments de perspective pratique, à l'usage des artistes, suivis de Réflexions et conseils à un élève sur la peinture et particulièrement sur le genre du paysage* (1800), explicitly recommended that painters should emulate Poussin, and be "le fidèle interprète de la Nature" as well as "donner en même temps des leçons de philosophie et de vertu". Quoted from the entry on Michallon in *Les Années romantiques : La peinture de 1815 à 1850*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1995 (419).

throughout his oeuvre, are determined by poetic precepts and guidelines.[80] His definition of the imagination as going beyond "ordinary life" enacts a displacement from nature to the decorative image: "La poésie a cet avantage : elle a encore celui de s'élever par les charmes de l'imagination au-dessus des scènes de la vie ordinaire" (*Jardins* 32). If there is transcendence here, it is not in the way that the poet synthesizes and creates his own world, but in the way he selects out of nature in order to create the *best* of worlds based on external criteria : "ces meilleurs mondes" (Ibid). The end result is a prescriptive assemblage of retrieved impressions.

What explains the French resistance to the creative imagination? Despite a long process of liberation from subservience to mimesis (the reflection of an objective truth), French philosophers and art theorists consistently fell short of conceiving the imagination as an independent and inventive faculty in its own right by systematically placing it into a dependent – and not symbiotic – relationship with reason. In *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne*, Annie Becq does not in fact illustrate an "emergence" of the creative imagination as much as an evolving dialectic between reason and the imagination. Her account, which she describes as "un changement de contenu du terme de raison" (13), is encased in a larger one that goes back to Antiquity, a genealogy that is important for our

[80] Though little known and little studied, Jacques Delille is nonetheless an important point of reference for the situation of poetry in early nineteenth-century France: "C'est chez Delille que tous les jeunes gens du début du XIXe siècle ont fait leur apprentissage poétique" (Philippe Auserve, "Delille préromantique?" 116). If I insist on contrasting Lamartine with Delille, it is because Delille was *the* poet in France not long before the *Méditations* appeared; the first edition of his *Œuvres complètes* was published between 1818 and 1820. Considering examples of some of Delille's representative verse gives us a more explicit idea of what Lamartine was working against, namely, Delille's primary emphasis on the eye and vision: "Un jardin est, à mes yeux, un vaste tableau" the narrator states at the beginning of *Les Jardins*. If, as Auserve rightly concedes, Delille allowed for the role of sentiment, he is still "d'abord et avant tout l'aboutissement des théories sensualistes" (120-121). Also, Lamartine at one point explicitly refers to himself as working against Delille and "toute l'école classique": "Quant au public, je n'y songeais pas, ou je n'en espérais rien. Il s'était trop endurci le sentiment, le goût et l'oreille aux vers techniques de Delille, d'Esménard et de toute l'école classique de l'Empire" (commentary on "L'Isolement", in Loiseleur's edition of the *Méditations*: 75).

understanding of how metaphysical (Platonic) and empirical (Aristotelian) paradigms would converge in a dialectic that produced two primary interpretations of the imagination in the history of Western thought: it was either viewed from a standpoint of suspicion (the imagination was false, removed from the original object), or regarded, if used properly, as an instructive (i.e., useful and pleasing) faculty.[81] Neither paradigm understood the imagination as *creating* an object, but only as imitating one; a mimetic theory of art restrained an imagination that ran the risk of descending into folly. In either interpretation, an imagination left to its own devices would be inconceivable for a form of representation grounded in imitation. Hence the emphasis in Aristotle's *Poetics* on the importance of the metaphor, "for the successful use of metaphor is a matter of perceiving similarities" (37).

1. The Eighteenth Century and the Legacy of Empiricism

Important for the contextualization of Lamartine's landscapes in the *Méditations* is an understanding of the Aristotelian, or empirical, model that took hold in eighteenth-century France. The imagination, while considered an essential attribute of the artist's 'génie', was limited to how the artist chose from countless sensations and impressions. Art had to remain "natural", and the artist had to erase the line of demarcation between truth and fiction: " Tous ses efforts durent nécessairement se réduire à faire un choix des plus belles parties de la nature elle-même, sans cependant cesser d'être naturel " (Charles Batteux, *Beaux-arts réduits à un même principe* (1747): I.1). Centering the work of art on the senses and the retrieval of sensations, vision, above all, was a way to prevent chaos or unintelligibility in the work of art. There was a fine line between

[81] Bundy's exposition of the theories of Plato and Aristotle demonstrates that, ultimately, subsequent philosophers and theorists appropriated both: "Two forces, the empirical (Aristotle) and mystical (Plato) were to mold the theory of the imagination during the Middle Ages".

'vraisemblance' and 'mensonge', and as Du Bos observes in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), it is the poet (or painter's) responsibility to be aware of the dangers of an imagination that strays from its subject: "Le poète ne doit pas exiger du spectateur une foi aveugle qui se soumette à tout" (I.24). Rubens's allegorical paintings of Marie de Médicis, for this reason, miss the mark; they are works of pure fancy more than history paintings: "Je sais bien qu'il ne parut aucune des divinités de la mer à cette cérémonie et cette espèce de mensonge détruit une partie de l'effet que l'imitation faisait pour moi" (Ibid). Diderot, who drew heavily on Dubos in the *Salon de 1767* – where the tension between art and nature in the medium of landscape painting is dramatized to its fullest – invokes the same connection between art and imitation when (literally) addressing the canvases of Vernet. Diderot's art criticism, in fact, becomes a work of 'vraisemblance' itself as he "paints" his stroll through the salon, as if it were a stroll through nature. If, however, an inventive imagination is central to the work of art in Diderot (one of Vernet's paintings prompts him to say, "Mon âme échauffée place à l'entrée de cette caverne une jeune fille qui en sort avec un jeune homme" 183),[82] it is quite apparent that this same "âme échauffée" has its limits: "L'imagination ne crée rien. Elle imite, elle compose, combine, exagère, agrandit, rapetisse" (214). The imagination that Diderot posits is bound up with memory and with the subject's physical experience in nature.[83] Art is an exhausting process, not because the artist has to achieve a certain

[82] *Salon de 1767* (op. cit.).

[83] Both Du Bos and Diderot were influenced by Joseph Addison's reflections on the imagination, which he laid out in *The Spectator* in 1712. While the imagination for Addison enables a prisoner to envision "landskips more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of Nature", the following paragraph makes it clear that this same imagination is bound to either the eye or memory: "We cannot, indeed, have a single image in the Fancy that did not make its first entrance through the Sight" (Number 411, 12 Jun. 1712). It should also be noted that Addison's preoccupation with the imagination is specifically centered on pleasure. For both English and French philosophers and writers on art in the eighteenth century, Locke and Hobbes – and their consideration of the imagination that "represents

'beau idéal', but because he has to keep up with the impossible task of retrieving and synthesizing countless stored impressions for the best possible effect.[84] Ultimately, the imagination succeeds in its endeavor: for the landscape painter, who not only competes with nature, but ultimately surpasses it, it is simply a question of *knowing* how to imagine: "Voilà les scènes qu'il faut savoir imaginer, quand on se mêle d'être un paysagiste. C'est à l'aide de ces fictions qu'une scène champêtre devient autant et plus intéressante qu'un fait historique. On y voit le charme de la nature avec les incidents les plus doux ou les plus terribles de la vie" (400). Though Diderot is far from prescribing a slavish imitation of nature (for this reason he is very wary of the genre of portraiture), it is still the case that the senses are the foundation of successful landscape painting.[85]

The *Méditations poétiques* work against eighteenth-century empirical paradigms, since Lamartine considered experience as the *inability* to perceive. What the poet evokes is not nature created (*natura naturata*), but his anxious efforts at creating something, anything, out of absence. Lamartine's correspondence from the few years prior to the

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empiricism" (Becq) were a common source: "Les conceptions de Hobbes et de Locke, dont s'inspirera Condillac, sur imagination, mémoire et jugement, sont devenues au XVIIIe siècle une sorte de bien commun, dans l'histoire de la théorie esthétique, et c'est par cette influence qu'il faut expliquer l'importance accordée à l'imagination en France, dans la deuxième moitié du siècle" (145).

[84] Diderot rejects the idea that there is a common model that artists must respect, and locates the enterprise of art in experience: "Avec le temps, par une marche lente et pusillanime, par un long et pénible tâtonnement, par une notion sourde, secrète d'analogie, acquise par une infinité d'observations successives dont la mémoire s'éteint et dont l'effet reste, la réforme s'est étendue à de moindres parties, de celles-ci à de moindres encore, et de ces dernières aux plus petites, à l'ongle, à la paupière, aux cils, aux cheveux, effaçant sans relâche et avec une circonspection étonnante les altérations et difformités de nature viciée ou dans son origine, ou par les nécessités de sa condition, s'éloignant sans cesse du portrait, de la ligne fausse, pour s'élever au vrai modèle idéal de la beauté, à la ligne vraie ;" (69-70).

[85] Christopher Collins' *The Poetics of the Mind's Eye* (1991) provides a succinct and helpful history of the degree to which science – specifically, psychology and physics – influenced poetry during this period. Collins cites Aristotle's *De Memoria* as the root of the empiricists' associational theories. Also, the field of physics offered a paradigm of how the mind could be ordered: "The new open universe of uniform physical law that Isaac Newton had revealed presented itself as the paradigm of the human mind, similarly infinite, lawful, and intelligible" (25). See chapter 2, "Science on the Nature of Imagination".

publication of the *Méditations* betrays an unequivocal lack of trust in the experience of the senses. The synthesizing of the eye's perception into a work of art, let alone a 'beau idéal', is a futile endeavor:

> Ah! si l'homme pouvait rendre seulement quelque ombre de ce qu'il sent dans la nature même inanimée, cela serait assez beau; mais je crois que les belles images que nous recevons par les yeux s'altèrent et se décolorent en passant par l'entendement, et nous ne faisons que de pâles et ternes copies de ce divin original. Les hommes sont bien orgueilleux de parler de leur beau idéal, c'est la nature qui est le suprême idéal. Nous ne faisons que la gâter, et nous croyons l'embellir. Il y a plus de 'poésie' dans ce petit coin d'un de ses tableaux que dans toutes nos poésies humaines. Cela me désole et me console en même temps. (21 May 1819)

At the same time that Lamartine undermines the role of the senses, he also unwittingly undermines the crucial role of the "colouring imagination" that Wordsworth had postulated in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1802). Wordsworth calls for a symbiosis of seeing and feeling, of seeing and thinking; the poet, via emotion, strives for the representation of an inner, heightened reality. An active faculty, the poet's imagination adds to what would otherwise be a merely mimetic or descriptive tableau. Though not strictly subordinated to the senses, Wordsworth's poems are nonetheless visual and concerned with the retrieval of impressions. The recollection of seeing daffodils in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," or of the landscape overlooking Tintern Abbey, is equivalent to, if not more powerful than, the initial experience: "The picture of the mind revives again" ("Tintern Abbey" 62).[86] Wordsworth colors in, that is, he makes up for, the initial moment of perception that cannot be completely recuperated. In *The Re-Creation of Landscape* (1984), James A.W. Heffernan points out how Wordsworth, despite his claim to represent an unmediated landscape, relies on the picturesque to

[86] In "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", Wordsworth emphasizes both the initial impression of seeing the daffodils ("I gazed – and gazed –") only to realize later that the retrieved impression is just as crucial: "For oft, when on my couch I lie / In vacant or in pensive mood, / They flash upon that inward eye".

intensify an otherwise inert scene. His insistence on light represents the poetic imagination at work, and leads to a verbal vision: "the only thing that mediates here is the poet's memory, or his 'pictures of the mind'" (21). One picture leads to another one: "Tintern Abbey" is not a single point of view, but "pictures leading to and through other pictures into the depths of the mind" (Ibid). In stark contrast, Lamartine states that the inner faculty (understanding) only serves to *dis*color nature. Accordingly, he presents his landscapes as, at best, pale and crepuscular. Even this feeble light is threatened with extinction; despite the stirring effects of the moon and stars, "tout rentre dans les ténèbres" ("Le Soir" 52).

By questioning the efficacy of perception, Lamartine destabilized both empirical and romantic paradigms. If vision was no longer the key component of the imagination, on what was the poet supposed to rely?

2. "L'Isolement": Lamartine's Iconoclasm

"L'Isolement", the opening poem of the *Méditations*, is Lamartine's anxiety-ridden attempt to answer this question. Not only does the poem mark a break from the didactic and descriptive poems of Delille, but also from a previous generation of lesser known French poets (Bertin, Parny, and Millevoye) who worked primarily in the elegiac mode. The irony of Lamartine's poem lies in its clash of traditional formal aspects of the elegy (a classical simplicity reflected by a natural but tempered rhythm) with the crippling moral effects of indifference and death. Despite the poem's controlled and fluid quality, which is enhanced by "smooth" enjambments and commas that allow for natural pauses, this calm is interrupted in the middle stanzas by a harder and more insistent "qu" sound and an abundance of commas that disturb more than carry the flow of the poem:

Que me font ces vallons, ces palais, ces chaumières?
Vains objets dont pour moi le charme est envolé;
Fleuves, rochers, forêts, solitudes si chères,
Un seul être vous manque, et tout est dépeuplé! (25-28)

Charles Millevoye, certainly an important source of inspiration for Lamartine's early poems, had stressed the melancholic nature of the elegy; but in a classical spirit reminiscent of La Fontaine or Fénelon, and only recently championed by Delille, he insists on capturing the charm and pleasures of this melancholy. Any excess of passion or sentiment had to be tamed: "Les sujets passionnés ne conviennent pas moins à l'Elégie; mais ils ne peuvent franchir un certain degré d'exaltation sans sortir des bornes prescrites. Les éclats de la fureur, les cris du désespoir lui sont interdits, ils détruiraient *le charme de la tristesse*" (I:20; emphasis mine).[87] In the stanza cited above, we see that Lamartine explicitly expunges any sense of charm ("pour moi le charme est envolé"), and while Millevoye highlights the suggestive quality of the elegy – "pour elle [l'élégie] les ruines sont vivantes, la solitude est peuplée, et la tombe a cessé d'être muette" (Ibid 19) – Lamartine's famous and emphatic pronouncement is that "tout est dépeuplé". By the end of Lamartine's poem, it is clear that the poet's enthusiasm for what might lie beyond, emphasized by a crescendo of exclamation points, has overwhelmed his initial attempt at restraint: "Que ne puis-je, porté sur le char de l'Aurore, / Vague objet de mes voeux, m'élancer jusqu'à toi!" (45-46). The success of the poem lies in its mastery but simultaneous if subtle erosion ("Ici gronde le fleuve aux vagues écumantes" 5) of both

[87] In *Œuvres complètes*, 4 vols. (Paris: Ladvocat, 1822). The passage quoted here is from Millevoye's reflections on the elegy ("Sur l'élégie"), which in general helps to illuminate the situation of poetry when Lamartine was actively preparing his poems between 1813 and 1820. Parny and Millevoye were both preoccupied with how to achieve new expression in poetry, which for Millevoye meant going back to the ancients to recuperate a more natural style (in distinction to Bertin and Parny's more fabricated elegies, which belong more to the eighteenth century in their melodramatic and erotic scenes). Almost an exact contemporary, Millevoye (1782-1816) would have served as a primary source for Lamartine; just a glance at the titles of some of Millevoye's elegies illustrate the important comparison: "La Chute des feuilles", "Prière à la nuit", "Le Poète mourant", "David pleurant Saül et Jonathan".

the traditional manner of the elegy as well as the classical idyllic landscape. The unraveling of both allows for the fuller expression of the poet's feeling of loss and solitude, as well as his desire to locate this landscape's mystery: "Il n'est rien de beau, de doux, de grand dans la vie, que les choses mystérieuses," Chateaubriand had noted in the opening chapters of the *Génie du Christianisme* (I: 60).[88] Yet, the landscape's less-than-sublime aspect further reinforces a less mediated voice, as the poet's contact with a humble and almost ordinary view - instead of with Alpine vistas or the untamed ones of early America - eliminates further distraction from the poet's contemplation of a tantalizing horizon.[89]

Accordingly, "L'Isolement" shows the reader how the poet works against description and the classical emphasis on the imitation of nature. The eighteenth century was a period "qui se montrait plus avide de sensations visuelles et auditives que de l'analyse psychologique", and the precept for poetry was to "peindre la nature" (Wil Munsters, *La Poétique du pittoresque en France* 105).[90] However, Lamartine's strategy in the opening stanzas of "L'Isolement" actually seems to work with the familiar medium of descriptive poetry. Elements of the landscape come into view, and the adverbs "ici" and "là", along with the demonstrative adjective "ce", reinforce the immediacy of a scene from nature. Not only is this a picture complete with details, but it is an animated one:

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[88] *Génie du Christianisme*, 2 vols., ed. Pierre Reboul (Paris : Garnier-Flammarion, 1966). Anticipating Mme de Staël's discussion of modern poetry in *De l'Allemagne*, Chateaubriand in the *Génie* refers to the emptying quality of the lyric: "Enfin les images favorites des poètes enclins à la rêverie sont presque toujours empruntées d'objets négatifs, tels que le silence des nuits, l'ombre des bois, la solitude des montagnes, la paix des tombeaux, qui ne sont que l'absence du bruit, de la lumière, des hommes, et des inquiétudes de la vie " (Part II, Book II, chap. 10 ; cited in Loiseleur's edition of the *Méditations*, 71).
[89] This distinguishes Lamartine from Chateaubriand, who detected divine presence in specifically spectacular landscapes such as Niagara Falls: "J'ai toujours remarqué que c'est à la vue des grandes scènes de la nature, que cet Etre inconnu se manifeste au cœur de l'homme" (*Génie* I : 182). Lamartine attests in a later note that he wrote "L'Isolement" at his father's estate (Milly) while viewing a sunset from a hillside.
[90] The 'theoretician' of the descriptive style, according to Munsters, was Delille.

Ici gronde le fleuve aux vagues écumantes,
Il serpente, et s'enfonce en un lointain obscur;
Là, le lac immobile étend ses eaux dormantes,
Où l'étoile du soir se lève dans l'azur. (5-8)

Lamartine continues in the fourth stanza with what the eye takes in ("Cependant, s'élançant de la flèche gothique, / Un son religieux se répand dans les airs" 13-14), although the use of a "cependant" underscores an intrusion that marks the presence of a self-conscious voice. This is where the poem makes a sudden shift to "inner" nineteenth-century sensibilities, as the "flèche gothique" is an explicit reference to Chateaubriand.[91] We suddenly get the idea, in other words, that the representation of a landscape is not the point of this poem. As the day is coming to a close, and the light dims over the landscape, a charged sound takes over: "Le voyageur s'arrête, et la cloche rustique / Aux derniers bruits du jour mêle de saints concerts" (15-16).

But this sound does not prove to be enough. In the following stanza, with another disorienting shift (this time he uses "mais"), the poet flatly remarks: "Mais à ces doux tableaux mon âme indifférente / N'éprouve devant eux ni charme ni transports," (17-18). A reference to Lamennais's recent *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* (1817), Lamartine's "Mais" drains the physical landscape described above of its materiality and inserts instead one of the burning questions of his day: if the church bell did not prove to be of solace, then what was left?[92] "Que le tour du soleil ou commence ou s'achève /

[91] Lanson points out the passage in Chateaubriand's *René*, where the meditating protagonist is forced out of his reverie by the sounding of church bells: "Au milieu de mes réflexions l'heure venait frapper à coups mesurés dans la tour de la cathédrale gothique" (12, n. 13).

[92] Lamennais's work had a profound effect on Lamartine, precisely at the time when he was both undergoing a moral crisis and earnestly working on publishing his *Méditations*. For Lamartine, Lamennais was an outstanding exception to what he felt had become an insipid literature: " Tous les livres m'ennuient ou m'exaspèrent, je dis les livres du jour. Cependant, je suis enfin tombé sur du bon, même sur du beau, même sur du sublime. Cela s'appelle *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* " (to Virieu, Aug. 1818). In the introduction to his *Essai*, Lamennais sees the collective's almost exclusive reliance on the senses as a major reason for its turning away from the spiritual: "Subjugué par les sens, l'homme

D'un œil indifférent je le suis dans son cours" (29-30).[93] The force of this pronouncement in turn puts into question the tradition of eighteenth-century descriptive poetry; the narrator's eye no longer works:

> De colline en colline en vain portant ma vue,
> Du sud à l'aquilon, de l'aurore au couchant,
> Je parcours tous les points de l'immense étendue (21-23)

A few lines later, after having lamented that not even the sun can redeem his indifference, his eyes only "see" absence; future vision is unknowable: "Mes yeux verraient partout le vide et les déserts" (34). He does not stop here: the third register of the poem is signaled with yet another "mais", which provides an even further leap from the materially drained landscape to a hoped-for "vrai soleil" (38) located above and beyond the terrestrial sphere. The poem ends with a desperate prayer in which the narrator pleads to be wrenched from what at first appeared to be a "doux tableau": "Et moi, je suis semblable à la feuille flétrie: / Emportez-moi comme elle, orageux aquilons!" (51-52). The narrator's frustration stems from the realization that he does not have an agency. There is no "colouring imagination" here, or an "emotion recollected in tranquility" (Wordsworth), that can re-motivate the landscape. The poet cannot find a voice to compensate for this barren, empty view of nature but can only pose a timid question:

> Mais peut-être au-delà des bornes de sa sphère,
> Lieux où le vrai soleil éclaire d'autres cieux,
> Si je pouvais laisser ma dépouille à la terre,

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insensiblement s'habitue à ne juger que par eux, ou par leur rapport. Il ne voit de réalité que dans ce qui les frappe ; tout le reste lui paroît de vagues abstractions, des chimères. Il n'existe que dans le monde physique : le monde intellectuel est nul pour lui" (iv-v).

[93] Lamartine's insistence on 'indifference' also works against classical tradition. While Lamartine, like Lamennais, emphasizes an indifference that stems from moral alienation and spiritual barrenness, poets before him had linked indifference to the objective practice of reasoning that served to tame human passion. In Parny's elegies, a notably "paisible Indifférence", which results from his encounter with a sublime landscape, calms the poet's feelings of rage and jealousy when his lover marries another suitor. Parny's poet must go through a cathartic experience to reach a sense of reconciliation, while Lamartine's somehow flat and uninspired landscape only amplifies the poet's anguish.

Ce que j'ai tant rêvé paraîtrait à mes yeux ? (37-40)

While on a biographical and sentimental level Lamartine here expresses his wish to join his absent lover, he is also "describing" a poetry that does not know what its referent or function should be. The poet, who is reaching for the "régions supérieures de la poésie et de la religion",[94] is frustrated by a sense of stasis and his inability to communicate. The self-assigned task of the poet in the *Méditations*, however, will be to confront this alienation through the medium of the lyric voice. The more the physical is absent, the more this voice can be heard. In explicit reference to his songs ("chants"), or *Méditations*, Lamartine writes: "Le monde serait désert qu'il faudrait que je produisisse encore" (to Virieu, Dec. 1818). The poet will create out of landscapes that he has drained of their physicality in order to reveal a new poetics, one that depends on the invisible and the abstract to compensate for the erosion that "L'Isolement" evokes. Lamartine revives poetry with an imagination that has abandoned mimesis and instead strives to create out of doubt and vagueness, out of an inability or failure to perceive, out of a fear of not being able to recollect. The poet not only makes a move from imitation to expression, or to use the language of "L'Isolement", from the description of "le coucher du soleil" (1) to the expression of sentiment ("Qu'importe le soleil?" 32), but makes this move out of absence ("Le soleil des vivants n'échauffe plus les morts" 20). Lamartine's landscapes are *invented*, not in the traditional sense, but in the "new" and romantic sense of creation.

[94] "Avertissement" of the first edition of the *Méditations* (Loiseleur, 493-494). The ineffectiveness of the poet's voice can be connected to the uncertain political moment. Though the 'Avertissement' claims to distance itself from current events (the Duc de Berry had been assassinated only a month before the *Méditations* appeared, which led to the dissolution of a more moderate royalist majority led by Decazes), the young Lamartine firmly supported the royalists and felt that a strong authority was needed to prevent a repeat of 1789 and its aftermath. Lamennais highlights the public's straying and violent tendencies in the *Essai*: "dans l'ordre moral, comme dans l'ordre politique, tout tend à la destruction […]. […] pour qui ne s'aveugle volontairement, il est visible que la révolution françoise, si éminemment destructive, n'a dû cet épouvantable caractère de mort, qu'au délire impie de ses promoteurs, qui attaquèrent, avec une rage inouie jusque-là, toutes les vérités ensemble" (Introduction vi-vii).

The absence of the sun allows his question to be asked. The imagination, which Lamartine symbolizes by stars and nebulous vapors, compensates for the voluntary abandonment of physical vision through an anxious but hopeful turn to the inner eye (not the archival "inward eye" in Wordsworth's "I Wander Lonely as a Cloud"): "Il n'est rien de commun entre la terre et moi" (48). The sacrifice of the image gives rise to an imagination that is free to act as an "esemplastic power", and lyric poetry (music) represented this power best.[95] In his later commentary on "L'Isolement", Lamartine describes the poem in terms of musical recollections rather than visual ones: "Je rentrai à la nuit tombante, mes vers dans la mémoire, et me les redisant à moi-même avec une douce prédilection. J'étais comme un musicien qui a trouvé un motif, et qui se le chante tout bas avant de le confier à l'instrument" (Loiseleur, *Méditations*: 75).[96] In French poetry, a genre that Chateaubriand had pointedly left out in his articles in *Le Conservateur* on the current state of French literature,[97] Lamartine was the first to illustrate this new and paradoxically revivifying imagination, and the first to respond to

[95] In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge describes Wordworth's poems as the demonstrable fruits of the imagination, while he concentrates instead on the vital force that produces these fruits. Coleridge takes Wordsworth to task for having chosen to ignore the actual workings of this dynamic. Just as in Chateaubriand's *Essai*, the question of consciousness arises here. Coleridge is not concerned with how the eye sees, or how the poet represents his visual recollections, but with the poet's awareness of the dynamic process behind the work of art: "My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their *poetic* fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness" (Chap. 4). The invisible is here so essential that the visible is unnecessary.

[96] In 1849, Lamartine published his *Œuvres complètes*, which for this first time included his commentaries for each 'Méditation'. Loiseleur includes these in her edition.

[97] The two short articles appeared in volumes 5 and 6 of *Le Conservateur* (Paris: Le Normant fils, 1818-1820), meaning they appeared precisely at the same time that the *Méditations* were being published. The following genres are under discussion: "littérature sacrée", "Histoire", "Romans", and "Voyages". Poetry is notably absent. Chateaubriand implicitly explains the absence of poetry by pointing to France's degeneracy: "Les peuples commencent par la poésie, et finissent par les romans" (vol. 6: 29).

the question "Où en sommes-nous, et où allons-nous?" through the medium of an elegy.[98] The fact that Lamartine wrote a book of poems in 1820 was an assertion in and of itself.

3. The Preromantics and the Legacy of a Demoralizing Imagination

Despite the new agency that can be discerned in "L'Isolement", nagging questions remain. Was Lamartine not simply translating into poetry the sentiments of the 'Sturm und Drang' movement, or of a Rousseau concerned with how the 'moi' should navigate its century and society? Aren't the *Méditations* merely the expression of the 'mal du siècle'? In "L'Isolement" alone, we can see Lamartine's considerable debt to Goethe[99] and Chateaubriand, particularly in regards to René and Werther's alienation from nature: "Ah, could I but overlook from there the wide landscape! The interlocked hills and familiar valleys! Ah, could I but lose myself in them! – I hurried here and there and came back, not having found what I hoped to find. Oh, it is the same with the distance as with the future!" (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*).[100] Echoing Chateaubriand's *Génie*, Lamartine also draws repeated attention to a symbolic horizon. His eyes never rest as they seek to find a line of demarcation that could orient the alienated speaker in the

[98] The question is the title of an article, signed M.F.A.B., that appeared in *Le Conservateur* in 1818. The same question is reformulated and even repeated by other critics in subsequent articles: "Où en sommes-nous?" is asked again by d'Herbouville, an article by Fiévée is entitled "Sur le malaise des esprits en Europe", and Bonald contributed with both "Sur les circonstances présentes" (they are not good!) and "Sur les inquiétudes publiques". Chateaubriand's opening letter to the journal describes this concern as the preoccupying one of his times: "C'est notre commun malheur aujourd'hui de savoir à peine ce que nous sommes" (vol. 1: 23).

[99] I insist on Goethe here because he was, due to *Werther*, the most recognized German writer in France at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The young Lamartine made note in a letter to Virieu of his reading of *Werther*, which he read alongside of Montaigne: "Je viens aussi de lire *Werther*…Je l'aime pas mal non plus. Il m'a redonné de l'âme, du goût pour le travail, le grec, etc. Il m'a aussi un peu attristé et assombri. Mais vive cette tristesse-là !" (9 Nov. 1809). It is interesting that Lamartine welcomes this "tristesse", to which Chateaubriand had been particularly hostile in the preface to *Atala*.

[100] First published in 1774, and a revised edition appeared in 1787. The translation used here is Elizabeth Mayer and Louise Bogan's (Dover, 1970). The major theme of "L'Isolement" is one that Goethe had already expressed: the absence of one person denies Werther everything ("I have so much in me, and the feeling for her absorbs it all; I have so much, and without her it all comes to nothing"), as it does in Lamartine: "Un seul être vous manque, et tout est dépeuplé!".

poem: “Du sud à l’aquilon, de l’aurore au couchant, / Je parcours tous les points de l’immense étendue” (“L’Isolement” 22-23). Much like René, the narrator in “L’Isolement” looks in vain for communion with nature, and by extension, the divine:

> Il me manquait quelque chose pour remplir l’abîme de mon existence: je descendais dans la vallée, je m’élevais sur la montagne, appelant de toute la force de mes désirs l’idéal objet d’une flamme future; je l’embrassais dans les vents; je croyais l’entendre dans les gémissements du fleuve: tout était ce fantôme imaginaire, et les astres dans les cieux, et le principe même de vie dans l’univers. (*René* 128-129)

Yet both Goethe and Chateaubriand would correct this excess of sentiment and yearning for something more; Werther and René are, in some sense, antiheroes. Informed more by classical conceits than romantic ones, the authors of *Werther* and the *Génie* expose the imbalanced state of modern art and sensibilities. The blame was primarily placed on an aberrant imagination. The spectacle of nature remains what it is (truth, disillusion), impervious to how Werther wishes to see it:

> I clearly remembered how often I stood there, following the river with my eyes, with strange presentiments in my heart; how colorfully my imagination painted the countries through which the river flowed, and how soon I discovered that my imagination had limits. (96-97)[101]

The truth of nature (a metaphor for the “truth” of Lotte being married) serves as a cruel lesson for a vagrant mind. Chateaubriand, as well, was very wary of an unbridled imagination, both because it led the subject astray from truth and morality, and because it detracted from the ‘beau idéal’ in the work of art. Hence his concern for an accurate

[101] Similarly, in “real life”, Goethe expresses the superfluity of the imagination; the landscape is what it is, and if it is accepted as such, it allows for a clearer understanding of history (facts, truth): “I have always looked at landscape with the eye of a geologist and a topographer, and suppressed my imagination and emotions in order to preserve my faculty for clear and unbiased observation. If one does this first, then history follows naturally and logically in all its astonishing wonder” (*Italian Journey* 125). As we will see below in his reflections on drawing, Goethe’s unmediated natural landscape would inform his own classically inspired aesthetic. Goethe has what Engell calls a “regulated” imagination: “He keeps something of a *via media* about the imagination, from which he surveys the borders and extremes of the surrounding countryside” (279-280). The translation of *Italian Journey* used here is W.H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer’s (London: Penguin, 1970).

description of the landscape in *Atala*, where there is no "colouring imagination", but just "vraies couleurs". In an early essay on landscape painting, Chateaubriand laments that landscape painters do not look enough at nature ("Lettre sur l'art du dessin dans les paysages").[102] The imagination, if left to its own devices, leads to certain folly. Chateaubriand even likens it to man's fallen condition: "Cela ne serait-il point une prévue du penchant que l'homme a pour détruire?" (276). Chateaubriand, like Goethe, looks at the landscape without the intervention of a mediating faculty: "Gardons-nous de croire que notre imagination est plus féconde et plus riche que la nature. Ce que nous appelons *grand* dans notre tête est presque toujours du désordre" (Ibid 275). This "true" nature, moreover, still adheres to a universal aesthetic principle. Chateaubriand sounds like Du Bos when he warns: "Peignons la nature, mais la belle nature: l'art ne doit pas s'occuper de l'imitation des monstres" (*Atala*).

In each of these cases, the imagination is limited by moral constraints. When Werther realizes that human intelligence is weak, he retreats into himself and contents himself with "vague perceptions" instead of revitalizing them: "When I see the limitations which imprison the active and speculative faculties of man […] I withdraw into my inner self and there discover a world – a world, it is true, rather of vague perceptions and dim desires than of a creative power and vital force" (11-12). The remedy to this "dimming" was classical art and its emphasis on the role of the artist's eye in the struggle to represent truth. While producing his own sketches, Goethe engages in this struggle in order to arrive at a clearer view of things:

> I can see clearly what is good and what is even better, but as soon as I try to get it down, it somehow slips through my fingers and I capture, not the

[102] The short essay, written in 1795, was published in vol. 22 of Chateaubriand's *Œuvres complètes* ("Mélanges et poésies"; Ladvocat, 1828).

> truth, but what I am in the habit of capturing. […] However, feeble as his efforts may be, the amateur should not despair. The few lines I draw on the paper, often too hasty and seldom exact, help me to a better comprehension of physical objects. The more closely and precisely one observes particulars, the sooner one arrives at a perception of the whole. (*Italian Journey*)[103]

While on a trip to Italy that was in part intended to rid himself of the stigma of *Werther* and its romantic sensibilities, Goethe also rejects an imagination that turns away from nature (truth).

Against this backdrop, it is clear that the *Méditations* reassess the role which the imagination can play in art. While for Goethe and Chateaubriand this role was quite limited, if not non-existent, in the case of Lamartine an unhampered imagination leads to the possibility of creative expression. Confronting the traditional suspicion concerning the creative capacity of art, Lamartine invents out of the "vague perception" that Werther could only bemoan, instead of correcting it with codes of conduct or tenets of classical art. The development of Lamartine's never-performed tragedy *Saül*, the bulk of which was drafted in 1818, is significant in this respect.[104] With a turn to the "homme intérieur" and the "yeux d'intelligence" (*Correspondance*, 26 Oct. 1818), art becomes the active pursuit of poeticizing the invisible and the uncertain. The "yeux d'intelligence" will pick up where the physical senses leave off: "[…] le reste est derrière le rideau. La mort le lève, et nous reconnaissons que nous étions des imprudents de blâmer ce que nous ne connaissions qu'à demi. Tu me diras : 'Mais nous ne voyons point tout cela avec nos

[103] Goethe traveled in Italy from 1786-1787, but he did not publish *Italian Journey* until twenty years later.
[104] Marie-Renée Morin, who has devoted a long career to the study of Lamartine, is one of the few critics to have pointed out the important influence of *Saül* on the first *Méditations*. The play, which was published posthumously (though extracts appeared in the *Méditations* and *Nouvelles méditations*) was a turning point in the development of his aesthetics. Morin's article, though brief, is important because it shows Lamartine actually working on his poems; in other words, it dispels the myth that Lamartine was an accidental artist. See "Un poète avisé, l'auteur des *Méditations*", in *L'Année 1820, Année des* Méditations.

yeux véritables et matériels ?' Non, mais nous pouvons l'entrevoir avec les yeux de l'intelligence […]" (Ibid). With a certainty regarding contemporary aesthetics, and one that does not rely on the familiar retreat to a vision-centered classical art, Lamartine writes emphatically to Virieu: "Au reste je me moque de l'art et des arts. Je pense que les beaux ouvrages sont en puissance dans l'âme, et que peu importe qu'ils en sortent ou n'en sortent pas" (13 Nov. 1818). Lamartine's struggle would be to give representational form to the non-visual. Identifying with the hero of the poem, who is not Saul but David, Lamartine extols the power of song in what had become a song-less epoch. It is with *Saül* that Lamartine viewed himself as picking up the lyre and becoming the earnest and resolved poet.

§II. Mme de Staël, Lamartine, and the New Landscape of Poetry

> On se pressait autour d'elle pour assister à cette explosion d'idées hautes et de sentiments magnanimes exprimés par l'éloquence inoffensive d'une femme. On en sortait passionné pour la tyrannie, pour la liberté, pour le génie, pour les perspectives sans limites de l'imagination.
>
> Lamartine, *Nouvelles confidences* (1851)

Despite his radical assertions ("peu importe qu'ils en sortent ou n'en sortent pas"), Lamartine's subject-centered lyric was not without precedent. Critical to situating the romantic shift from an objective to a subjective view of nature are the examples from the work of Rousseau, where the viewing subject not only perceives, but also filters scenes of nature through his inner faculties: "Tout est dans un flux continuel sur la terre. Rien n'y garde une forme constante et arrêtée, et nos affections qui s'attachent aux choses extérieures passent et changent nécessairement comme elles" (*Rêveries* 83). Rousseau's most important followers likewise emphasized this interaction between subject and object. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in his preface to *Paul et Virginie* (1788),

even established it as the means to his aesthetic ("L'éloquence naturelle […] naît de la vérité des choses dont elle est l'expression ; elle est toujours de mode, comme le corps de chaque objet" clv-clvi),[105] while in *Corinne* (1807), Mme de Staël describes poetry as "les rapports touchants entre les beautés de la nature et les impressions les plus intimes de l'âme" (55).[106]

But Lamartine raised the stakes: while the communication between the self and nature led to tension and disillusion more than it did to harmony in Rousseau (a disillusion upon which Chateaubriand would continue to insist in *Le Génie du christianisme*),[107] poetry provided a concrete means, that is, a communicative language, that could transcend external reality. While "L'Isolement" is most famous for its sentimental pining and for the metaphor of the dead leaf that symbolizes a passive, dying figure who hopes for eventual resurrection, what is most striking are its grave and emphatic pronouncements: "Je ne demande rien à l'immense univers" (36) and "Il n'est rien de commun entre la terre et moi" (48). However, while Rousseau and Chateaubriand always refer back to reality and the subject's alienation from it, Lamartine, confident in his new poetic language, sets out to redeem this void by contemplating and transcribing the infinite. While cloaked in the guise of a timid question ("Mais peut-être au-delà des bornes de sa sphère […] Ce que j'ai tant rêvé paraîtrait à mes yeux?"), the immediacy and insistence of the hypothetical makes up for the fading terrestrial landscape: "*Là*, je m'eniverais à la source où j'aspire; / *Là*, je retrouverais et l'espoir et l'amour" 41-42 – emphasis mine). The path to this world first requires a kind of blindness, a process of

[105] In the "Avis sur cette édition" (1789). Ed. Pierre Trahard (Paris: Garnier frères, [n.d.]).
[106] Ed. Simone Balayé. 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1985.
[107] This tension stems from the mediating faculty of the imagination: as in *Werther*, the world fails to harmonize with the subject's view of the world.

purification that frees the subject from the distraction and the weight of his physical surroundings: "Mes yeux verraient partout le vide et les déserts". The "peut-être" may be timid, but it is a postulating one.

1. Mme de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*: An Attainable Infinite

Lamartine's ideal of attaining the infinite suggests that he has been an attentive reader of Mme de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (1813).[108] His initial negative review would turn out to be an anomaly;[109] as Henning notes, Lamartine would always speak of Mme de Staël as a crucial figure in the development of his aesthetic, as well as his century's as a whole. As for the *Méditations*, they are a direct response to the challenge that Mme de Staël presents in her treatise, namely, that France find its way to an art that embraces the "new philosophy" of Germany, grounded in an infinite self whose mission it was to express: "De cette application du sentiment de l'infini aux beaux-arts, doit naître l'idéal, c'est-à-dire le beau, considéré, non pas comme la réunion et l'imitation de ce qu'il y a de mieux dans la nature, mais comme *l'image réalisée de ce que notre âme se représente*" (II: 136 – emphasis mine). The poet had to harmonize, and not problematize, exterior and interior; and the way to do this was to ground the starting point of experience in the self: "Nous sentons," Mme de Staël affirms, "que ce n'est qu'au-delà des expériences terrestres que notre véritable vie doit commencer" (II: 238). Getting to this interior

[108] "Cette nouvelle vague de lyrisme […] a incontestablement une grande partie de ses origines dans le livre de Mme de Staël" (Ian Henning, *Livre de l'Allemagne et la polémique romantique* : 294). Henning even makes the claim - and I agree with it - that out of all the romantics, Lamartine, in his first *Méditations*, was the most inspired by *De l'Allemagne* (297). And yet, there have been few sustained analyses of Mme de Staël's influence on Lamartine.

[109] If Lamartine was initially reserved and even scornful of Mme de Staël's exposition of German philosophy and aesthetic theory, a complete turnabout occurs in his later important essay "Destinées de la poésie" (1834). Here, Lamartine credits Mme de Staël with serving as a 'raison d'être' for the survival of poetry in a "barbaric" and vulgar nineteenth century. Her emphasis on liberty recuperated the vital forces that the tyrannies of history and habit had submerged. *De l'Allemagne* brought to the ear and to the heart "ce souffle lointain de morale, de poésie, de liberté" (op. cit. 503).

reflects the thesis of her study: "Nous [les Français] avons tellement épuisé tout ce qui est superficiel, que, même pour la grâce, et surtout pour la variété, il faudrait, ce me semble, essayer d'un peu plus de profondeur" (I: 47). The only place left to go for Mme de Staël's ideal of the perfectible poet was toward the unseen;[110] for this reason, she regards Winckelmann's vision of classical art as distinctly modern: "Winckelmann a développé les vrais principes admis maintenant dans les arts sur l'idéal, sur cette nature perfectionnée dont le type est dans notre imagination, et non au dehors de nous. L'application de ces principes à la littérature est singulièrement féconde " (I: 187).

The sacrifice of the external, however, did not lead to "bizarrerie" or pure fantasy, but to an ordered intellectual process re-centered on the self's infinite striving towards an ideal.[111] Due to a mediating imagination, art – particularly verbal art, Mme de Staël suggests here – could attain and represent the infinite.

> C'est au sentiment de l'infini que la plupart des écrivains allemands rapportent toutes les idées religieuses. L'on demande s'il est possible de concevoir l'infini ; cependant, ne le conçoit-on pas, au moins d'une manière négative, lorsque, dans les mathématiques, on ne peut supposer aucun terme à la durée ni à l'étendue ? Cet infini consiste dans l'absence des bornes ; mais le sentiment de l'infini, tel que l'imagination et le cœur l'éprouvent, est positif et créateur. (II: 238)

[110] "The only true autonomous whole, in fact, is the 'great coherence of the whole of nature', which transcends the measurement of our perception" (A.W. Schlegel, quoted in Behler: 85). This "great coherence" is a priori, and from the beginning of *De l'Allemagne*, Mme de Staël insists on the activity of the intellect. "J'ai donc cru qu'il pouvait y avoir quelques avantages à faire connaître le pays de l'Europe où l'étude et la méditation ont été portées si loin, qu'on peut le considérer comme la patrie de la pensée" (I: 47). See Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (op. cit.).

[111] Despite his attention to dream and fantasy in the *Rêveries*, Rousseau's imagination remains centered on the empirical since it depends above all on the retrieval of visual impressions. Books on botany make up for what he is no longer able to experience himself within nature, providing visual cues that reorient him: "[…] je n'ai qu'à ouvrir mon herbier et bientôt il m'y transporte. Les fragments des plantes que j'y ai cueillies suffisent pour me rappeler tout ce magnifique spectacle. Cet herbier est pour moi un journal d'herborisations, qui me les fait recommencer avec un nouveau charme et produit l'effet d'une optique qui les peindrait derechef à mes yeux" (Seventh Promenade, 122-123). This chain of association is reminiscent of Condillac's theory of the imagination.

The modern poet, who filters nature through an autonomous imagination distinct from the senses, transposes material into the ethereal; hence Mme de Staël's emphasis on the ocean and stars, which are meant to symbolize the new poet's vast domain. While pagan poets had concerned themselves exclusively with the representation of the earthly: "Les bosquets, les fleurs et les ruisseaux, suffisaient aux poëtes du paganisme", Christian and modern poets turned to "la solitude des forêts, l'Océan sans bornes, le ciel étoilé" that "peuvent à peine exprimer l'éternel et l'infini dont l'âme des chrétiens est remplie" (I: 207).

Mme de Staël, informed by German aesthetic theory and writings on poetry, took Rousseau's and Chateaubriand's concern for the relationship between nature and the self and added a case for poetry. Poetry was not a dying art belonging to a remote past, but a genre that, on the contrary, provided the ultimate ideal of unity. A vital source of inspiration, poetry was not bound to rules or natural phenomena, but to a creative inner faculty that kept moving and expanding: "[…] il faut, pour concevoir la vraie grandeur de la poésie lyrique, errer par la rêverie dans les régions éthérées, oublier le bruit de la terre en écoutant l'harmonie céleste, et considérer l'univers entier comme un symbole des émotions de l'âme" (Ibid). There was no place for Rousseau, Werther, or René's alienation in Mme de Staël's scheme of things, because art could produce a unity between subject and object, between the imagination and nature; the poet had the privilege of serving as an interpreter of both the terrestrial and the divine.

> La poésie lyrique ne raconte rien, ne s'astreint en rien à la succession du temps, ni aux limites des lieux ; elle plane sur les pays et sur les siècles ; elle donne de la durée à ce moment sublime, pendant lequel l'homme s'élève au-dessus des peines et des plaisirs de la vie. Il se sent au milieu des merveilles du monde comme *un être à la fois créateur et créé*, qui doit mourir et qui ne peut cesser d'être, et dont le cœur tremblant, et fort en

même temps, s'enorgueillit en lui-même et se prosterne devant Dieu. (Ibid – emphasis mine)

Modern poetry, Mme de Staël reminds us through her interpretation of Kant in particular, was, like the mind, now stripped of any sense of contingency.

Both *De l'Allemagne* and the *Méditations* try to set the stage for what comes next, and thus each work also suggests something new. *De l'Allemagne* is Mme de Staël's attempt to synthesize both the models of French 'bon goût' and German aesthetic philosophy and aesthetics, and the *Méditations* likewise uphold a productive tension between past and present. *De l'Allemagne* forms a theoretical, inchoate landscape paving the way for a poet who might work within this mysterious and disorienting terrain.[112] Mme de Staël's tantalizing evocations, in turn, lead Lamartine to the articulation of his own poetic project. It is a striking paradox that his most coherent views on poetry came out of doubt and vagueness. He will work in part with the "déja dit", as founding a new poetry dependent on the poetry of the past; but now it is up to the poet to consider what *could be* in creating a landscape, rather than depicting one based on experience or 'vraisemblance'. Lamartine, surely sensing Mme de Staël's urgency and optimism regarding the potential of lyric poetry in France, will accept her invitation by creating a series of erased landscapes that showcase a new expressive voice. Lamartine charts what will be the ultimate landscape of the *Méditations*: the possible. "Le réel est étroit, le possible est immense" ("L'Homme" 95-96).

2. "Le Golfe de Baya, près de Naples": Lamartine at the Threshold of the Possible

[112] Mme de Staël's study is a thinly veiled critique of Napoleon I's oppressive Empire and its stifling neo-classical aesthetic of propaganda, and cast Germany as a wellspring of intellectual, religious, and political liberty that stemmed from the peoples' free imagination. Napoleon was swift to condemn the book and order its destruction before it went to press in 1810. It was not published until 1813 in London, then 1814 in France.

Lamartine sketched out this landscape of the possible in "Le Golfe de Baya, près de Naples".[113] Despite having the name of a specific landscape as its title, the poet expunges his natural surroundings with hints of the lyric voice. If Baia is a place, it is a poetic one: "Colline de Baya, poétique séjour!" (73). The poet's search for a song, not the workings of the senses or memory, motivates the poem. The more we "read" this landscape, the more it loses its form. Baia is but a fading echo, and as such it symbolizes the current state of poetry. The invisible lyric refrains of Italy's past poets may supplant the material monuments of its history -

> Mais n'interrogeons pas vos cendres généreuses,
> Vieux romains ! fiers Catons ! mânes des deux Brutus !
> Allons redemander à ces murs abattus
> Des souvenirs plus doux, des ombres plus heureuses. (54-57)

- yet even these seemingly eternal echoes are on the verge of extinction. Horace, Properce, Tibullus and Tasso are simply dead, and if the poem describes anything, it is the very real threat of silence and loss:

> Pas une voix qui me réponde,
> Que le bruit plaintif de cette onde,
> Ou l'écho réveillé des débris d'alentour ! (77-79)

But if the surrounding valley represents a lack ("Tu ne retentis plus de gloire ni d'amour" 76), the poet's imagination serves as a source of plenitude. In a letter to Virieu from this period, Lamartine explained: "L'imagination, d'un pinceau complaisant / crée, embellit pour nous des mondes invisibles" (3 Aug. 1814). Lamartine's concept of the imagination – though slightly "tainted" by the reference to a paint brush, the eighteenth-century metaphor of choice for the poet's undertaking – is Mme de Staël's, and as such,

[113] A manuscript of "Le Golfe de Baya, près de Naples" does not exist, but the evidence suggests that at least certain parts of the poem were originally written around 1814 or even 1813, in other words, at the same time that Mme de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* appeared in France.

"Le Golfe de Baya" focuses on sacrificing the landscape to the infinite.[114] As the gulf opens its arms out to the sea, Lamartine transforms the landscape into a meditation on the capacity of poetry to counteract the passing of time. As the approaching night erases the landscape and ushers in a moment of truth, the poet makes it clear that this landscape is not a mere picture:

> Mais déjà l'ombre plus épaisse
> Tombe et brunit les vastes mers;
> Le bord s'efface, le bruit cesse,
> Le silence occupe les airs. (36-39)

As the theoretical landscape that Mme de Staël sketches out in *De l'Allemagne* sets the stage for a song of the imagination, the poet of the *Méditations* is caught in an expectant moment of silence that considers both what poetry currently is (descriptive and didactic), and what it could be. In the gulf, a site of threshold between land and sea, the poet wonders whether a place for lyric poetry exists: "Quels chants sur ces flots retentissent? / Quels chants éclatent sur ces bords?" (26-27). He remains caught between the past and the unrealized potential of the present. The poem still relies heavily on classical rhetoric (the sun is "plongé dans le sein de Thétis", and the moon is "la pâle reine des nuits"), but the modern sensibilities of anxiety, doubt and melancholy destabilize this foundation. The varying stanza patterns, which reflect the push and pull movement of the sea (increasing from the octosyllable to the alexandrine, then decreasing back to the octosyllable), reflect this hesitation formally; if the epic and the ghosts of

[114] The poem resonates strongly with the pivotal scene in Mme de Staël's *Corinne*, where the poetess improvises in the Neapolitan countryside. Both Lamartine's poem and Mme de Staël's passage "trace", or "retrace", the history of this place and the important figures that have left their mark on it, and both situate the landscape as the site of a lost idyllic origin. While Mme de Staël's landscape is transcended by Corinne's presentiment - based on the movement of history from good to evil, from creation to destruction - of an impending catastrophe ("Quand notre esprit s'élève aux plus hautes pensées, nous sentons, comme au sommet des édifices élevés, un vertige qui confond tous les objets à nos regards; mais alors même la douleur, la terrible douleur, ne se perd point dans les nuages, elle les sillonne, elle les entr'ouvre" 354) – Lamartine's is transcended by the threat of stillness and silence.

Roman poets are resuscitated here, they ultimately disappear ("plus de trace" 82). The source of the poet's anxiety, which is not only reviving the trace left by ancient poets but also finding a way to leave one of his own, the theme of "Trace" is in fact sustained throughout the poem by an insistence on the soft "c" and "s" sounds (often a double "s"). Just as the insistent waters gradually erode the idyllic land (the classical), the "s" cuts through and affirms the emergence of a new voice. The romantic-inspired poet, like the waves, is insistent: "Au *s*ein de l'onde frémi*s*sante / Je tra*c*e un rapide *s*illon" (14-15 – emphasis mine).

The first five stanzas and their attention to the description of twilight evoke the tension between two aesthetics. Lamartine encapsulates the pleasant "fraîcheur" of this evening within an insidious melancholy ("C'est l'heure où la Mélancolie / S'assied pensive et recueillie" 40-41). The seemingly classical landscape has a turbulent romantic undercurrent. The result is a subdued but charged landscape that hovers between stillness and movement. The poet navigates a "flot paisible" (1) but the atmosphere is heavy and balmy ("vapeurs embaumées" fill the air), and a "volage zéphyr" (3) stresses further the barely perceptible movements at work in the landscape. The air laden with the scent of sleepy flowers, Lamartine blurs the visible landscape with the transient notes of perfume:

> Le sein des fleurs demi-fermées
> S'ouvre, et de vapeurs embaumées
> En ce moment remplit les airs;
> Et du soir la brise légère
> Des plus doux parfums de la terre
> À son tour embaume les mers. (20-25)

Baia is a "voluptuous" valley (74) that requires more than inert description, as it is the site of an infinite horizon that beckons to a latent voice to reach for it.

There is a force, then, that tarnishes the neo-classical veneer of "Le Golfe de Baya". There are subtle hints even in the opening stanzas that something more is at stake here than the canvas of a poet-painter.[115] Lamartine uses a number of understated strategies that present powerful intimations of alienation and loss. Where to go next?[116] The "explorers" that Lamartine features in the poem head out to the bay with caution ("timidement", "d'une main craintive"), which seems out of place in such calm and inviting surroundings. This strange juxtaposition comes to a head in the fifth stanza, where the register suddenly shifts. With a strategy that foreshadows the one in "L'Isolement", a "mais" disturbs the calm scene, as a dense cloud threatens what now appears to be a fragile landscape. The image of melancholy sitting "pensive" on a kind of precipice suggests an impassive threat. The void and silence, the thick of the shadows, everything in this fifth stanza seems too heavy and imposing. There is an excess of sentiment that runs counter to idyllic calm and pleasure. The erasure of the landscape ("Mais déjà l'ombre plus épaisse / Tombe et brunit les vastes mers;" 36-37) leaves room for questions, which the likes of Delille or even Millevoye had answered with their faith in the enterprise of their art. In "Le Golfe de Baya" any optimism regarding the redemptive and immortalizing role of poetry has waned, leaving the poet disoriented and

[115] In *Lamartine and the Poetics of Landscape* (1982), Mary Ellen Birkett describes eighteenth-century French poetry as "the tyrannization of the verbal aspect of words by their picture-like value". Lamartine, she argues, works against this tyrannization by "escaping unifying principles" (the picture) and promoting the "dynamic quality of affective landscape" (memory, dream). Of "L'Isolement", which she calls a 'literary manifesto,' Birkett concludes: "these landscapes are not meant to be seen". However, I disagree with Birkett's argument that Lamartine looked at landscapes in a "compositional way", that is, as a means for structuring language. My concern is for the communicability of the Lamartinian voice, not for its form. Birkett, in her image-phobic analysis, seems (rather ironically) to transfer the pictorial method – the rule-governed arrangement of forms - to that of poetry; the only difference is the medium (language instead of a palette): "Lamartine's description is a function of codified poetic language".

[116] I reiterate the questions asked in *Le Conservateur*: "Où en sommes-nous? Et où allons-nous?"

doubtful. In the end, "tout s'efface", and the reader has no idea what this landscape actually looks like.[117]

In "Le Golfe de Baya", poetry, like the ghosts of Italy's great poets that haunt this bay, is silent. Yet, if we take into account the particular form of this landscape, where water laps onto land, the idea of a threshold, or of a horizon within reach, comes to mind. The poet has reached a moment of transition. Will the boat drift out to sea and explore the unfamiliar, or will it return to the stable shore? The end of the poem makes it clear that it has drifted off to sea, floating aimlessly away as the familiar ground of the comforting scene disappears; the echoing effect accentuated in this last stanza adds to the sense of disorientation:

> Ainsi tout change, ainsi tout passe;
> Ainsi nous-mêmes nous passons,
> Hélas ! sans laisser plus de trace
> Que cette barque où nous glissons
> Sur cette mer où tout s'efface. (80-84)

At the same time, the gulf is the site of forces that both push and pull. As much as the water moves the boat farther along, its undercurrent takes it back. Despite his doubts, Lamartine resists the annihilation of the lyric voice; despite the consuming waves and the vast, open sea, the poet leaves a trace, however small. The end of the poem recuperates the continuing movement of the wake ("*s*ans lai*s*ser plus de *trace* / Que cette barque où nous gli*s*sons" – emphasis mine) that the poet initiated with his oar at the start of the poem ("Au *s*ein de l'onde frémi*s*sante / Je *trace* un rapide *s*illon" 14-15 – emphasis

[117] Delille had asked the same sort of question regarding the poetic process in the beginning of his "Imagination, poëme", written between 1785 and 1794 but not published until 1806: "Sur mes yeux se répand un nuage confus; / Et comment peindre encore ce que je ne vois plus?" ("Epître à Mme Delille"). But Delille's treatment of the imagination reiterates eighteenth-century empirical conceits. Images in poetry are tightly bound to the physical, and imagination depends on perception, the recollection of what has been seen: "Ce sont ces images qui donnent, aux idées abstraites de la morale et de la métaphysique, un corps, une figure et un vêtement" (320).

mine). Lamartine's originality will be to serve as a creative agent (here symbolized by the action of the oar) within the landscape, and to find a way to enhance this agency through the medium of the water's surface. The creative imagination posits a discernable landscape beyond the finite that the poet's song must reach, and "Le Golfe de Baya" is the privileged place in the *Méditations* in which the poet first has this horizon in sight.[118] Chênedollé, who would publish his *Etudes poétiques* in the same year (1820) and with the same publisher, acknowledged that Lamartine had created a new landscape for poetry: "Un essai tenté, il y a quelques mois, par M. de Lamartine, et qui a eu beaucoup de succès, m'a fait croire que tout n'est pas désespéré, et que la fibre poétique peut encore frémir dans les imaginations françaises" (Avant-Propos).

Part II.

The Brush with the Horizon: From "Le Vallon" to "Dieu" in the *Méditations poétiques*

> Ainsi se dessine une astronomie du ciel romantique, qui reproduit, sous des espèces éternelles et dans des figures nocturnes d'un singulier éclat, les imparfaites configurations des pays terrestres.
>
> A. Béguin, "Le Ciel romantique", *L'âme romantique et le rêve*

> Vénus se lève à l'horizon ;
> À mes pieds l'étoile amoureuse
> De sa lueur mystérieuse
> Blanchit les tapis de gazon.
>
> Lamartine, "Le Soir", *Méditations poétiques*

[118] Michel Collot sees the figure of the horizon as the site of modern poetry, where, at a threshold, classical emphasis on rhetoric and language is carried away by a music that resonates beyond the material. The hushed voice of the poet represents a charged silence that holds promise: "Ce silence […] n'est-il pas précisément aussi l'horizon de la poésie moderne, qui, loin de cultivar l'éloquence ou de chercher à saturer l'énoncé en 'déclinant' tout le 'stock lexical' de la langue, sait le faire résonner au-delà des mots pronounces?" (*Poésie et paysage* 37). Collot is referring here to Senancour's *Obermann* (1804), where, much in the manner of Lamartine's poet, the narrator cannot find the language to express the effects of the surrounding Alpine landscape. However, in a significant difference, Lamartine's landscapes are never sublime and are often classical or familiar; the sense of a loss of language is thus more disconcerting.

Despite his reticence, Lamartine proposed a way out of his poetic limbo. I will here trace a tendency in the first *Méditations* to erase a landscape of experience in order to unveil a divinely colored landscape. From "Le Vallon", and via "La Prière" (an expressive *and* self-conscious language), we arrive at "Dieu":

> Si de nombreuses méditations peuvent être dites descriptives, en ce qu'elles esquissent une toile de fond, un décor, elles sont sujettes pour la plupart à une "désertification" progressive, comme si l'annulation de l'image, en même temps qu'elle se dessine, devait donner libre champ au sentiment de l'infini. (Loiseleur: *Méditations* 15).

Even more radically, Lamartine sacrifices sensuous experience in "Le Vallon" in order not only to conceptualize, but to *experience* the infinite. The imagination, enacting a "'désertification' progressive", is the mediating faculty allowing this paradoxically replenishing leap. Lamartine's book reveals how the lyre's music can mediate between the seen and unseen. Poetry harmonizes what prose could only present as hopelessly disjunctive: "Le public entendit une âme sans la voir, et vit un homme au lieu d'un livre. Depuis J.-J. Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre et Chateaubriand, *c'était le poète qu'il attendait*" (emphasis mine).[119] Though Lamartine dematerializes his object, this gesture does not lead to pure fantasy but to a consciously *meditated* language that establishes a harmonious dialogue with the infinite. This effacement of limits or constraints is what will yield a fully communicative art. Similarly, Mme de Staël had called for poetry's dynamic creativity as opposed to the imitation of what were already pale copies:

> Des combinaisons étrangères peuvent exciter des idées nouvelles; et quand on voit de quelle stérilité notre littérature est menacée, il me paraît difficile de ne pas désirer que nos écrivains reculent un peu les bornes de la carrière; ne feraient-ils pas bien de devenir à leur tour conquérants dans l'empire de l'imagination? Il n'en doit guère coûter à des Français pour suivre un semblable conseil. (I: 259)

[119] From Lamartine's 1849 preface to the *Méditations*, which Loiseleur includes in her edition.

Questioning the assumed limits between art and the representation of the infinite, Lamartine will in turn fill a valley that he empties of its picture with a potent song. And if most readers can barely "hear" this new language, this was no doubt deliberate. The nineteenth-century French poet, in Lamartine's view, modeled more on Chateaubriand than on Byron, was necessarily hesitant, and his engagement ambivalent. But the thrust is there, and I will attempt to make out its trace.

I will first consider how Lamartine, underneath his resigned poetic persona, created a poetic method that gave an underlying sense of potential and cohesiveness to his seemingly formless *Méditations*. Next, I will turn to "Le Lac", the book's signature poem, to show how it best exemplifies the tension between the concrete and the abstract and how Lamartine ultimately resolves this tension by liberating poetry from the image. The lake becomes an instrument rather than a body of water. The natural landscape dissolves into music.

To "see" this imagination at work, I will examine three poems – "Le Vallon", "La Prière", and "Dieu" – and follow the poet from the physical to the infinite. My objective is not to impose a narrative on a book that purposefully flaunts itself as disinterested, but to provide an overall reading of the *Méditations* that reveals its operating aesthetic. The *Méditations*, however quietly, boast of the poet's ability to make contact with God through what had become a debased medium. The concern, in fact, is less for the poet's revealing God's "landscape" than for his revelation of lyric poetry in a prosaic and demoralized century. Lamartine articulates a new imagination capable of representing the infinite and symbolized by a reflecting (not merely reflective) lake that allows for his song to resonate.[120]

[120] Again, Lamartine would always be criticized for what his readers believed to be a lack of earnestness and rigor. After 1820, it would not be long before readers (including Hugo and his coterie) would take Lamartine less and less seriously. A review in *Le Globe* concludes: "Aussi, à prendre les choses sévèrement, les *Méditations* ne sont-elles que l'hymne du découragement, du scepticisme et de l'inaction"

1. The Engaged Lyre: The Poet Behind the Persona

> Telle est l'impression que laisse la poésie lamartinienne, d'être elle-même peu de chose par rapport à une possible poétique, une nébuleuse imprécise qui attend, pour éclairer les hommes, d'être changée en étoiles.
>
> M. Blanchot, "Situation de Lamartine", *Faux-Pas*

The *Méditations* can be "viewed" as a constellation. Though they are made up of scattered parts and fragments, and of questions more than answers, they still possess a faint but general sense of cohesiveness. They place the reader in the position of the poet caught between land and sea. How do we make out this constellation? How do we read the *Méditations*?

The apparent facility of Lamartine's verse masks an underlying sense of potential. His famous inattention to form is actually, to use Maurice Blanchot's words, a "pureté" that reflects the will and "méthode" of the poet: "La facilité est sa principale rigueur" (*Faux-Pas*, "Situation de Lamartine" 176). Readers from Lamartine's time to ours often overlook the creative dynamic formed by this paradox. Examples of Lamartine's correspondence, passages in his own commentary on his poems, as well as the editor's preface of the first edition of the *Méditations*, are normally taken at face value; consequently, tradition has left us with the persistent image of a listless poet who negligently pours his loss and alienation into dated neo-classical forms and cheap sentimentality.[121] The Lamartinian elegy is thus typically remembered for the spectacle

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(signed "C.R."; 8 Mar. 1825). Notably, the reviewer does not regard Lamartine's imagination as a faculty, but as a quality, an inherently vague source of inspiration that was weak and "female": "sa rêveuse imagination s'adressait aux imaginations rêveuses: aussi son succès a-t-il été plus grand dans le monde que dans les académies, chez les femmes que parmi les hommes, dans le nord qu'en France". This chapter attempts to challenge this dismissive reading of Lamartine, which still persists today.

[121] Stendhal expressed a more or less generally accepted criticism of the *Méditations*, although not without an exaggerated sarcasm: "dès qu'il sort de l'expression de l'amour, il est puéril; il n'a pas une haute pensée de philosophie ou d'observation de l'homme; c'est toujours et uniquement un cœur tendre au désespoir de

of a poet dying a slow death; and, true to this persona, the 'Avertissement de l'éditeur' defines the *Méditations* as stemming from a vague inspiration:

> Le nom de *Méditations* qu'il [l'auteur] a donné à ces différents morceaux en indique parfaitement la nature et le caractère; ce sont en effet les épanchements tendres et mélancoliques des sentiments et des pensées d'une âme qui s'abandonne à ses vagues inspirations. (493)[122]

But beneath this persona of a hapless victim there is an underlying intention: Lamartine cultivated a creative force out of the uncertain. His insistence on the necessary hybridity of classical form and modern sensibility reveals a conscious manipulation of the 'lieu commun'. The transparency of the "déjà dit" (the familiar) allowed Lamartine to better communicate his unique message: his personal melody.[123] He "plays with a kaleidoscope of poetic expressions, creating beautiful, ever-changing patterns from pieces which are already supplied" (Birkett, *Lamartine and Landscape*). Lamartine does not merely lift from past sources, but imposes an aesthetic on them contingent on the subject:

> Il n'utilise pas seulement jusqu'à l'extrême les dispositions naturelles d'une culture et d'un langage, il impose aussi le sentiment d'une présence poétique dont aucun vers, à lui seul, ne peut être le miroir fidèle mais qui s'accumule dans un flux et reflux de vers imparfaits, dans une forêt liquide qu'on peut apercevoir dans son ampleur à condition de ne regarder aucun arbre. (*Faux-Pas* 177)

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la mort de sa maîtresse" (Lanson: *Méditations* xci). In a similar vein, and in what was to become a recurring refrain in critics' revisiting of the *Méditations*, René Doumic observes: "tous les thèmes lamartiniens étaient déjà des lieux communs de la littérature sentimentale" ("La Poésie classique dans les *Méditations*" 449).

[122] In a much more sensitive reading of Lamartine, Charles Bruneau notes that Lamartine's "negligence" was intentional. However, Bruneau still emphasizes the passive aspect of the *Méditations*, that is, their abandon to the force of inspiration: "Ce n'est donc pas par négligence ou paresse que Lamartine s'est peu corrigé, - et il s'est plus corrigé qu'on ne l'a cru jadis : c'est par respect pour son inspiration première, et par crainte de gâter son premier jet" (op. cit. 154).

[123] Through the use of clichés, Lamartine was speaking a universal language: "Car c'est une loi incontournable de l'harmonie d'évoluer avec le goût d'une époque […]" (Loiseleur, *L'Harmonie selon Lamartine*: 25).

Blanchot's analogy of the "forêt liquide" helps us to see that Lamartine's method is actually constructive in its tendency to destroy and confuse. His representation of landscape reflects this purposefully ambivalent aesthetic, in which dissipation and death generate movement. In the opening of "L'Isolement", the "saints concerts" of the church bell supplant the "tableaux mouvants" of the natural landscape. In turn, the poet's own agency supplants the "saints concerts" as it seeks to identify with the visible spectacle: "Je parcours tous les points de l'immense étendue" (23). No single image does the job; instead, words accumulate that signify withering or disappearance, a progressive negation of the landscape's substance: "ombre errante", "plus", "en vain", "nulle part", "vains", "manque", "dépeuplé", "qu'importe", "rien", "le vide", "les déserts", and a stream of negative constructions appear in striking succession within just twenty lines (17-36). Despite this destructive vein, vagueness offers the possibility of transcendence: "Que ne puis-je, porté sur le char de l'Aurore, / Vague objet de mes vœux, m'élancer jusqu'à toi!" (45-46). The withered leaf (the metaphor for the poet) falls only in order to be picked up and brought closer to this "vague objet". The whole poem, in turn, collapses into the self and triggers the projection of the poet's voice: "Et moi, je suis semblable à la feuille flétrie: / *Emportez-moi comme elle, orageux aquilons!*" (51-52 – emphasis mine).

The purity of the poet's voice in the *Méditations* – "L'Isolement" ends in the form of a prayer – challenges the status of art as artifice. Even right after the publication of the book, certain critics were quick to notice that the meaning of the word "poëte" had changed. In an incisive article that appeared in the *Journal des débats* (1 Apr. 1820) shortly after the publication of the *Méditations*, Charles-Dorimond de Féletz praised the book by insisting on the difference between a poet and a maker of verses: "L'auteur des

Méditations poétiques est un poëte; ce qui est extrêmement rare parmi ceux qui font des vers".[124] The difference, according to Féletz, derives from the role of the imagination, here designated by the adjectives "vive", "ardente" and "forte". The poems have a double character of strength and dissipation that work in tandem: "Le poëte, en variant ses tons, en élevant ou en abaissant sa voix, en parcourant diverses cordes de sa lyre, a tantôt saisi les imaginations fortes, tantôt ému les fibres les plus délicates des cœurs tendres […]". Here, Féletz taps into the familiar eighteenth-century emphasis on the visual in poetry; and though Lamartine's poems are "si pleines d'images", Féletz makes the crucial distinction that the *Méditations* consist of "de belles images *et* une belle poésie" (2 – emphasis mine).[125] The concern here is not so much for the mechanics of poetry, or for the proper representation of nature's movement, as for the movement of notes that come out of the lyre: "en variant ses tons, en élevant ou en abaissant sa voix, en parcourant diverses cordes de sa lyre". Even after the poem has been read, its sounds continue to reverberate. Lamartine's lyric actively creates a harmony that reverberates beyond the representation of a lake. It evokes a sonorous "forêt liquide", rather than just the static image of a tree:

> De ce hêtre au feuillage sombre
> *J'entends* frissonner les rameaux :
> On dirait autour des tombeaux
> Qu'*on entend* voltiger une ombre. ("Le Soir" 9-12 – emphasis mine)

2. "Le Lac": The Representation of Non-Representation

[124] Signed with an "A.".
[125] Féletz and Loyson (cited above) thus echo one another, each critic emphasizing Lamartine's status as a lyric poet.

"L'Isolement", the opening poem, announces the 'what'. Yet, there has been little focus on the *how* of the *Méditations*.[126] "Le Lac" is automatically dubbed "romantic" or musical because it is the lyric expression of sentiment; it is simply a love poem.[127] "Le Lac", however, is more of an artistic performance than an expression: it demonstrates how Lamartine's new aesthetic operates. A critical "place" within Lamartine's oeuvre, the lake has a specific form. Unlike the gulf, at once closed and open, the lake is a small, circumscribed figure suggesting a coherent space. This enclosed figure corresponds to a determinate aesthetic, but one that depends paradoxically on the very erasure of its limits.[128] As was the case in "L'Isolement", the poem's irony lies in its juxtaposition of an apparently tranquil scene (like the lake, the stanzas are fixed into a pattern) with the hardly contained expression of the poet's voice. Fragile like the calm waters of an immobile lake, this voice is threatened by weak rhyme, vowels that run into each other, and later by punctuation that interrupts the flow of the poem. The poetic imagination, inherited from Mme de Staël, goes

[126] Jean-Marie Gleize's analysis of Lamartine in *Poésie et figuration* (Seuil, 1983) is an exception and serves as an important resource for my interpretation of "Le Lac". Gleize reads the poem for what it is doing, as opposed to what it is: "Ce n'est pas la représentation, mais l'effort, ou la tension, ou le relâchement nécessaries à ce que le réel ou l'image devienne chant-musique, poésie-mots" (22). Notably, Gleize resists Anne Hiller's analysis of Lamartine, which focuses on the role of the poet's perception and how it forms the "poème-image". See "Lamartine, poésie et perception", *Romantisme* 15 (1977). I agree with Gleize that Lamartine saw himself as starting from scratch ("Il part du constat que la poésie est morte" 20); as such, the image – *the* trait of the descriptive poetry of very recent memory – would interfere with his enterprise. While Gleize concentrates mostly on "Le Lac" and its place within the history of French poetry, I am looking at the poem for its specific role within the *Méditations*.

[127] Like "L'Isolement", "Le Lac" laments the absence of Julie Charles, with whom Lamartine had a brief but life-changing liaison. But "Le Lac" is, at least in my reading, even more fraught with tension because Julie had not yet died at this point. Though they had promised to meet at Lake Bourget (where they had met, and where each had come for a physical cure), Julie was bed-ridden and unable to make the trip. Lamartine, waiting at the lake, wrote the poem "on the spot". True to his aesthetic, "Le Lac" performs this confusion between absence and presence.

[128] In a different approach, Eric Gans considers "Le Lac" as the "structured model" of the origin of language. The poem represents the drama of two languages colluding: "Writing in what was still very much the idiom of late eighteenth-century elegy, Lamartine transforms the lake and its surroundings into the locus of a dialectical opposition between neo-classical and romantic hypotheses of origin, as revealed in differing conceptions of time, poetry and language. The secret of 'Le Lac' is its dramatization of this opposition in the contrast between the pathetic voice of the dying Elvire and the strong new voice of the romantic poet" (33). "The Poem as Hypothesis of Origin: Lamartine's 'Le Lac'", in *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry: Introductions to Close Reading*; ed. Christopher Prendergast (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990): 29-47.

beyond the representation of the world to embrace the invisible refrains of a song.[129] Lake Bourget, for this reason, is *the* Lake;[130] the new imagination of the poet, in the formless medium of music, makes the physical abstract.

But the representation of landscape is curiously very much still at stake in "Le Lac". As much as Lamartine works against the physical presence of the lake, the material landscape is still there. In fact, Lamartine insists on it. In the last four stanzas of the poem, he deploys an abundance of substantive nouns: "lac" (twice), "rochers", "grottes", "forêt", "orages", "coteaux", "sapins", "rocs", "eaux", "zéphyr", "bruits", "bords", "astre", "vent", "roseau", "parfums", "air". But now, the landscape requires a new kind of representation, one that, as the poet strives for the non-representable, severs itself from tradition. "Le Lac" invites the voice to evacuate the image, but in order to attain this goal, Lamartine must first represent a landscape that is *in the process* of disappearing. "Le Lac" is a poem that purges: it shows a mediating poetic agency that works hard to generate something out of the landscape. The 'emergence' of the lyric voice is by no means a given here.[131]

Of all the first *Méditations*, it is clear that "Le Lac" constitutes the site of the most intense of struggles.[132] Lamartine sets out to destroy and create simultaneously in the

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[129] Essential to any study of the *Méditations* is Jean-Pierre Richard's essay on Lamartine in *Etudes sur le romantisme* (Seuil, 1970). Richard, as I do, describes the poet's imagination as effacing the surrounding landscape: "l'objet lamartinien se trouvera, au bout de cet effort imaginaire, peu à peu évidé, aérisé, devenu semblable à de l'espace" (145). Richard also privileges "Le Lac", suggesting that it serves as a site of conciliation: the intimate (the valley) and the infinite (space), or a "marriage" of earth and sky. "Le Lac", in other words, orients the poet. I suggest here that the poem is but a passing, if critical, instance in Lamartine's oeuvre. It does not represent, in other words, an 'ars poetica'. Lamartine will never go back to this place of tension: he would either transcend it, or shy away from it.

[130] The title in the manuscript is "L'Ode au lac de Bourget". In the final version, then, Lamartine emptied the site of its specificity.

[131] Gleize: "N'allant pas de soi, la poésie va d'abord, essentiellement, surgir comme question" (20).

[132] In her article "Lamartine – précipité de poésie" (*Etudes sur le temps lyrique*, 2005), Loiseleur notes the tension between stasis and movement in "Le Lac". A point of departure for her study of Lamartine's consciousness of the passage of time, and how to represent it, describe it, and fix it in poetry, "Le Lac" is

"confines" of just sixty-four lines. The echo, uninhibited by physical boundaries (and which, as such, symbolizes the creative imagination), does not immediately project off of the lake.[133] It first requires the temporal flow of the poet's verse as he turns this landscape into a 'tabula rasa': "L'épanchement verbal lamartinien parcourt le monde sans brutalité ni hâte " (Jean-Pierre Richard, "Vallon et horizon" 63). Lamartine's insistence on nouns, alluded to above, supports this claim. The formless but insistent and dynamic voice must first penetrate the lake and hollow it out: "Avec Lamartine, après lui, la poésie devient caisse de résonance, susceptible d'élévation, capable de creuser la dimension de l'intériorité" (Loiseleur, *Méditations*: 10).[134] Lamartine insists on this slow penetration with the relentless repetition of "dans". It becomes evident that this poet is focused and engaged, no longer the earnest but "flighty" one in "L'Isolement" ("Emportez-moi comme la feuille flétrie"). His deliberateness counteracts the quick passing of time: "Je dis à cette nuit: Soit plus lente" (31). The voice in "Le Lac" is a strong and flowing one that attains sufficient agency to perturb the lake's border. Lamartine maintains a tension throughout "Le Lac" between moving and still water, reinforcing the impression that these limits somehow have to give way:

> Tu mugissais ainsi sous ces roches profondes;
> Ainsi tu brisais sur leurs flancs déchirés;
> Ainsi le vent jetait l'écume de tes ondes

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that place where the poet's voice is first emitted: "la voix lyrique s'affirme" (40). Insisting on this productive tension, Loiseleur continues: "D'un côté 'suspendre' et 'fixer', de l'autre 'couler'. Voilà la manifestation du divin, qui s'atteint dans la pure rencontre avec le réel. […] L'éternité devient perceptible […] (43). "Le Lac" is a fixed matrix where possibility first opens up.

[133] As Gleize points out, the particular physical properties of the lake heighten the echo. The water does not only reflect images, but serves as a resonant chamber: "En tant que surface-miroir, comme aussi étendue bornée-bordée, sa vérité est celle de la réfraction. Le lac, une sorte de miroir magique, retient les images. Chambre d'échos, écrivions-nous" (45).

[134] Remarking on Lamartine's evacuation of the image, Richard notes : "Sur aucun objet elle ne s'arrête précisément. Tous elle les recouvre de sa progression régulière, elle les reconnaît en étendant sur eux comme un mince glacis verbal, mais sans jamais chercher à les faire être dans leur individualité ni leur particularité, voire même dans leur pittoresque" (144).

Sur ses pieds adorés. (9-12)

It becomes clear early on that a sensual energy underlies this apparently chaste love, an energy that belies what Lamartine is doing here as a poet. The lake whose surface his voice penetrates serves as a receptacle that echoes his words. The resulting sound is not a cacophonous or faded echo; rather, the echo is pure in its self-reflexivity and only increases in volume and clarity: “Dans les bruits de tes bords par tes bords répétés” (58). The lake is the site of a perfect union between self and language, and between self and object (the lake), and between self and other (Julie).

I cite the last four stanzas in their entirety here, because the flow that de-forms the lake is visual as well as audible. In their repetition and their form (the lulling, hypnotic meter), the lines demonstrate how the apparently calm surface of the lake moves insistently toward the release of those crucial last three words:

Ô lac! rochers muets! grottes! forêt obscure !
Vous, que le temps épargne ou qu’il peut rajeunir,
Gardez de cette nuit, gardez, belle nature,
Au moins le souvenir !

Qu’il soit dans ton repos, qu’il soit dans tes orages,
Beau lac, et dans l’aspect de tes riants coteaux,
Et dans ces noirs sapins, et dans ces rocs sauvages,
Qui pendent sur tes eaux.

Qu’il soit dans le zéphyr qui frémit et qui passe,
Dans les bruits de tes bords par tes bords répétés,
Dans l’astre au front d’argent qui blanchit ta surface
De ses molles clartés.

Que le vent qui gémit, le roseau qui soupire,
Que les parfums légers de ton air embaumé,
Que tout ce qu’on entend, l’on voit ou l’on respire,
Tout dise : ils ont aimé ! (49-64)

Reflected here by an abundance of exclamation points and the overall form of a crescendo, Lamartine's imagination – like the lake's surface – is the mediating agent that bridges the vertiginous gap between the seen and the unseen. Both translate the mysterious: both depth *and* height, earth *and* sky, the material *and* the immaterial. The more the poet penetrates, the more his sound reverberates upward. The lake is thus a mobile site that subsumes the external into the infinite ("Eternité, néant, passé, sombres abîmes, / Que faites-vous des jours que vous engloutissez?" 45-46). Like the Eternity that engulfs time, the lake is a vortex that pulls the landscape in, processing it and leaving behind a wavering imprint (the reflection on the water, or what Blanchot calls the "forêt liquide"). Everything ("tout ce qu'on entend, l'on voit ou l'on respire") leads to the abstract hymn of this place, and yields an intelligible voice speaking on behalf of an *as yet* unintelligible "Eternité". The poet surmounts the silence that had remained unresolved in "Le Golfe de Baya", and proceeds to answer his own crucial question: "Parlez: nous rendrez-vous ces extases sublimes / Que vous nous ravissez?". In the face of the disorientation inflicted by the infinite, Lamartine adopts, for the first time, a resolute stance. In "Le Lac", he firmly posits a site of origin, a place from where all his subsequent songs can emerge: "L'installation de la poésie en son lieu" (Gleize 46).

3. From "Le Vallon" to "Dieu": The Thrust of the Imagination in the *Méditations*

> Doux reflet d'un globe de flamme,
> Charmant rayon, que me veux-tu?
> Lamartine, " Le Soir ", *Méditations poétiques*

The *Méditations* do not trace a clear narrative.[135] Lamartine was not especially concerned with how his elegies were ordered, and he customarily cut and pasted his poems

[135] "La narration échoue dans le projet lyrique" (Loiseleur: "Lamartine – précipité" 47). Loiseleur rightly observes that the act of sounding is what is most at stake in Lamartine's poetry. I would add that, at least in

from an array of notebooks. His insistence on the tension of the threshold frustrates any sense of direction. However, as this chapter has suggested, the *Méditations* at least tell the story of a new imagination, which, however timid or hesitant, aims to create freely away from any original impression or image. "Le Lac" in particular establishes a confident sense of resolve. The three poems I now turn to, all written in 1819 (after "Le Lac"), come out of this critical site.

This section seeks to demonstrate how the poet, by effacing specific sites in nature (one of personal significance) and injecting his own mediating voice, achieves the "representation" of a purely ideal "landscape" of the infinite. Turning the tradition of descriptive poetry on its head, and going beyond the "visionary" poetry of Wordsworth and the English romantics, Lamartine purports to describe the invisible. This account helps us to see how Lamartine approaches the threshold of an out-of-reach horizon. His deployment of the creative imagination, and not the mere expression of sentiment, is what motivates the *Méditations*. Lamartine's aimless meandering through "Le Vallon" of clichés coalesces into the fresh and emphatic act of "La Prière" which enables the creative imagination to represent the divine in "Dieu".

a. "Le Vallon"

In its opening stanzas, "Le Vallon" sets up a familiar scenario. The solitary figure (already a romantic cliché), alienated from his peers and even from nature, folds in on himself and waits for death to do its work. The valley that the narrator describes in the second stanza engulfs the poet, wrapping him into the safe haven of childhood memories: "Prêtez-moi seulement, vallons de mon enfance, / Un asile d'un jour pour attendre la

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the *Méditations*, this voice goes somewhere. After Lamartine has put pressure on the limits of the lake, particularly through the suggestion of the echo, he is free to move out of its confines. This freedom or sense of directionality invites a reading.

mort" (3-4). As in Rousseau's *Rêveries*, the flux and reflux of the valley's streams represent the interior meanderings of the "moi". Despite this fleeting contact between the movement of nature and the self, the poet relies on form and description (the use of the alexandrine, the use of the adverbs "voici", "là"), rather than expression. The narrator, invoking a "chant monotone," suggests that this landscape bounded by the horizon will have to suffice:

> Ah! c'est là qu'entouré d'un rempart de verdure,
> D'un horizon borné qui suffit à mes yeux,
> J'aime à fixer mes pas, et, seul dans la nature,
> À n'entendre que l'onde, à ne voir que les cieux. (21-24)

Yet, this valley is a mere stopping point, not a definitive resting place. The trope of the "voyageur" who stops to rest before entering the gates of a city suggests that the poet is going somewhere beyond the familiar horizon.

> Repose-toi, mon âme, dans ce dernier asile,
> Ainsi qu'un voyageur, qui, *le cœur plein d'espoir*,
> S'assied avant d'entrer aux portes de la ville,
> Et respire un moment l'air embaumé du soir. (37-40 – emphasis mine)

As in "Le Golfe de Baya", the air here is balmy and expectant ('embaumé', in fact, is a recurring word throughout the *Méditations*). We are once again at a threshold, but as in "Le Lac", Lamartine here puts pressure on bounded space, opening up the landscape into a meditation on love (the absolute, the infinite). Everything in the valley must disappear for this "grande image" of love to become visible:

> D'ici je vois la vie, à travers un nuage,
> S'évanouir pour moi dans l'ombre du passé,
> L'amour seul est resté : comme une grande image
> Survit seule au réveil dans un songe effacé. (33-36)

The resolve evident in his small gestures (sitting in front of the city gates, dusting off his feet, taking in a deep breath) point to the poet's intention to move ahead. The fading

imprint of his dream has led him to reassess the valley's function. No longer just a source of solace before death, the negated landscape also memorializes a site of love (the corporal), and expresses this love as eternal (the spiritual). The significance of the valley does not lie in the memories it contains, but in the memories it releases. Like "Le Lac", "Le Vallon" purges. Accordingly, the poet's sound is not the unintelligible echo of a lamentation, but the *potential* of a yet silent hymn located outside the valley's hills. The "oreille incertaine" (32) of the first half of the poem becomes the ear that hears ethereal but well-orchestrated concerts: "Adore ici l'écho qu'adorait Pythagore, / Prête avec lui l'oreille aux célestes concerts" (55-56). These concerts absorb and transform both the valley and the physical union between Lamartine and his beloved Elvire. The narrator, after having taken in his breath at the threshold, endows this landscape with agency. The "n'ira plus" of the first stanza becomes an energy that, like the one in "Le Lac", never comes to a stop: "Suis le jour dans le ciel, suis l'ombre sur la terre, / Dans les plaines de l'air vole avec l'aquilon," (57-58). Communication with the divine, in the poet's new "vision", has become distinctly possible:

> Dieu, pour le concevoir, a fait l'intelligence;
> Sous la nature enfin découvre son auteur !
> Une voix à l'esprit parle dans son silence,
> Qui n'a pas entendu cette voix dans son cœur ? (61-64)

Through the subtle but active gesture of listening, the poet renders the valley more expressive than confining. The valley is thus a source and point of departure: it presents an enclosed space in which the process of sorting out its echoes, and of learning to listen beyond the senses, enables the poet's voice to transcend its limits.[136]

[136] Richard also sees a way out of this otherwise seemingly closed-off valley. The juxtaposition of valley and horizon, like the juxtaposition between the lake and the reverberation of its echoes, allows for the interpenetration of the circumscribed and the infinite: "C'est une intimité qui demeure imperméable à la

b. "La Prière"

"La Prière" embodies this defined but also liberated voice; a "true" meditation, it appears as a long sequence of uninterrupted thought.[137] The beginning of the poem evokes the threshold moment when the sun sets and the moon rises. This detailed image of the sky at sunset produces a traditional 'tableau'. However, Lamartine creates this image only to destroy it. The shifting moment of the "crépuscule", with its vivid and constantly changing colors, visually points to imminent change. Something has to give way: "Voilà le sacrifice immense, universel!" (15). The fleeting image of the sunset quickly shades into a grander philosophical musing on the sacred figure of the temple. Its architecture is constructed on the page, and the sky surrounding it evaporates into holy elements. Stars become sacred flames:

> Ces feux demi-voilés, pâle ornement de l'ombre,
> Dans la voûte d'azur avec ordre semés,
> Sont les sacres flambeaux pour ce temple allumés : (18-20)

The clouds that appeared in the opening of the poem morph into wafts of incense:

> Et ces nuages purs qu'un jour mourant colore,
> Et qu'un souffle léger, du couchant à l'aurore,
> Dans les plaines de l'air repliant mollement,
> Roule en flocons de pourpre aux bords du firmament,
> Sont des flots de l'encens qui monte et s'évapore (21-25)

Despite the flow of movement from the material to the intercessory, however, the "weight" of the temple asserts itself along with the threat of the impassive "ciel d'airain". This place of prayer, despite its role as a gateway to God, its sacred flames, its "souffle léger", and the curling incense, does not yield complete expression: "Mais ce temple est sans voix. Où sont les saints concerts?" (27). The temple, a metaphor for the poet, is a

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pression extérieure et qui, dans son plus grand abandon à l'agitation cosmique, peut encore se replier sur elle-même" ("Vallon et horizon" 75).

[137] Other examples are "L'Immortalité", "La Foi", and "Dieu".

vessel who waits for *sound* to reverberate within it. But cutting through the tension of the moment, the *silent* voice of the poet at least affirms itself: "Tout se tait; mon coeur seul parle dans ce silence / La voix de l'univers, c'est mon intelligence" (29-30). In a stream of constant movement begun in the opening stanza, the purple clouds that became incense now become sounds. The sacrifice of the material has led to the stirrings of the poet's interior voice: "La voix de l'univers, c'est mon intelligence. (30) […] Elle s'élève à Dieu comme un parfum vivant" (32). An image could never express this "perfume", or voice. We have come far here from the "chant monotone" and the enclosed space of "Le Vallon". The temple in "La Prière", an intermediary space between man and God, symbolizes the silent but dynamic voice of the poet. The voice is now so powerful that, despite being inaudible, it can traverse infinite space and reach into the divine sphere. As the poet listened in "Le Vallon", God listens in "La Prière":

> Seul, invoquant ici son regard paternel,
> Je remplis le désert du nom de l'Eternel ;
> Et celui qui, du sein de sa gloire infinie,
> Des sphères qu'il ordonne écoute l'harmonie,
> Ecoute aussi la voix de mon humble raison,
> Qui contemple sa gloire et murmure son nom. (35-40)

If the horizon has not yet been crossed, here the poet has come as close as possible to its line of demarcation. Despite this proximity, there remains a clear distinction between the poet and the divine presence beyond the horizon. What the poet projects is a mere reflection of the sun, not the creative energy of its rays: "Ainsi l'astre du jour éclate dans les cieux, / Se réfléchit dans l'onde et se peint à mes yeux" (55-56). He has come to understand the universe as a veil, and by internalizing the landscape can identify what it conceals ("ce monde qui te cache est transparent pour moi"); but he remains on earth, while his sound moves beyond. The representation at stake here is not

the sunset, but the "voile" that separates the physical from the abstract. From the initial perception of the sunset at the outset, to the contemplation of the temple in the middle, to the final affirmation of a distinction between the poet and the divine, the poet hangs in the balance: "J'attends l'immortalité". We are far from the anguished prayer of "L'Isolement" here, but have not yet attained a full, audible and resolute sounding of the voice.

The poet would no doubt willingly relinquish his reason ("Ma raison voit le jour à travers ces ténèbres") in order for this sounding to happen, and for the walls of the temple to resound with the chorus of universal harmony. The "absorbe ma pensée!" at the end of the poem signals the ultimate sacrifice that definitively turns the poet away not only from the landscape, but also the intercessory architecture. Lamartine insists on the verb 'entr'ouvre':

> Ce monde qui te cache est transparent pour moi;
> C'est toi que je découvre au fond de la nature,
> […]
> Pour m'approcher de toi, j'ai fui dans ces déserts ;
> Là, quand l'aube, agitant son voile dans les airs,
> Entr'ouvre l'horizon qu'un jour naissant colore,
> Et sème sur les monts les perles de l'aurore,
> Pour moi c'est ton regard qui, du divin séjour,
> S'entr'ouvre sur le monde et lui répand le jour :
> Quand l'astre à son midi, suspendant sa carrière,
> M'inonde de chaleur, de vie et de lumière,
> Dans ses puissants rayons, qui raniment mes sens,
> Seigneur, c'est ta vertu, ton souffle que je sens ;
> Et quand la nuit, guidant son cortège d'étoiles,
> Sur le monde endormi jette ses sombres voiles,
> Seul, au sein du désert et de l'obscurité,
> Méditant la nuit la douce majesté,
> Enveloppé de calme, et d'ombre, et de silence,
> Mon âme, de plus près, adore ta présence ;
> D'un jour intérieur je me sens éclairer,
> Et j'entends une voix qui me dit d'espérer. (64-84)

While “L’Isolement” had spoken hypothetically, “La Prière”, insisting on the poet’s ever increasing proximity to God (“de plus près”), speaks calmly in the present tense. This is no longer the anguished hope of “L’Isolement”, but an assured one: “Et j’entends une voix qui me dit d’espérer”. But the tension between night and day, between self and God, between voice and its audible enunciation, has still not been fully resolved.

c. “Dieu”

“Dieu” exhibits a full and uninhibited communication that “La Prière” had still left in suspense. It gives the most optimistic affirmation of the poet’s creative will and energy. An emphatic “Oui” marks the opening of the poem (“Oui, mon âme se plait à secouer ses chaînes”), and the speaker feels himself moving without restraint: “Je plane en liberté dans les champs du possible” (6). Now out of the valley, the poet happily resigns himself to the destabilizing but liberating force of the unknown: “Laissant errer mes sens dans ce monde des corps, / Au monde des esprits je monte sans efforts” (3-4). This “place”, unlike the lake, has no clear limits: “Il me faut un séjour qui n’ait pas d’horizon” (8). The poet’s presentation of his idea of the infinite erases any boundary between the created and Creation. In a crucial response to the entreaty from the end of “La Prière” (“absorbe ma pensée”), the “Océan” (the infinite) here grants his wish: “L’infini dans son sein absorbe ma pensée” (10). This final absorption, not only of the world, but also of the poet’s intellect (reason), at last liberates his lyric voice. Purged of the contingency of the external (“un verbe vivant dans le coeur entendu”), his language has become fully expressive. The third stanza of “Dieu” is a meditation within a meditation, where the poet reflects on the coexistence of two languages: the earthly, limited one (articulated sounds) and an innate, interior one. While the poet refers here, as in “ La Prière ”, to the inherent silence of humanity’s innate language, and of his

inability to communicate his inner experience ("Mais sitôt que je veux peindre ce que je sens, / Toute parole expire en efforts impuissants. / Mon âme croit parler, ma langue embarrassée / Frappe l'air de vingt sons, ombre de ma pensée" 15-18), he nonetheless claims access here to an eternal language, "universel, immense": "Aux pures régions où j'aime à m'envoler, / L'enthousiasme aussi vient me la révéler" (35-36). " Dieu " is the story of an ultimate revelation of a fully communicative language; as such, the poet can evoke the infinite. As in Dante's "Paradise", Lamartine takes us on a tour of these "pure regions"; but all that can be "seen" is a point of light, a star symbolizing God's presence. This distant point encompasses more than any landscape: "tout est en lui". The "real" truth remains after all material reality has been effaced:

> Viens donc! il est mon guide, et je veux t'en servir.
> À ses ailes de feu, viens, laisse-toi ravir.
> Déjà l'ombre du monde à nos regards s'efface,
> Nous échappons au temps, nous franchissons l'espace,
> Et dans l'ordre éternel de la réalité,
> Nous voilà face à face avec la vérité. (39-44)

Lamartine uses the adverb 'voilà' to convince his reader that this revelation is actually happening: "Voilà, voilà le Dieu que tout esprit adore" (73). Now in the present tense, with a demonstrative 'voilà' that replaces the vague 'Là', we are far removed from the hypothetical questions voiced in "L'Isolement". At the juncture of the seen and the unseen, everything reduces to this single entity, one which, like the sun, is invisible in its very intensity: "Nos pères n'ont point vu briller son premier tour, / Et les jours éternels n'ont point de premier jour" (143-144). This destination is at the same time an origin, and the course of man's history lies distinctly outside of it: "Il a perdu ton nom, ta trace et ta mémoire" (130). In this non-landscape, where enthusiasm outdoes reason, where the imagination is all-powerful ('croire', 'exister', 'imaginer', and 'parler' are one and the same), poetry is absolute: "A la limite,

l'intellectualité s'évapore à peu près complètement: […] A ce point, Lamartine nous amène au seuil de la poésie pure" (Lanson: "Le romantisme de Lamartine" 192-193).

At this threshold, Lamartine moves beyond even Mme de Staël's prescriptions in *De l'Allemagne*. While she had insisted on an enthusiasm tempered by calm and reason, Lamartine clearly exceeds such harmony in "Dieu". In the next-to-last stanza, at the brink of divine revelation, the poem becomes increasingly dramatic. Question marks have disappeared from the language, replaced by a liberal use of exclamation points:

> Réveille-nous, grand Dieu! parle et change le monde ;
> Fais entendre au néant ta parole féconde.
> Il est temps ! lève-toi ! sors de ce long repos ;
> Tire un autre univers de cet autre chaos.
> A nos yeux assoupis il faut d'autres spectacles !
> A nos esprits flottants il faut d'autres miracles !
> Change l'ordre des cieux qui ne nous parle plus !
> Lance un nouveau soleil à nos yeux éperdus !
> Détruis ce vieux palais, indigne de ta gloire ;
> Viens ! montre-moi toi-même et force-nous de croire !

The slippage between subject and object is clear ("montre-moi toi-même"): God's revelation, like Lamartine's lyric, requires a prior destruction in order to become manifest. For both, creation emerges out of chaos. Even freedom, the predominant theme of the poem, is problematized: can one be forced to believe? At this moment of reckoning, the poet must finally accept to negotiate an imminent change. While he had hovered and hesitated before, the revelation happening in "Dieu" leaves him little choice.

And so the poet steps over the threshold: "Cet astre universel, sans déclin, sans aurore, / C'est Dieu, c'est ce grand tout, qui soi-même s'adore !" (45-46). Yet crossing over exacts an enormous cost. The final stanza begins with a disturbing "Mais" that undermines all that had been gained before. What is worse, the word "peut-être", so pathetically enunciated in "L'Isolement", returns. The ultimate sacrifice of reason, the marker of man's humanity, leads

to a permanent darkness. Destruction no longer leads to the promise of creation, but is now final:

> Mais peut-être, avant l'heure où dans les cieux déserts
> Le soleil cessera d'éclairer l'univers,
> De ce soleil moral la lumière éclipsée
> Cessera par degrés d'éclairer la pensée ;
> Et le jour qui verra ce grand flambeau détruit
> Plongera l'univers dans l'éternelle nuit.
> Alors tu briseras ton inutile ouvrage : (163-169)

In the end, the poet does not have the last word. The last stanza of "La Poésie sacrée," the final poem of the book, imposes silence on the lyre so that God's word can be heard: "Fermez-vous, lèvres inspirées; / Reposez-vous, harpes sacrées" (249-250). The poet who had guided us to God's space falls passively silent. He speaks as if the revelation of that pure language had never even happened, as if his imagination had, *à la limite*, failed him. Lamartine would remain, and still remains, the poet of "Le Lac".[138]

Part III.

The *Nouvelles méditations poétiques*: The Poet's Retreat

> C'était l'heure où jadis !... Mais aujourd'hui mon âme,
> Comme un feu dont le vent n'excite plus la flamme,
> Retombe sur soi-même, et languit et s'endort !
> Lamartine, "Les Préludes", *Nouvelles méditations poétiques*

1. Back to Earth

[138] Lamartine actually prophesized this failure; in "L'Homme" (notably, the second poem of the *Méditations*, right after the suggestion of a penetrable horizon in "L'Isolement"), Lamartine warns Byron that he will be punished for his ambition: "Malheur à qui du fond de l'exil de la vie / Entendit ces concerts d'un monde qu'il envie!" (91-92). In an article on " L'Homme ", Claude Mauron suggests that the fallen angel represents Lamartine's aesthetic as a whole, as it represents a method that has limits: "L'extrapolation demeure donc possible, quoique disposant d'un crédit que l'on sent limité, et qui ne suffira pas, tant s'en faut, à garantir la rédemption de l'ange". See "La Méditation sur *L'Homme* : un discours sur la méthode lamartinienne ?" in *L'Année 1820, Année des* Méditations (op. cit.).

If the creative imagination provides a direction to the seemingly tentative *Méditations poétiques* of 1820, the title of Lamartine's *Nouvelles méditations poétiques* (1823) is misleading in its suggestion of novelty: "L'ample respiration lyrique s'étouffe et la vie se retire du texte" (Loiseleur, *L'Harmonie selon Lamartine*: 227). Lamartine falls back into the demoralized pose of the viewer in "Le Vallon", where he cannot establish mediation between nature and the divine. The figure from "Le Golfe de Baya", who would boast later in "Dieu" that "Au monde des esprits je monte sans efforts" (4), reappears in "Les Etoiles", where the distance between the real and the divine cannot be crossed. As the title indicates, the stars are in the plural; the sky no longer holds the single star that represents God's unity:

> Alors ces globes d'or, ces îles de lumière
> Que cherche par instinct la rêveuse paupière
> Jaillissent par milliers de l'ombre qui s'enfuit,
> Comme une poudre d'or sur les pas de la nuit ; (9-12)

As in "L'Isolement", the eye cannot find a place to rest: "L'œil ébloui les cherche et les perd à la fois" (15). Questions pour forth as the "je", disoriented by the repetitive rocking of his boat, searches for unity and fixity; everything remains scattered and formless, like the stardust in the opening stanza. In the *Nouvelles méditations*, Lamartine asks the same questions asked nearly a decade earlier by journals such as *Le Conservateur*: "Où donc allons-nous tous?" (64). While Lamartine had expressed a similarly overwhelming disorientation at the end of "Le Golfe de Baya", the vague figure of the "gulf" had been animated in subsequent poems by his faith in the creative imagination. In 1823, Lamartine, without fully denying the possibility of connecting the terrestrial and the celestial, resists the challenge to do so. The poet is resigned to defeat in advance:

"Lamartine suggère l'échec d'Icare, qui serait d'avoir réussi à voler mais à une hauteur raisonnable, *sans risquer la chute*" (Loiseleur: *L'Harmonie selon Lamartine* 63).

La Mort de Socrate, published only a week prior to the *Nouvelles méditations*, illustrates Lamartine's preoccupation with the fallen state of a prophet. In the "Avertissement", he describes the beautiful as a flash of another world, and suggests that not even poetry, even if inspired by philosophy, can communicate it.

> […] la sublime philosophie, la poésie digne d'elle, ne sont que des révélations rapides qui viennent interrompre trop rarement la triste monotonie des siècles : ce qui est beau dans tous les genres n'est pas l'état naturel, n'est pas de tous les jours ici bas, c'est un éclair de cet autre monde où l'ame s'élève quelquefois, mais où elle ne séjourne pas.

Heavily marked by the thought of Victor Cousin, Lamartine reconciles poetry with philosophy and thus restricts the power he had previously accorded to the uninhibited imagination.[139] Shunning the exhaustion stemming from his pursuit of the infinite, Lamartine defuses the creative energies flowing from his music. No longer a composer with a prophetic voice, he becomes a poet-philosopher who underscores the role of reason. And this less ambitious undertaking does not even succeed. Lamartine presents his project as a futile one at the outset: "Ces réflexions nous semblent propres à excuser du moins l'auteur de *fragment*, d'avoir tenté de fondre ensemble la poésie, et la métaphysique de ces belles doctrines du sage des sages" (Ibid). In "Philosophie", a poem from this period, he begins in the familiar setting that appears in "L'Isolement" or "Le Golfe de Baya": "Je suis d'un œil rêveur les barques sur les eaux, / J'écoute les soupirs

[139] For Cousin, the infinite has the dangerous potential to unleash the imagination rather than harness it, an unbridled liberty that leads to an unrefined Rubens rather than to the delicateness of a Raphael. In *Du Vrai, du Beau, du Bien*, Cousin's concern is to work against the vague qualities of art produced by the sublime in order to reach a tempered enthusiasm. The problem with the infinite is its tendency to stimulate melancholy; pleasure is traded for an unsettling and never satisfied desire to reach what remains indefinable and invisible.

du vent dans les roseaux" (31-32); but there is no move beyond this sphere, and his searching eye is met with disillusion: "Dans ces vastes hauteurs où mon oeil s'est porté / Je n'ai rien découvert que doute et vanité!" (79-80).[140] The result is a reveling in pleasure that provides an escape from the imagination's struggle with nature : "Je laisse mon esprit, libre d'inquiétude, / D'un *facile bonheur* faisant sa seule étude" (105-106 – emphasis mine). It is clear in "Philosophie" that the poet is exhausted from his effort to reach the infinite through song:

> Et, las d'errer sans fin dans des champs sans limite,
> Au seul jour où je vis, au seul bord que j'habite,
> J'ai borné désormais ma pensée et mes soins : (81-83)[141]

The fall into this Eden of sufficiency instigated a turn towards the familiar imagery of empirical vision.[142] The rejection of the far-off horizon appears in Lamartine's treatment of landscape, where he trades open and nebulous vistas for closed and clear ones that suffice in their pseudo-idyllic plenitude. In reclaiming physical vision, and dissipating the clouds that beckon beyond, the poet quells his own voice. He initiates thoughts and sounds, but does not prolong or sustain them; his effort is short-lived. The poet's program is a negative one, and the editor of the *Nouvelles méditations* consequently describes them more as what they are not than what they are:

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[140] The poem "Philosophie" did appear in the *Méditations poétiques*, but not until the ninth edition, which was published, like *La Mort de Socrate* and the *Nouvelles méditations*, in 1823.

[141] Cousin expressed the same sense of exhaustion: "Le sens et l'imagination s'efforcent en vain d'atteindre ses dernières limites. […] A la vue du ciel étoilé, de la vaste mer, de montagnes gigantesques, l'admiration est mêlée de tristesse" (147).

[142]
> Pourvu que dans les bras d'une épouse chérie
> Je goûte obscurément les doux fruits de ma vie ;
> Que le rustique enclos, par mes pères planté,
> Me donne un toit l'hiver, et de l'ombre l'été ;
> Et que d'heureux enfants ma table couronnée
> D'un convive de plus se peuple chaque année,
> Ami ! je n'irai plus ravir si loin de moi
> Dans les secrets de Dieu ces comment, ces pourquoi,
> Ni du risible effort de mon faible génie,
> Aider péniblement la sagesse infinie ! ("Philosophie" 84-94)

> […] nous devons prévenir les lecteurs que les incorrections, ou même les vers et les strophes qui manquent dans quelques-uns des morceaux qui le composent, ne doivent point nous être imputés. Quelques-unes des pièces que l'on va lire appartiennent à de plus grandes compositions encore inédites; celles-là ne sont pour ainsi dire que des fragments; (296)

The symbolic horizon that Lamartine brushed in the *Méditations* here fades from sight; hence the return of questions raised by "L'Isolement", as the opening poem of the first edition of the *Nouvelles méditations* asks: "O mon âme, de quels rivages / Viendra ce souffle inattendu?" ("L'Esprit de Dieu" 11-12).[143] In "Le Poète mourant" we hear the plaintive question, complete with an ellipsis: "Faut-il gémir? faut-il chanter?..." (6). The decision is clear: he will end his song with the sacrifice of the lyre. The poem is, on one level, a recuperation of the dying figure who appears in "Le Chrétien mourant" of the *Méditations*; but the impact on Lamartine's aesthetic of the slippage from the Christian to the poet is a damning one. The poet, in a self-critical gesture, reactivates the distance between himself and the divine:

> Je suivrais dans l'azur l'instinct qui vous entraîne;
> Vous guideriez mon œil dans ce brillant désert,
> Labyrinthe de feux où le regard se perd: ("Les Etoiles" 146-148)

Left to navigate this disorienting labyrinth, the poet turns to the familiar and the here and now. Relinquishing the metaphysical, he "fills up" his landscapes. While "Le Lac" had provided a calm, still surface onto which he could project his constellation of poems, the ocean in "Les Etoiles" confuses the sounds emitted by the voice. The waves blur the stars:

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[143] The order of the poems in the first edition of the *Nouvelles méditations* is respected here, as it is in the Pléiade edition. Starting with the second edition (also of 1823), Lamartine completely changed the original order. Guyard argues that this change had to do with the publisher's catering to a general criticism regarding the fragmented nature of the book, but that the first edition, nonetheless, reflects better Lamartine's intitial conception: "[…] la disposition de l'originale correspond à un dessein réfléchi: cette édition s'ouvre sur *l'Esprit de Dieu* où Lamartine médite sur l'inspiration poétique; elle s'achève sur ses *Adieux à la poésie*. Cette belle et satisfaisante architecture s'effond si on substitue, comme fait Lamartine à partir de II, *le Passé* à *l'Esprit de Dieu*" (Pléiade 1821).

Tandis qu'aux bords du ciel de légères étoiles
Voguent dans cet azur comme de blanches voiles
Qui, revenant au port d'un rivage lointain,
Brillent sur l'Océan aux rayons du matin. (25-28)

The antidote to this disorientation would be concrete experience. The *Nouvelles méditations*, in this respect, are not a continuation of what had been attempted in the *Méditations*, but an apologetic 'correctio'.[144]

2. "Ischia"

The initial response to the *Nouvelles méditations* was hardly enthusiastic. The difference between Lamartine's two volumes of "Méditations" was not lost on the critic Durand, who took note of the "new" meditations' turn away from religious preoccupations. The critic trades the words by now universally associated with Lamartine's poetry – "rêveuse" and "méditatifs" – for "coquetterie" and "frivole". Durand takes note of the shift from a religious imagination to one preoccupied with pretty pictures: "Lorsqu'on parle des hauteurs où s'est élancé M. de Lamartine, on ne doit point sacrifier l'unité d'une pensée profonde et sainte à la coquetterie du talent, à ce frivole

[144] This is where my argument departs significantly from Loiseleur's in *L'Harmonie selon Lamartine*. Her concept of 'harmony' is so broad (it is the 'lieu commun', the place of communication between poet and reader) that she is able to fit any and every Lamartine poem into her thesis. In her reading, no poem is allowed to be an anomaly or an exception, that is, a work in and of itself: as the site of communication, harmony – and thus the poem - must obey time, because the 'lieu commun' is subject to history, and as such, is always changing. For example, Loiseleur gives an historical explanation for what was generally perceived as the "échec" of the *Nouvelles méditations poétiques*: the elegy's fall from favor. Lamartine's *Méditations* failed, she argues, because, in order to obey the 'lieu commun', Lamartine had to turn to a different and more "in vogue" medium of poetry (the epic). "Ce reniement au contraire entre selon nous dans une 'stratégie' de l'harmonie qui permettait d'en dépasser l'aspect élégiaque trop restreint pour augmenter sa portée" (228). The word "strategy" implies system, of which, due to his insistence on the flux of inspiration and sentiment, Lamartine would no doubt have been wary; but in the present study, I approach each work – the first editions of the *Méditations* and the *Nouvelles méditations* – in and of themselves in order to focus on Lamartine's postulation of an aesthetics that he would later recant. He did not simply "move on" from the *Méditations*, but looked back to them as a lost point of origin throughout his career. While the form of Lamartine's poems suggests harmony, the aesthetic underlying them is always put into question.

plaisir de montrer qu'on peut déployer toutes les grâces et obtenir tous les succès".[145] Despite his overarching concern for what he perceives as Lamartine's wavering faith, Durand is nonetheless sensible to the loss of an original aesthetic. Lamartine insists too much on the surface of things.

Lamartine's correspondence of 1820 reveals that his lyric was becoming increasingly concerned with the *description* of landscape rather than its purposeful fragmentation. While staying on the island of Ischia, he was keen on painting verbal pictures for the recipients of his letters. A letter to Louis de Vignet, for example, reads as a travel memoir:

> Au milieu de la mer de Naples, non loin du cap où Misène laissa ses armes et son nom, en face de la grotte de Cumes et du rivage classique de l'*Enéide*, s'élève une île de deux ou trois lieues de tour, couronnée par une montagne à pic semblable à celles que tu as sous les yeux. C'est une de vos fraîches montagnes de Savoie avec vos forêts de châtaigniers, vos vignes serpentant sur les mûriers, vos ruisseaux, vos chalets, et même les mœurs douces et pures de vos paysans. Sur les flancs onduleux de cette montagne sont épars les plus charmants casins entourés de vignes, de vergers et de bosquets. (31 [sic] septembre 1820)

No detail is spared ("nous dînons, nous dormons"), and the picture of Ischia is replete with vegetation and various bodies of water: "Un promontoire élevé de sept ou huit cents pieds s'avance dans la mer comme Châtillon sur le lac; ses pieds sont couverts de bois jusque sur l'eau, le sommet de vignes qui ombragent, de citronniers, de lauriers, de grenadiers et de myrtes, etc.". And then, in a typical use of ellipsis, Lamartine reveals that this letter has so far been a poetic one: "Ici elle [la nature] découvrirait ses trésors les plus secrets, ses beautés les plus ravissantes! ici… ! *Mais laissons le pathos et revenons à l'ancienne prose*. Si cependant tu aimais mieux les vers, je pourrais t'en donner, car,

[145] Durand's review of *La Mort de Socrate* and the *Nouvelles méditations* in *La Muse française* (Oct. 1823) presents Lamartine as a sort of hack: "paresseux, peut-être, à développer cette grande faculté qui crée". Cited in Loiseleur's edition of Lamartine's *Méditations* (543-544).

quand je ne sais plus que dire et que faire, j'en dis et j'en fais" (emphasis mine). The description of Ischia, in this respect, is not a mere visual aid, or the stuff of a letter, but an implicit commentary on the direction his poetry is taking.

A few days later, Virieu would receive eight lines of verse from what would become the two opening stanzas of "Ischia". The emphasis on the physical response to the landscape of Ischia is tightly connected with these new rhymes, and the traditional form of the elegy (the alexandrine in a natural rhythm) conveys no irony this time around. It is clear that the physical eye has regained its vision. Eager to show the natural surroundings to his friends, Lamartine insists, as he did in "L'Isolement", on the eye of the poet ("Je promène au hasard mes regards sur la plaine"); yet here, the eye does not seek the invisible, but lingers on the earthly spectacle ("Mortel, ouvre ton âme à ces torrents de vie; / Reçois par tous les sens les charmes de la nuit" 29-30). The horizon in "Ischia" does not lead to God (the infinite), but to an open sea stripped of any symbolic meaning. The promise of the horizon in the *Méditations* is lost, as Lamartine suggests in the poem's opening line: "Le soleil va porter le jour à d'autres mondes; / Sur *l'horizon désert* Phoebé monte sans bruit" (emphasis mine). No longer symbolized by stars, twilight and vapor, the imagination is bound to an eye that sees.[146] Most remarkably, the poet now sings of happiness instead of melancholy; "Ischia" expresses a bodily state more than the anxious questioning of the mind:[147]

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[146] For example, Lamartine stresses the moon's brightness and its ability to penetrate shadows. In the manuscript version, Lamartine placed the second stanza of "Ischia" into the form of a question, which reinforces visual immediacy:

> Vois-tu du haut des monts ses clartés ondoyantes
> Comme un fleuve de feu inonder les coteaux,
> Dormir dans les vallons, ou glisser sur les pentes,
> Ou rejaillir au loin du sein brillant des eaux ?

[147] In "Le Centenaire des *Nouvelles méditations*", Maurice Levaillant describes Lamartine's Naples poems as "La Poésie du bonheur" ; while the poet had been unable to arrest time in "Le Lac", he succeeds in

> *Verseggio di quà in là*, quand je suis seul, mais j'ai des maux, des palpitations, qui m'arrêtent. Sans cela je chanterais la félicité de l'homme mieux que je n'ai chanté son malheur. Le bonheur, quoi qu'on en dise, est poétique quand il est bien entendu ; il serait même intéressant ; mais le foie, le cœur, l'estomac ! Chante qui pourra! (5 Oct. 1820)

The dismissive exclamation leaves little room for doubt: singing is secondary to the experiences of the body and the senses.

A few years later, when preparing to publish the *Nouvelles méditations*, Lamartine sent Virieu a number of stanzas that formed the song he would insert in the middle of "Ischia" (26 Feb. 1822). The insertion reminds us of the song sung by the departed lover in "Le Lac", but this time we are far from the shores of Lake Bourget. Though Lamartine begins with the recognized trademark of the vague and the vaporous ("la douteuse lueur", "la pâle obscurité"), he gradually tunes the ear to the sound of the ocean rather than to his song:

> Doux comme le soupir de l'enfant qui sommeille,
> Un son vague et plaintif se répand dans les airs:
> Est-ce un écho du ciel qui charme notre oreille?
> Est-ce un soupir d'amour de la terre et des mers?
>
> Il s'élève, il retombe, il renaît, il expire,
> Comme un cœur oppressé d'un poids de volupté,
> Il semble qu'en ces nuits la nature respire,
> Et se plaint comme nous de sa félicité! (21-28)

The sound of church bells and the anxious questioning of the poet of "L'Isolement" meld into the sounds of nature. This song heightens rather than erases the landscape. The female figure sings of attraction rather than absence, she commands her lover to see:

> " Maintenant sous le ciel tout repose, ou tout aime:
> La vague en ondulant vient dormir sur le bord ;
> La fleur dort sur sa tige, et la nature même

"Ischia": "Comme dans le *Lac*, la chanteuse s'est tue; et le poète reprend la parole. Mais cette fois, c'est pour prolonger l'extase, pour bénir le destin" (392).

Sous le dais de la nuit se recueille et s'endort.

" Vois ! la mousse a pour nous tapissé la vallée,
Le pampre s'y recourbe en replis tortueux,
Et l'haleine de l'onde, à l'oranger mêlée,
De ses fleurs qu'elle effeuille embaume mes cheveux. (57-64)[148]

Figures like the "paisible pêcheur" from "Le Golfe de Baya" reappear, but this time the poet's boat moves toward the shore drawn to the earth and to the musician calling out to him from solid ground. Despite the poet's wandering, the beloved has never lost him from her sight. Instead of voicing alienation and despair, she is confident of her lover's return. Lamartine effaces the "Ils ont aimé!" of "Le Lac" with an emphatic use of the future tense in "Ischia": "Nous chanterons ensemble assis sous le jasmin". Connected by this song, a figure for sexual union, the poet literally comes back to earth.[149] This place is fixed, concentrated, and charged with personal meaning. Like the Lake, it serves as the intersection between universal nature and an intimate, personal experience.

While the poet's concern in "Le Lac" had been to challenge the fixed givens of nature, in order for his music to echo a vaster space, the objective in "Ischia" is the opposite. Nature envelopes its protagonists in its inviting scents and hypnotic movements. It takes over, drowning the voices of the couple. The sounds of the lute break:

Elle chante; et sa voix par intervalle expire,
Et, des accords du luth plus faiblement frappés,
Les échos assoupis ne livrent au zéphire
Que des soupirs mourants, de silence coupés ! (69-72)

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[148] Yet another use of the word "embaume"; but this time, it is not used to evoke an atmosphere, but to refer to the action of a material element (a scented balm) that accentuates another material (the hair that is an aspect of the lover's body).

[149] Du flot qui tour à tour s'avance et se retire
L'œil aime à suivre au loin le flexible contour:
On dirait un amant qui presse en son délire
La vierge qui résiste et cède tour à tour. (17-20)

Although the poet can now suspend time - in a clear response to “Le Lac” - this capacity implies the surrender of his song. The poet who has once had contact with the divine has sacrificed his own voice, hence his use of the ellipsis:

> Celui qui, suspendant les heures fugitives,
> Fixant avec l’amour son âme en ce beau lieu,
> Oublierait que le temps coule encor sur ces rives,
> Serait-il un mortel, ou serait-il un dieu ?... (77-80)

The name “Elyse” (Lamartine’s wife’s full name was Mary-Ann-Eliza), an echo of “Elysées” that appears in the penultimate stanza, is also followed by an ellipsis, a series of dots that leads to a reminder of death: “Elyse!...et cependant on dit qu’il faut mourir!”. And so the song ends. The heavy atmosphere, the trance produced by the repetitive motions of the sea, the sensual stirring of the breeze, all of these lead to a stillness close to non-existence. This is a framed image, not a song meant to reverberate beyond the landscape or beyond the page. Despite his initial attempts at prophecy, the poet sees himself as an ordinary mortal. The vast ‘Océan’ reappears here, but now as a personification of the masculine lover who is attracted to the feminine ‘rive’. The concentration on the outline of the gulf, the weightiness of the line “Et pressant dans ses bras ces golfes et ces îles”, reminds us that this moment is taking place on earth. It is at the feet of his wife, in the here and now (“Maintenant sous le ciel tout repose”, “A cette heure d’amour”) that his voice will be overcome by the sound of the waves:

> Celui qui, sur la mousse, au pied du sycomore,
> Au murmure des eaux, sous un dais de saphirs,
> Assis à ses genoux, de l’une à l’autre aurore,
> N’aurait pour lui parler que l’accent des soupirs ;

His voice and her guitar – the harmony of a communicative, poetic voice – remain stifled.

In the preface to his *Anthologie de la poésie française* (1949), André Gide is quick to qualify his initial praise for Lamartine. Though he gives Lamartine credit for having been the first to recuperate an expressive lyric, Gide describes Lamartine's once soaring music as rapidly falling flat:

> Je me souviens d'avoir entendu Verlaine, ce musicien, déclarer que, de beaucoup, il préférait à Hugo Lamartine. En tout cas Lamartine est le premier en date et c'est de lui qu'il convient d'abord de parler. Il a des départs prestigieux et je ne connais rien qui puisse être comparé aux premiers vers du *Lac* ou du *Vallon*; mais son essor atteint aussitôt son plafond; hauteur où il plane ensuite inlassablement, (ou du moins ne lassant que le lecteur), sans sursauts, sans nouveaux coups d'ailes. […] c'est dans ses poèmes de jeunesse que nous trouvons les plus beaux accents. Par la suite, il se répète sans cesse. (xxx)

Though he continued to write poems on a regular basis, and even in earnest at times, Lamartine wrote as a poet exiled from his own imagination after the publication of his first *Méditations*. Hugo would sense this determination to retreat and be wary of it. In his *Odes et Ballades* (1826), "A M. Alphonse de L." reads as a plea. Despite the fact that Lamartine had been publishing fairly regularly since 1820, Hugo seems to be taking his "ami" to task for his resigned retreat. The century may have no more room for prophets,[150] but the lyre of the poet is still relevant. Hugo thus invites his friend to carry on: "Mais qu'importe! accomplis ta mission sacrée. / Chante, juge, bénis; ta bouche est inspirée!". Then, in an explicit call for sound, "Il faut bien que ton nom dans ses cris retentisse".

Here, Hugo implicitly responds to Lamartine's "Adieux à la mer", where the sea has literally eroded the voice of the poet by washing over his "poétiques débris". This poet has had his moment:

[150] "Ah! nous ne sommes plus au temps où le poète / Parlait au ciel en prêtre, à la terre en prophète!" (III.1-2).

Murmure autour de ma nacelle,
Douce mer dont les flots chéris,
Ainsi qu'une amante fidèle,
Jettent une plainte éternelle
Sur ces poétiques débris. (1-5)

The floating protagonist yearns to be nestled in a cradle, as he was in "Le Vallon" before setting out for a new horizon. With that journey accomplished, the poet retreats into a childlike, stammering prayer to the sea, asking not for transcendence, but for dissipation into the elements. He claims to have only dreamt of the wave and the woods:

Ah! berce, berce, berce encore,
Berce pour la dernière fois,
Berce cet enfant qui t'adore,
Et qui depuis sa tendre aurore
N'a rêvé que l'onde et les bois! (21-25)

As in "Les Etoiles", there is a close link here, not between the poet and the sky (as so often in the *Méditations*), but between the ocean and the sky. The matrix of surface and profundity is undone by the sun's work on the water's surface:

Le Dieu qui décora le monde
De ton élément gracieux,
Afin qu'ici tout se réponde,
Fit les cieux pour briller sur l'onde,
L'onde pour réfléchir les cieux. (26-30)

At the exact center of the poem, we realize that the infinite possibilities afforded by the imagination have led nowhere. In this "new" meditation, the moving sea is meant to emphasize the poet's desire for immobility: "L'esprit cherche en vain ton rivage, / Comme ceux de l'éternité" (44-45). The ocean has usurped all agency, while the poet merely describes its interaction with other natural elements.[151] As the senses are more

[151] "La mer, la mer, toujours recommencée!" the poet exclaims in Paul Valéry's " Cimetière marin " (1920). The movement of the sea, as in Lamartine's poem, relentlessly erodes illusions, ideals, and any claim to an unmediated language. The play of the sun on the water is a ruse, scintillating and hypnotic but empty in meaning:

and more piqued, the poet abandons composition for description. The decomposition of the voice corresponds to the re-composition of the landscape, and the sea effectively replaces the poet:

> Ta voix majestueuse et douce
> Fait trembler l'écho de tes bords,
> Ou sur l'herbe qui te repousse,
> Comme le zéphyr dans la mousse,
> Murmure de mourants accords. (46-50)

The contact here is not between the poet and the divine, but between the poet and the water. The sense of touch, so rare in the *Méditations*, strikes the reader as the poet's hand "presses" the water (in "Le Golfe de Baya", his oar had left a faint wake). Moreover, at the end of this stanza, Lamartine compares the swell of the water to the heaving breast of a woman:

> Qu'il est doux, quand le vent caresse
> Ton sein mollement agité,
> De voir, sous ma main qui la presse,
> Ta vague, qui s'enfle et s'abaisse
> Comme le sein de la beauté. (66-70)

The poet loses himself in this intimacy. He does not float across a threshold, as he did in "Le Golfe de Baya", but consciously returns to the same landscape.[152] The ellipsis at the end marks his voluntary fall into silence. "Adieux à la poésie" is, in this respect, a reiteration of the same poem. "Mer" and "poésie" become one as the waves drown out

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> Et vous, grande âme, espérez-vous un songe
> Qui n'aura plus ces couleurs de mensonge
> Qu'aux yeux de chair l'onde et l'or font ici ?
> Chanterez-vous quand serez vaporeuse ?
> Allez ! Tout fuit ! Ma présence est poreuse,
> La sainte impatience meurt aussi !

[152] Even though the poem was not written in Naples (Lamartine was not there in 1822), the inscription under the title of the poem indicates that it was. Lamartine's commentary suggests that it was actually written in 1820 on Ischia, and this date is accepted as accurate because it resonates with other poems known to have been written at the same time and place.

"ma voix plaintive" (101). The poet is far from the sky that had once invited a transcendent song:

> Flottant de rivage en rivage,
> J'aurai péri dans un naufrage,
> *Loin des cieux* que je vais quitter. (98-100 – emphasis mine)

Re-appropriating the timid boat ride that had led from the contemplation of the idyllic to the transcendent, the passively (at times even stationary) drifting poet in the *Nouvelles méditations* is ironically anchored in happiness and the already-experienced. The aborted flight towards the sky and the stars, or towards the transcendent potential of poetry, collapses into a listless and intimate lyric whose sounds re-morph into images ("Chaque flot m'apporte une image").[153] In his resignation, Lamartine accepts the recuperation of the concrete. An ideal-bound imagination stripped of its vitality admits the sun's rays into the nocturnal Lamartinian landscape and favors the corporalization of nature's elements. And just as his "new" poetry recuperates the physical, it also culminates in silence. This second time around, however, the poet's silence does not so much express potential as absence. Moving away from the ambition of Mme de Staël, Lamartine's new landscape does not express latent longing but contentment and acceptance. Ischia, an island, is sufficient unto itself. The source of one kind of poetry has been lost, and the horizon has disappeared: "Peut-être à moi, lyre chérie, / Tu reviendras dans l'avenir" (71-72). This ending provides a coda that resonates well with Lamartine's initial program for the *Méditations*: "Je veux me laisser aller où me portera la fantasia, et je sens qu'elle m'entreouvre des champs inconnus et assez vastes pour m'y égarer pendant une vingtaine de chants. Après cela je briserai, comme on dit, la lyre, et

[153] "Adieux à la mer" (88).

je laisserai ces chants s’évanouir dans les airs ou retentir dans l’avenir” (letter to Virieu, Dec. 1818).

Chapter 2

Victor Hugo: The Imagination Restored (1819-1829)

Introduction.

French Restoration Poetry: Music's Counterimage

> Qu'allais-je faire en cet orage,
> Moi qui m'échappais du berceau ?
> V. Hugo, "A M. de Lamartine", *Les Feuilles d'automne* (1831)

Lamartine's landscapes, which hesitate between representation and effacement, sparked French Restoration poets' intense efforts throughout the 1820s to define a modern aesthetic.[154] Post-*Méditations* poets were searching for their own way between neo-classicist tenets of imitation and translation and romantic idealism as it was transmitted through English and German theory and practice.[155] Though Lamartine had awakened them to the generative possibilities of a strongly subjective lyric voice, post-revolutionary French poets nonetheless sensed that this freedom came at the cost of alienating loss. In *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836), Alfred de Musset,

[154] The anxiety surrounding this "in-between" state of French Restoration poetry was symptomatic of a more general one as to how the French tried to define their ongoing post-Revolutionary history. Göran Blix has shown how the French Romantics' attempts to name or frame a period (what he calls a "periodizing imagination") only led to more "gray zones", or transitions. The moral ramifications of such a disorienting enterprise were pervasive: "A tragic sense of insubstantiality is what most marks this modern experience of transition" (60). See "Charting the 'Transitional Period': The Emergence of Modern Time in the Nineteenth Century", *History and Theory* 45 (Feb. 2006): 51-71. Blix cites Lamartine in particular when giving an example of how this sense of insubstantiality gave rise to the notion of aesthetic decadence, which echoes what a contemporary critic (Durand) said of the *Méditations*: "Nul poëte n'a su mieux exprimer cette étrange inquiétude, cette rêveuse souffrance qui pèse sur certains hommes dans les âges de décadence ou de transition" (*La Muse française*, Oct. 1823; signed Holmondurand). Victor Hugo was one of the co-founders of *La Muse française*.

[155] In *Chronologie du romantisme français (1804-1830)*, René Bray underscores how "Le romantisme se cherchait encore" in 1820, and did so until Hugo published his Preface to *Cromwell* in 1827 (34). In his adept nuancing of the romantic/classical debate (as well as his probing of what "romantic" meant), Bray challenges our tendency to label works of this period 'revolutionary'. Taking their cue from Sismondi and Mme de Staël, who saw art as reflecting a process of cross-fertilization and harmonization, French artists and poets purposely fused classical and romantic sensibilities. Delacroix, one of Mme de Staël's avid readers, voiced his classical inclinations even when transposing Byron and Dante onto canvas: "L'habitude de l'ordre dans les idées est pour toi la seule route au bonheur ; et pour y arriver, l'ordre dans tout le reste" (*Journal*, 16 May 1823). Delacroix, who is addressing himself here ("toi") noted this right before deciding to paint *Les Massacres de Scio* for the Salon of 1824.

painting a vivid portrait of this period, dramatically describes how the double effects of 1793 and Napoleon's fall, whose ruins allowed for foreign literatures to infiltrate France's borders, infected rather than inspired French literature:

> Quand les idées anglaises et allemandes passèrent ainsi sur nos têtes, ce fut comme un dégout morne et silencieux, suivi d'une convulsion terrible. Car formuler les idées générales, c'est changer le salpêtre en poudre, et la cervelle homérique du grand Goethe avait sucé, comme un alambic, toute la liqueur du fruit défendu. Ceux qui ne le lurent pas alors crurent n'en rien savoir. Pauvres créatures ! l'explosion les emporta comme des grains de poussière dans l'abîme du doute universel. (30)[156]

The epigraph to the first edition of Hugo's *Odes et poésies diverses* (1822) - "vox clamabat in deserto" - distinctly evokes a poet who unleashes his voice into a void.[157] Citing Augustine's *Confessions*, Sainte-Beuve's *Vie, poésies et pensées de Joseph Delorme* (1829) – which recalls the opening years of the decade – opens with a sense of bitter despair : "Ainsi de moi en ce temps-là : je pleurais très amèrement et je reposais dans l'amertume".[158]

In this chapter, I will show how the French romantics following in Lamartine's wake, seeking to stabilize the melodic but disoriented *Méditations*, placed the image and the faculty of sight front and center in forging a lyric poetry for contemporary times. Yves Vadé expresses the unsettling situation of the early nineteenth-century poet that Victor Hugo and those of his generation would struggle in earnest to resolve: "La voix de l'univers ou de l'au-delà n'est pas une Muse, plutôt un ensemble de sonorités résonnant

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[156] Ed. Gérard Barrier. Paris: Gallimard, 1973.
[157] The *Odes et Ballades* evolved over a span of six years, and appeared under the following titles: *Odes et poésies diverses* (1822), *Odes* (1823), *Nouvelles odes* (1824), *Odes et Ballades* (1826 and 1828). All references to Hugo's poetry in this chapter are from his *Œuvres poétiques*, vol. 1, ed. Pierre Albouy (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).
[158] Like Hugo's first *Odes*, the epigraph is cited in Latin: "Sic ego eram illo tempore, et flebam amarissime, et requiescebam in amaritudine". The edition of *Joseph Delorme* I use here is Gérald Antoine's (Saint-Pierre-du-Mont: Eurédit, 2002; 1st ed. 1957).

dans une gigantesque chambre d'échos où le moi risque à tout moment de se perdre" (27).[159] Precisely due to sound's tendency to fade or to distort, Hugo's Cénacle shunned the lack of discernible form and lawlessness associated with the properties of music.[160] The echo no longer represented the potential heightening of voice as in "Le Lac", but its dissipation and disappearance: "Depuis longtemps ma voix plaintive / Sera couverte par les flots" (Lamartine, "Adieux à la poésie").[161] As I argued in my previous chapter, Lamartine had indeed explored the aesthetic potential of the image and the senses in the *Nouvelles méditations poétiques* –

> Reconnaissez mes pas, doux gazons que je foule,
> Arbres, que dans mes jeux j'insultais autrefois,
> Et toi qui, loin de moi, te cachais à la foule,
> Triste écho, réponds à ma voix.
>
> Je ne viens pas traîner, dans vos riants asiles,
> Les regrets du passé, les songes du futur :
> J'y viens vivre ; et couché sous vos berceaux fertiles,
> Abriter mon repos obscur. ("Les Préludes" 336-343)[162]

– but this is not the Lamartine that readers of the period remembered. The poets after him saw themselves as more coherent.[163] Above all, they considered the image a

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[159] Each essay in Rabaté's *Figures du sujet lyrique* examines French Romantic poets' attempts to situate both themselves and their lyric voice. How could what was originally oral (the lyric) be embodied in language? What happens to this voice when "elle se risque au poème"? ("Présentation" 8).

[160] Hugo and Sainte-Beuve were the leading figures of this group, but it also included Emile Deschamps, Alfred de Vigny and Alexandre Dumas. Léon Séché gives a full account of the general literary atmosphere as well as the specifics on the intense collaboration between writers during the late Restoration in *Le Cénacle de Joseph Delorme (1827-1830): Victor Hugo et les poètes* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1912).

[161] *Nouvelles méditations poétiques.*

[162] Notably, Lamartine addressed this poem to Hugo in the fourth edition of the *Nouvelles méditations* (1825). Despite Vigny's reservations concerning the rushed and negligent quality of the *Nouvelles méditations*, he insists ("je le dis avec séverité") that the last stanzas of "Les Préludes" are incomparable due to their melding of interior sentiment and description. The remarks are from a letter to Hugo, which I cite below.

[163] Hegel: "Music, for example, which is concerned only with the completely indeterminate movement of the inner spirit and with sounds as if they were feeling without thought, needs to have little of no spiritual material present in consciousness. Therefore musical talent announces itself in most cases very early in youth [...]. In poetry, on the other hand, it is quite different. In it all depends on the presentation, full of content and thought, of man, of his deeper interests, and of the powers that move him; and therefore the

paradoxical means to bolster the poet's voice. Ferdinand Brunetière asserts that the image, due to Hugo's natural disposition to "concrétiser le mystère" (13), was the principal creative element to his lyric poetry: "L'image est l'élément essentiel du lyrisme de Victor Hugo: le poète la crée avec un art suprême, et l'image est chez lui magnifique, neuve et grandiose" (177-178).[164] In a review of Hugo's first book of poems, Alfred de Vigny presents his counterpart as a resolved painter who steadies the modern poet's "pas chancelant":

> M. Victor Hugo a su, dans un temps où l'on répète sans cesse que tout est usé, et où tout l'est en effet pour les écrivains débiles qui suivent d'un pas chancelant les routes frayées, a su, dis-je, se créer un genre d'odes à lui seul, où la force de ses pensées s'unit à la fraîcheur de sa poésie ; il prend toutes les sommités des événements, les entoure d'inspiration, et jette dans ses récits des réflexions profondes, qui font rêver longtemps. On dirait la religion qui chante l'histoire; et *peintre, ce serait peut-être ainsi que je représenterais ce beau talent*.[165] (emphasis mine)

As his experimentation with rhyme and meter shows, Hugo's music had discernable and even bold form. His early poems require seeing as much as they do hearing.[166] Though he cites Lamartine in the opening of "Le Poète" (*Nouvelles odes*, 1824), Hugo presents his lyric as more effective due to its luminosity:

> Un formidable esprit descend dans sa pensée.
> Il paraît; et soudain, en éclairs élancée,

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spirit and the heart must be richly and deeply educated by life, experience, and reflection before genius can bring into being anything mature, of sterling worth, and complete in itself" (*Aesthetics* 28).

[164] In *Victor Hugo*, vol. 1 (Paris: Hachette, 1902). Brunetière's study, which is actually a collaborative compilation of essays prepared by his students at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1900-1901 (just in time for the centennial of Hugo's birth), seems to inform all modern analyses.

[165] "'Odes et poésies diverses' par Victor Hugo". *Lettres champenoises*, 81e lettre, 1822, t. IX : 266-272. Cited in Vigny's *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. F. Germain and A. Jarry (Paris: Gallimard, 1986): 1279-1282.

[166] Jacques Rancière, emphasizing the "toute puissance du language", thus locates Romanticism's "rupture" in the architecture of Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831): "C'est désormais la 'partie matérielle' du langage – les mots avec leur pouvoir sonore et imagé – qui prend la place de la 'partie intellectuelle'" (*La parole muette* 20). My chapter will show that Hugo had already begun theorizing a "rupture" with the past in key poems and texts dating from the Restoration period, when the role of the image in poetry became one of the most salient topics in his Cénacle.

Sa parole luit comme un feu. (73-75)[167]

At the same time, Hugo and his group reconsidered the role of description in romantic poetry due to their insistence that the imagination was a filtering process rather than a bank of stored images: "On a mis la mémoire à la place de l'imagination," Hugo states accusatorily in the preface to *Cromwell* (89).[168] Micheline Tison-Braun exposes the paradoxes and problematics involved with the writer's conceit to capture the "real thing". Citing Proust's passage in *Du côté de chez Swann* on the hawthorns at Combray, she describes the imagination as a "kaléidoscope mental" that turns brute nature into "la pure magie visuelle de l'objet" (21):

> Non seulement les meilleures descriptions décrivent très peu, mais certaines indications, comme le passage des aubépines intraitables au champ de blé si complaisamment étalé, tendraient à faire croire que plus on s'attache au concret moins on l'évoque, et que la présence de l'objet bloque sa représentation, tant l'œil imaginaire diffère de l'œil corporel. Or, cet œil de l'esprit ne perçoit pas des choses, mais des significations. C'est en suggérant des significations nouvelles que la description agit. (28)[169]

Hugo, however, had already made the same observation in his writings on modern drama, using the refracting medium of the prism as his analogy for an imagination that produces "magic" out of nature: "Le théâtre est un point d'optique. Tout ce qui existe dans le monde, dans l'histoire, dans la vie, dans l'homme, tout doit et peut s'y réfléchir, mais sous la baguette magique de l'art" (Pref. to *Cromwell*: 90). No longer a mimetic or a rhetorical device, Hugo's images were symbols of the poet's inventive faculty.[170] The

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[167] Notably, the epigraph to this poem is from Lamartine's "Enthousiasme" ("Muse, contemple ta victime!"), a poem in which the poet's vocation is thrown entirely into question.
[168] *Cromwell* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968).
[169] *Poétique du paysage* (op. cit.).
[170] Chateaubriand, evidently wishing to distinguish himself from what he considered the romantic "contamination" of Rousseau as well as of Goethe's *Werther,* insists on the truth of his images in *Atala* and states his resolve to emulate the classics: "Je m'aperçus bientôt que je manquais des vraies couleurs, et que si je voulais faire une image semblable, il fallait, à l'exemple d'Homère, visiter les peuples que je voulais

poet's reality was his creative imagination, and his images reflect this conflation: "Cette tendance au réalisme se fait jour dans la propension à prendre l'image, la métaphore au pied de la lettre et, du coup, contrairement à l'usage des classiques, qui fut celui de Hugo, à ses débuts, à réaliser l'image ou la métaphore" (Pierre Albouy).[171]

It must be said, however, that music still played a crucial role in romantic theories of art, as its qualities of succession and its intangible form reflected the freedom of the artist's imagination.[172] In *De l'Allemagne*, Mme de Staël attributes the Germans' disposition for music ("[Ils] savent presque tous la musique" I:58) to their imagination ("C'est l'imagination [...] qui caractérise les Allemands" I:57). German poets are thus most inclined to be lyric poets: "Les Allemands [...] sont plus capables que la plupart des autres nations de la poésie lyrique" (II: 207). In *The Cambridge Companion to French Poetry* (2003), Mary Lewis Shaw shows that Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Lettre sur la musique* (1753) and *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (1781; posthumous) also established a tie between music and the freedom of the imagination. Rousseau's refutation of Rameau's emphasis on harmony as opposed to melody would lead the romantics to

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peindre" (Preface 16). As Tison-Braun observes, however, Chateaubriand was not immune to taking liberties : "Même le grand magicien de la description, Chateaubriand, tombe dans le bric à brac exotique" (28). Chateaubriand even contradicts his claim to objectivity when, in the *Génie du christianisme*, he differentiates between the eyes of the classics and those of the moderns: "Le spectacle de l'univers ne pouvait faire sentir aux Grecs et aux Romains les émotions qu'il porte à notre âme. Au lieu de ce soleil couchant, dont le rayon allongé, tantôt illumine une forêt, tantôt forme une tangente d'or sur l'arc roulant des mers; au lieu de ces accidents de lumière, qui nous retracent chaque matin le miracle de la création, les anciens ne voyaient partout qu'un uniforme machine d'opéra" (I : 315).

[171] In *La création mythologique chez Victor Hugo* (Paris: J. Corti, 1961). Albouy's magisterial study examines the formation and role of the imagination in Hugo's creation of myth.

[172] In his analysis of German romantic music, Edward Lippmann cites Ludwig Tieck, Herder and E.T.A. Hoffmann in particular as extolling the imagination and how it led to their "new awareness of the value of instrumental music" (*A History of Western Musical Aesthetics* 206). The symphony reflected an art that was transience itself. Hoffmann, whose writings were well known in France, even proclaims in "Beethovens Instrumentalmusik" (1813) that music "is the most romantic of all the arts – one might say, the only genuinely romantic one – for its sole object is the infinite" (cited in Lippmann: 210). Music is superior to any other art to the point where it becomes its own sphere, and in his view, even poetry was too plastic.

"voice [...] complaints regarding the traditional metrical devices of poetry. [...] French poets no longer think in mathematical terms, but rather increasingly as a mimetic expression of the individual human passions" (181). Rousseau's valorization of melody thus resisted a rule-based seventeenth-century classical model and invited one that was free and spontaneous.

Yet, it was precisely the unrestricted freedom afforded by a lawless music that presented an obstacle for French Restoration poets and literary theorists.[173] Lamartine's melody somehow had to be contained, and the solution was to forge an unequivocal and resounding voice. When reflecting on German authors, Hugo lamented: "Heureux s'ils avaient su se renfermer dans de justes bornes!".[174] I am not suggesting that Hugo and his Cénacle sought to be formulaic or 'mathematical', but they did seek to curb Lamartine's indecisiveness by insisting on order. In the 1826 preface to his *Odes et Ballades*, Hugo made it clear that he resisted romanticism's associations with anarchy: "Ce qu'il est important de fixer, c'est qu'en littérature comme en politique l'ordre se concilie merveilleusement avec la liberté" (281).[175] This order, however, is not absolute and imposed by tradition or institution, but corresponds to the laws of nature. A natural landscape rather than the tamed gardens of Versailles inspires an original poem:

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[173] Though Shaw's examination of the influence of music on French poetry is part of a brief epilogue, it is nonetheless curious that she does not mention any romantic poet in particular when citing Rousseau's influence (save for Baudelaire and his Wagner essay, which did not appear until 1861). Was Hugo, for example, one of the poets "partly under the influence of such important Romantic composers as Beethoven, Liszt, and Chopin" (181)?

[174] In *Littérature et philosophie mêlées* (86). This is from a fragment on theater that originally appeared in *Le Conservateur littéraire*. *Littérature et philosophie mêlées* (1834) is a compilation of essays that Hugo drafted or published between 1819 and 1834, and is in vol. 12 of his *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1985).

[175] The influence of Chateaubriand's *Essai sur les révolutions* is obvious here. Later, Hugo seems to link Lamartine's quick fall from power after the Revolution of 1848 to his indecisive poetic sensibilities: "A côté de la signature de Lamartine, signature à peine formée, où l'on retrouve les incertitudes qui bouleversaient le cœur du poète, Ledru-Rollin mit sa signature tranquille ornée de ce banal paraphe de clerc d'avoué qu'il partage avec Proudhon" (*Choses vues* 520).

"Choisissez donc du chef-d'œuvre du jardinage ou de l'œuvre de la nature, de ce qui est beau de convention ou de ce qui est beau sans les règles, d'une littérature artificielle ou d'une poésie originale!" (Ibid). Hugo distinguished himself from his predecessor by highlighting the poet's unwavering self-awareness amongst change. The modern poet did not spurn the landscape and the transience it evoked, but was instead inspired by its dynamic. The poet's fixity within a fluctuating nature also extended to history. The opening poem of the first edition of the *Odes* (1822) is a 'prise de position' that asserts the poet's sense of focus in a century defined by upheaval:

> Je cède au Dieu qui me rassure;
> J'ignore à ma vie encore pure
> Quels maux le sort veut attacher;
> Je suis sans orgueil mon étoile;
> L'orage déchire la voile;
> La voile sauve le nocher. ("Le Poète dans les révolutions" 35-40)

Several years later, in the preface to his fifth and definitive edition of the *Odes et Ballades* (1828), the formerly ultra-leaning Hugo does not provide an "apologie" for his earlier poems, but instead demonstrates "ce qu'il croit que l'art lui a appris" (286). Despite the turbulent circumstances, the poet remains anchored against the tide of history.

Hugo's experimentation with form throughout the 1820s reflects his insistence on order. In *Discours sur la musique à l'époque de Chateaubriand*, Nicolas Perot rephrases what Vadé asks of lyric poetry: how can music be expressed in words? "Comment dire la musique, l'art qui échappe le plus à la représentation?" (15).[176] Lamartine's emphasis on melody, for example, had only led to the ineffective echo and ellipsis. Hugo thus *orchestrated* his music for the sake of effective expression: "Cette vigueur et cette

[176] Paris: PUF, 2000. Perot's study, which considers how music came to embody the sacred in French nineteenth-century fiction (Chateaubriand, Mme de Staël, Joubert and Senancour), is outside the scope of mine, but his introduction is nonetheless helpful in situating the problematic relationship between music and literature at the beginning of the century (1-24).

ampleur des strophes lyriques ressortent avec une netteté parfait, à considérer la poésie au point de vue presque exclusif des qualités musicales. L'harmonie en est infiniment plus pleine, plus ferme, que la mélodie fugitive des vers lamartiniens" (Brunetière 196).[177] More recently, Claude Millet has also demonstrated how Hugo resisted music's unbridled drive towards the infinite by stressing the material aspects of his lyric poetry: "Le vers tient toujours, il est exact, résistant" (36).[178] Hugo's emphasis on what Millet terms "la puissance du vers" - the enjambment, for example, or the liberal use of the caesura - was meant to order movement and circumscribe the infinite. He tamed the threat of "évanouissement" by resisting the hypnotic persuasion of music's "flots sonores": "la poésie est à la musique ce que la pensée est à la rêverie" (Ibid). There is a plasticity to Hugo's lyric poetry, then, that problematizes its relationship to romantic notions of music. In the famous "Les Djinns" of *Les Orientales*, the reader's eye is caught by the varying syllabic patterns that make the poem appear as a vast but unified crescendo and decrescendo (the first and last stanzas contain two syllables per line, while the central and climactic one has ten). Despite the sudden fury of the passing demons, the poet remains standing and detects rhythm amongst the chaos:

> D'un nain qui saute
> C'est le galop.
> Il fuit, s'élance,

[177] In *Crise de vers* (1895), Mallarmé describes Hugo's indomitable command of verse as so great that it sacrificed itself and broke upon his death: "Le vers, je crois, avec respect attendit que le géant qui l'identifiait à sa main tenace et plus ferme toujours de forgeron, vînt à manquer ; pour, lui, se rompre" (205). For Mallarmé, who sees Hugo's death as representing the end of a unifying and harmonious poetry, modern verse corresponds to this disintegration: "Sûr, nous en sommes là, présentement. La séparation. Au lieu qu'au début de ce siècle, l'ouïe puissante romantique combina l'élément jumeau en ses ondoyants alexandrins […] ; la fusion se défait vers l'intégrité" (*La Musique et les Lettres*; Ibid 64). Both in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

[178] The tension between fluidity and stasis, Millet explains, comes from Hugo's 'accumulation' of different theories of music (the Pythagorian one of order and harmony, as well as the Heraclitian one of change and movement). See "Figures du rythme" in *Victor Hugo: l'écriture poétique*, ed. Ludmila Charles-Wurtz (Caen: Lettres modernes Minard, 2006): 11-44.

Puis en cadence
Sur un pied danse
Au bout d'un flot. (19-24)

The echo does not distort, but as the rich rhyme suggests, amplifies the original sound:

La rumeur approche,
L'écho la redit.
C'est comme la cloche
D'un couvent maudit; -
Comme un bruit de foule,
Qui tonne et qui roule,
Et tantôt s'écroule,
Et tantôt grandit. (25-32)

As Hugo would later observe in *William Shakespeare* (1864), pure melody lacked this sense of precision: "La musique, par son défaut de précision même, […] va où va l'âme allemande" (287).[179] German art, which, like Mme de Staël before him, he describes as inherently musical, is thus still waiting to have its moment: "Si l'âme allemande avait autant de densité que d'étendue, c'est-à-dire autant de volonté que de faculté, elle pourrait, à un moment donné, soulever et sauver le genre humain" (Ibid).

In this chapter, I will specifically concentrate on Hugo's Restoration poems and consider their emphasis on images as a way to bolster "la puissance du vers". Considering how the physical act of seeing, the material means of painting, the writing of history, the phenomenon of public monuments as well as optical devices informed French Restoration poets, I will show how the "clear" device of the image provided a way for romantic poetry to leave a more immediate and lasting impression. For this reason Du Bos had given the advantage to painting over poetry, as it calls out to the eye and consequently does not need to adopt the artificial signs of language. Painting gives the viewer nature itself: "c'est la nature elle-même que la peinture nous met sous les yeux"

[179] In *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 13 ("Critique"); Laffont, 1985.

(134). The post-*Méditations* poet set out to give poetry this same ambition, aiming for a more natural language that, as Paul de Man has argued in his analysis of the romantic image, is paradoxically metaphorical in its ideal of immediacy: "the structure of the language becomes increasingly metaphorical and the image comes to be considered as the most prominent dimension of the style" (2).[180] Recuperating certain elements of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aesthetic doctrine, the French romantics reevaluated the role of experience (empiricism), the representation of an objective truth in the work of art (mimesis), and a universal model of truth in art ("le vrai", or "la clarté").[181] Hence Restoration poets' and critics' revived interest in the picturesque, as well as their increased attention to the ways poets could appropriate painting. Though it focuses on English literature, Roy Park's study of the nineteenth-century interpretation of 'ut pictura poesis' is nonetheless pertinent here, as it complicates Meyer Abrams's generalization in *The Mirror and the Lamp* that the influence of painting almost disappeared in romantic literature due to music's "profound affinity" with poetry.[182] Park, and David Scott after him in *Pictorialist Poetics* (1988), instead argue that the relationship between poetry and painting during this period was far from dead. The romantics did not simply reject the poet's appropriation of painting, but re-conceptualized the image as a means to expression as opposed to mere imitation. Scott specifically refers to both Hugo's "Preface to *Cromwell*" and *Les Orientales* in the context of the 'ut pictura poesis' debate,

[180] "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" (op. cit.).
[181] Boileau, for example, stresses how the reader needs to *see* the idea that the poet sets out to express: " L'esprit de l'homme est naturellement plein d'un nombre infini d'idées confuses du Vrai, que souvent il n'entrevoit qu'à demi; et rien ne lui est plus agréable que lorsqu'on lui offre quelqu'une de ces idées bien éclaircie et mise dans un beau jour ". From the 'Préface des *Œuvres diverses*' (ed. of 1701), in *Satires, Epîtres, Art poétique*, ed. Jean-Pierre Collinet (Paris: Gallimard, 1985). Praising Malherbe, Boileau commands the poet: "Marchez donc sur ses pas; aimez sa pureté, / Et de son tour imitez la clarté" (*Art Poétique* I: 140-141).
[182] "'Ut Pictura Poesis': The Nineteenth-Century Aftermath". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28.2 (Winter 1969): 155-164.

framing the texts as the writer's attempt to rival in literature the success of painting in expressing visual experience.[183]

For Hugo, then, lyric poetry meant more than creating pictures or achieving realism: "L'art ne peut donner la chose même" (Préface de *Cromwell* 90).[184] Hugo does not, as de Man says of Wordsworth and Hölderlin, sacrifice "the demands of consciousness to the realities of the object" ("Intentional Structure of Image" 8). Instead, I argue that Hugo aims for his images to represent artistic consciousness itself: "La société, en effet, commence par chanter ce qu'elle rêve, puis raconte ce qu'elle fait, et enfin se met à peindre ce qu'elle pense" (Préface de *Cromwell* 76). If, as Brunetière observes, "L'inspiration lyrique de Victor Hugo a presque toujours sa source première dans la réalité, dans l'actualité même" (173), Hugo then filters this reality through his "magic" medium to produce the poem. The increasing emphasis on images in the *Odes et Ballades*, for example, is due to what Hugo describes as "La fidélité du dessin avec laquelle elles revêtent la pensée, en un mot le mouvement" (Ibid 69). The poet's images are thus the reflection of his creative power, what Albouy calls a "vérité de l'imagination" (*La création mythologique* 58). "Victor Hugo," Albouy elaborates, "se distingue par cette faculté très dominante de voir objets et paysages avec des figures et dans des postures vivantes, humaines" (309). This power, then, was no longer an inspirational Muse, nor a passive memory that retrieved impressions, nor a lawless and alienating melody, but the poet's intellectual and inventive faculty as his eye

[183] See chapter 1, "Poetry and Painting: 'Ut pictura poesis' Reconsidered".
[184] Besides, in distinction to the poets and art theorists of Louis XIV's time as well as to empirical theories of art in the eighteenth century, the romantic notion of "truth" was not absolute, but contingent on an ongoing history. A drama is romantic, Stendhal said, if "les événements ressemblent à ce qui se passe tous les jours sous nos yeux" (*Racine et Shakespeare* 84). In the Preface to *Cromwell*, Hugo even pronounced drama as the new lyric poetry, due to its melding of image and movement: "L'ode chante l'éternité, l'épopée solennise l'histoire, le drame peint la vie" (76).

contemplates nature or contemporary history. Hugo's poems visually narrate his creative imagination in real time. The post-*Méditations* poet thus highlighted instead of dissolved the artist's relationship to the landscape. In *Joseph Delorme*, Sainte-Beuve appropriates Lamartine's privileged trope of the gulf and makes it clear that the firm ground attracts him more. His "Retour à la poésie" is a return to land:

> En vain j'ai fui la plage oisive;
> En vain ma rame avec effort
> Fatigue la vague plaintive ;
> Toujours ma nacelle dérive,
> Et je reviens toujours au bord. (1-5)

If Lamartine's aesthetic informs Sainte-Beuve's, it is the one of "Ischia", where the earthly shore has as much of a hypnotic pull as the ocean.[185]

However, while the young romantics recuperated the role of images and the representation of the natural landscape in poetry, they at the same time critiqued eighteenth-century descriptions of nature, which ignored the movement and colors of a living nature to recompose it on an artfully contrived canvas: "Nous admirons le pinceau qui a su contrefaire si bien la nature" (Du Bos I.10). Insisting on the 'beau idéal' in *Les Jardins*, Delille had managed to render gardens lifeless in his chiseling away at nature's accidents:

> Le sol le plus ingrat connaîtra la beauté.
> Est-il nu ? que des bois parent sa nudité ;
> Couvert ? portez la hache en ces forêts profondes ;
> Humide ? en lacs pompeux, en rivières fécondes,
> Changez cette onde impure ; et par d'heureux travaux
> Corrigez à la fois l'air, la terre, et les eaux: (Chant I)

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[185] L'Océan amoureux de ces rives tranquilles
Calme, en baissant leurs pieds, ses orageux transports,
Et pressant dans ses bras ces golfes et ces îles,
De son humide haleine en rafraîchit les bords. ("Ischia" 13-16)
Again, I am arguing that post-*Méditations* poets were more preoccupied with received notions of Lamartine than with his actual poetic strategies in later *Méditations* such as "Ischia" and "Les Préludes".

Yet, Lamartine's almost complete erasing of nature for the sake of a free imagination turned out to be unsustainable. In their effort to 'restore' lyric poetry, Restoration poets saw themselves as having to establish common ground between servile copying and complete abstraction: "L'art, outre sa partie idéale, a une partie terrestre et positive. Quoi qu'il en fasse, il est encadré entre la grammaire et la prosodie, entre Vaugelas et Richelet. Il a, pour ses créations les plus capricieuses, des formes, des moyens d'exécution, tout un matériel à remuer" (Hugo, Preface to *Cromwell*: 90). Their ideal work of art was romantic in that it was the product of an inventive imagination, but classic because it was grounded in the direct apprehension of nature: "il est temps de le dire hautement, et c'est surtout que les exceptions confirmeraient la règle, tout ce qui est dans la nature est dans l'art" (Ibid 79). Hugo insists that the poet's "inspiration", or faculty of invention, is an aspect of nature's truth: "Le poète, insistons sur ce point, ne doit donc prendre conseil que de la nature, de la vérité, et de l'inspiration qui est aussi une vérité et une nature" (Ibid 88). The imagination thus worked *with* as opposed to *upon* nature in order to produce the poem. The poet's imagination, like the bee, extracts from rather than modifies the flower. Countering those who accuse the romantics of having created a barbaric and lawless language, Hugo responds by describing the poet's balancing of flight and order: "Les poëtes ont fait ce travail, comme les abeilles leur miel, en songeant à autre chose, sans calcul, sans préméditation, sans système, mais avec la rare et naturelle intelligence des abeilles et des poètes" ("But de cette publication" 54).[186] The analogy is even more striking in the Preface to *Cromwell*, where the bee's intelligence does not detract from nature's vital and vibrant substance. Hugo's abundant use of commas and

[186] This is Hugo's introduction to *Littérature et philosophie mêlées.*

curious rhythm in the following passage shows the bee in its halting and erratic but purposeful movement:

> Le génie, qui devine plutôt qu'il n'apprend, extrait, pour chaque ouvrage, les premières de l'ordre général des choses, les secondes de l'ensemble isolé du sujet qu'il traite ; non pas à la façon du chimiste qui allume son fourneau, souffle son feu, chauffe son creuset, analyse et détruit ; mais à la manière de l'abeille, qui vole sur ses ailes d'or, se pose sur chaque fleur, et en tire son miel, sans que le calice perde rien de son éclat, la corolle rien de son parfum. (88)[187]

Hugo thus arrives at a concretized creative imagination, since we are led to see how it works. Albouy notes the poet's countering of fluidity with solidity, describing it as "cette puissance particulière qu'a l'imagination de Hugo, de rendre concret l'abstrait et le fluide ou le gazeux compact et solide" (*La Création mythologique* 106). In distinction to a persistent philosophical and theological tradition, where the imagination harbors connotations of fancy and vagueness, as well as in opposition to the recent romantic linking of the creative imagination to melody's anarchy, Hugo maintained that the imagination was calm and orderly: "l'ordre résulte du fond même des choses, de la disposition intelligente des éléments intimes d'un sujet" (*Odes et Ballades*, Préface de 1826: 281).

Hugo's figure of the eye is the symbol of this generative but in-control imagination. More than a mere receptacle of physical impressions, the dilation and contraction of the pupil reflects how his free but ordered imagination operates. The same

[187] Only a year earlier, Hugo had already explained how the artist's imagination conserves rather than corrects the color of the original object. It is a process that allows the original impression to flourish: "Il existe certaines eaux qui, si vous y plongez une fleur, un fruit, un oiseau, ne vous les rendent, au bout de quelque temps, que revêtus d'une épaisse croûte de pierre, sous laquelle on devine encore, il est vrai, leur forme primitive, mais le parfum, la saveur, la vie, ont disparu. Les pédantesques enseignements, les préjugés scholastiques, la contagion de la routine, la manie d'imitation produisent le même effet. Si vous y ensevelissez vos facultés natives, votre imagination, votre pensée, elles n'en sortiront pas. Ce que vous en retirerez conservera bien peut-être quelque apparence d'esprit, de talent, de génie, mais ce sera pétrifié". (*Odes et Ballades*, Preface of 1826: 282-283)

eye that follows a blinding meteor, which is a metaphor for the poet's moving and maturing "pensée" –

> Vois l'astre chevelu qui, royal météore,
> Roule, en se grossissant des mondes qu'il dévore ;
> […]
> Entraînant dans son cours des mondes de pensées,
> Toujours marche et grandit toujours ! ("A M. de S.-B." 43-48)

– is the same eye that takes in a much more humble and indeterminate twilight after a passing rain in "Pluie d'été":

> Les courants ont lavé le sable;
> Au soleil monte les vapeurs,
> Et l'horizon insaisissable
> Tremble et fuit sous leurs plis trompeurs. (31-34)[188]

Yet, in the last stanza of the poem, the eye that was struggling to make sense out of this nebulous horizon, as well as out of the ominous interplay of shadow and light in the city below, now takes in a brilliant rainbow. In these critical formative years of Hugo's positioning himself as the century's leading poet, he never loses himself to shadows or the sky. His poems perform the drama of this struggle: "Nous pouvons voir à tout instant le déroulement magnifique de ce lyrisme," Brunetière remarks (182). Hugo thus saves the imagination from dissipation by underscoring its fundamental meaning: the imagination, however creative, ultimately refers back to an image of something. But if mimesis is at stake here, it is in Hugo's effort to capture the dynamic and illuminating process of his imagination. "La 'mimesis'", Jacques Neefs says of Hugo, "semble alors coïncider avec son propre exercice, elle se pose comme l'énigme d'une vision concrète

[188] These two poems, both added to the 1828 edition of the *Odes et Ballades*, were written within months of each other. The first is addressed to Sainte-Beuve.

qui serait l'émergence d'une pensée-vision" ("Dire la création ou Penser, est-ce voir?" 330).[189]

After providing a general context of the French romantics' discourse on the image during the Restoration period, as well as the specific ways in which Hugo contributed to this discourse in the *Odes et Ballades* and *Cromwell* by emulating the optical device of the diorama, I will show how the overall landscape of Hugo's *Orientales* (1829) is not a representation of a point of view, but a metaphor for a lyric poetry that vividly places the poet's imagination *on* view. Hugo designed his Orient to display the narrative of a creative but ordered process in response to his lament that readers noticed "plutôt du talent d'un écrivain que de ses façons de voir" (Preface to *Cromwell* 61). In response to Lamartine, Hugo 'oriented' poetry by representing a concrete but perpetually inventive imagination that never faded. As early as the first edition of the *Odes*, Hugo makes it clear that he will depart from the safe if alienating space of Lamartine's valley. A storm may be approaching, but he purports to face it fearlessly:

> Elle approche, il la voit; mais il la voit sans crainte.
> Adieu, flots purs, berceaux épais,
> Beau vallon où l'on trouve un écho pour sa plainte,
> Bois heureux où l'on souffre en paix ! ("Au vallon de Chérizy" 57-60)

Part I.

The Image in French Romantic Poetry (1820-1830)

[189] In *L'Œil de Victor Hugo* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2004). This compilation of essays is an important resource for my examination of Hugo's eye as the source of the poetic imagination. The stated purpose of these conference proceedings was to examine the physical condition and workings of Hugo's eye ("son regard même, l'activité de son œil") in relation to his creative output: "Quelles sont les voies qui conduisent Hugo de la perception à la représentation, et qui reconduisent celle-ci vers celle-là?" (xv).

Rayonne, il en est temps ! Et, s'il vient un orage,
En prisme éblouissant change le noir nuage.
V. Hugo, "A mon ami S.-B.", *Odes et Ballades* (1828)

Quel prisme à ma vue effacée
Repeindra la couleur passée
Où nageaient la terre et les cieux ?
Sainte-Beuve, *Joseph Delorme* (1829)

Before turning to Hugo's enactment of an ocular imagination in his late Restoration poetry, I will first consider the complex phenomenon of the poetic image and how it was theorized in the romantic period. The complexity arises from the image's historical relativism, as well as from the much less strict interpretation of Horace's 'ut pictura poesis' that came about as the French Romantics critiqued the genre of descriptive poetry. After demonstrating how poets in Hugo's coterie – unanimous in their heeding of the eighteenth-century poet André Chénier's call for a bolder and more colorful French poetry – emphasized a return to land and the setting forth of poetry as a visual experience, I will then explore the role of color in lyric verse. Suggesting a rivalry rather than a harmony with painting, French romantic poets suggested that the emblem of their art was not an inert palette, but an incandescent rainbow that represented an infinite but ordered imagination.

1. The Post-*Méditations* Context

What, exactly, *is* an image in poetry? As my study of the French Romantics' simultaneous response to eighteenth-century mimetic poetry and to Lamartine's *Méditations* suggests, it depends on the time period in question. W.J.T. Mitchell, for example, thinks of images "as a far-flung family which has migrated in time and space and undergone profound mutations in the process" (9).[190] In a study that focuses on

[190] *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986).

English poets, but that reinforces Mitchell's argument, Roy Frazer considers how Augustan and then eighteenth-century poets reacted vehemently against Renaissance writers' rhetorical use of the image – the image, as a copy or simulacrum, amounted to a lie – in order to minimize as much as possible the distance between nature and art.[191] In his examination of the history of the image in French poetry, Marc Eigeldinger traces the specific ways that poets from the Medieval period to the Surrealists freed the image from rhetorical constraints. He shows how certain prose writers (Rousseau, Bernardin de Sainte-Pierre, Chateaubriand) were the preferred models for romantic poets, due to their emphasis on capturing the movement of nature, dreams and emotion:

> Rousseau ne fit pas que de réintégrer le moi dans les lettres françaises, il a redécouvert et approfondi le sentiment de la nature, il a montré que le rêve pouvait être un singulier excitant pour l'imagination. Ces deux découvertes étaient indispensables à la poésie puisque les romantiques allaient puiser leurs métaphores dans le spectacle de la nature et concevoir un art contemplatif. (35)[192]

The Romantics, according to Mitchell, dissociated the image from its traditionally mimetic or allegorical function, presenting it as a living and free medium that corresponds to Hugo's description of a work of theater as a growing flame: "The progressive sublimation of the image reaches its logical culmination when the entire poem or text is regarded as an image or 'verbal icon', and this image is defined, not as a pictorial likeness or impression, but as a synchronic structure in some metaphorical space" (24). "The picture of the mind revives again," Wordsworth says in "Tintern Abbey". The initial impression is not merely retrieved, but becomes an active agent in its own right that transforms the revisited abbey into a mental landscape:

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[191] "The Origin of the Word 'Image'", in *English Literary History* XXVII.2 (Jun. 1960): 149-161.
[192] Eigeldinger's thesis is entitled *L'Evolution dynamique de l'image dans la poésie française du romantisme à nos jours* (Neuchâtel, 1943).

> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. (48-50)

The "wild green landscape" upon which the poet gazes becomes an interior view of what the light of his mind produces. Material colors and forms are not enough ("That time has past"):

> […] And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. (94-103)

In Terry Eagleton's words: "What had started out as a matter of clear representations now touched on the very essence of the poetic imagination, which combines, distinguishes, unifies and transforms. […] Rhetoric and reality were no longer at daggers drawn" (*How to Read a Poem* 141). The romantic image was thus the sign of an inner creative faculty that acted on external objects, and since it was contingent on the poet's subjectivity, it had infinite potential (symbolized in Wordsworth's poem by the ethereal elements of light and air). Coleridge remarks on the chameleon nature of poetry's imagery: "As of higher worth, so doubtless still more characteristic of poetic genius does the imagery become, when it moulds and colors itself to the circumstances, passion, or character, present and foremost in the mind" (*Biographia Literaria* II: 18).

French Restoration poets' emphasis on the image is evident in their reviews of Lamartine's *Méditations*. In his, Hugo somewhat provocatively labels the eighteenth-century poet André Chénier as the "real" romantic poet. The extent of Chénier's

influence on Hugo's early career and, hence, on French Restoration poets in general, cannot be overemphasized. Hugo furnished a review of his predecessor upon the publication of Chénier's *Œuvres complètes* in 1819,[193] and it figures prominently both as the first installment of *Le Conservateur littéraire* (Dec. 1819) and as Hugo's longest piece of criticism in the publication as a whole.[194] Here, in a fairly obvious slight to Lamartine, Hugo proclaims Chénier the father of the 'true' elegy : "Malgré tous ses défauts, André Chénier sera regardé parmi nous comme le père et le modèle de la véritable élégie" (96). What is more, Hugo opened his very first poem to the *Odes* (which was also his first collection of verse) with an epigraph from Chénier's " Iambe ".[195] A year later, in his article on the *Méditations*, Hugo continues to push Lamartine well into the background. While Chénier was a "romantique parmi les classiques", Lamartine was a "classique parmi les romantiques" (*Le Conservateur littéraire*, 15 Apr. 1820).[196] Hugo's distinction rested on visual form. Both Chénier and Lamartine shared the same "luxe d'images neuves et vraies", but Hugo nonetheless goes on to suggest that Lamartine's images were nebulous : "seulement l'un est plus grave et

[193] Ed. H. de Latouche. Only two of Chénier's poems were published before he died at the guillotine, so this was the first significant introduction of his work to the French public. It was met with great enthusiasm by royalists such as the young Hugo, who were quick to assimilate Chénier, a victim of the Terror, to their cause. He was also lauded for having modern sensibilities: in his introduction, Latouche casts Chénier as a romantic figure like Werther or René who leads a "vie errante, inquiète, incertaine". A more recent edition of Chénier's *Poésies* is used here (Gallimard, 1994).

[194] Also notable is the fact that Hugo republished it in full in *Littérature et philosophie mêlées*, which was an exception to the norm. His entry on Lamartine's *Méditations*, however, is considerably truncated. The notes in the Laffont edition of *Littérature et philosophie mêlées* reveal Hugo's explicit intention to give primacy to Chénier: "Les citations [dans l'article sur Chénier] ne sont pas supprimées comme celles de l'article sur Lamartine, dont Hugo disait dans une conversation de 1832 'qu'au moins on n'assigne pas à ce dernier la prééminence' (Fontaney, *Journal intime*, 6 sept)" (731).

[195] The epigraph resonates with the militant tone of Hugo's poem:

Mourir sans vider mon carquois!
Sans percer, sans fouler, sans pétrir dans leur fange
Ces bourreaux barbouilleurs de lois !

"Ce n'est qu'aux inventeurs que la vie est promise", Chénier announces in "L'Invention", and in a call that would have certainly stirred Hugo, he rallies poets to be courageous: "Osons".

[196] Hugo signed the article "E.".

même plus mystique dans ses peintures". He then uses musical terms to describe Lamartine's poems, and links him to Northern writers (Ossian, Klopstock, Schiller). We can take these remarks as a rather thinly veiled criticism, since Hugo adopts the rhetoric, however subdued, of his classical contemporaries who resisted literary 'foreign invaders'. If Lamartine's poems were "riches d'idées", he did not represent them clearly.[197] In his review of Chénier, however, Hugo had lauded his eighteenth-century predecessor for "cette vérité de détails, […] cette abondance d'images qui caractérisent la poésie antique" (96). Chénier, with a "teinte ferme et originale", evoked "pensées nouvelles" in the form of "peintures vivantes". In Chénier's "L'Invention", the mere "rimeur" sees clouds ("Un rimeur voit partout un nuage; et jamais, / D'un coup d'œil ferme et grand, n'a saisi les objets" 325-326), but for the true poet the eye is the floodgate to his invention:

> Celui qu'un vrai démon presse, enflamme, domine,
> Ignore un tel supplice : il pense, il imagine ;
> Un langage imprévu dans son ame produit,
> Naît avec sa pensée, et l'embrasse et la suit ;
> Les images, les mots que le génie inspire,
> Où l'univers entier vit, se meut et respire,
> Source vaste et sublime et qu'on ne peut tarir,
> En foule en son cerveau se hâtent de courir.
> D'eux-mêmes ils vont chercher un nœud qui les rassemble
> Tout s'allie et se forme et tout va naître ensemble. (331-340)

Similar to Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, while more receptive to the *Nouvelles méditations* than Hugo and his circle, nonetheless pointed to Lamartine's "blind" eye as an overriding fault.[198] In a letter to Hugo, Vigny concedes that Lamartine leaves too

[197] Hugo was far from being alone when referring to Lamartine's vagueness. In the previous chapter, I cited Charles Loyson's review of the *Méditations*, which extols Lamartine for his musical qualities and for having recuperated a long lost lyric voice. At the same time, Loyson admonishes Lamartine for his inattention to form as well as for his lack of clear ideas, what he calls "un peu trop de ce vague qui plaît dans la poésie, mais qui doit en être l'âme et non le corps" (*Le Lycée français*, vol. 4, Apr. 1820; cited in Lanson's edition of the *Méditations*, vol. 1: xcvii).

[198] Durand's review of *La Mort de Socrate* and the *Nouvelles méditations* in *La Muse française* (cited above) presents Lamartine as a sort of hack: "paresseux, peut-être, à développer cette grande faculté qui

much to interior sentiment : "Il y a en général dans tous ces ouvrages une verve de cœur, une fécondité d'émotions qui le feront toujours adorer parce qu'il est en rapport avec tous les cœurs, il ne lui reste plus qu'à l'être avec l'esprit par la pureté et avec les yeux dans ses descriptions".[199] It is thus not surprising that Vigny's poems illustrate the central role of the image. Though his early poems' evocation of fictional worlds far removed in history do not take into account the processing of actual experience, they certainly reflect Hugo's lauding of "cette vérité d'images […] qui caractérisent la poésie antique". "Le Bain" (*Poèmes*, 1822) begins with a description of the poem's setting ("C'était près d'une source à l'onde pure et sombre. / Le large sycamore y répandait son ombre" 1-2), and then features an abundance of jewels that further call out to the eye:[200]

> L'une ôte la tiare où brille le saphir
> Dans l'éclat arrondi de l'or poli d'Ophir ;
> Aux cheveux parfumés dérobe leurs longs voiles,
> Et la gaze brodée en tremblantes étoiles ;
> La perle, sur son front enlacée en bandeau,
> Ou pendante à l'oreille en mobile fardeau ;
> Les colliers de rubis, et, par des bandelettes,
> L'ambre au cou suspendu dans l'or des cassolettes. (11-19)

Each image the poet produces makes as strong an impression on the reading eye as possible, while the density of each line and generally unbroken alexandrine evokes

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crée". He describes Lamartine's fall from the *Méditations* in brutal terms: "Lorsqu'on parle des hauteurs où s'est élancé M. de Lamartine, on ne doit point sacrifier l'unité d'une pensée profonde et sainte à la coquetterie du talent, à ce frivole plaisir de montrer qu'on peut déployer toutes les grâces et obtenir tous les succès". Vigny was troubled by the review, and wrote to Hugo: "On dit que vous l'avez excommunié. Je ne puis le croire" (3 Oct. 1823). Cited in Loiseleur's edition of Lamartine's *Méditations* (543-544).

[199] From the same letter cited above (3 Oct. 1823). Eigeldinger argues that, while Lamartine demonstrated an original imagination, his images were nonetheless stylized: "Lamartine n'est toutefois pas un créateur de métaphores comme Hugo ou Baudelaire, car son imagination est dominée par la sensibilité, elle se plie aux mouvements et aux variations du sentiment. L'image est considérée comme un ornement de style, elle n'a pas encore acquis sa pleine autonomie" (39).

[200] This poem, under the title "Chant de Suzanne au bain", also appeared in *La Muse française* (Apr. 1824). The editors stress in a note how Vigny's poem reflects the poetry of the times: "M. le comte Alfred de Vigny est un des écrivains originaux qui caractérisent le plus la physionomie poétique de notre époque". Here, they stress that Vigny's poem has shape and body; his depiction of Susannah thus serves as an allegory of the modern lyric.

weight and permanence. Movement is hardly suggested, but for this reason, it is highly charged and even erotic as the servants' hands work to undress Susannah and especially as a red blush infuses her almost translucent face.[201] However, the poet counters the aggression of the elders' unwelcome glances by ending with a static and imposing vision of marble and crystal: the hands that flit around her during the course of the poem come to a stop, and she remains aloof in an eternal pose ("soutenue enfin"). In the last lines of the poem, the readers' eyes are held captive in the same way as Susannah's body:

> Mais, soutenue enfin par une esclave noire,
> Dans un cristal liquide on croirait que l'ivoire
> Se plonge, quand son corps, sous l'eau même éclairé,
> Du ruisseau pur et frais touche le fond doré. (33-36)

Laurence M. Porter, when analyzing how Vigny reinvented the genre of the "poëme", notes how the poet's sense of concision and immediacy heightens the visuality of the dramatic moment.[202] Showing how painting and statues had a significant impact on his aesthetic, Porter refers to a quote from Vigny's journal (dated 1826) concerning the poet's primary emphasis on the eye: "Voir est tout pour moi. Un seul coup d'œil me révèle un pays et je crois deviner, sur le visage, une âme" (55). In an insightful study, François Germain argues that, despite commonly held opinions that his poems are colorless due to their foundation in philosophy, Vigny's poetry is in fact picturesque. Only, while the romantic imagination typically emphasized undulating movement, Vigny concentrated all of his colors and images into a hidden point: "Si l'on peut risquer cette

[201] In "Vigny poète" (an essay that serves as a 'Notice' to Vigny's poetry as a whole in vol. 1 of the 1986 Pléiade edition), François Germain considers Vigny's emphasis on 'volupté' as a sign of the influence of Chénier's idylls. Within a classical framework, sensuality is heightened in the eighteenth-century manner of erotic poetry: "D'emblée, Vigny a reconnu le sien dans la voix de Chénier. Qu'il imagine une Antiquité alexandrine ou biblique dans ses premiers poèmes, c'est surtout Éros qui l'inspire. Il invente un univers complice d'eaux vives, de bosquets, de boudoirs, pour y surprendre au lit ou au bain des amoureuses toujours dévoilées" (901). In this sense, Vigny's images are more 'earthly'.

[202] *The Renaissance of the Lyric in French Romanticism: Elegy, "Poëme" and Ode* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1978). See Chap. 2, "Symbolic Gesture in Vigny": 47-74.

comparaison, les images de Hugo s'étalent comme dans une vitrine, celles de Vigny se cachent comme dans un trésor. […] Souterraine et secrète, cette imagination tourne le dos à la virtuosité; profondément intégrée à la vie mentale, elle n'a pas l'aisance d'une faculté autonome, mais se présente plutôt comme une force qui fait converger tous les facteurs de l'inspiration" (*L'Imagination d'Alfred de Vigny* 11).[203]

Perhaps the most significant illustration of the French romantic poet's cultivation of an image-based poetics is Sainte-Beuve's *Joseph Delorme*. I see it as the story, not only of the quintessential post-Revolutionary poet, but even more specifically, of the poet-*Méditations* poet. Delorme's dejected moral "landscape" reflects Lamartine's, but he hopes to recolor it:

> Et moi, mon regard est sans vie;
> Dans l'univers décoloré
> Je traîne l'inutile envie
> D'y revoir la lueur ravie
> Qui d'abord l'avait éclairé. ("Vie" 23)

Galvanized by Hugo's emboldened Cénacle, Sainte-Beuve's poet finds an ironic sense of stability by re-familiarizing himself with an in-flux external world, thereby problematizing the idea that art could make claims to truth (imitation) or circumvent nature altogether (Lamartine). Like Hugo, but delving into a sustained textual analysis, Sainte-Beuve contrasts Chénier and Lamartine and explains for the divide by contrasting their landscape aesthetic. While Chénier's landscape is earthly, Lamartine's is aerial: "La poésie d'André Chénier n'a point de religion ni de mysticisme; c'est, en quelque sorte, le

[203] Paris: José Corti, 1961. Germain goes on to suggest that Vigny's mind-centric imagination anticipates Baudelaire's, which corresponds to my own interpretation of the Baudelairean imagination in the following chapter: "Etudier cette imagination, c'est donc préciser les caractères constants et originaux de l'activité créatrice, son idiosyncrasie, comme disait Baudelaire" (Ibid).

paysage dont Lamartine a fait le ciel, paysage d'une infinie variété et d'une immortelle justice" ("Pensées").[204] Chénier is 'down to earth', and accordingly, each element of his landscape appears crystal clear: "Avec ses forêts verdoyantes, ses blés, ses vignes, ses monts, ses prairies et ses fleuves". Lamartine, in contrast, has a necessarily image-less poetry. Water below can reflect the sky, but the sky itself (Lamartine's domain) reflects nothing: "le dôme du ciel ne réfléchit pas les images projetées de la terre" (Ibid).[205] Though Sainte-Beuve was not critical of Lamartine's melody-centric aesthetic, it is clear that *Joseph Delorme* enacts a modern, post-*Méditations* poetry that appropriates a clear manner of presentation.[206] In one of his elegies, Chénier conflates song and image; do we hear this poem, or do we see it?[207]

> Mes chants savent tout peindre; accours, vient les entendre;
> Ma voix plaît, ô Camille, elle est flexible et tendre.
> Philomèle, les bois, les eaux, les pampres verts,
> Les Muses, le printemps, habitent dans mes vers. (Livre II.IV: 1-4)

This poem has substance ("habitent *dans* mes vers"), and its earthly quality ("Mes vers sont parfumés de myrte et de fleurs" 11) evokes immediacy and tangibility. Sainte-Beuve's "Promenade" looks to return to this earth, and accordingly reduces the scale of things. The poet's conversational tone enhances this familiarity:

> Bien; il faut l'aigle aux monts, le géant à l'abîme,
> Au sublime spectacle un spectateur sublime.

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[204] The section of the "Pensées" to which I refer here appears as section VIII in the 1861 Poulet-Malassis edition (considered definitive) of *Joseph Delorme*. Antoine's edition is based on the original 1829 version.

[205] Lamartine seems to reiterate this in his "Epître à M. de Sainte-Beuve" (*Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, 1830):

> Quand l'oiseau s'élevant des rochers du rivage
> Plane dans le rayon au-dessus du nuage,
> Qu'il n'entend plus la vague, et qu'il voit sous ses yeux
> Ces abîmes d'azur qui sont pour nous les cieux ! (185-188)

[206] Sainte-Beuve's point is not to say that Lamartine should emulate Chénier, but that the settings of their poems are simply different: "Mais, après tout, le ciel est toujours le ciel, et rien n'en peut abaisser la hauteur" (Ibid).

[207] This comes from the eighteenth-century's strict interpretation of Horace's 'ut pictura poesis': "Il faut donc que nous croyions voir, pour ainsi dire, en écoutant des vers: ut pictura poesis dit Horace" (Du Bos).

> Moi, j'aime à cheminer et je reste plus bas.
> Quoi ? des rocs, des forêts, des fleuves ? … oh ! non pas,
> Mais bien moins ; mais un champ, un peu d'eau qui murmure,
> Un vent frais agitant une grêle ramure ;
> L'étang sous la bruyère avec le jonc qui dort ;
> Voir couler en un pré la rivière à plein bord ;
> Quelque jeune arbre au loin, dans un air immobile,
> Découpant sur l'azur son feuillage débile ;
> À travers l'épaisseur d'une herbe qui reluit,
> Quelque sentier poudreux qui rampe et qui s'enfuit ;
> […]

The point is to show to what degree poetry has rid itself of any metaphysical pretenses, while in "A M. A. de Lamartine", Sainte-Beuve emphasizes instead Lamartine's trading of the voice and of light for the dark and silent mystery of the infinite:

> Est-ce assez pour moi que mon âme
> Frémisse à ton chant inouï ;
> Qu'écoutant tes soupirs de flamme,
> Comme à l'ami qui la réclame,
> Dans l'ombre elle réponde : Oui ;
>
> Qu'aux voix qu'un vent du soir apporte
> Elle mêle ton nom tout bas,
> Et ranime son aile morte
> A tes rayons si doux…qu'importe,
> Hélas ! si tu ne le sais pas ? (36-45)

Sainte-Beuve fills Lamartine's landscape back in, not to re-appropriate a mimetic aesthetic, but to highlight the poet's reactivated imagination. His poet is not lost to the infinite, but remains grounded as he creates. In an article on England's Lake Poets, Sainte-Beuve shows how, in their attention to the minutiae of nature and everyday life, the creative process can extract more powerful colors than the copier:

> Quand on eut épuisé les tableaux extérieurs et reproduit les dehors de la nature, on pénétra plus avant, on s'identifia avec elle, et on ne la sépara plus de nous. Dès lors les plus minces objets, les plus vulgaires accidents qu'elle offre, s'embellirent d'un nouveau charme aux yeux de

> l'observateur passionné, *et puisèrent en quelque sorte dans la fraîcheur de sa pensée des couleurs nouvelles*.[208] (emphasis mine)

Joseph Delorme may waver in his vocation as a poet, but his turn to the here and now effectively nourishes his inventive faculty. The poet's landscape in "Retour à la poésie", like Ischia, is a self-sufficient island ("Ile sauvage ou fortunée, / Toujours la même, ô lieu charmant" 36-37) that allows the poet to mature:

> *Trop longtemps incomplet génie,*
> Distrait jusqu'au pied de l'autel,
> J'ai senti comme une agonie
> La lutte entre mon harmonie
> Et les bruits d'un monde mortel. (56-60 – emphasis mine)

Accordingly, Sainte-Beuve illuminates instead of erases his landscape. In an obvious reference to "Le Lac" ("L'âme ressemble au lac immense / De rocs sublimes entouré" 61-62), Sainte-Beuve now wrests light out of its deep. While Lamartine's lake led to a destabilizing echo, Sainte-Beuve's invites stars whose distance seems to be obliterated:

> Que d'éclat derrière cette ombre,
> Et quel beau firmament reluit !
> Plus l'œil plonge sous le flot sombre,
> Plus il voit d'étoiles sans nombre
> Dans ce qui lui semblait la nuit. (66-70)

The lake's reflection of light represents the mediating faculty of the imagination, and this blinding effect allows the poet to propose a new starting point:

> Pour l'œil tout plein de cette image
> Le soleil n'est plus que nuage
> Et pâle est la lueur du jour. (73-75)

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[208] This article was the third installment of Sainte-Beuve's review in *Le Globe* of Amédée Pichot's *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Ecosse* (1825). It is included in Maxime Leroy's edition of Sainte-Beuve's *Premiers lundis*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1949): 134-138. Though Sainte-Beuve believed Wordsworth and Coleridge had become too systematic or metaphysical in their representations of nature, in that nature and representation were lost to the idea ("Partis d'une idée profonde et vraie, ils en ont abusé sans mesure"), he felt that they were nonetheless important for having made the break from descriptive poetry. Sainte-Beuve sees Lamartine's "Le Lac" as representative of the Lake Poets' subjective landscapes.

Lamartine, in contrast, resigns himself to defeat. By the end of the *Nouvelles méditations*, "Ischia" turns out to be a short-lived paradise:

> Bientôt !...Mais de la mort la main lourde et muette
> Vient de toucher la corde : elle se brise, et jette
> Un son plaintif et sourd dans le vague des airs. ("Le poète mourant" 157-159)

Tellingly, Sainte-Beuve's "Retour à la poésie" appears shortly after *his* "Adieux à la poésie"; what is more, "A mon ami Victor Hugo" is in between both. Armed with a sense of resolve, however mitigated compared to his mentor's, Sainte-Beuve's alter-ego crosses a threshold (Hugo) that amplifies Lamartine's "son plaintif" into a loud cry: "Oh! Moi, je l'entends bien ce monde qui t'admire. / Cri puissant! Qu'il m'enivre, ami; qu'il me déchire!" (25-26).[209]

But "A mon ami Victor Hugo" indicates that this conversion comes at no small cost: "On s'envole; ô douleur!"[210] A fair amount of irony infuses the poem, suggesting that Hugo makes it look too easy. There is the sense in this apparent tribute that Hugo's prism is too blinding and aloof:[211]

> Dis-moi, jeune vainqueur,
> Dis-moi, nous entends-tu ? la clameur solennelle
> Va-t-elle dans la nue enfler d'orgueil ton aile

[209] Antoine places "Retour à la poésie" in Sainte-Beuve's pre-conversion period, whose poems are still heavily marked by Lamartine and classical sensibilities, while "A mon ami Victor Hugo" was produced a bit later (between 1827 and 1829).

[210] Again, the parallels with Augustine's mind- and heart-wrenching conversion are strong. Two studies examine Sainte-Beuve's uneasy and ultimately strained relationship to the Romantics. Paul Bénichou considers the poet's agnosticism and hence incapacity to identify with any particular sect (in *L'Ecole du désenchantement*), and in a different vein, Marie-Catherine Huet-Brichard sees Sainte-Beuve's poetry, due to the poet's emphasis on irony and violence, as "evolving" into "le néant". While I think her emphasis on the violence of Sainte-Beuve's poetics is exaggerated, I do agree with her reflection that "La poésie de *Joseph Delorme*, reflet d'un univers sans transcendance, révèle une recherche de l'authenticité qui s'exprime ainsi par un dépoussiérage de tout l'arsenal poétique" (162). *La poésie de Sainte-Beuve : un imaginaire de l'échec* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1999) ; see chap. 5, "Une révolution poétique".

[211] As my next chapter will show, Sainte-Beuve's initial slight 'méfiance' developed into downright scorn – which Baudelaire inherited – as Hugo relied increasingly on the idea of Nature instead of the experience of nature itself. Even though it was dedicated to Hugo, a Sainte-Beuvien yellow fog infuses the Parisian landscape in Baudelaire's "Les Sept vieillards".

Et remuer ton cœur ?

Ou bien, sans rien sentir de ce vain bruit qui passe,
Plein des accords divins, le regard dans l'espace
Fixé sur un soleil,
Plonges-tu, pour l'atteindre, en des flots de lumière,
Et bientôt, t'y posant, laisses-tu ta paupière
S'y fermer au sommeil? (15-24)

Sainte-Beuve, in a more humble gesture, directs his mind's prism to a more mundane and familiar life instead of Hugo's vast and generalized Nature or History.[212] One of the very few French literary figures to be familiar with English romantic poets, he goes further than their filtering of countrysides and aspects of nature (clouds, daffodils, cottages) by placing poetry in more immediate surroundings of Salons, balls, interiors, and non-imposing or "everyday" landscapes.[213] Sainte-Beuve thus dramatizes to an even greater extent the tension between the artist and his experience in the world. In an important poem that anticipates Baudelaire's urban poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Sainte-Beuve's "Les Rayons jaunes" reveals a modern poet who, stripped of religious or metaphysical baggage, looks to the mundane to keep poetry fresh:

Ce ne sont que chansons, clameurs, rixes d'ivrogne ;
Ou qu'amours en plein air, et baisers sans vergogne,
Et publiques faveurs ;
Je rentre ; sur ma route on se presse, on se rue ;
Toute la nuit j'entends se traîner dans ma rue
Et hurler les buveurs. (91-96)[214]

[212] Barat (op. cit.) situates Sainte-Beuve's originality as a romantic poet in his turn to a "réalité basse" (222-232). Barat quotes Sainte-Beuve's later observation that Joseph Delorme was "un Werther et un René des faubourgs" (230).

[213] Antoine notes that a translation of Wordsworth did not exist in this period, and that an English edition would not have been readily available until 1828.

[214] Sainte-Beuve's poem also anticipates Verlaine's treatment of the urban landscape, although unlike his predecessors, Verlaine dissolves the irony of rendering poetry out of the city and creates a harmonious music out of the din. The notes of a shrill street organ turn into a symphony:

Les notes ont un rhume et les do sont des la,
Mais qu'importe ! l'on pleure en entendant cela!
Mais l'esprit, transporté dans le pays des rêves,
Sent à ces vieux accords couler en lui des sèves;
[…]

This reality is what makes for a more natural and thus convincing aesthetic, and towards the end of the "Pensées" in *Joseph Delorme*, Sainte-Beuve reflects on how he sees himself as having contributed to the "nouvelle école":

> J'ai tâché, après mes devanciers, d'être original à ma manière, humblement et bourgeoisement, observant la nature et l'âme de près, mais sans microscope, nommant les choses de la vie privée par leur nom, mais préférant la chaumière au boudoir, et, dans tous les cas, cherchant à relever le prosaïsme de ces détails domestiques par la peinture des sentiments humains et des objets naturels. (150)

The blinding effects of Hugo's poetry and Sainte-Beuve's own "Retour à la poésie" are compensated in "Les Rayons" with gentler yellow rays of light that are somehow more powerful in how they present the poet's imagination (a prism) as more immediate:

> J'aime à les voir percer vitres et jalousie;
> Chaque oblique sillon trace à ma fantaisie
> Un flot d'atomes d'or ;
> Puis, m'arrivant dans l'âme à travers la prunelle,
> Ils redorent aussi mille pensers en elles,
> Mille atomes encore. (13-18)

Symbolized by a beam of light rather than the mark of the paint brush, Sainte-Beuve shows that the picturesque was no longer the result of the mechanical transfer of mental image onto the canvas, but representative of the infinite possibilities ("mille atomes encore") of the combining processes of the poet's mental faculties.[215] The poem appears

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> La pitié monte au cœur et les larmes aux yeux,
> Et l'on voudrait pouvoir goûter la paix des cieux,
> Et dans une harmonie étrange et fantastique
> Qui tient de la musique et tient de la plastique,
> L'âme, les inondant de lumière et de chant,
> Mêle les sons de l'orgue aux rayons du couchant ! ("Nocturne parisien" 67-76)

In *Poèmes saturniens* (1866). Ed. Jacques Borel (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

[215] Sainte-Beuve thus comes to the conclusion in the "Pensées" that "Les adversaires du pittoresque se trompent". For the "new" romantics, the picturesque does not limit the artist, but lends him the full, literal spectrum of possibilities offered by an actual view of nature: "[…] il n'y a dans la nature, à parler rigoureusement, ni vert, ni bleu, ni rouge proprement dit; les couleurs naturelles des choses sont des couleurs sans nom; mais, selon la disposition d'âme du spectateur, selon la saison de l'année, l'heure du

as a glowing palette of different yellows that represent different moments from the poet's experience and meditations on faith and death: candles at a church altar, candles at his aunt's funeral rites, and then his vision of embers in an incense burner at his own funeral. As the sun sets and reflects the mind's constantly changing tones of yellows, the poet remarks: "Ainsi va ma pensée". When, in the end, he descends into the city, an implicit yellow spleen seeps in as he works against the crowd and enters the seedy life of cabarets.[216] Sainte-Beuve's poems, despite their evocation of the doubt-stricken "mal du siècle", are paradoxically bold in how they capture what Erich Auerbach calls "the modern consciousness of reality".[217]

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jour, le jeu de la lumière, ces couleurs ondulent à l'infini, et permettent au poète d'inventer aussi à l'infini, tout en paraissant copier" (148).

[216] In this period, Gautier was also working on urban poems, but they are proto-Parnassian in their emphasis on form as opposed to the intimate aspects of the poet's experience. His colors appear as shapes more than as the product of a refracted light:

> D'un côté rares broussailles,
> Sillons à demi noyés,
> Pans grisâtres de murailles,
> Saules noueux et ployés ;
>
> De l'autre, un champ que termine
> Un large fossé plein d'eau,
> Une vieille qui chemine
> Avec un pesant fardeau ;
>
> Et puis la route qui plonge
> Dans le flanc des coteaux bleus,
> Et comme un ruban s'allonge
> En minces plis onduleux. ("Paysage" 1-16)

Gautier's *Poésies*, his first published volume, appeared in 1830.

[217] In chapter 18 of *Mimesis* ("In the Hôtel de la Mole"), Auerbach argues that Stendhal's novel *Le Rouge et le Noir* "would be almost incomprehensible without a most accurate and detailed knowledge of the political situation, the social stratification, and the economic circumstances of a perfectly definite historical moment". Nuancing Barat's rather crude presentation of Sainte-Beuve as a Hugo devotee who was no match for his master, Michel Brix underscores how Sainte-Beuve, in fact, tried to advise the head of the Cénacle to sharpen further his consciousness of the present moment: "Une fois entré dans l'intimité de Hugo, c'est le facteur humain et terrestre, c'est cette 'science de la vie', que Sainte-Beuve va encourager son illustre aîné à mieux prendre en compte" (*Hugo et Sainte-Beuve* 66). Brix refers to Sainte-Beuve's affinity for Stendhal in this regard: "Au sein même du groupe de Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, précisément, allait soutenir des idées très proches de celles qui avaient été avancées par l'auteur du *Rouge*" (65). In *La poétique du pittoresque en France de 1700 à 1830*, Wil Munsters demonstrates that Hugo's separation of the descriptive (Delille) and the picturesque in the preface to *Cromwell* came directly from Sainte-Beuve (192-194).

2. Color's Restoration

The image, as Sainte-Beuve suggests in *Joseph Delorme*, was something that the poet could reach out and grasp:

> Amoureux de la grande image,
> D'abord j'en jouis à loisir ;
> Bientôt désirant d'avantage,
> Poète avide, enfant peu sage,
> J'étends la main pour la saisir. ("Rêverie"; 11-15)

The romantic image had substance. Tracing the same evolution as Mitchell, but concentrating exclusively on the impact of the romantic interpretation of the image on poetic diction, Paul de Man describes the vivifying of the image at the start of the nineteenth century as a desire for "a return to a greater concreteness, a proliferation of natural objects that restores to language the material substantiality which had been partially lost" ("Intentional Structure of Image" 2). De Man refers to Hölderlin's "Brot und Wein" and its image of the flower as "implying a return to the source, the pure motion of experience at its beginning" (3). Similarly, in the Preface to *Cromwell* (where the question of the origin of poetry is central), Hugo defines 'couleur locale' as surface detail that depends on a vital inner sap running steadily throughout the whole drama:

> Ce n'est point à la surface du drame que doit être la couleur locale, mais au fond, dans le cœur même de l'œuvre, d'où elle se répand au dehors, d'elle-même, naturellement, également, et, pour ainsi parler, dans tous les coins du drame, comme la sève qui monte de la racine à la dernière feuille de l'arbre. (91)

In the introduction to *Littérature et philosophie mêlées*, Hugo saw himself as having to revive poetry, which for him had become "incolore et insipide", by coloring language back in and giving it tangible form: "Il fallait d'abord colorer la langue, il fallait lui faire

reprendre du corps et de la saveur" (54).[218] André Chénier once again emerges as an important precursor for the French romantics in Sainte-Beuve's *Joseph Delorme*. While Delille thought he was painting, Chénier really was in his use of the 'mot propre' *(*"Pensées" 146).[219] A simpler language allowed for a natural heightening of the poem's colors:

> Au lieu du mot vaguement abstrait, métaphysique et sentimental, employer le mot propre et pittoresque ; ainsi, par exemple, au lieu du *ciel en courroux* mettre le *ciel noir et brumeux* ; au lieu de *lac mélancolique* mettre *lac bleu* ; préférer aux doigts délicats les *doigts blancs et longs*. (Ibid 146-147)

However, more than a painting restricted to a flat canvas, the poem, due to the movement of language, best evoked the 'profondeur' of the romantic image. "If *ut pictura poesis* became a viable proposition to the Romantics," David Scott explains, "it did so to the extent that it allowed the term *image* to be applicable to both painting and poetry in that although one was a linguistic phenomenon and the other an arrangement of pigment on canvas, both were essential focusses of imaginative activity" (*Pictorialist Poetics* 11). The romantic lyric, as opposed to eighteenth-century descriptive poetry,

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[218] In a review of J. Lefèvre's "Parricide" (1823), Hugo suggests that the nineteenth century ("notre époque") is inherently vivid – "si éclatante de son propre éclat" – and needs "une école nouvelle et pure" to reflect it (Ibid 111-112). He will reiterate this in the 1823 preface of the *Odes et Ballades*, where, drawing from Chateaubriand's discussion of the "merveilleux chrétien" in the *Génie du christianisme*, he describes himself as injecting new color into the ode: "les couleurs neuves et vraies de la théogonie chrétienne," instead of the "couleurs usées et fausses de la mythologie païenne" (267). Hugo adopts the same rhetoric as Chénier, who had described the French language as "si faible en couleurs, si froid et timide; lourd, gauche, plat, inspide" ("L'Invention").

[219] Sainte-Beuve notes with irony: "Il n'y a que l'abbé Delille qui ait pu dire, en croyant peindre quelque chose: …Tombez, *altières* colonnades, / Croulez, *fiers* chapiteaux, *orgueilleuses* arcades" (147). Sainte-Beuve echoes Emile Deschamps, who said of Delille: "il nous donne toujours la périphrase au lieu du mot propre" (Préface, *Etudes françaises et étrangères* : liii). Earlier in the century, Senancour had expressed the same aversion to figures of language in descriptive passages: "On doit éviter presque toujours les figures devenues triviales et les expressions consacrées aux sciences ou empruntées de nos arts, comme le cristal des eaux, les tapis de verdure, les nuages semblables à des flocons de laine cardée, ou à des réseaux de soie. Ces images prises d'objets plus petits que ceux qu'elles servent à exprimer, rapetissent et désenchantent la nature [...]". "Du style dans les descriptions", *Mercure de France* (Sept. 1811); cited in Collot, *Paysage et poésie* (33).

therefore represents both surface and the artist's inner faculty that produces this surface. As we saw in the previous chapter, Wordsworth describes this inner faculty as a "colouring imagination" that compensates for the artist's inability to capture fully the initial impression or experience. Color in romantic poetry, then, does not respond to the material colors of the painter's palette, but to the luminous result of the poet's filtering and thus temporal imagination:

> The sense of colour must be a property of the artist, an individual way of looking at and conceiving tones of colour as they really exist; it must as well be an essential feature of reproductive imagination and invention. On account of this personal way in which the artist sees colour-tone in his world and which at the same time he continually produces in his work, the great difference in pictorial colouring is no mere caprice or a favourite way of adopting a colour that does not exist *in rerum natura*, but on the contrary it lies in the nature of the case. (Hegel, *Aesthetics*; II : 849)

Chénier, Vigny and Hugo, according to Sainte-Beuve, all demonstrate that "Le pittoresque n'est pas une boîte à couleurs qui se vide et s'épuise en un jour; c'est une source éternelle de lumière, un soleil intarissable" ("Pensées" 148). In distinction to mimetic theories of art, where color is a weak reflection – "On sait ce que la couleur et la lumière perdent à la réflexion simple," Hugo remarks in the preface to *Cromwell* (90) – the poet's imagination acts like a prism that channels light's rays and then refracts the colors according to the artist's unique way of seeing. The poet's tool is not a reflective mirror, nor a paintbrush, but a "miroir de concentration" that requires time to take effect: "il faut donc que le drame soit un miroir de concentration qui, loin de les affaiblir, ramasse et condense les rayons colorants, qui fasse d'une lueur une lumière, d'une lumière une flamme" (Ibid). Hugo, here describing the intensifying activity of the imagination, sets out to represent the effects of light as it acts on objects. God's first

creative act was in the hands of the romantic poet: “Ainsi le but de l’art est presque divin : ressusciter, s’il fait de l’histoire ; créer, s’il fait de la poésie” (91).

Instead of the palette, then, the figure of the rainbow serves as a better metaphor for how poetic imagery was both stimulated and represented in the romantic period. Romantic poets remind us that the image is the result of an infinite play of light that never allows for a true copy. Leonardo da Vinci, for example, had cautioned that “The painter must pay great attention in situating his bodies amongst objects which possess various strengths of light and various lit colours, inasmuch as every body which is so surrounded never shows itself wholly in its true colour” (“Of lights and shadows and their colours” 75).[220] The artist does not represent the thing, but the effects that constantly render the thing uncertain: if the subject is a woman in white in the countryside, “The dress continues to transform itself in response to the luminous and non-luminous colours of adjacent objects” (75-76). In *Color and Culture* (1993), John Gage demonstrates the extent to which romantic poets (more so than painters) derided Newton for “unweaving the rainbow” (Keats). Newton’s *Optics* had sacrilegiously sacrificed the experience of the rainbow itself – the splendors of its luminous and fleeting variances – for a science that explained these splendors away.[221] For the romantics, contemplating the rainbow strengthened the eye and inspired the artist to represent the delights that came from this exercise. Gage, for example, notes how the constantly changing atmospheric effects prompt the painter to combine colors on the palette to produce the most visual impact: “The example of the bow thus suggested to painters how they might manage subtle transitions from one colour to the next” (109). The rainbow inspired a process of the

[220] In *Leonardo on Painting*, ed. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989).
[221] Later, Hugo would call Newton “myopic” in “Magnitudo parvi” (*Les Contemplations*, 1856).

imagination that the artist tries to replicate on canvas, and Gage goes on to describe Delacroix in particular as the "virtuoso" of the palette. It is well known that Delacroix's travels in northern Africa had a profound impact on his manner of seeing and his sensibility to color, and the painter himself remarked on the immense challenge of capturing light:

> Les héros de David et compagnie feraient une triste figure avec leurs membres couleur de rose auprès de ces fils du soleil…venez en Barbarie, vous y verrez le naturel qui est toujours déguisé dans nos contrées, vous y sentirez de plus la précieuse et rare influence du soleil qui donne à toute chose une vie pénétrante. Je rapporterai sans doute des dessins, mais cela ne donnera pas la meilleure partie de l'impression que tout ceci procure.[222]

Similarly, but unburdened by the material medium of paint, Hugo describes the genre of drama in atmospheric terms. He first situates the play in its modern time period, claiming that modern drama, following the dawn of the ode and the zenith of the epic, represented the inevitable decline of poetry. Here, Hugo does not anticipate Baudelaire's pessimistic sense of art's decadence, but on the contrary, asserts the sunset's rich source of light and shadow. Modern drama was superior because it was *real*: "L'ode chante l'éternité, l'épopée solennise l'histoire, le drame peint la vie" (76). Philosophy and the picturesque, due to seventeen-century theorists' and poets' valorization of 'pureté' and 'clarté', had traditionally been separated (one was truth, the other distracting ornament) but Hugo now merges the two. The romantic imagination was "serious" in its evocation of light itself, as his ironic appropriation of a vaudeville-going crowd's voice indicates:

> S'il n'était pas ridicule de mêler les fantasques rapprochements de l'imagination aux déductions sévères du raisonnement, un poète pourrait dire que le lever du soleil, par exemple, est un hymne, son midi une éclatante épopée, son coucher un sombre drame où luttent le jour et la

[222] Letter to Villot, written from Tangiers, Morocco (29 Feb. 1832). In *Correspondance*, vol. 1; ed. André Joubin (Plon, 1932).

> nuit, la vie et la mort. Mais ce serait là de la poésie, de la folie peut-être ; et *qu'est-ce que cela prouve* ? (Ibid 76-77)

The picturesque element of poetry did not serve to decorate, but was a living, three-dimensional truth. Not satisfied with one image, Hugo goes on to pronounce a storm-prone ocean as the metaphor for modern drama:

> Pour rendre sensibles par une image les idées que nous venons d'aventurer, nous comparerions la poésie lyrique primitive à un lac paisible qui reflète les nuages et les étoiles du ciel ; l'épopée est le fleuve qui en découle et court, en réfléchissant ses rives, forêts, campagnes et cites, se jeter dans l'océan du drame. Enfin, comme le lac, le drame réfléchit le ciel ; comme le fleuve, il réfléchit ses rives ; mais seul il a des abîmes et des tempêtes. (Ibid 77-78)[223]

Modern dramatic poetry captures the whole "gamme" (Ibid 95). As such, Hugo aspires *Cromwell* to be the equivalent of contemplating clouds, rainbows, flames, or oceans 'en plein air'. The poet-dramatist arranges all elements of his drama into the most illuminating effects : "Il faut qu'à cette optique de la scène, toute figure soit ramenée à son trait le plus saillant, le plus individuel, le plus précis" (92). Representing the vacillating effects of the colors of the rainbow ("la couleur locale") was thus not the sign of a disordered or barbaric imagination, since creating a natural atmosphere required the poet's rigorous sense of unity:

> Le drame doit être radicalement imprégné de cette couleur des temps ; elle doit en quelque sorte y être dans l'air, de façon qu'on ne s'aperçoive qu'en y entrant et qu'en en sortant qu'on a change de siècle et d'atmosphère. Il faut quelque étude, quelque labeur pour en venir là ; tant mieux. (Ibid 91)[224]

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[223] Of course, the lake had become *the* symbol of Lamartine's poetry; at the same time that he moves beyond a classical aesthetic, Hugo implicitly asserts that Lamartine was not romantic enough for this new model. As I will show in my analysis of *Les Orientales*, the first poem "Le Feu du ciel" ends with the storm cloud's dramatic annihilation of a lake.

[224] Jacqueline Lichtenstein's *The Eloquence of Color* (1993) addresses how painting "haunted" philosophy and was seen as undermining Plato's suspicion of the image: "The insistent presence of these overly material forms of representation reveals a permanent internal conflict that reason could neither resolve or ignore" (7). The "danger" of painting's color is that it gave the illusion of presenting the thing itself. Goethe was well aware of this polemic: "From time immemorial it has been dangerous to treat of colour; so

Even if color depended on the physical operations of the individual's eye, it was nonetheless the result of an ordered psychological and intellectual process. In Goethe's *Theory of Color* (1810), for example, the eye must take time to attain a harmonizing view of the whole:

> The eye cannot for a moment remain in a particular state determined by the object it looks upon. On the contrary, it is forced to a sort of opposition, which, in contrasting extreme with extreme, intermediate degree with intermediate degree, at the same time combines these opposite impressions, and thus ever tends to a whole […]. (13)

Though at first destabilized (Goethe stresses extremes as the retina confronts either complete darkness or dazzling light), the eye gradually makes sense out of what it sees. Even in Byron's sublime drama of the modern psyche, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818), the unified but "brilliant hues" of the rainbow (a reflection of the poet's "steady eyes") at one point counter the turbulence of a forbidding waterfall. This view of an Alpine landscape is symbolic of Hugo's spectrum of the 'laid' and the 'beau':

> Horribly beautiful! but on the verge,
> From side to side, beneath the glittering morn,
> An Iris sits, amidst the infernal surge,
> Like Hope upon a death-bed, and, unworn
> Its steady eyes, while all around is torn
> By the distracted waters, bears serene
> Its brilliant hues with all their beams unshorn:
> Resembling, 'mid the torture of the scene,
> Love watching Madness with unalterable mien. (Canto IV, 72)[225]

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much so, that one of our predecessors ventured on a certain occasion to say, 'The ox becomes furious if a red cloth is shown to him; but the philosopher, who speaks of colour only in a general way, begins to rave'" (*Theory of Color* lv). In response to Hugo's second volume of *Odes* and especially *Han d'Islande* (1823), Lamartine refers to color as the symbol of the imagination and advises his younger counterpart to soften his palette: "Adoucissez votre palette; l'imagination, comme la lyre, doit caresser l'esprit; vous frappez trop fort" (8 Jun. 1823). In the public arena, Ingres and Delacroix became living symbols of this debate.

[225] In *The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford, 2000). Iris is the Greek word for 'rainbow', and in Greek mythology, she is a goddess who serves as a messenger between earth and heaven.

Hugo's stumbling across a rainbow in "Pluie d'été", towards the end of the *Odes et Ballades* (1828), thus represents both the promise of a new way of seeing (calm and illumination) and the turning away from an old one (turbulence and disorientation):

> L'arc-en-ciel ! L'arc-en-ciel ! Regarde. –
> Comme il s'arrondit pur dans l'air !
> Quel trésor le Dieu bon nous garde
> Après le tonnerre et l'éclair !
> Que de fois, sphères éternelles,
> Mon âme a demandé ses ailes,
> Implorant quelque Ithuriel,
> Hélas ! pour savoir à quel monde
> Mène cette courbe profonde,
> Arche immense d'un pont de ciel ! (61-70)

The rainbow redeems not only the summer rainfall, but the threat of the setting sun. Closer to Sainte-Beuve than Byron in his emphasis on modern consciousness, the turbulence that appears in Hugo's poem is not a natural phenomenon but the manmade one of the city. As light fights shadow, the surrounding urban landscape is eerie –

> De la ville, que ses feux noient,
> Toutes les fenêtres flamboient
> Comme des yeux au front des tours. (58-60)

– but the rainbow (the resulting colors that refract out of the prism of the eye) counteracts the vagueness of chiaroscuro.[226] No longer a meditation on what is passing, the poem shifts in the end to a forecast on what is to come. The rainbow, a colorful mediator between earth and sky, is the symbol of the new poet's ocular and illuminating imagination that would render Lamartine's "Romantic" aesthetic obsolete.

Part II.

[226] This same process of the eye as it transfigures cloud into light is prominently featured in Hugo's "La Vision d'où est sorti ce livre", which was written in 1857 but not included until the 1877 edition of *La Légende des siècles.* Except, in his poem of exile, the poet contemplates his own vision as opposed to an external spectacle of nature: "Il n'est pas de brouillards, comme il n'est point d'algèbres, / Qui résistent, au fond des ténèbres ou des cieux, / A la fixité calme et profonde des yeux" (41-43).

Hugo's Imaging Eye

> Je vois, avec des yeux dans ma pensée ouverts,
> Se transformer mon âme en un monde magique,
> Miroir mystérieux du visible univers.
> V. Hugo, "Dans le cimetière de…" *(Les Rayons et les Ombres)*

Now that a general context for the romantic revitalization of the image and color has been established, I will outline in this section the specific aspects of Hugo's unique ocular imagination. More than any other poet of his time, Hugo considered the physical workings of the eye and how they could inform his poetics.[227] More than an allegorical Iris, Hugo's iris features the muscular contractions that occur as the poet takes in his immediate time and place, which in turn allow for the rhythmic dilation and contraction of a black and mysterious pupil. Though steady, the poet's eyes are the site of an even more tremendous energy than his surrounding landscape.

The last poems of the *Odes* (1828) could be said to serve as a "rainbow" to the *Ballades*. The common theme of both "Pluie d'été" and "Rêves" is what the poet will become: "C'est le soleil après la pluie" ("Pluie d'été" 56). In "Rêves", the potential of the tuft of grass growing out of ruins ("Comme une touffe d'herbe / Dans les brèches des tours" 149-150) represents this imminent change.[228] More specifically, I read these

[227] For Eigeldinger, Hugo's sense of sight dominates all others in his pursuit to represent a spectrum: "Chez Victor Hugo plus que chez tout autre poète français, la vision l'emporte sur les autres sens. Son imagination se représente spontanément les phénomènes de la nature dans l'ordre visuel, elle transpose volontiers les sensations auditives afin de les exprimer par une forme ou une couleur correspondante. […] Le champ de sa perception visuelle s'étend des objets les plus infimes, les plus modestes jusqu'aux mystérieuses révélations de l'infini, l'imagination du poète appréhende les choses les plus proches comme les plus lointaines, elle sonde l'abîme, interroge la matière inerte, saisit les formes fuyantes, fixe les radiations chromatiques" (88-89).

[228] The problem for early French Romantic poets (Lamartine, Vigny and Hugo) was, in Suzanne Nash's words, "how to reconstitute a ruin when one is not the original architect" ("Victor Hugo's *Odes et Ballades*" 77). Hugo's increasing alienation from a stagnant and "backwards" Restoration monarchy led to a self-critical lyric that, Nash suggests, shows him digging deep and replanting in order to arrive at an always evolving poetics: "The revolutionary tensions of the new poetry […] plow under the garden of

poems as Hugo's pronouncement of a new imagination. Hugo had referred to the prominent role of the poet's imagination in the 1826 preface of the *Odes et Ballades*: "l'auteur dirait […] qu'il a mis plus de son âme dans les Odes, plus de son imagination dans les Ballades" (279). We can flesh out what Hugo means by 'imagination' from how he describes the *Ballades*, which he distinguishes from the *Odes*:

> Les pièces qu'il intitule *Ballades* ont un caractère différent; ce sont des esquisses d'un genre capricieux: tableaux, rêves, scènes, récits, légendes superstitieuses, traditions populaires. L'auteur en les composant a essayé de donner quelque idée de ce que pouvaient être les poèmes des premiers troubadours du Moyen Age, de ces rapsodes chrétiens qui n'avaient au monde que leur épée et leur guitare, et s'en allaient de château en château, payant l'hospitalité avec des chants. (Ibid)

Hugo presents the *Ballades* as an almost tongue-in-cheek experiment, or an innocent playing with the popular literary and artistic trends of the time. Both their titles and their mannered form exhibit a strong sense of experimentation. Imagination, in this context, seems to mean fantasy. However, in the original preface to his first novel *Han d'Islande* (1823), an experiment in the "genre frénétique", Hugo states straightaway that his work, despite appearances, is anchored by an idea from which he does not stray.[229] The work is thus the fruit of a long process:

> S'étant imaginé qu'une composition en quatre volumes valait la peine d'être méditée, il a perdu son temps à chercher une idée fondamentale, à la développer bien ou mal dans un plan bon ou mauvais, à disposer des

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Versailles, to return language to its 'original' condition, generative of a variety of different forms […] Each individual tree – genus or genius – will grow in its own way, out of a common linguistic soil" (80-81). In *Les Genres de l'hénaurme siècle*, ed. William Paulson (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1989). Hugo gravely pronounces in the last edition of the *Odes et Ballades*: "Une forte école s'élève" (Préface de 1828: 286). Given that, in "Rêves", the vegetation is growing out of specifically Gothic ruins, I also read this poem as 'growing out' of Chateaubriand as well. The *Orientales* expressed a bold romantic poetry that was free from any pessimism or sense of constraint regarding poetry's role. Hugo's "individual tree" has grown and is flourishing: "L'art n'a que faire des lisières, des menottes, des bâillons; il [le poète] vous dit: Va! et vous lâche dans ce grand jardin de poésie, où il n'y a pas de fruit défendu" (*Les Orientales*, Préface de l'édition originale: 577).

[229] Hugo's first novel shows the heavy influence of Charles Nodier, whose fantastical tales (*Smarra*, *Trilby*) made a rather large impact in the early 1820s. Nodier would consequently feature quite prominently in Hugo's *Ballades*.

> scènes, à combiner des effets, à étudier des mœurs de son mieux ; en un mot, il a pris son ouvrage au sérieux.[230]

Likewise, we should not be too quick in passing over how the *Ballades* respond to Hugo's organicist model of art in the prefaces to the *Odes et Ballades*. The *Ballades* are a natural extension of what came before, a part of what Hugo calls the "mouvement progressif de la pensée humaine" (Préface de 1828: 286). "Rêves", the last ode of the *Odes et Ballades* (1828), serves not as an end, but as a threshold. After all five books, Hugo leaves the reader with a symbolic horizon: the poet is at the threshold between reality ("jour") and the infinite ("nuit"), and he straddles the barely distinguishable line between the two ("voile"). The second section of the poem is worth quoting in its entirety, as it shows how the poet sees himself as hanging in the balance. Even when dreaming, he maintains consciousness. The eye emerges "triumphant" because the poet never loses sight or control of the expanse of his creativity:

> Qu'un songe au ciel m'enlève,
> Que, plein d'ombre et d'amour,
> Jamais il ne s'achève,
> Et que la nuit je rêve
> A mon rêve du jour !
>
> Aussi blanc que la voile
> Qu'à l'horizon je voi,
> Qu'il recèle une étoile,
> Et qu'il soit comme une voile
> Entre la vie et moi !
>
> Que la muse qui plonge
> En ma nuit pour briller,
> Le dore et le prolonge,
> Et de l'éternel songe
> Craigne de m'éveiller !
>
> Que toutes mes pensées
> Viennent s'y déployer,

[230] *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Laffont, 1985): 5.

Et s'asseoir, empressées,
En cercle à mon foyer !

Qu'à mon rêve enchaînées,
Toutes, *l'œil triomphant*,
Le bercent inclinées,
Comme des sœurs aînées
Bercent leurs frères enfants ! (31-55 - emphasis mine)[231]

We can thus read the opening poem of the *Ballades*, "Une fée", as operating with the eye that has seen the rainbow in "Pluie d'été", or with the "triumphant eye" that emerges in "Rêves".[232] The modern Muse, or "fée", heightens his faculty of seeing as well as his voice:

Dans le désert qui me réclame,
Cachée en tout ce que je vois,
C'est elle qui fait, pour mon âme,
De chaque rayon une flamme,
Et de chaque bruit une voix ; (16-20)

These lines enact the "miroir de concentration" that Hugo had described in the Preface to *Cromwell*, where beams of light that filter through the poet's eye gradually intensify into flames. And the "fée", as the dramatist does to his spectator, envelopes him in "mille images" (33). When Hugo uses the word 'imagination' in his preface, then, he is not just referring to fantasy or whim, but on his strengthened capacity to see and to produce images. The surge from the last line of the *Odes* ("Oubliant, oublié!") to the epigraph of the *Ballades* ("Renouvelons aussi / Toute vieille pensée")[233] to the illuminated and resounding atmosphere in "Une fée" is powerful:

Elle, - qui, la nuit, quand je veille,
M'apporte de confus abois,

[231] We will again note Hugo's emphasis on light (white, gold) as opposed to color.
[232] "Une fée" was originally published in the 1824 edition (*Nouvelles odes*), and "Pluie d'été" did not appear until the fifth and final edition of the *Odes et Ballades* (1828). However, I am respecting Hugo's final arrangement of poems in this final edition, which he took particular pains to organize.
[233] Joachim Du Bellay (*Vers lyriques*: "Du premier jour de l'an").

Et pour endormir mon oreille,
Dans le calme du soir, éveille
Un cor lointain au fond des bois ! (36-40)

The poet's senses have been strengthened, and he will be armed with these corporeal "tools" throughout the *Ballades* as well as the subsequent *Orientales*. The Romantic poet is infused with light, as Hugo reiterates in another "Ballade":

C'est toi, Lutin! – Qui t'amène?
Sur ce rayon du couchant
Es-tu venu ? Ton haleine
Me caresse en me touchant !
A mes yeux tu te révèles.
Tu m'inondes d'étincelles !
Et tes frémissantes ailes
Ont un bruit doux comme un chant ! ("A Trilby, le lutin d'Argail" 1-8)

The eye-opening "fée", however, was not an arbitrary Muse or a mere nod to Nodier, but responded to the general discourse in the late 1820s concerning the role of the eye in the work of art. In this section, I will show how French Restoration poets interpreted sight as a subjective faculty and how Hugo even applied the physical operation of the eye to the formation of his poetics. Moreover, the nineteenth-century poet's eye had more to take in: while the model of the 'beau idéal' had restricted poetry's subject matter and vocabulary, Hugo's Cénacle sought to recuperate raw material (the "laid"). Hugo and his contemporaries were thus highly influenced by the genre of history writing in their formulation of a modern lyric poetry that left nothing out and aimed to capture the flux of past, present and future. Two of Hugo's *Odes*, "Le Rétablissement de la statue d'Henri IV" and "A la colonne de la place Vendôme", are examples of how Hugo sees, filters and ultimately images history. More than a representation of the facts, these poems demonstrate how Hugo's ordered imagination makes sense of the Restoration period.

1. The Creative Sense of Sight

The faculty of sight had been reinterpreted by the beginning of the nineteenth century. No longer strictly bound to a passive memory, or the machine-like retrieval of impressions, the subject's eye now maintained an active relationship with the viewed object. Seeing was not an objective and immediate practice,[234] but, as Jonathan Crary has shown in his study of the displacement of the camera obscura to subject-centered optical devices (such as the stereoscope and kaleidoscope), a post-Kantian subjective one: "The visible escapes from the timeless order of the camera obscura and becomes lodged in another apparatus, within the unstable physiology and temporality of the human body" (70).[235] Hugo would later put it in his own words: "les obscurs mouvements de machines nécessaires s'opérèrent dans ma prunelle".[236] Truth was no longer determined by universals, but by the arbitrary capacity of the subject to manipulate reality. Sight, in other words, had become a creative rather than a mimetic sense.[237]

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[234] Condillac: "Nous ne voyons qu'autour de nous" (*Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* ; "Introduction" 100).

[235] *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT, 1990). For Crary, Goethe's *Theory of Color* and its situating of color in the subject's eye marks this shift. Looking more at literature, Max Milner's *La Fantasmagorie: Essai sur l'optique fantastique* (Paris: PUF, 1982) shows that nineteenth-century 'contes fantastiques' and science fiction, no matter how fantastical or imaginative, are rooted in the epistemology of seeing and the science of optics. As our way of seeing the world changed due to technological advances, so did our concept of what constituted reality or the real (see chapter one, "Optique et imagination"). Milner's analysis of vision is more general than Crary's and considers traditional concepts of the link between eye and intellect prior to the nineteenth century.

[236] *Promonotorium somnii* (posthumous), in vol. 13 of Hugo's *Œuvres complètes* (Laffont, 1985). Hugo reflects here on his experience of looking at the moon through a telescope in Arago's observatory in 1834, and likens this physical experience, where the eye strives to see and make sense out of the moon, to the workings of the poetic imagination. Notably, *Promontorium somnii* (which illustrates the poetic imagination as an ocular process) was originally meant to be included in *William Shakespeare*, which, as we have seen, rejects music as the exemplary romantic genre.

[237] Frederick Burwick emphasizes how this creative model of sight problematized the tenets of mimetic art: "Reacting to discoveries in physical and physiological optics, [the Romantics] all recognized the fallibility of the senses. If the means of perception and the media of representation are unreliable, then any attempt to define imitation in the arts will obviously be complicated by disjuncture" (*Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*, "Introduction" 9).

This creativity, however, had limits. While the subject's eye was the locus of infinite creative potential, it remained bound to experience. The French Romantics following Lamartine, informed by German Idealists' critique of Kant, stressed a harmonious rather than problematic relationship between nature and the self.[238] In his exposition of modern German aesthetic philosophy, Andrew Bowie shows how Friedrich Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* attempted to find a way to think about the self within an infinitely developing nature.[239] The unity between nature and the "I" allows us to see the finite as part of a process of infinite productivity. This is what Schelling refers to in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) as "a continuous becoming-object-to-itself of the subjective" (108). Art was an "organ of philosophy" that attempted to objectify or concretize this consciousness, and Friedrich Schlegel applies this philosophy to art in his *Dialogue on Poetry* (1799-1800), describing poetry as a "new realism" that was paradoxically ideal: "It is to be expected that this new realism, since it must be of

[238] It is not easy to determine which German philosophers or writers directly influenced French Romantic poets, or to what extent. Generally speaking, the French poets and theorists that I discuss in this chapter did not read or speak German, and kept their distance from German philosophy and theories of art. However, Lessing and Schiller were important influences due to their writings on theater, and Goethe had a huge impact on the continent. The Schlegel brothers, due to their affiliation with Mme de Staël as well as Wilhelm's popular *Cours de littérature dramatique* (1814), were important disseminators of German Romantic aesthetic theory. A good resource that examines the reception of German writers in early nineteenth-century France is André Monchoux's *L'Allemagne devant les lettres françaises, 1814-1835* (Paris: Colin, 1953; 2nd ed.). Above all, Monchoux's study, as well as Ian Henning's *L'Allemagne devant Mme de Staël et la polémique romantique* (1929), show the extent to which French Romantics relied on Mme de Staël's study both to familiarize themselves with German aesthetic theory and to formulate their own theories of art. More specific to Hugo and the influence of German writers, if much more schematic, is Charles Dédéyan's *Victor Hugo et l'Allemagne*, 3 vols (Paris: Minard, 1964-1977). I do not wish to impose a reading of German Romantic and Idealist philosophy on the French Romantics, but point to an important genealogy: since the Schlegels were greatly influenced by Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) (see Behler, *German Romantic Theory Literary Theory*, chap. 4), and since the French Romantics would have been at least conversant with the Schlegels' writings, the broad application of Schelling's linking of objective nature and the subjective mind to French Restoration poetry seems plausible.

[239] *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003; 2nd ed). At the crux of Schelling's philosophy is "the emergence of the crucial anti-dogmatic notion of self-determining subjectivity" (104). Bowie explains that Schelling's 'system' was meant to remedy Kant's dualism (the separation of appearances from things in themselves) by "reconciling Kant, seen through the eyes of Fichte, with Spinoza, by finding a route between 'Criticism' and 'Dogmatism', a project he characterizes in terms of a reconciliation of Idealism and Realism, or of transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophie*" (Ibid).

idealistic origin and must hover as it were over an idealistic ground, will emerge as poetry which indeed is to be based on the harmony of the ideal and real" (84). Poetry was the perpetual striving for this harmony:[240]

> Idealism in any form must transcend itself in one way or another, in order to be able to return to itself and remain what it is. Therefore, there must and will arise from the matrix of idealism a new and equally infinite realism, and idealism will not only by analogy of its genesis be an example of the new mythology, but it will indirectly become its very source. Traces of a similar tendency you can now observe almost everywhere, especially in physics where nothing is more needed than a mythological view of nature. (Ibid 83-84)

Schlegel's passage resonates well with Hugo's reflections on observing the moon in *Promonotorium somnii*: "Les poëtes ont créé une lune métaphorique et les savants une lune algébrique. La lune réelle est entre les deux" (642). The eye sees the ideal but remains conscious of, or knows that it is limited by, the real: "L'effet de profondeur et de perte du réel était terrible. Et cependant le réel était là. […] Ce songe était terre" (640). Hugo does not describe the moon, but how he looks at the moon.

The eye played a highly significant role in Hugo's poetry at the outset. The short preface to his first *Odes* (1822) opens with the well-known declaration: "Sous le monde réel, il existe un monde idéal, qui se montre resplendissant à l'œil de ceux que des méditations graves ont accoutumés à voir dans les choses plus que les choses" (265). But as much as Hugo presented the eye as a metaphor for the poet's genius, he also

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[240] After all, Mme de Staël's emphasis on poetry as inhabiting an ethereal domain in *De l'Allemagne* was not meant to be the whole story. In her commentary on August Schlegel, she specifically describes poetry as conciliating nature with the idea, and posits the imagination as the mediating agent. We will note her reference to the harmony of line and color as she describes this "reasoned" imagination: "W. Schlegel a trouvé l'art de traiter les chefs-d'œuvre de la poésie comme des merveilles de la nature, et de les peindre avec des couleurs vives qui ne nuisent point à la fidélité du dessein ; car, on ne saurait trop le répéter, l'imagination, loin d'être ennemie de la vérité, la fait ressortir mieux qu'aucune autre faculté de l'esprit, et tous ceux qui s'appuient d'elle pour excuser des expressions exagérées ou des termes vagues, sont au moins aussi dépourvus de poésie que de raison" (II:70). In the *Méditations*, then, Lamartine had passed over Staël's qualification, only to fall back to earth in "Ischia".

considered its physical operations. If the French Romantic image had substance, the French Romantic eye was corporeal. Hugo's poetic eye (the imagination) thus worked like the human eye: like the pupil, it both expanded and contracted. This fluctuating but rhythmic movement informed Hugo's poetics. The more ambitious the idea behind the work of art, the more nature or reality keeps this expansion in check. This fluctuation occurs within the evolution of the *Odes* themselves. The ambitious and brazen "Poète dans les révolutions" in the first edition is the same one who, only two years later in the *Nouvelles odes* (1824), meditates on memory and the effects of viewing intimate landscapes. In "A G…Y", which anticipates the famous "Tristesse d'Olympio" (*Les Rayons et les Ombres*, 1840) in its situating of memory in a landscape, the ideal is met with the realities of melancholy and nature's transience:

> Souvent ici, domptant mes douleurs étouffées,
> Mon bonheur s'éleva comme un château de fées,
> Avec ses murs de nacre, aux mobiles couleurs,
> Ses tours, ses portes d'or, ses pièges, ses trophées,
> Et ses fruits merveilleux, et ses magiques fleurs.
>
> Puis soudain tout fuyait : sur d'informes décombres
> Tour à tour à mes yeux passaient de pâles ombres ;
> D'un crêpe nébuleux le ciel était voilé ;
> Et, de spectres en deuil peuplant ces déserts sombres,
> Un tombeau dominait le palais écroulé. (11-20)[241]

Yet, in the following "Paysage", the poet almost cheerfully refuses his Muse's invitation to stay outside his actual landscape of the city ("Loin du monde surtout mon culte te réclame"):

> Tu le disais, ô Muse! Et la cité bruyante
> Autour de moi pourtant mêle ses mille voix,
> Muse ! et je ne fuis pas la sphère tournoyante
> Où le sort, agitant la foule imprévoyante,

[241] The poem is a souvenir of Hugo's stay at his future in-laws' summer residence in Gentilly, soon after he was engaged to Adèle.

Meut tant de destins à la fois ! (56-60)

A French Romantic resisting Lamartine's wake, Hugo stressed the role of the external world and personal experience. In response to the literary critic Hoffman, who dismissed the Romantics as merely fantastical in his review of Hugo's *Nouvelles odes*, Hugo retorted by emphasizing the artist's experience of physical objects: "ces *formes*, ces *couleurs*, ces *corps* une fois trouvés au pays des abstractions, appartiennent nécessairement, en qualité de *corps*, au monde physique; c'est donc au monde physique que les *romantiques* ont, en définitive, emprunté leurs *formes* et leurs *couleurs*" (*Journal des débats* 26 Jul. 1824 – emphasis Hugo's).[242] The poet's perspective, then, depended on the eye in a literal sense. Hugo intended his *Odes* to tell the truth ("ce n'est pas un besoin de nouveauté qui tourmente les esprits, c'est un besoin de vérité; et il est immense"),[243] and he thus privileged the sense of sight when formulating a modernized poetics. The eye, a receptacle of light's rays, was traditionally regarded as registering the stable truth of human experience within a fluctuating universe. To see clearly meant to think clearly. Da Vinci probably said it most famously: "The eye, which is said to be the window of the soul, is the primary means by which the *sensus communis* of the brain may most fully and magnificently contemplate the infinite workings of nature".[244]

[242] Hoffman's review had appeared in the same publication on 14 Jun. 1824. Not to be confused with E.T.A. Hoffman, François-Benoît Hoffman (1760-1828) contributed frequently to the *Journal des débats* in the 1820s.

[243] *Nouvelles odes*, Preface of 1824: 274.

[244] Pierre Georgel notes how Hugo's images depend on a strict correlation between sight and thought : " [Hugo] a pensé par l'image, portant peut-être au paroxysme la corrélation classique de la vue et de l'intellect " (5). " Présentation ", *Victor Hugo et les images* (Dijon: Aux amateurs de livre, 1989). Referring to Cervantes in *William Shakespeare*, and "le profond sens poétique de la renaissance", Hugo's description of the role of the imagination resembles Leonardo's: "l'imagination, qui, soleil, met le clair-obscur partout, et, donnant le relief, fait vivre" (281). Observation is not just a sense, but a faculty: "L'observation, qui s'acquiert et qui, par conséquent, est plutôt une qualité qu'un don, est incluse dans la création" (Ibid).

At the same time, Hugo presented seeing as the principal sign of his creativity. The poet's contemplation of his surroundings was an indicator of his "génie": "ce chaos d'où le fiat lux du poète tire un monde!".[245] This "génie" is inherent and not bestowed by a Muse or any other external aid. In an essay on Hugo and his aversion to optical instruments, David Charles remarks: "l'instrument est oublié et ses qualités mécaniques transférées à l'œil de l'observateur" ("Instruments optiques" 28).[246] The unmediated eye was enough, as the retina serves as the connector between lens (objective) and brain (subjective).[247] In an early essay, Hugo insists on the immediacy of experience and uses the analogy of the "lorgnon" in his dismissal of an artificial point of view:[248]

> Défiez-vous de ces gens armés d'un lorgnon, qui s'en vont partout criant: J'observe mon siècle! Tantôt leurs lunettes grossissent les objets, et alors des chats leur semblent des tigres ; tantôt elles les rapetissent, et alors des tigres leur paraissent des chats. Il faut observer avec ses yeux. (*Litt. et phil. mêlées* 109)[249]

Hugo thus depends on the organ of the eye alone – the matrix of seen and unseen – as a means to producing images. Léon Emery, in *Vision et pensée chez Victor Hugo* (1939), articulates how Hugo's poetic image results from the productive union of eye and brain:

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[245] "But de cette publication" (*Litt. et phil. mêlées* 59).

[246] In *L'Œil de Victor Hugo*, op. cit. Charles describes this unaided eye as the "œil des génies" (28), and cites a passage from Hugo's *William Shakespeare* to describe, in turn, how Hugo defined these "génies" (Eschylus, Isaiah, Juvenal, Dante and Shakespeare are some examples): "Ils ont une prunelle télescope et une prunelle microscope. Ils fouillent familièrement ces deux profondeurs inverses, l'infiniment grand and l'infiniment petit" (Ibid).

[247] Hugo's drawing "Planète-Oeil", which features nothing but an eye ball against a shaded background, is a radical and visual example of this unmediated eye (the illustration is reproduced in *L'Œil de Victor Hugo*).

[248] Though it would seem so, not even Hugo's telescope anecdote in *Promonotorium somnii* is an exception to this rule. It is only when he adopts the point of view of the poet that his vision can take place. While the telecope is limited, Dante is infinite: "Le champ du télescope était trop étroit pour embrasser la planète entière, la sphère ne s'y dessinait pas, et ce que j'en voyais, si j'en voyais quelque chose, n'était qu'un segment obscur. […] – Je ne vois rien. – Regardez, dit Arago. Je suivis l'exemple de Dante vis-à-vis de Virgile. J'obéis. Peu à peu ma rétine fit ce qu'elle avait à faire, les obscurs mouvements de machine nécessaires s'opèrent dans ma prunelle [etc.] " (640). Given that *William Shakespeare* is a commentary on poetic genius, Hugo's allusion to Dante is more, I think, than a master/student analogy.

[249] "Journal des idées, des opinions, et des lectures d'un jeune jacobite de 1819". Hugo's suspicion of the optical aid was, according to Charles, systematic: "L'expérience visuelle de Victor Hugo s'affranchit peu à peu des modèles culturels qui la structure" (32).

> A partir du moment où la sensation immédiate et directe assaille le poète, l'ébranle et l'éblouit, l'image devient le tissue même de la pensée. Non la comparaison classique qui suit l'idée pour la traduire, mais le cliché instantané d'une apparence concrète saisi dans une synthèse verbale inédite. (25)

Hugo's creative and "striving" model of sight found expression in French romantic theories of poetry during the Restoration. In his preface to *Etudes françaises et étrangères* (1828), Emile Deschamps even seems to put into question the enterprise of poetry, as it is the art out of all of the arts that is most removed from the senses. Music and painting, that is, what can be heard and seen, communicate better in a century of turmoil because they carry more immediate impact than language. Deschamps thus insists on the need for modern poetry to place the senses in harmony with the creative imagination: "Or, la poésie n'est pas seulement un genre de littérature, elle est aussi un art, par son harmonie, ses couleurs et ses images, et comme telle c'est sur les sens et l'imagination qu'elle doit d'abord agir, c'est par cette double route qu'elle doit arriver au cœur et à l'entendement" (xviii).[250] Deschamps calls upon poets to emulate the more "real" genres of the novel, of painting, and theater, because to be effective in a loud and discordant age, the poet's imagination has to be more immediate and concrete: "De là vient que les grands musiciens et surtout les grands peintres, enfin tous les artistes distingués sont bien plus sensibles à la poésie, et par conséquent, en sont bien meilleurs

[250] In "Destinées de la poésie" (1834), Lamartine also defines poetry as the harmonious relationship between idea and sensations: "La prose ne s'adresse qu'à l'idée, le vers parle à l'idée et à la sensation tout à la fois" (507). However, in contrast to Deschamps (and, by extension, to Hugo), Lamartine does not stress the art of poetry (invention), but its divine origin: "Cette voix ne s'éteindra jamais dans le monde; car ce n'est pas l'homme qui l'a inventée" (508). Man is no match for poetry's effects, and Lamartine thus describes poetry as a short-lived "jouissance" : "Voilà pourquoi aussi l'homme ne peut ni produire ni supporter beaucoup de poésie; c'est que le saisissant tout entier par l'âme et par les sens, et exaltant à la fois sa double faculté, la pensée par la pensée, les sens par les sensations, elle l'épuise, elle l'accable bientôt, comme toute jouissance complète, d'une voluptueuse fatigue, et lui fait rendre en peu de vers, en peu d'instants, tout ce qu'il y a de vie intérieure et de force de sentiment dans sa double organisation" (507). This analogy fits with Lamartine's trademark reliance on the ellipsis and the fragment, which represents poetic exhaustion.

juges que les hommes de lettres proprement dits. Ce qui est vrai pour la musique et la peinture l'est bien davantage pour la poésie qui est l'art le moins palpable" (xviii).[251] Hence Deschamps's insistence on painting and the picturesque, as well as on a music detached from its traditional romantic connotations of fleetingness. In his preface, however, the balance is tipped clearly in favor of painting, and Deschamps privileges the sense of sight. Like Lamartine's critics in 1820, Deschamps also distinguishes between the poet and the "versificateur". This time, however, the poet is likened to a painter rather than a voice. His notable features are his "tours variés, les coupes hardies et pittoresques, les grands secrets de l'harmonie et de la *facture*…" (lvi). In what was by now a common gesture, Deschamps refers to Chénier and his "manière franche" and "expression mâle" as exemplifying this visual poetics.[252] In blurring the line between verbal and visual image, the poet expresses the idea more clearly.[253] A combination of narrative and painting, nineteenth-century lyric poetry is dynamic: "C'est l'ordre des idées, la grâce ou la sublimité des expressions, l'originalité des tours, le mouvement et la couleur, l'individualité du langage, qui composent le style" (l).

2. The Widening Eye: The Sacrifice of the 'Beau idéal'

The important role that the Romantics yielded to the senses, in turn, necessarily meant the sacrifice of universals. They rejected above all the model of a 'beau idéal' in order to allow for contingencies and accidents. In his preface, Deschamps reiterates the

[251] Deschamps even claims that Chateaubriand and Mme de Staël, prose writers, were France's first nineteenth-century poets (xxii).
[252] Monchoux singles out Deschamps as being particularly wary of the German influence on French lyric poetry. Deschamps, according to Bray, saw romantic poetry as the expansion, not the renewal, of a classical one: "Deschamps considère le romantisme plutôt comme un élargissement que comme un renouvellement du classicisme" (89).
[253] Mitchell underscores the seamlessness between word and image in the Romantic period, as both were subservient to the imagination: "Romantic writers typically assimilate mental, verbal and even pictorial imagery into the mysterious process of 'imagination'" (24).

main idea of Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare*: "Avant tout il faut être de son temps" (xvi). The new poet confronted the world, no matter what its tumult or idiosyncrasies. The eye had to take it all in. The grotesque serves as a symbol of this confrontation in the Preface to *Cromwell*, where Hugo describes modern art as looking below the surface of the beautiful: "pénétrer sous toutes les surfaces pour extraire l'essence de tout".[254] Hugo does not mean penetration in the sense of 'profondeur' as Mme de Staël had conceived it in *De l'Allemagne*, where she meant a highly abstract and religious 'profondeur'; the post-*Méditations* poets and theorists were more literal in what they meant by looking below the surface. The new poet did not turn away from the ugly in his pursuit of the ideal, but faced it head on in the process. "La littérature nouvelle est vraie," Hugo pronounces in the 1824 preface to the *Odes et Ballades*, and continues: "Et qu'importe qu'elle soit le résultat de la révolution ? La moisson est-elle moins belle, parce qu'elle a mûri sur le volcan ?" (273). The modern artist's imperative was to assume a wider scope that worked with "le tout": "la muse moderne verra les choses d'un œil plus haut et plus large" (Preface to *Cromwell* 69). The poet's incorporation of the 'laid' - words that had been eliminated, the foreign, and the grotesque - offered more creative possibilities:[255]

> Le beau n'a qu'un type; le laid en a mille. C'est que le beau, à parler humainement, n'est que la forme considérée dans son rapport le plus simple, dans sa symétrie la plus absolue, dans son harmonie la plus intime avec notre organisation. Aussi nous offre-t-il toujours un ensemble complet, mais restreint comme nous. Ce que nous appelons le laid, au

[254] Milton, for example, is superior to Homer because he digs below the seduction of the surface: "Si l'Elysée homérique est fort loin de ce charme éthéré, de cette angélique suavité du Paradis de Milton, c'est que sous l'éden il y a un enfer bien autrement horrible que le Tartare païen" (72).

[255] It is precisely to reclaim the underside of the French classical tradition that Sainte-Beuve would set out to do in his *Tableau historique et critique de la Poésie française et du Théâtre français au XVIe siècle* (1828). Not concerned with 'looking up' towards the abstract ideals of art, Sainte-Beuve 'looks down' at the "ugly" and material roots of French poetry. Like his Romantic counterparts, he reiterates that art is a reflection of the times, and the purpose of the *Tableau* is to show how art evolves. Underneath a formulaic tradition was where the "essence" of French poetry was located, and the Romantics of Hugolian persuasion were not afraid to unearth it.

> contraire, est un détail d'un grand ensemble qui nous échappe, et qui s'harmonise, non pas avec l'homme, mais avec la création tout entière. Voilà pourquoi il nous présente sans cesse des aspects nouveaux, mais incomplets. (73-74)

In his emphasis on incompleteness and imperfection, Hugo reiterates the striving for an ideal ("le tout") that Schlegel and his German counterparts had posited as the romantic poet's essential activity. The eye fixed itself on "le tout", but this is precisely what placed lyric poetry on firmer ground: "C'est alors que, l'œil fixé sur des événements tout à la fois risibles et formidables, et sous l'influence de cet esprit de mélancolie chrétienne et de critique philosophique que nous observions tout à l'heure, *la poésie fera un grand pas, un pas décisif"* (69 – emphasis mine). Hugo thus extended movement, idiosyncrasies, and accidents to the domain of French lyric poetry and theater. *Cromwell* – Napoleon's prototype – was a vivid representation, the "ideal realism", of France's contemporary turbulent history. Hugo acknowledges the ambition of this new imagination: "On conçoit qu'un pareil tableau sera gigantesque" (Preface to *Cromwell* 104).

3. Seeing History in the *Odes et Ballades*

It was precisely contemporary history that called out most to Hugo's imaging eye, as the modern poet's ideal was to work within the flux of the Restoration period.[256] The title alone of Hugo's opening poem to the first *Odes* (1822), "Le Poète dans les révolutions", evokes this challenge. The poet, unlike the one in Lamartine's "L'Isolement", sets out to overcome uncertainty and alienation:

[256] Though she examines a later poem (Hugo's "La Révolution" from *Les Quatre vents de l'esprit*), Ellen S. Burt's linking of historical change to change in poetry applies here: "it becomes possible to suggest that the referent of modern poems could be precisely the historical event of a change in the way that poets think about language and poetry, the event of the establishment of a new a more modern understanding of literature and literariness" (966). See "Hallucinatory History: Hugo's Révolution", *MLN* 105.5 (Dec. 1990): 965-991.

Le mortel qu'un Dieu même anime
Marche à l'avenir, plein d'ardeur;
C'est en s'élançant dans l'abîme
Qu'il en sonde la profondeur. (71-74)

To reveal the truth of his century, he has to confront it first:[257]

Un souffle immense et fort domine ces tempêtes.
Un rayon du ciel plonge à travers cette nuit.
Quand l'homme aux cris de mort mêle le cri des fêtes,
Une secrète voix parle dans ce vain bruit. ("L'Histoire" 5-8)[258]

The writing of history, whether in factual or fictional accounts, thus informed Hugo and his contemporaries to a great extent. Color once again emerges as a critical component of the French romantic imagination. As the genre of drama came under serious and even urgent scrutiny, "la couleur locale" – designed to immerse the reader or spectator in all details of the particular history in question – emerged as the romantic work of art's essential attribute. In his introduction to the *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne de la maison de Valois* (1824-1826), Prosper de Barante equates the depiction of local color ("painting") to the imagination. The writer's task is to "manifester tous les dons de l'imagination dans la peinture exacte de la vérité" (3). The imagination strives to keep up with details and movements: "cette mobilité de l'imagination, si précieuse pour tout peindre" (4). As in Deschamps' model of poetry, the reader's senses must be stimulated in order for this history to make as vivid an impression as possible. The writing of history produces "cette connaissance intime de ce qu'on a vu vivre, de ce

[257] While Hugo would consistently criticize Lamartine for having retreated from literature as well as from Paris –

J'unis donc à tes chants quelques chants téméraires.
Prends ton luth immortel : nous combattrons en frères
Pour les mêmes autels et les mêmes foyers. ("A M. Alphonse de L.", *Odes et Ballades*)

– Lamartine would respond by making no apologies for this retreat:

Oiseau chantant parmi les hommes,
Ah ! reviens à l'ombre des bois ; ("Epître familière à M. Victor H…", 1825)

[258] *Nouvelles odes* (1824)

qu'on a entendu parler" (11-12). Barante's theory of local color depends so heavily on the senses that it evokes eighteenth-century aesthetic conceits, where the work of art is more pleasing or impressionable than nature. Barante sounds like Du Bos or Diderot when he claims that his fictional characters and scenes are more alive than real ones from history: "De telle sorte que les héros fictifs de l'épopée, du drame ou du roman sont souvent plus vivants à nos yeux que les personnages réels de l'histoire" (12).[259] Barante thus conflates the writing of history with the work of art. His preface above all shows the extent to which Walter Scott's "colorful" historical novels influenced the French Romantics and their representation of history: "J'ai tenté de restituer à l'histoire elle-même l'attrait que le roman historique lui a emprunté" (41).

While Barante's theory of local color describes a mimetic and sense-based imagination – "Car il n'y a rien de si impartial que l'imagination: elle n'a nul besoin de conclure; il lui suffit qu'un tableau de la vérité soit venu se retracer devant elle" (37) – Scott's details lead the reader beneath the surface to the "secrète voix" that Hugo refers to in "L'Histoire" ("Une secrète voix parle dans ce vain bruit"). In *The Spectacular Past* (2004), Maurice Samuels shows how Scott's novels were concerned with more than the surface of history: "These novels offer not only a fictionalized account of events from the past but a lesson in historical epistemology: they teach the reader how to look at history in a new way. In these works, as in Scott's novels, knowledge accrues through the eyes" (172). The reader, filtering these surface details through the eye, extracts "deeper

[259] In the famous Vernet promenade "scene" in the *Salon de 1767* (op. cit.), Diderot ends with his narrator waking up from a dream and observing: "Les eaux, les arbres, les forêts que j'ai vus en nature, m'ont certainement fait une impression moins forte que les mêmes objets en rêve" (230).

historical truths" (174).[260] In his review of *Quentin Durward* (1823), Hugo also saw something more at stake in Scott's novel than a mimetic enterprise ("l'imagination domine et caresse toutes les imaginations" 146), though his interest was centered on the aesthetic potential of history more than its epistemology.[261] For Hugo, Scott's representation of local color, in all of its combinations, exemplifies an active imagination that filters details to reveal the poet's "truth". Hugo highlights the balancing between the real and the ideal that Scott maintains in his novel: "L'habile magicien veut cependant avant tout être exact" (Ibid). While Barante had described a mimetic imagination, Scott mobilizes a creative one that exploits the freedoms afforded by history's turbulence. In the preface to *Quentin Durward*, Scott expresses the challenge of filtering and then presenting his material with the most impact:

> Amidst so great an abundance of materials, it was difficult to select such as should be most intelligible and interesting to the reader; and the author had to regret, that though he made liberal use of the power of departing from the reality of history, he felt by no means confident of having brought his story into a pleasing, compact, and sufficiently intelligible form.[262]

In his effort to provide a representation of truth, Scott, in all of his arranging and combining, paradoxically arrives at a work of fiction. Hugo shows how Scott, in striving to "paint" 'le tout', leads us to the mysterious and invisible: "pinceau vrai qui trace un portrait fidèle d'après une ombre confuse, et nous force à reconnaître même ce que nous

[260] Samuels aims to show how the visual spectacles of history, which Scott in particular appropriated in the form of the novel, were a way for post-Revolutionary France to stabilize its recent violent history: "The demand for visual realism in historical representation – fulfilled by new representational technologies such as the panorama – sprang from a desire to ground Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary identities in a stable vision of the past" (8). In a different vein that is concerned with the poetics of representing history, I am showing how the Restoration poet's intent to display the truth of his century – through the means of an unwavering eye – was a way to stabilize poetry.

[261] "Sur Walter Scott: A propos de Quentin Durward" (*Litt. et phil. mêlées*). The article first appeared in the first issue of *La Muse française* (1823).

[262] Ed. Susan Manning. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

n'avons pas vu" ("Sur Walter Scott" 147). Scott's novel is not just a moving painting, as Barante describes the representation of history, but a moving drama with an underlying mediating impetus that *produces* and does not merely copy details. The details, in other words, depend on the writer's imagination, and Hugo accordingly describes Scott's novel as "le roman dramatique, dans lequel l'action imaginaire se déroule en tableaux vrais et variés" (149).

History, in its infinite ambiguity, was like the colorful rainbow that constantly changed under the fixed gaze of the eye, and for Hugo, Scott had set out to capture this movement and prevent it from fading. In the "Dedicatory Epistle" to *Ivanhoe* (1819), Scott implies that a strict rendering of nature belonged to a past age, and that the modern writer had the "freedom of choice" to tint history in an individual way. The "antiquarian" painter is bound by imitation, but the modern painter appropriates Hugo's metaphorical prism to refract his own light:

> To take an illustration from a sister art, the antiquarian details may be said to represent the peculiar features of a landscape under delineation of the pencil. [...] His general colouring, too, must be copied from Nature: The sky must be clouded or serene, according to the climate, and the general tints must be those which prevail in a natural landscape. So far the painter is bound down by the rules of his art, to a precise imitation of the features of Nature; but it is not required that he should descend to copy all her more minute features, or represent with absolute exactness the very herbs, flowers, and trees, with which the spot is decorated. These, as well as all the more minute points of light and shadow, are attributes proper to scenery in general, natural to each situation, and subject to the artist's disposal, as his taste or pleasure may dictate. (20)[263]

What is thus revealing to me in Samuels's study of the various popular visual spectacles that captivated audiences during the Restoration period is how the diorama in particular – a visual device that could depict moving images and changing atmospheric effects –

[263] Ed. Ian Duncan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996).

serves as a model for a romantic imagination striving to produce an infinite combination of images.[264] Opened to the public by Daguerre in 1822, the year that Hugo's first *Odes* appeared, the diorama reflects how the history writer's imaging eye works: Scott's novels strive, in keeping up with the "atmospheric changes" (the rainbow) of history, for the evocatively unattainable romantic ideal. The more "real" the diorama tries to be, the more it is elusive. Samuels, for example, demonstrates how Daguerre and his rival 'dioramistes' used their visual device to try and keep up with the times, at one point featuring the July Revolution, or Napoleon's tomb on Saint Helena the next (40).

While Samuels focuses on the representation of history in novels, a particular conundrum for Hugo during the Restoration period (and beyond) was how to represent the movement of history in the fixed form of verse.[265] What lent form to the movement of Scott's history? In its freedom, Scott's prose corresponds to a lawless melodic music. The unique quality of the diorama, however, is that it does not require the viewer to move to follow the image. As much as the picture keeps moving, the viewer remains fixed.[266] Hugo, likewise countering infinite movement with fixity, suggests that the medium of

[264] See chapter 1, "Showing the Past" (18-62). Since I define Hugo's imagination as 'dioramic', a technical definition is in order: "A mode of scenic representation in which a picture, some portions of which are translucent, is viewed through an aperture, the sides of which are continued towards the picture; the light, which is thrown upon the picture from the roof, may be diminished or increased at pleasure, so as to represent the change from sunshine to cloudy weather, etc." (Def. a. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 13 Sept. 2010).

[265] *La Légende des siècles*, a fragmented epic of all of history, is the most famous example. The form of the poem allows for the condensation of history, which heightens its impact: "Tous ces poëmes," Hugo says in preface to the 'Première série', "ceux du moins qui résument le passé, sont de la réalité historique condensée ou de la réalité historique devinée". *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5 (Paris: Laffont, 1985). Herbert J. Hunt points out the parallels between *La Légende* and Hugo's Restoration poetry, noting how the nineteenth-century poet was obliged to tailor the epic to a modern audience. Hugo, despite claims to historical continuity, simplifies in order to captivate a jaded and disillusioned public that was in the hands of puppet kings (Charles X) or illegitimate rulers ("Napoléon-le-Petit"). The originality of Hugo's *Légende*, Hunt argues against its detractors, is its very "neglect of nuance" (288). See "The 'Little Epic': Legends of the Ages in Mosaic Patterns" (Chap. X), *The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1941).

[266] Samuels: "As opposed to the circular panorama, the diorama's canvas was flat, like a film screen. Daguerre's simulation of the moving image, if not in actual technology, foreshadowed cinema […]. […] the spectacle gave the impression of change without shifting the position of the spectator" (48).

verse could lend the representation of history an even more indelible impression than the historical novel. As in the Preface to *Cromwell*, which the review of *Quentin Durward* anticipates, Hugo's ideal drama is not in the loose form of prose, but in the form of a poem: "L'idée, trempée dans le vers, prend soudain quelque chose de plus incisive et de plus éclatant. C'est le fer qui devient acier" (Preface to *Cromwell* 96). As if holding a prism to Scott's prose in order to concentrate its colors further, Hugo intimates that the novelist's writing of history could be more:

> Après le roman pittoresque, mais prosaïque, de Walter Scott, il restera un autre roman à créer, plus beau et plus complet encore selon nous. C'est le roman, à la fois drame et épopée, pittoresque mais poétique, réel mais idéal, vrai mais grand, qui enchâssera Walter Scott dans Homère.[267] ("Sur Walter Scott" 149)

While Stendhal, the same year that Hugo published his review of *Quentin Durward*, had already pronounced drama as the exemplary form of romantic (thus modern) art, he understood this drama to be in prose. Verse, on the other hand, was as modern as a powdered wig: "De nos jours, le vers alexandrin n'est le plus souvent qu'un cache-sottise" (*Racine et Shakespeare*). Part of Hugo's objective in the Preface to *Cromwell* would be to prove Stendhal wrong, as the representation of history specifically invited the resuscitation of the *poet's* imagination: "Quelle voix s'élèvera dans l'orage, si ce n'est celle de la lyre qui peut le calmer?" ("Sur Walter Scott" 147). Tellingly, Hugo asks this question in an article on the century's most famous novelist.

[267] "Hugo rêve au-delà de Walter Scott", Claude Duchet observes in "Victor Hugo et l'âge d'homme" (*Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, ed. Massin). This paragraph was not in the original 1823 article, but added for the 1834 publication of *Littérature et philosophie mêlées*. The small addition is significant, because Hugo could be slyly referring to his own *Notre-Dame de Paris*, which appeared in 1831. This lends support to Rancière's claim that Hugo's novel, due to its hybrid form (stone and word, word and image, poetry and prose), represents "la ruine du principe de généricité" (28).

I will now turn to two examples of Hugo's lyric poetry, one from the beginning of the Restoration period and one from the end, to demonstrate how Hugo formulates a dioramic imagination to make sense out of the "vain bruit" around him. It was not seeing or writing history, but putting it into the form of a poem, that best stabilized this noise. Hugo's history poems first situate his eye (the aperture), and then project the eye's imagination in the form of a diorama (the moving image). The drama of the Restoration called for this emboldened romantic imagination, and if Hugo makes no apologies for having confronted a traumatic past, it is because his eye's unwavering focus has succeeded in ordering it:

> Des révolutions j'ouvrais le gouffre immonde?
> C'est qu'il faut un chaos à qui veut faire un monde ;
> C'est qu'une grande voix dans ma nuit m'a parlé ;
> C'est qu'enfin je voulais, menant au but la foule,
> Avec le siècle qui s'écoule
> Confronter le siècle écoulé. ("Fin" 19-24)[268]

a. "Le Rétablissement de la statue d'Henri IV"

One of Hugo's earliest poems, "Le Rétablissement de la statue d'Henri IV", situates straightaway the poet's eye:[269]

> Je voyais s'élever, dans le lointain des âges,
> Ces monuments, espoir de cent rois glorieux ;
> Puis je voyais crouler les fragiles images
> De ces fragiles demi-dieux. (1-4)

The more history moves forward and produces images, the more this Restoration poet's eye remains fixed (the twice repeated "je voyais" remains intact despite time rushing forward). As the diorama's moving image emerges from a fixed aperture, Hugo asserts a

[268] Again, while Samuels focuses on historical fiction after the July Monarchy, I would argue that Hugo's exploration of how to represent history in verse form was a critical precursor. Hugo's "gouffre immonde" is a reference to his theory of the grotesque, which helped usher in a realist and ocular aesthetic in France.
[269] "Le Rétablissement" was first published in 1819 by the Académie des Jeux floraux (Toulouse), who awarded Hugo first prize for the poem.

stable eye amid the disorder. The Restoration poet does not enjoy a privileged command over a distant history, which was the subject of more or less recent history paintings (David's *Oath of the Horatii* (1785)) or narratives of history (Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs* (1809)). Hugo emphasizes instead how the subject of his poem is a recent violent history and its present-day aftershocks: "Eh quoi! sont-ils donc loin, ces jours de notre histoire / Où Paris sur son prince osa lever son bras?" (31-32). "Le Rétablissement" not only depicts a Restoration moment (the people's hoisting back up of Henri IV's statue, which the Revolutionaries had toppled), but it serves as a Restoration *monument*: as Henri goes back on his pedestal, so does the French lyric poet. As Hugo states in the 1822 preface to the *Odes*, France's contemporary political landscape provided a fertile place for poetry: "Il y a deux intentions dans la publication de ce livre, l'intention littéraire et l'intention politique".[270] The poet's eye must focus on and not shun this landscape's instability, and "Le Rétablissement" expresses the young poet's anxiety as he sets out to face it:[271]

> Nous ne verrons jamais l'image vénérée
> D'un roi qu'à la France éplorée

[270] In contrast, the preface to the first edition of the *Méditations* presents Lamartine's elegies as a welcome respite from political turmoil (the assassination of the duc de Berry had taken place only a month prior to the collection's appearance): "Nous sentons que le moment de cette publication n'est pas très heureusement choisi, et que ce n'est pas au milieu des grands intérêts politiques qui les agitent, que les esprits conservent assez de calme et de liberté pour s'abandonner aux inspirations d'une poésie rêveuse et entièrement détachée des intérêts actifs de ce monde ; mais nous savons aussi qu'il y a au fond de l'âme humaine un besoin imprescriptible d'échapper aux tristes réalités de ce monde, et de s'élancer dans les régions supérieures de la poésie et de la religion!" (493-494). Here, poetry hardly serves as a monument, but more like a temporary balm.

[271] In an extensive analysis of "Le Rétablissement", Kevin Smith has demonstrated how the singularity of the moment is undermined by a "politics of representation" that flanks the central image of the king with the opening "fragiles images" and concluding "frêles métaux". Hugo's poem thus becomes an icon in its own right that ironically undermines the sense of stability and continuity that this statue is supposed to represent: "By de-stabilizing its textual framework, Hugo creates a disjunction between the subject of his poem – the restoring of an image to its rightful 'center' – and the implicit emphasis on impermanence and discontinuity" (67-68). In "Bare Pedestals: The Text of Public Monuments in Nineteenth-Century Paris". Diss. Princeton U, 1996. In my argument, the fragility at stake is whether or not the poet's invisible verbal image, competing with the statue, can order the confused moment.

Enleva sitôt le trépas ;
Sans saluer Henri nous irons aux batailles,
Et l'étranger viendra chercher dans nos murailles
Un héros qu'il n'y verra pas ! (54-60)

What France lacks is an image (Henri IV's), and Hugo makes up for this by insisting on the eye and the image throughout the poem. He thus remolds and recasts in lyric form what the iconoclastic revolutionaries had demolished. But while Hugo expresses the palpable fear that the people can no longer see Henri, he also suggests a latent fear that the poet's voice will be lost in the crowd:

Ô ma lyre! tais-toi dans la publique ivresse ;
Que seraient tes concerts près des chants d'allégresse
De la France aux pieds de Henri ? (68-70)[272]

The people, as they rush towards the visible icon, drown out the audible. Sound does not suffice as the modern lyric poet's medium. It is "clear" in "Le Rétablissement" that it is not his instrument that will make him heard, but the images that he evokes in order to "reestablish" the king: "Ciel! c'est lui! je vois sa noble tête…" (65). Emphasizing the rehabilitative role of the image, Hugo fixes his eye and emulates Henri's calm and eternal gaze:[273]

[272] The fear of the lyre no longer being heard, or of no longer being relevant to the crowd, is acute and frequently expressed in Hugo's early *Odes*: "Mais toi, que peux-tu pour le monde?" (65) asks Hugo's 'anti-Muse' in "Le Poète dans les révolutions".

[273] Of course, Hugo betrays his 'ultra' leanings by celebrating the re-hoisting of this statue. Important studies on Hugo have demonstrated, however, that his political stance was more complex. Brunetière explains Hugo's relative unpopularity at the start of his career was due to his readers' confusion as to what his political and aesthetic leanings really were. Editors of journals, for example, hesitated to review his works because they were unsure of his exact allegiances (see chapter V, "Victor Hugo de 1822 à 1830"). Smith notes how Hugo's supposed celebration of a statue curiously turns into that of "the evolution of the collective body" (70), although it could be argued that this collective reflects more a propagandist statement (an ecstatic crowd paying public tribute to a monarch) than a fermenting democratic ideal. Bernard Degout's more recent study of Hugo's early poetry considers the curious situation of the Restoration poet, in that a *Re*storation identifying with the past called for something new: "Hugo est alors un royaliste ultra, pour lequel la question profonde posée par le nom même de son époque – la Restauration – est avant tout celle de l'Instauration. La chaîne des temps a été brisée, et ne pourra être 'renouée' que par le Nouveau. Toute la difficulté étant celle de la fondation – définition, légitimation et mise en œuvre – de ce Nouveau" (*Le sablier retourné: Victor Hugo (1816-1824) et le débat sur le "romantisme"* 13-14). Like

Un héros, respirant dans le marbre immobile,
Arrêtait tout à coup par son regard tranquille
Les factieux épouvantés ! (28-30)

The view of Henri's visage is not enough for the poet, and he thus 'zooms in' on the king's eyes for a more profound source of inspiration: "Désormais, dans ses yeux, en volant à la gloire, / Nous viendrons puiser la victoire" (85-86). These steady eyes in turn allow the poet to uncover the ordered "secret" of history. Despite the recent turmoil, Henri still watches over his people. Hugo reiterates the contrast between stasis (Henri's eye) and movement (the people rushing to restore his statue):

Où courez-vous ? – Quel bruit naît, s'élève et s'avance ?
Qui porte ces drapeaux, signe heureux de nos rois ?
Dieu ! quelle masse au loin semble, en sa marche immense,
Broyer la terre sous son poids ?
Répondez…Ciel ! c'est lui ! je vois sa noble tête… (61-65)

Henri's image allows the poet to participate in the tumult without falling prey to a sense of insubstantiality: "Qu'importe si mon bras est perdu dans la foule! / Henri me voit du haut des cieux" (71-72). The narrative is thus part of Hugo's larger reflection on how the poet can "reestablish" poetry in 1819, and this before Lamartine's *Méditations* had even appeared. Hugo combats the period's pessimism and even hostility concerning the efficacy of poetry –

Les lyres n'ont plus de prophète,
Et la Muse, aveugle et muette,
Ne sait plus rien de l'avenir ! (" Le Poète dans les révolutions " 68-70)

– by insisting on optimism, symbolized by his emphasis on light and sun: "Ce n'est qu'à travers les nuages / Qu'il prend son vol vers le soleil!" (99-100). The new poet can see through the fog of his century. Accordingly, more than music, France needs the image to

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Smith, Degout points out that Hugo's poem has little to do with history and everything to do with the present moment. Hugo's acknowledgement of the people reflects his modern consciousness of an evolving history rather than Chateaubriand's melancholic nostalgia for a lost past.

regain a sense of stability: “La France aime à revoir le geste populaire / Et le regard accoutumé!” (99-100). Reestablishing the image is what allows for the people’s song, which is notably an orchestrated chorus: “Le peuple, fier de sa conquête, / Répète en choeur son nom chéri” (66-67). Within this chaotic moment that he did in fact experience, Hugo, by equating the steady gaze to the poet’s lyre, manages to give history tangible form. Pierre Moreau observes: “Victor Hugo est un œil, mais qui touche et qui écoute” (“Les deux univers de Victor Hugo : Le visible et l’invisible”).[274]

b. “A la colonne de la place Vendôme”

In the last edition of the *Odes et Ballades* (1828), Hugo reflects on his vocation as a poet who has confronted his history:

> Ainsi d’un peuple entier je feuilletais l’histoire !
> Livre fatal de deuil, de grandeur, de victoire.
> Et je sentais frémir mon luth contemporain,
> Chaque fois que passait un grand nom, un grand crime,
> Et que l’une sur l’autre, avec un bruit sublime,
> Retombaient les pages d’airain. (“Fin” 1-6)

With a retrospective glance, Hugo considers his representation of history as substantial and “filled in”, even monumental (“les pages d’airain”). The only thing left to “see” is that which is impossible to confront: the sphinx, or history’s ‘why’. But even Victor Hugo has to let this go: “Ne cherchons pas ce mot” (13). The poet, in order to carry on, must find a freer place, which explains how “Fin”, added to the final edition of the *Odes et Ballades*, is a transitional poem like “Rêves” and “Pluie d’été”. After the “landscape” of contemporary history, the poet needs even more room: “Il n’a pas trop de l’océan!” (30). The rainbow analogy once again applies to Hugo’s prophecy of where poetry is

[274] In Hugo’s *Œuvres complètes* (ed. J. Massin), vol. III.

headed. During the storm, the poet remains fixed and forms a buttressing and scintillating arc ("géant capricieux") between water and sky:

> C'est là qu'il peut bondir, géant capricieux,
> Et tournoyer, debout dans l'orage qui tombe,
> D'un pied s'appuyant sur la trombe,
> Et d'un bras soutenant les cieux ! (33-36)

I argue that "A la colonne de la place Vendôme", which Hugo also added to the final edition of the *Odes et Ballades*, tells us the poet's job of representing history as fully as possible has been accomplished.[275] While Hugo had situated the role of the poet's eye in "Le Rétablissement", six years later, he puts the dioramic imagination on full display when contemplating how the otherwise fixed structure of the Vendôme column has changed meaning over the course of hardly over a decade. Restoration history is condensed by Hugo's sense of immediacy as he reads the visual icon, as well as the heightening of gesture and the effects of light.[276] Like "Le Rétablissement", "A la colonne de la place Vendôme" also considers the monument and its function as the residual, living matter of history.[277] Both poems intend to put this peculiar tension between past and present on view (how can a Restored monarchy not have a statue of Henri IV? how can a monument honoring Napoleon's exploits stand during the reign of Charles X?), and thus feature the poet's eye as the principal protagonist. In what was by

[275] "A la colonne", like "Le Rétablissement", was published separately before becoming a part of the *Odes*, first in the *Journal des débats* (9 Feb. 1827), then in pamphlet form (Paris: A. Dupont, 1827).
[276] As in his discussion of "Le Rétablissement", Smith provides a detailed history and the overall cultural context of the monument. The images on the column, which was inspired by Trajan's column in Rome, depict France's victory at Austerlitz. In reality, the frieze would have been hard to scrutinize since it was perched on a high pedestal, but Hugo zooms in and demonstrates an intense familiarity with the visual narrative.
[277] Hugo was inspired to write this ode when, at a reception at the Austrian embassy, four French generals from Napoleon's army were announced by their names instead of their titles. The message was clear: the Austrians did not want to revive memories of their defeats. Through a highly visual poem, Hugo insisted on showing them graphically.

now a customary self-critical gesture, Hugo refers to "Le Rétablissement" in his newly emerged poem:

> Au bronze de Henri mon orgueil te marie.
> *J'aime à vous voir* tous deux, honneur de la patrie,
> Immortels, dominant nos troubles passagers, (19-21 – emphasis mine)

Just as the monument situates history, the eye situates the poet and helps him "dominate" present-day confusion.

Unlike its predecessor, "A la colonne de la place Vendôme" forms a detailed description of the monument as much as it does an internalized meditation. The poet's eye, by 1828, has become more powerful. Not only does it contemplate the history pictured on the monument, it "devours" it: "Je viens […] d'un oeil enflammé dévorer ton histoire" (27-28). Reminiscent of the "miroir de concentration" that Hugo features so prominently in the Preface to *Cromwell*, Hugo's prismatic eye, in its epic designs, produces a span of France's history - past, present, and future – as he contemplates the monument. Conjuring the French troops' melting of seized Austrian canons to commemorate their victory at Austerlitz, Hugo's eyes "melt" the vertical column into an unfurling history that goes way beyond the function of a history painting or commemorative statue.[278] History may be turbulent, but the poet's contemplation of the column shows how it obeys a natural law underneath:

> A quoi pense-t-il donc, l'étranger qui nous brave?
> N'avions-nous pas hier l'Europe pour esclave ?

[278] Stamos Metzidakis, in his analysis of both Hugo's "A la Colonne de la place Vendôme" and "A la Colonne" (*Les Chants du crépuscule*), shows how Hugo's vertical columns served as an ideal axis of permanence and stability in their insistence on Napoleon's mythical status. Though Metzidakis accounts for the ambiguity that results from a vertical ideal (the column) and a horizontal reality (history), and how this ambiguity reflects the friction between romantic and classical sensibilities in this period, I argue that Hugo's ideal is not the imposing "security" of the column, but the poet who enflames the representations of history into a dioramic image. Metzidakis's article "Poétique de la ligne: Autour des colonnes sculptées" appears in *Sculpture et poétique: Sculpture and Literature in France, 1789-1859*, ed. L. Cassandra Hamrick and Suzanne Nash; *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 35.1 (Fall 2006): 206-225.

Nous, subir de son joug l'indigne talion !
Non ! au champ du combat nous pouvons reparaître.
On nous a mutilés ; mais le temps a peut-être
Fait croître l'ongle du lion. (91-96)

France's past presents an ominous warning to the Austrians as to what is to come: "Tout s'arme, et la Vendée aiguisera son glaive / Sur la pierre de Waterloo" (115-120). History is thus not confused, but follows a logic: "la Vendée" can be said in the same breath as "Waterloo".

While Hugo does not provide a description of Henri's statue in "Le Rétablissement" (even after it has been restored), the monument in "A la colonne de la place Vendôme" is the target of his scrutinizing gaze. We know straightaway what it looks like: "Bronze qui, tournoyant sur ta base immobile" (2). But description is not the main objective here. Hugo depicts instead the creative process that takes place in the eye as it contemplates this monument. The story in "A la colonne de la place Vendôme" is how the poet's ocular imagination operates. As his eye moves in, the column becomes more and more charged: "De ce bronze, forgé de foudres étouffées, / Chaque étincelle est un éclair!" (65-66). What the column depicts (the French victory at the Battle of Austerlitz) emerges from its stasis:

J'aime à voir sur tes flancs, Colonne étincelante,
Revivre ces soldats qu'en leur onde sanglante
Ont roulés le Danube, et le Rhin, et le Pô ! (13-15)

Hugo's detailed history insists on places, names and icons, but it is not a history painting or a dry narration of facts. It is, significantly, a *poem* that produces a temporal diorama of history: "There is a disjunction between the poet's political role: to stand by, to watch over, and his aesthetic role: to re-create, to re-shape" (Smith 109). The poem is at once the fixed monument (form) and the moving narrative of a spiraling history. "A la

colonne" is Hugo's potent visual reminder that France's imprint (Napoleon's monument) on Europe is far from "ruined". He insists on the most grand and significant of images, warning that this column is not for "timid" eyes:

> Est-ce un langage obscur à ses regards timides?
> Eh ! qu'il s'en fasse s'instruire au pied des Pyramides,
> A Vienne, au vieux Kremlin, au morne Escurial ! (85-87)

The visual impact of the column accentuates the accusation that Hugo levels against those who seek to erase the past. The more the eye illuminates the spiraling monument, the clearer the message becomes: France, despite its period of latency, is nonetheless evolving: "Prenez garde! – La France, où grandit un autre âge, / N'est pas si morte encor qu'elle souffre un outrage!" (115-116). The monument may already tell the story, but Hugo's focused eye, the "miroir de concentration", turns these inert images into an epic drama that features the interplay of light and shadow:

> Que de fois j'ai cru voir, ô Colonne française,
> Ton airain ennemi rugir dans la fournaise !
> Que de fois, ranimant tes combattants épars,
> Heurtant sur tes parois leurs armes dérouillées,
> J'ai ressuscité ces mêlées
> Qui t'assiègent de toutes parts ! (31-36)

There is no heroic or passionate action (the hoisting of a statue, celebrations in the streets), but a simple viewing of the column from which an intimate dialogue between column and poet ensues ("Que de fois, tu le sais…" 25).[279] What is heroic here is the poet's illuminating and dioramic imagination as he revives this monument and establishes its function, not as a symbol of the past, but as a threshold to a mysterious future: "Hugo posits the notion of rupture, not as a definitive break, but rather as a process, an on-going affair whose beginnings may be mapped but whose results remain

[279] For Smith, "the poem exhibits a strong subjective presence, one which moves beyond the poetic self and into the realm of creative power and into a romantic rhetoric of visionary heroism" (108).

uncharted and unknown" (Smith 110).[280] Without the functioning of this self-aware and creative eye, the monument would simply be what the Austrians wanted it to be, that is, the inert debris of an already forgotten if recent past: "Débris du Grand Empire et de la Grande Armée" (7). "Released from his role of passive recipient of an already written and rewritten history," Suzanne Nash concludes in her analysis of the poem, "he is able to participate at last as avenging hero".[281] In the end, what spirals around the monument is not the sculptural frieze, but the molten flow of the poet's text.

Part III.

The Dioramic Imagination: Hugo's *Orientales*

> - L'Orient! l'Orient! qu'y voyez-vous, poètes?
> V. Hugo, "Prélude", *Les Chants du crépuscule*

The *Orientales*, a melding of palette, pen and stage, represent the ultimate achievement of the Restoration poet as his Cénacle had been formulating it. Sainte-Beuve celebrates Hugo's achievement of a *lyric* picturesque imagination:

> Pour nous résumer sur le talent lyrique de Victor Hugo, nous dirons que, l'ode politique étant close pour lui, l'ode rêveuse lui étant commune avec d'illustres rivaux, et en particulier avec Lamartine, sa spécialité la plus propre et la plus glorieuse est l'ode pittoresque ou d'imagination, dont les *Orientales* lui assurent le sceptre parmi les contemporains.[282]

[280] In a famous later poem, Hugo plunges into an even further past while at the same time visualizing an apocalyptic future in "A l'Arc de triomphe" (*Les Voix intérieures*), thus opening up his meditation of the Napoleon myth into the poetic diorama of French civilization as a whole: "Il ne restera plus […] / Que deux tours de granit faites par Charlemagne, / Et qu'un pilier d'airain fait par Napoléon; / Toi, tu compléteras le triangle sublime!".

[281] "Victor Hugo's *Odes et Ballades*", op. cit. (89). Nash traces Hugo's transfigurations of Napoleon throughout the *Odes*, a micro-diorama that reflects the poet's evolving consciousness of the "truth" of a diachronic rather than synchronic form of history.

[282] "Prospectus sur les œuvres de Victor Hugo" (1829); in *Premiers lundis*, op. cit. (297-303).

The *Orientales* vividly remind the reader that, even in 1829, the lyric poet did not intend to be outdone by the competing "realist" genres of painting and the novel.[283] The music of Lamartine's lyric poetry may have been fading, but Hugo's imaging imagination compensated for this breakdown. The *Orientales* are the showy "success story" of the lyric poet's restored imagination, which Hugo represents by the workings of his expanding and contracting eye: "Le poète est libre," he says in the preface to the first edition, with the accompanying command, "Mettons-nous à son point de vue, et voyons" (577). Here, I will first consider how *Cromwell*, by setting up this "point de vue" and its taut tension with the tendency for the imagination to expand, sets the stage for the *Orientales*, in which the rhythm of expansion and contraction is further intensified. The evocation of an immediate and ongoing history (the Greek War of Independence, Napoleon's recent rise and fall) called for an even more despotic eye, and Hugo's preface is a concise and highly visual presentation of this empowered imagination that has already melted the Vendôme column. My readings of the volume's bookend poems, "Le Feu du ciel" and "Novembre", as well as the famous "Mazeppa", will show that the collection's exoticism concerns, not only Oriental themes and colors, but a poet who effectively calls out to contemporary readers without having to lapse into prose or painting.

[283] Hugo's preoccupation with capturing "le tout", as well as with the workings of the artist's eye, initiated questions that would surge throughout the July Monarchy. In his "Avertissement" to *Les Chouans* (1829), Balzac describes the concept of an imagination that strives to incorporate everything as a necessary evil ("cette faute"). In contrast to Lessing's model of the imagination, where less is more, Balzac seeks to incorporate all details in order to speak to a jaded public who was swayed more by spectacles than by ideas: "Alors les imaginations ardentes me reprocheront de ne leur rien laisser à deviner; mais cette faute […] appartient peut-être à notre littérature moderne; elle n'a plus que l'immense vérité des détails, l'idéalisation des formes, la longue concrétion de ces œuvres sublimes où l'on a mis le germe de tout, de ces situations fécondes à peine effleurées est hors de notre portée. Dans ce genre, tout est dit". The "Avertissement" was written in 1828, but was never published during Balzac's lifetime. It is included in the Livre de poche edition of *Les Chouans* (ed. Claudie Bernard, 1997). Starting in the same period, 'plein air' Barbizon landscapes, where studies of all details in nature (rocks, tree trunks, foliage) became paintings in their own right, rapidly became the most popular genre at the Salons.

1. *Cromwell*: "la forme optique de la pensée"

Before tracing the pulsating dynamic of Hugo's imagination in *Les Orientales*, I will provide a buttressing arc of my own by showing how the poems are the lyric performance of the dioramic imagination that Hugo had theorized and aimed to put on stage in *Cromwell*. Since *Cromwell* was Hugo's proclamation that modern drama was the new lyric poetry, it is *Cromwell* more than the *Odes et Ballades* ("A la colonne de la place Vendôme", published the same year as *Cromwell*, serves as a notable exception) that points to the key elements that are at stake in Hugo's following book of poems. Despite their emphasis on the artist's freedom and their revolutionary overtones ("Que le poète donc aille où il veut, en faisant ce qui lui plaît" Ibid), the poems are rooted in the ocular drama that precedes them. Hugo's attack against the 'trois unités' in the Preface allows for a full and fluid representation of history: "Ce que recouvre l'attaque contre les unités, c'est le refus de toute convention qui restreindrait les possibilités de peinture de l'histoire" (Ubersfeld, *Cromwell*: 47).[284] While the history painter was constrained by the two-dimensional canvas and one moment in time, the dramatist was free to expand in an effort to capture a larger whole.[285] Hugo's model of a modern poet-painter-dramatist establishes the verticality of a penetrating eye that sees below the surface *and* the horizontality of passing time, as well as the matrix of the idea (the ambiguous status of the Cromwell-Napoleon figure) and the real (historical detail): "Le drame," Hugo

[284] Helpful for the study of *Cromwell* are Annie Ubersfeld's introductions to both this edition (Garnier-Flammarion) and the one that appears in Laffont's *Œuvres complètes* (vol. 12), as well as Maurice Souriau's edition, which is an exhaustive study of Hugo's sources (Slatkine reprints, 1973; 1st ed. 1897). Pierre Moreau's "Les Deux univers de Victor Hugo: Le visible et l'invisible" and Claude Duchet's "Victor Hugo et l'âge d'homme ('Cromwell' et sa préface)", both in Vol. III of the Massin edition of Hugo's *Œuvres complètes* (1967) are useful for providing a history of Hugo's drafting of the play as well as for historical context.

[285] In his review of the 'Exposition de tableaux au profit des Grecs' (1826), Hugo did not hide his disdain for the painter Jacques-Louis David, and mentions him along with the phrases "seconde école" and "détestables tableaux". The review is in Massin, vol. II: 983-986.

explains, "unissant les qualités les plus opposées, peut être à la fois plein de profondeur et plein de relief, philosophique *et* pittoresque" (76 – emphasis mine). What Hugo had once said of Walter Scott's *Quentin Durward* could now be said of *Cromwell*, in the combination of its "minutieuse exactitude" and "majestueuse grandeur de l'histoire et l'intérêt pressant du roman" (*Litt. et phil. mêlées* 146). Ubersfeld elaborates on the harmony between stasis (image) and movement (word): "La peinture de l'histoire dans Cromwell est peinture de roman: une esthétique nouvelle du drame aboutit à ce tableau énorme, fourmillant de détails" (25).[286]

But more than the novel, the diorama serves as the better model for Hugo's imagination because, as in "A la colonne de la place Vendôme", *Cromwell*'s ambiguous ending does not allow for a closing of the book. It is more than apparent that the design of *Cromwell* will be out of reach – in the same way that it is impossible to anticipate what the diorama will look like from one moment to the next – when Hugo makes the claim that poetry will "[se mettre] à faire comme la nature" (69). The play could not feasibly be represented on the stage, as Hugo readily acknowledged in the preface: "Il est évident que ce drame, dans ses proportions actuelles, ne pourrait s'encadrer dans nos representations scéniques. Il est trop long" (102-103). *Cromwell*, more than the representation of history, is thus the drama of the romantic poet's perpetual striving. After 6413 lines, it ends with the same question that serves as the secret "sève" of history's mystery that runs throughout the play: "Quand donc serai-je roi?".[287] Yet Hugo says in the Preface: "Tout se tient" (69). Just as the blind poet Milton serves as

[286] In *Laocoön*, Lessing had stressed the limits of painting ("The single moment of time to which art must confine itself by virtue of its material limitations" 19), which were to the advantage of poetry: "Each variation which would cost the artist a separate work costs the poet but a single pen stroke" (24).
[287] As painting and prose in particular were gaining more ground, while the music of Lamartine's *Méditations* was fading fast into the background, the lyric poet of 1827 was asking the same question.

Cromwell's conscience, reminding the confused leader of his mission ("Quoi! tu veux être roi, Cromwell! – Y penses-tu?" 2808), the poet Hugo orders his vast narrative by referring back to his "point optique". The court jesters, symbols of the grotesque, serve as this point. The more disoriented Cromwell becomes, the more they see and make sense of the situation: "Le Cromwell, qui croit tout soumettre à son contrôle, / Ferait bien d'emprunter l'oeil de ses quatre fous" (2377-2378). Contrary to the customary associations of Romanticism with disorder, Hugo places expansion in check, which leads Jean-Pierre Reynaud to describe his lively but controlled aesthetic as a "loi générale qui veut qu'il n'y ait pas de loi".[288] Hugo sets up a paradox in *Cromwell*: the vaster the work of art, the more fixed and calm is the poet that motivates it. The whole of *Cromwell*, like the diorama that moves infinitely onward, depends on the aperture of the poet's filtering eye.

Hugo, like Mme de Staël before him in *De la littérature* (1800), provides an account in his Preface of the history of literature. The question, however, is no longer the general one of how modern Europe or France will fit into this history, but how the individual poet will. If Hugo takes on the persona of the humble hermit in the beginning of the Preface ("Il s'offre donc aux regards, seul, pauvre, et nu" 61), he grows in stature by the end: "le chêne a le port bizarre, les rameaux nouveaux, le feuillage sombre, l'écorce âpre et rude; mais il est le chêne" (108). The leaves have roots. Likewise, the poet's imagination is far from being fanciful or arbitrary. Much as Cromwell's "fous" make sense out of the chaos around them, Hugo provides a coherent and sustainable theory of art within all of contemporary history's complexities and disturbances. Hugo

[288] 'Présentation' to vol. 12 of Hugo's *Œuvres complètes* (Laffont, 1985), in which the Preface to *Cromwell* is included.

shows ("faire voir") that there is unity in this tumult by heightening rather than erasing colorful descriptions in order to illuminate his idea: "essayons de *faire voir* que c'est de la féconde union du type grotesque au type sublime qui naît le génie moderne, si complexe, si varié dans ses formes, si inépuisable dans ses créations" (70 – emphasis mine). The expansive text thus has plasticity as Hugo forms out of the apparently formless: "Le vers est la forme optique de la pensée. Voilà pourquoi il convient surtout à la perspective scénique" (95). The relentless stream of images in *Cromwell* is a constant reminder that this "pensée" is behind every seemingly disparate and haphazard person or object. *Cromwell*, a non-representable play, is more the vivid representation of the modern lyric poet who is in control despite his striving for "le tout".

2. *Les Orientales*

The representation of history is also front and center in *Les Orientales*, though Hugo's imaging eye widens further to take in the East. Hugo puts the drama of the Greek War of Independence, the major news event of the period, on full display. When examining Hugo's passage from the *Nouvelles odes* (1824) to the *Orientales*, Claude Millet nonetheless determines that the poet's "je" lacks direction by 1829, due to what she views as the loss of a traditional form of inspiration that formerly allowed him to be an interpreter of history.[289] For her, what "guides" the poet in the *Orientales* is instead a directionless force, an "Esprit qu'un souffle enlève" ("Enthousiasme"). The "je" is thus unstable and melds with the voice of "le Tout".[290] However, as much as I see Hugo

[289] "L'Inspiration poétique des "*Nouvelles odes*" aux "*Orientales*", in *Autour des* Orientales, ed. Claude Millet (Paris: Minard, 2002).

[290] In *Poétique du sujet lyrique dans l'œuvre de Victor Hugo* (1998), Ludmila Charles-Wurtz also sees the poet's "Je" as surrendering to a multiplicity of voices. The volume's theatricality, in her view, subsumes any sense of cohesive narrative: "Dans ce recueil centré autour de la guerre d'indépendance qui oppose les insurgés grecs aux troupes de l'Empire ottoman au début du dix-neuvième siècle, le 'je' poétique est assumé tour à tour par chacun des belligérants, ce qui a pour effet de multiplier les points de vue sans en

being "carried away" by poetic inspiration in *Les Orientales*, I also see him working hard to counteract this sense of non-direction and insubstantiality. Since I read the *Orientales* as growing directly out of *Cromwell* and especially the 1826 preface to the *Odes et Ballades* (which Millet curiously passes over), I contend that "order" was at the center of Hugo's poetic enterprise, and that underscoring the command of the lyric poet was of utmost importance in a dawning age of prose: "l'ordre est le goût du génie" (282).[291] The poet's inspiration is not arbitrary, but obeys the natural law of his immediate history's flux. The opening poem "Le Feu du ciel" may take us on a flight of Biblical proportion, but in the ones that follow, Hugo quickly grounds the reader in the battered landscapes of Greece and the lavish palaces of the Ottoman Empire. Places are specific ("La riante Stamboule")[292] and described in full. The eye, which Hugo presents in the third person, takes it all in:

> L'œil distinguait les tours par leurs angles marquées,
> Les maisons aux toits plats, les flèches des mosquées,
> Les moresques balcons en trèfles découpés,
> Les vitraux se cachant sous des grilles discrètes,
> Et les palais dorés, et comme des aigrettes
> Les palmiers sur leur front groupés. ("Les Têtes du sérail" 13-18)

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favoriser aucun" (469). Charles-Wurtz's chapter on the *Orientales* is entitled "Le 'Je' vacant", and is part of a larger study that problematizes the traditional notion of romantic lyric poetry as being the full and stable expression of the subject (the poet's "I"). Instead, Charles-Wurtz deconstructs this "I", reading Hugo's lyric poetry as an exchange between self and other. Because it is dialogic, Hugo's voice communicates and is thus the utopian voice of the people, or "L'idéal d'une communauté de communication exempte de toute domination est l'horizon éthique, et donc politique, de son travail théorique" ("Introduction"). I agree that the *Orientales* produce a kaleidoscope effect, but maintain that Hugo saw himself as controlling the visual instrument's mechanism throughout. In my view, Pierre Albouy is more accurate in locating the rupture between the poet and the poet's "I" in *Les Contemplations* (1856); see "Hugo, ou le 'je' éclaté". Charles-Wurtz perhaps anticipates too hastily Hugo's later poetry of exile, whose visionary impulse, as we will see in the following chapter, does indeed sacrifice the poet's voice to the collective. I contend that the *Orientales* need to be read in light of what they grow out of - the ironically despotic eye of the "fous" in *Cromwell* - more than for what they anticipate.

[291] *Odes et Ballades*, Préface de 1826. Of Hugo's oeuvre in general, Victor Brombert remarks, "The visionary thrust of his work is always controlled by a will to lucidity, by a longing for order" (*Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel* 5).

[292] "Les Têtes du sérail" (3).

While "À la colonne de la place Vendôme" had emphasized France's past glory while also suggesting that it would soon be recaptured, "Navarin" announces that this time has arrived: "La France combat: le sort change" (II: 6). In the *Orientales*, history is even more immediate.[293] The reader is caught in the middle of the fray, immersed in the port town of Navarino and its decisive battle: "Ecoutez! – Le canon gronde" (IV:1).[294] Pointing to the ongoing victory, Hugo commands us to see France not as the recent victim of a despot, but as the current savior of the Greeks: "Rouvre les yeux, regarde, Autriche abâtardie! / Que dis-tu de *cet* incendie?" (VII: 58-59 – emphasis mine).

Despite this poetic expansion to the East, however, Hugo's process of concentration counteracts it.[295] The *Orientales* reflect the 'triumphant eye' in "Rêves", which highlights the poet's awareness that the dream is but a dream:

> Que toutes mes pensées
> Viennent s'y déployer,
> […]
>
> Qu'à mon rêve enchaînées,
> Toutes, l'œil triomphant,
> Le bercent inclinées (46-53)

I see this eye as the unifying figure in what otherwise seem to be the haphazard and chaotic *Orientales*. It is even despotic, as the haunting persistence of Napoleon's image

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[293] Hugo wrote "À la colonne de la place Vendôme" and "Navarin" within the space of a few months in 1827.

[294]
> Enfin ! – C'est Navarin, la ville aux maisons peintes,
> La ville aux dômes d'or, la blanche Navarin,
> Sur la colline assise entre les térébynthes,
> Qui prête son beau golfe aux ardentes étreintes
> De deux flottes heurtant leurs carènes d'airains. (III : 1-5)

In an effort to force the Ottoman Empire into a cease-fire, the English, French and Russians joined together to destroy the Egyptian-Turkish fleet at Navarino in 1827. Franck Laurent's edition of *Les Orientales* (Paris: Le Livre de poche, 2000) provides excellent notes and historical context for the volume as a whole.

[295] I should stress that I am not addressing the politics of expansionism, but strictly Hugo's aesthetic enterprise.

indicates: “Toujours lui! Lui partout! – Ou brulânte ou glacée, / Son image sans cesse ébranle ma pensée. / Il verse à mon esprit le souffle créateur” (“Lui” I.-3).[296] Similar to how all experiences of the poet in “Lui” point back to the fallen emperor who is now suffering the consequences of his ambition (“L’oeil même qui te fuit te retrouve partout” 9), each poem in the *Orientales* and its emphasis on form and images is the relentless imprint of the poet’s consciousness as he resists the impulse to escapism and dissipation.[297] Mobility and immobility are thus always at odds, and the reader comes to realize that Hugo’s imagination is far from being free. At a time when the fate of lyric poetry was thrown into question, Hugo formulated an ordered and “serious” romantic imagination that placed the sober lessons of modern history in relief against a fantastical background (and not, as most readers have claimed, the reverse).[298] Contrary to Lamartine’s *Méditations* and even to his own *Cromwell*, Hugo’s *Orientales* have a discernable ending. In the final poem “Novembre” – which follows directly after “Lui” – we see that the poet has never lost himself to his ambition of capturing “le tout”:

> Devant le sombre hiver de Paris qui bourdonne,
> Ton soleil d’orient s’éclipse, et t’abandonne,
> Ton beau rêve d’Asie avorte, et tu ne vois
> Sous tes yeux que la rue au bruit accoutumée,
> Brouillard à ta fenêtre, et longs flots de fumée
> Qui baignent en fuyant l’angle noirci des toits. (7-12)

[296] In the *Orientales*, Napoleon thus serves as a column that the poet “reestablishes”. The poet later cries: “Napoléon! soleil dont je suis le Memnon!” (III.6). In his note to this line, Laurent points out that in ‘Memnon’ we hear ‘même nom’.
[297] “Lui” opens with a quote, which Hugo puts in the form of an alexandrine, from Napoleon’s *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*: “J’étais géant alors, et haut de cent coudées”.
[298] By 1829, lyric poetry had become something that readers consumed. Hugo provides a biting satire on the facile way in which the public understood poetry and the role of the poet in the opening of *Le Dernier jour d’un condamné* (also published in 1829). Even the lyric poet was guilty of transforming his poetry into something digestible; the character of the Lamartinian elegiac poet describes himself as a “romantique raisonnable”: “La catastrophe est voilée” (22).

In the end, the reader learns that the *Orientales* have told the full story of the poet more than that of the Orient, and I will now trace this acute sense of consciousness from the perspective of Hugo's imaging eye that is prominently featured in the book's preface.

The preface to the first edition is not just a defense of Hugo's poems, but an unapologetic illustration of *how* he created them: "Examinons comment vous avez travaillé, non sur quoi et pourquoi" (577).[299] The *Orientales* feature a "hands-on" poet who is always sure to point to his own role: "Comme Dieu, le vrai poète est présent partout à la fois dans son œuvre" (Preface to *Cromwell* 92). It makes sense, then, that critics have looked more to the surface than to the idea behind the collection. A review in *Le Figaro* is but one example of how readers of Hugo's time regretted "l'abus […] de ces coups de pinceaux rouges, bleus, verts, violets, etc., [qui] donne à certaines strophes l'aspect d'une palette de couleurs".[300] In his emphasis on the 'how' of poetry, Hugo seems to privilege the exterior details of his art: "*Les Orientales* sont, en effet," Pierre Albouy remarks, "*une poésie d'art* et la préface illustre, avec une éclatante insolence, la doctrine naissante de *l'art pour l'art*…" (*Œuvres poétiques*; 'Notice' 1299). In *La Fantaisie de Victor Hugo*, Jean-Bertrand Barrère concludes that the book has the "caractère d'exercices", the result of sincere, but apparently unyielding, "efforts" (126), while in her critical edition of the *Orientales*, Elisabeth Barineau takes Hugo's own assessments of his "inutile" project at face value.[301] In this light, the *Orientales* remain

[299] Hugo anticipates the familiar criticisms. In response to the *Orientales*, a certain Emmanuel Chêtelat published his scathing *Les Occidentales, ou lettres critiques sur les Orientales de M. Victor Hugo* (1829). Chêtelat's point was to decry the " barbarism " of foreign influences: "Or, voici venir de l'Orient, c'est-à-dire de la Barbarie, des inspirations nouvelles faites pour altérer la pureté de notre belle littérature" (6).
[300] Cited in Laurent's "Présentation": 7.
[301] 2 vols. (Paris: Dider, 1952-1954). Anticipating the response of his critics, Hugo asks ironically in his first preface: "que signifie ce livre inutile de pure poésie?" (578).

an ‘étude’. They are “pour le moment”, a brief interruption in an otherwise unified oeuvre that always points to the profound and the subjective (Barineau 3-4).

The *Orientales* indeed delight in form, especially in the use of unusual syllabic patterns. These poems are meant to be seen as much as heard. With strong emphasis on rhyme and meter, as well with the word’s materiality and a freer vocabulary, Hugo plays with the aural, visual, and generally “tactile” elements of his liberated lyric:

> Adieu lougres difformes,
> Galéaces énormes,
> Vaisseaux de toutes formes,
> Vaisseaux de tous climats,
> L’yole aux triples flammes,
> Les mahonnes, les prames,
> La felouque à six rames,
> La polacre à deux mâts ! (“Navarin” VI: 65-72)

Caesuras are inserted where we least expect them, and we “trip” over enjambments. In one of the few full-length studies devoted to the *Orientales*, Louis Guimbaud describes these elaborate procedures as “ruses poétiques” (142).[302] It is trickier than it first appears to read aloud the opening stanza of “Les Djinns”, due to Hugo’s unusual insertion of breaks and the tongue-twister effect produced by the rich rhyme:

> Murs, ville,
> Et port,
> Asile
> De mort,
> Mer grise
> Où brise
> La brise
> Tout dort. (1-8)

Hugo’s virtuosity with form, then, requires the fully engaged participation of his readers’ senses. The shock-effect comes not so much from the “horrible essaim” (58) of the furies, but from how the poem looks and sounds. Citing a number of contemporary

[302] *‘Les Orientales’ de Victor Hugo* (Amiens, 1928).

reviews of the volume, Claude Millet shows why it was easy for critics to censure the crudity of tones: not only did Hugo suggest garish colors, but he called colors by name instead of cloaking them in paraphrases. Colors are not only vivid, but they clash: "Le coloris des *Orientales* est une provocation" ("Noir, blanc, couleurs" 303).[303]

Before we cast aside the *Orientales* as mere experimentation with verse or a dabbling in the picturesque, we should note how the underlying idea of the poet counterbalances the external questions of form and appearance.[304] Emery, though qualifying Hugo's color as crude, nonetheless concedes to the poet's emphasis on movement and light (in other words, on a sense of naturalness):

> L'œil de l'artiste découpe les tons à l'emporte-pièce. Pourtant quelle magie déjà dans ce feu d'artifice ! Comme les objets saisis dans des éclosions de clarté y prennent le relief de la vie, l'autorité du mouvement ! Car – et c'est là le miracle le plus fécond de cette vision – la poursuite de la couleur et de la lumière y conduit à un perpétuel animisme. (25)

Millet, continuing her analysis of Hugo's use of color throughout the 1830s, notes that the poet's evocation of light became a central preoccupation before the *Orientales* even appeared: "dès la *Préface* de *Cromwell*, la couleur pigmentaire commence à être dévalorisée au profit de la couleur lumière" ("Noir, blanc, couleurs" 307). In the *Orientales*, Hugo now applies his "magic" prism to Eastern landscapes and history, concentrating details into a unifying ray of light: "La bonne couleur locale est un halo dans lequel se fondent les détails en un tout organique, le tout de l'œuvre" (Ibid). Henri Meschonnic goes even further when asserting Hugo's sense of control, arguing that the

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[303] In *L'Œil de Victor Hugo* (op. cit.). For the contemporary reception of the volume, Millet refers to Sandrine Raffin's "*Les Orientales*: La Réception critique en 1829", in *Autour des* Orientales (op. cit.). According to Raffin, the *Orientales* were a success due to their sensational representation of the period's leading news topic, but nonetheless drew criticisms from all sides. The 'ultras' found Hugo too liberal in both his poetics and politics, while the liberals (such as his in-laws) were concerned that his art was not "useful" enough.

[304] "C'est le contraire de ce mot, l'*art pour l'art*, qui est écrit dans toute notre œuvre, et, insistons-y, dans notre vie entière", Hugo would later write in *William Shakespeare*.

Orientales are the product of "une concentration à l'extrême" (485), one initiated by the poet "qui sait *situer* un livre pour lui donner sa force" (Ibid).[305] Hugo does more than situate a place or landscape for poetry. After all, there was not much that was new about the East in 1829.[306] Hugo also situates his "point optique". We learn that what inspired the book was not the Orient, but Hugo's (the poet's) viewing of a sunset: "[…] à quoi bon ces *Orientales*? […] Il [l'auteur] répondra qu'il n'en sait rien, que c'est une idée qui lui a pris; et qui lui a pris d'une façon ridicule, l'été passé, en allant voir coucher le soleil" (578). Yet it is precisely this "ridiculous" viewing of the sunset, the striving of the eye to take in atmospheric effects (the rainbow), that in turn produces a stream of images. Perceived objects strike the prism of the eye, forming an intermediary space of illumination that occurs before the poet refracts new images. Eigeldinger suggests that those readers who only consider what might be called the rhetoric of color are missing the point:

> Cette débauche de couleurs dans les Orientales n'a pas d'intérêt plastique ou pictural en elle-même, mais par le jeu des contrastes, elle crée une ambiance de miroitement et de rutilance qui demeurera un des dons précieux de la vision hugolienne. La couleur tend à se fondre dans la lumière, à lui prêter son irisation. Aussi l'imagination du poète qui ne s'embarrasse guère de nuances est-elle beaucoup plus sensible à l'éclat et au rayonnement des objets qu'à leur couleur. La sensation chromatique est réduite à une impression de clarté et de transparence […]. (91)[307]

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[305] 'Présentation' to the *Orientales*, in Hugo's *Œuvres complètes* (Massin, vol. III): 485-492.

[306] Barineau provides a revealing account of the trend for the Orient in both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. She situates all aspects of this vogue: scholarly (translations of Oriental texts, travel to and study of Eastern landscapes and architecture); travel books (Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*); politics (Napoleon's campaign in Egypt, the Greek War of Independence); and the arts (Byron, Gros, Géricault, Delacroix). See "Introduction", vol. 1, ix-xxxiii. By the time Hugo wrote the *Orientales*, in other words, the Orient was a cliché. Hugo even acknowledges this in his first preface: "l'Orient, soit comme image, soit comme pensée, est devenu, pour les intelligences autant que pour les imaginations, une sorte de préoccupation générale à laquelle l'auteur de ce livre a obéi peut-être à son insu" (580).

[307] Here, Eigeldinger cites an especially evocative reference to the effects of light and color in the *Orientales* : "Et l'arc-en-ciel des nuits teint d'un reflet d'opale / Le nuage aux franges d'argent" ("Fantômes" V.29-30).

As the preface continues, an apparently straightforward view of any old Spanish town ("ces belles vieilles villes d'Espagne" 578) morphs into his unfurling invention of *the* Oriental mosque ("la mosquée orientale" 579). Taking pains to reveal his own perspective to the reader, Hugo leads us through the winding streets of a Medieval Spanish town ("rues étroites, tortueuses, quelquefois obscures, où se lient les unes aux autres mille maisons de toute forme" 578) and its whimsical gothic architecture ("labyrinthes d'édifices dressés côte à côte, pêle-mêle, palais, hospices, couvents, casernes, tous divers" Ibid) before arriving at his unique mosque (an alleogry of his creation, the *Orientales*): "si on lui demandait ce qu'il a voulu faire ici, il dirait que c'est la mosquée" (579).[308] Between these two points, the poet's 'promenade' reflects a diorama that shows everything associated with an old Spanish town, "où vous trouvez tout": "fraîches promenades d'orangers le long d'une rivière; larges places ouvertes au grand soleil pour les fêtes; rues étroites, tortueuses, quelquefois obscures, où se lient les unes aux autres mille maisons de toute forme, de tout âge, hautes, basses, noires, blanches, peintes, sculptées […] (Ibid). Hugo continues for a full page. As the poet (Hugo, the self) contemplates the setting sun, viewing the diaphanous palette of the sky as it constantly changes color during the sun's slow descent, his imagination (the prism) in turn produces these images. The description of the mosque ends with a surprising and vivid simile: "comme épanouie au soleil comme une large fleur pleine de parfums" (Ibid). The poet, referring back to his experience of a sunset that motivated the creation of these poems, leaves his mark with a powerfully condensed image that is not only visible but fragrant. Like the sun, the poet not only illuminates an object, but generates

[308] Hugo's situating himself in Spain is significant, as he resided in Madrid for a year as a child (1811-1812). Spain was a "chose vue", which lends support to my claim that Hugo's poetic process is grounded in the physical act of seeing.

something sensual out of it. Likwise, no matter what the subject or how many seemingly distracting details are involved, all of the *Orientales* are rooted in the poet's fixed and calm eye as he contemplates this moving but unified light. The task of the artist is to never lose sight of his point of view as he navigates both the expanse of the Orient and different points in time. This very restriction boosts the power of the poet's eye: "ne verrait-on pas de plus haut et plus loin, en étudiant l'ère moderne dans le moyen-âge et l'antiquité dans l'Orient?" (581).[309]

The *Orientales*, then, are as immediate and familiar as they are exotic and foreign. Spain, where the poetic eye begins to function, thus plays a leading role throughout the collection.[310] With its special status as a Western country that owes a great deal to Eastern influence and culture, and as a place that Hugo had actually visited, this "in-between" landscape of reality and creativity symbolizes Hugo's restored imagination: "Le visible tranche à la limite de son extension dans l'emploi absolu du verbe 'voir' (Meschonnic 490). As much as his poems point to the infinite possibilities of the creative imagination, Hugo insists on the immediacy of the visible. His Orient is not distant or 'dreamy', but "filled up" and teeming with vitality: "L'image poétique de l'Orient n'est pas celle d'un désert mort hanté par le passé, mais celle d'un monde ardent, rempli de bruit et de couleurs, de désir, de haine et d'énergie, - image poétique d'un monde vivant" (Laurent, "Présentation": 20).[311] The blurred distinction between East and West lends the

[309] This expression echoes a key phrase in the Preface to *Cromwell:* "la muse moderne verra les choses d'un coup d'œil plus haut et plus large" (69).
[310] Poems XXIX-XXXIII ("Sultan Achmet", "Romance mauresque", "Grenade", "Les Bleuets" and "Fantômes") all take place within Spain, or at least within a backdrop reminiscent of Spain. But Spanish references (such as the guitar) appear throughout the volume, for example in "La Captive" (IX) and "Clair de lune" (X). A "jeune Espagnole" appears in "Fantômes", whose macabre story (a grotesque ghost kisses the young woman as she prepares for a ball, signaling her immanent death) could be likened to Goya's *Caprichos*.
[311] Laurent is referring here to Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811).

(French) reader a sense of being present: "L'Orient n'est pas si loin" (Ibid 15). Likewise, Guimbaud stresses how Hugo's focus on the latest in news events and Oriental studies renders him a participant in his own fabricated landscape: "Au moment qu'on le croit assez loin du rivage, et imprudemment engagé dans ses jeux de poète, le voilà qui revient; il touche terre, il se mêle aux hommes, il partage leurs soucis, leurs espoirs, leurs sentiments; il est vivant" (68). The unexpected impact of this immediacy, the familiarity of what should be exotic, is Hugo's way of granting the reader easier access to his creative process.[312] Hugo pushes to the limit how the image gives access to the non-visual, or the interior of the artist. Jean-Pierre Reynaud describes this "pushing" as the means to Hugo's imagery : "Arracher les larves à leur larvitude, faire sortir toute la quantité de lumière latente dans l'obscurité, susciter le contour, *pousser l'image* comme on dit en termes de développement photographique : ceci me paraît être l'ambition privilégiée de l'imaginaire hugolien" ("Le contour et l'infini" 216-217).[313] This ambition meets the disorienting obstacle of the infinite - "[…] l'infini ne se laisse jamais complètement ou durablement maîtriser. Conquise sur lui, l'image est constamment remise en question par lui" (218) - but intensifies surrounding objects in the process.

I will conclude the chapter by reading three of Hugo's *Orientales* in light of an ocular imagination that expands and contracts in its taking in of a constantly metamorphosing light that varies in both intensity and color. "Le Feu du ciel", the opening poem, situates the aperture of the poet's eye that will remain intact throughout

[312] Laurent remarks on the presence of Europe in the *Orientales*: "On s'aperçoit que l'Orient géographique du recueil n'est pas Bagdad ou Ispahan, ni même Alger, mais qu'il est, bien plus proche, grec (douze poèmes), espagnol (cinq poèmes), danubien ('Le Danube en colère'), ou russo-ukrainien ('Mazeppa'). Cet Orient est donc…européen" (15).
[313] In *Victor Hugo et les images* (op. cit.).

the volume. "Mazeppa", reiterating Hugo's dynamic of the imagination and prominently featuring the figure of the eye as the symbol of the poet's genius, at the same time calls to mind the question of 'ut pictura poesis'. Dedicated to a painter, the poem nonetheless suggests an uneasy relationship between the sister arts of painting and poetry due to the sublime force of Mazeppa's movement. The poet, Hugo portends to demonstrate, proves to have a superior eye to the painter's. My reading of "Novembre", the final poem of the volume, shows how the volume has all along been steadily contracting back to the point of the poet's pupil. A literal return to the poet's home, "Novembre" is also a metaphorical return to the "point optique", serving as an indelible reminder to the reader that the poet's domain is not a celestial infinite, but an infinitely moving and ruminating earth.

"Le Feu du ciel", which I argue serves as the book's 'ars poetica', is Hugo's immediate demonstration of how he commands the fine line between dream and reality.[314] A performance of how expansion and contraction put each other into check, the eye is presented as a subject and remains steady and operable despite the turmoil: "l'oeil entrevoyait, dans le chaos confus" (VII.7). Georges-Emmanuel Clancier refers to the actual working of the eye, the dilation and contraction of the pupil, as a metaphor for Hugo's poetics, describing it as:

> […] l'ampleur illimitée de la vision […] et, à certains moments, la contraction, le retour de la vision jusqu'à son foyer original, jusqu'à ce point lumineux ou sombre de l'œil qui soudain reprend, concentre en lui-même tous les rayons, toutes les images qu'il avait prodigués ; il y a là comme un phénomène de diastole et de systole […] (89-90).[315]

[314] I agree with Richard Grant that "The opening poem, 'Le Feu du ciel', serves as a kind of prologue to the entire volume" ("Sequence and Theme in Victor Hugo's *Les Orientales*" 896).
[315] "Note sur la poétique de l'œil chez Hugo", in *Cahiers du sud* 368 (1962): 87-96.

"Le Feu du ciel" sets up this constant vacillation between mobility and immobility, between impulse and restraint, between real and ideal, creating a diaphanous landscape that nonetheless heightens detail:

> It is thus by a double amplifying movement that Hugolian poetry takes possession of its space. For on the one hand its figures seem endowed with a kind of instantaneous fecundity which makes them proliferate and multiply forthwith; and, on the other hand, as each of these figures becomes more distinct, it divides itself, so to speak, into all the perceptible elements that compose it; […] so that this multitude is as it were interiorly inflated by precision of detail and variety of aspect. (Georges Poulet 7)[316]

The poem's epigraph, which announces the story that will be told in the poem, is taken from the book of Genesis; and though 'Genesis' is the story of God's creation, the particular subplot that Hugo draws from is God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Creation confronts demolition as God saves the whole of his people from the aberrances of a few. Hugo makes the same gesture: in order for a new lyric poetry to be realized, he must destroy. "Le Feu du ciel" vaporizes a familiar romantic aesthetic (Lamartine's elegiac "Le Lac") and produces the indelible image of a new crystallized lake that has form and substance.

The first line of "Le Feu du ciel" begins with the verb 'voir': "La voyez-vous passer, la nuée au flanc noir?" (1). The poet's eye works hard to make sense out of the ongoing atmospheric changes, and the verb 'voir' appears two more times in this opening stanza:

> La voyez-vous passer, la nuée au flanc noir?
> Tantôt pâle, tantôt rouge et splendide à voir,
> Morne comme un été stérile ?
> On croit voir à la fois, sur le vent de la nuit,
> Fuir toute la fumée ardente et tout le bruit

[316] "The Interior Distance: Hugo's Spatial Imagery", in Harold Bloom, ed., *Victor Hugo* (New York: Chelsea House, 1988).

De l'embrasement d'une ville. (I.1-6)

No matter what the landscape, even within the turbulent waves of the sea or the moving sands of the desert, the eye (now a subject) manages to make some sort of contact despite the disorienting effects of nature:

> Toujours des flots sans fin par des flots repoussés;
> L'œil ne voit que des flots dans l'abîme entassés
> Rouler sous les vagues profondes. (II.16-18)

The landscapes are crammed with detail, but the eye continues to take everything in:

> Les enfants, les jeunes filles,
> Les guerriers dansaient en rond,
> Autour d'un feu sur la grève
> Que le vent courbe et relève,
> Pareils aux esprits qu'en rêve
> On voit tourner sur son front. (III: 37-42)

The eye continues to appear in the next section; in fact, Hugo doubles its role when he illustrates the landscape of Egypt. Similarly to the way he leads us to see the bases of the pyramids, and not just their famous and familiar points ("Trois monts bâtis par l'homme au loin perçaient les cieux / D'un triple angle de marbre, et dérobaient aux yeux / Leurs bases de cendre inondées" 67-69), the poet's increasingly charged and "devouring" ocular imagination probes the story underneath Sodom and Gomorrah. Two eyes now appear, and this doubling suggests that there is an "âme" or larger force at work besides the form or "corps" of the poem. The various landscapes that Hugo describes in "Le Feu du ciel" stem from this pair of eyes, a calm source of order within the movement and turmoil. The promise of creation always asserts itself in the face of destruction:

> L'astre-roi se couchait. Calme, à l'abri du vent,
> La mer réfléchissait ce globe d'or vivant,
> Ce monde, âme et flambeau du nôtre ;
> Et, dans le ciel rougeâtre et dans les flots vermeils,
> Comme deux rois amis, on voyait deux soleils

Venir au-devant l'un de l'autre. (85-90)

This pair of eyes, figured by the sun's reflection in the water, prevents a fall into utter chaos. The poet shows his imaging imagination within the act of destruction itself.[317] The more the sulfurous cloud destroys, the more the poet describes:

> Il fond comme cire
> Agate, porphyre,
> Pierres du tombeau,
> Ploie, ainsi qu'un arbre,
> Le géant de marbre
> Qu'ils nommaient Nabo,
> Et chaque colonne
> Brûle et tourbillonne
> Comme un grand flambeau! (64-72)

But after destruction, calm: the "Revolution" instigated by God's wrath is quick, and there is no subsequent relapse into aftershocks of "Terror". The poet will simply move on. He therefore abolishes the ambiguity left behind by Lamartine's tentative verse – epitomized by "Le Lac" – as the poem's final image of the "lac glacé", utterly annihilated, fumes and smolders:

> Aujourd'hui le palmier qui croît sur le rocher
> Sent sa feuille jaunir et sa tige sécher
> A cet air qui brûle et qui pèse.
> Ces villes ne sont plus ; et, miroir du passé,
> Sur leurs débris éteints s'étend un lac glacé,
> Qui fume comme une fournaise ! (XI.1-6)

This time, the promise of the root vegetating in debris is figured by the more potent analogy of smoldering embers that wait to be fanned. "Le Feu du ciel" is a site of threshold: creative in its destruction, Hugo signals to the reader that he is ready to move forward. Consequently, the next cycle of poems (II-VI) lift the veil of far-removed myth to confront the immediacy of the ongoing events in the Greek War of Independence:

[317] References to the eye and to the verbs "voir" or "regarder" occur at least once in each section of the poem, save for the last (short) one.

"Ecoutez! – Le canon gronde. / Il est temps qu'on lui réponde" ("Navarin" IV.1-2). The rest of the collection, as Laurent shows in his division of the volume into cycles, will play out this vacillation between the general (the expansion of the imagination) and the concrete (the poet's return to reality).[318]

"Mazeppa" is included in a small cycle devoted to the Occidental Orient, or Eastern Europe.[319] As such, it symbolizes the fragile line between myth and reality (East and West) that is the "idée fixe" of the *Orientales*. Like "Le Feu du ciel", but in even more concentrated and immediate form, the poem also prominently features the eye. Beginning not only with a close "shot" of Mazeppa, the poet further accentuates this telescoping effect by closing in on Mazeppa's tears as he scrutinizes his tied limbs: "Ainsi, quand Mazeppa, qui rugit et qui pleure, / A vu ses bras, ses pieds, ses flancs qu'un sabre effleure" (1-2).[320]

Hugo's emphasis on the eye is further demonstrated by his explicit reference to the genre of painting. Dedicated to Louis Boulanger, Hugo clearly references the painter's own version of *Mazeppa*, which was featured at the Salon of 1827. The poem thus raises the question of 'ut pictura poesis', and I will examine it in light of the

[318] These cycles reflect the general pattern the volume takes of moving between the general and the specific, between the 'beau' and the 'laid', and between the political and art for art's sake: I: la Bible. II-VI: la Grèce moderne. VII-XIV : l'Orient généralisé. XV-XVIII : nouveau cycle guerrier (la Grèce). XIX-XXII : le désir. XXIII-XXV : la guerre (généralisée). XXVI-XXVIII : le fantastique, les monstres. XXIX-XXXIII : L'Espagne, la chanson. XXXIV-XXXV : L'Espagne orientale. XXXVI-XXXVIII : le poète, le 'je'. XXXIX-XL: Napoléon. XLI: le poète, la réalité, l'intime.

[319] "Mazeppa" (XXXIV) takes place in Poland and Ukraine, and "La Danube en colère" (XXXV) recounts the ongoing events of the Russo-Turkish War (1828-1829).

[320] As the epigraph to the poem indicates, Byron was one of Hugo's sources of inspiration. What follows is my own truncated synopsis of Byron's "Mazeppa" from J.J. McGann's annotations (op. cit.). Using Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* (1772) as a reference, Byron recounts the trials and tribulations of Ivan Mazeppa (1632?-1709), a page in the court of John Casimir V of Poland. Mazeppa was punished (literally run out of the country, tied to a wild horse) because of his affair with the wife of a nobleman; but later he was made Hetman of the Ukraine by Peter the Great, and later still defected to Charles XII of Sweden. Byron's poem speaks through Mazeppa himself as he recounts his story to the king.

mounting tension between the arts as poetry was losing its hold on a public increasingly seduced by the spectacle and the canvas. Though he dedicates the poem to Boulanger, the epigraph from Byron that immediately follows asserts that movement is the impetus to the poem: "Away! – Away!". Hugo's "Mazeppa", I argue, demonstrates how he paradoxically appropriated a "pictorial poetics" as a way to rival painting. But as we have seen, his sense of the pictorial was less informed by the material aspects of form than employed as a vehicle for capturing atmospheric effects. By accentuating a generative poetic process of poetry that threatens to spill beyond the limits of traditional prosodic form (in a rainbow, there is an infinite possibility of colors between each band), Hugo's "Mazeppa" stands as a metaphor for the illuminating imagination of the poet rather than as a figure for the artist who simply refers to colors and images. In the space of just one stanza, Hugo achieves in "Mazeppa" the chiaroscuro effects of the expanding-contracting dynamic that "Le Feu du ciel" had announced. As soon as the landscape is fully illuminated, it almost disappears:

> Ils vont. Dans les vallons comme un orage ils passent,
> Comme ces ouragans qui dans les monts s'entassent,
> Comme un globe de feu ;
> Puis déjà ne sont plus qu'un point noir dans la brume,
> Puis s'effacent dans l'air comme un flocon d'écume
> Au vaste océan bleu. (19-24)

This stanza strongly suggests that the painter whom Hugo emulates is not Boulanger, but Delacroix. The emphasis on atmosphere, movement (symbolized by a wild horse) and the interplay of black, gold and red evoke a Delacroix canvas. Hugo's silent appropriation of Delacroix is ambiguous, however, as the poet stresses painting's limits while touting the strengths of his own art.

It is curious that Hugo makes no reference to Delacroix in a book of poems that revels in color, enthusiasm, movement, Greece, veils, tigers, sultans and slaves, especially since Delacroix had only very recently exhibited a number of Oriental themed paintings at the 'Exposition de tableaux au profit des Grecs' (1826). It is curious especially since 1827 marks the brief period when poet and painter were on friendly terms.[321] From the little mention that Hugo made of Delacroix, we do know that the poet was particularly drawn to *La Mort de Sardanapale*, exhibited in the third installment of the Salon of 1827. Though the target of unanimous criticism, Hugo (albeit in a private letter) eagerly defended it: "Son *Sardanapale* est une chose magnifique, et si gigantesque qu'elle échappe aux petites vues".[322] Given Hugo's central tenant in the "Preface to *Cromwell*" that "la muse moderne verra les choses d'un coup d'oeil plus haut et plus large" (69), this was no passing remark. At the same time, we have evidence that Delacroix was in turn taken with Hugo's *Cromwell*. Hugo, who had started the play and given a series of readings since the early part of 1827, had finished it by September of the same year when Delacroix wrote to the poet: "Eh bien! Envahissement général: Hamlet lève sa tête hideuse, Othello prépare son poignard essentiellement occiseur et subversif de toute bonne police dramatique. […] Craignez les poignards classiques, ou plutôt immolez-vous courageusement pour nos plaisirs à nous autres barbares". Appearing only weeks after *Cromwell*, Delacroix's ambitious and expansive canvas meets Hugo's main criterion for the modern work of art: the widening and active eye. Delacroix "sees" what

[321] There is little evidence of the correspondence exchanged between Hugo and Delacroix, and what we do have is not very revealing. Delacroix designed the costumes for Hugo's *Amy Robsart* (1828), but the collaboration between the two quickly waned thereafter.

[322] Letter to Victor Pavie, 3 Apr 1829. Notably, Hugo is one of the few to have defended the painting. In his "Notice" to his letters, André Joubin shows how *Sardanapale* was received so negatively that Delacroix was not the subject of any worthy attention until his *La Liberté de 1830* (I: 138).

the eye normally resists, combining in *Sardanapale* the lush material, sensuous flesh, and attention to human form ("le beau") with a strange palette, a lack of perspective, and arbitrary violence ("le grotesque"). With the appearance of the *Orientales*, written in the wake of the Salon of 1827, the "chef" of Romantic poetry thus comes "eye to eye" with the one of romantic painting. But this "meeting" produces a sense of friction, with Hugo's volume presenting a response meant to safeguard the poet's place of privilege.[323] In a succinct but insightful overview of Hugo's relationship with painting in the early part of his career, Tony (A.R.W.) James shows how he appropriated certain elements of painting to the poet's advantage: "au fond, ce qui intéresse Hugo désormais ce n'est ni l'art contemporain, ni l'art ancien en eux-mêmes. Ce n'est pas, non plus, leur variété grotesque : c'est ce qui, dans les arts plastiques, est susceptible à l'art 'rêveur'" (xxxiv).[324] The poet was the one who could better reflect the temporality of what needed to be subjected to a process: "Il s'agit, pour les poètes, de voir ce que l'image comporte, mais aussi de mettre du leur, de rêver, de supposer ou d'imaginer au-delà de la simple figuration. Démarche fondamentalement hugolienne…" (Ibid xxxv). Hugo's unstated rivalry with painting becomes more apparent if his "Mazeppa" is viewed, so to speak, alongside of Delacroix's provocative painting: both works are based on Byron, both highlight despotism, and both place emphasis on the figure of the protagonist's eye. Furthermore, if Hugo's "Preface to *Cromwell*" was a manifesto, the stakes were equally high for Delacroix in 1827; later musing on *Sardanapale*, he would say: "ce fut mon

[323] A close reader of La Harpe and a fervent devotee of Chateaubriand, Hugo maintained a neo-classical sense of the hierarchy of arts. Theater, the seventeenth-century genre par excellence, thus rules supreme, and the "Preface to *Cromwell*" (1827) reiterates as much in its valorization of Corneille and Molière. Hugo's iconoclasm in this manifesto is directed against descriptive poetry and bourgeois theater (eighteenth-century genres), and *not* against the classical sense for form and scenes worthy of the epic.
[324] In Hugo's *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Massin, vol. 15-16, no. 1 (1970): xxvii-xlvii. Above all, James' article demonstrates that Hugo's knowledge of painting came more from his peers than from his own interest in the subject.

Waterloo".[325] These parallels not only invite comparison, but due to Hugo's evident doubt that painting could make the same claims as poetry, they should motivate us to find the significant differences.

I will start with Hugo's poem, which is the extreme condensation of Byron's "Mazeppa" (a love story within a larger narrative of history). Hugo's version is brief in comparison, but its power of suggestion is potent as the poet puts into action the device of the "miroir concentré". A vermilion blood that at first fills Mazeppa's eyes shines in the end as "ardentes étincelles". At what was the mid-point of Byron's poem, Hugo begins with the split second moment before the horse begins his long and frenzied run. He further condenses Byron's longer narrative to Mazeppa's eye, to what Mazeppa sees. The details are surprisingly specific:

> Il voit courir les bois, courir les larges nues,
> Le vieux donjon détruit,
> Les monts d'un rayon baigne les intervalles ;
> Il voit; […] (36-41)

Mazeppa can even see within darkness; as night falls, he discerns the massive flocks of birds of prey that follow him. He can thus discern black upon black:

> Entre le ciel et lui, comme un tourbillon sombre,
> Il les voit, puis les perd, et les entend dans l'ombre
> Voler confusément. (76-78)

The climax of the poem occurs in the second part, when the figure of the suffering poet who struggles with his genius replaces Mazeppa and the horse, respectively. The drama comes not from Mazeppa's vindication, but at the point where we learn that he, as a figure of the poet, sees everything within a cosmic landscape:

[325] Cited in Pomarède; see below.

Les six lunes d'Herschel, l'anneau du vieux Saturne,
Le pôle, arrondissant une aurore nocturne
Sur son front boréal,
Il voit tout; et pour lui ton vol, que rien ne lasse,
De ce monde sans borne à chaque instant déplace
L'horizon idéal. (121-126)

The poet has gone from the image of ropes that bind Mazeppa to the moons of Saturn, but with his controlling eye at the center at all points in time. Mazeppa serves as the aperture, and the horse as the projector of the diorama.

Hugo, then, in no way defers to the visual artist. Readers should be wary of reading "Mazeppa" as a tribute to Boulanger: "l'un est assez loin de l'autre" (James xxxv). While there is a sense of fluidity and action as the horse runs its course, the one in Boulanger's representation is stuck within a mannerized assemblage of figures. The painter's representation of the story contrasts starkly with Hugo's not only because of its temporal limitations, but even more because of Boulanger's disorienting placement of human figures. The details that Boulanger incorporates symbolize *limits* (the court, the court's henchmen, the imposing architecture, the ropes, the crowd), rendering it difficult for the viewer to gain access to the protagonist (unlike in Hugo's poem, where the figure of Mazeppa - and, even more than that, the point of his eye - are front and center). In Boulanger's version, formal shapes dwarf detail, suggesting that this painter's eye is not wide open. The viewer's eye is drawn upward to the group that stands above and in the background, as opposed to Mazeppa himself, a figure who is so strongly illuminated that he is lost in a wash of white. Finally, the power of suggestion is feeble, as it does not even appear certain that this horse will effectively take off (how can it move out of this throng? will it run into the onlookers, or the fortress?). Boulanger, in effect, produces a weak suspended moment out of the weight of Byron's poem. Hugo, however, after two

stanzas that capture the tortured and futile movements of both Mazeppa and his restrained horse, delights in running "away, away" from limits:

> Un cri part; et soudain voilà que par la plaine
> Et l'homme et le cheval, emportés, hors d'haleine,
> Sur les sables mouvants,
> Seuls, emplissant de bruit un tourbillon de poudre
> Pareil au noir nuage où serpente la foudre,
> Volent avec les vents! (13-18)

Likewise, when it came to his 1827 painting, Delacroix, who referred to it as "le grandissime tableau" (letter to Soulier, 29 Sept. 1827) knew no bounds. Whereas Boulanger's forms are static, Delacroix evokes movement with every brushstroke. Despite the crowded nature of *La Sardanapale*, there is an unmistakable fluidity to its lines and placement of figures.[326] Yet, Delacroix's murky representation of Sardanapalus somehow captures our attention as his eye gleams within the darkness. If it is hard to find a sense of perspective in the painting, due to the abundance of material, color and serpentine lines, the king's eye orders our own. The painter, despite a scene that would seem to carry him away, reveals a sense of fixity. This is an original retelling, not a history painting; Delacroix identifies not with the events or even tragedy of the scene, but with the figure who shows an acute sense of restraint and order. Independent of the word, Delacroix paints his own poem.[327] The eye of Sardanapalus is to Delacroix what the sunset is to Hugo in the *Orientales*, that is, the idea that orders everything else. As

[326] Ancient accounts tell us that Sardanapalus was king of the Assyrian empire. Rather than see it fall to the Medes, he orders it destroyed. Essential to any study of *La Mort de Sardanapale* is Vincent Pomarède's accompanying pamphlet published by the Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998. Also helpful for a very close analysis of the story of Sardanapalus (which goes well beyond Byron's version) is Beatrice Farwell's "Sources for Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus*" (*Art Bulletin* 40.1 (1958): 66-71).

[327] In his commentary, Alain Daguerre de Hureaux prompts us to consider *Sardanapale* apart from Byron's influence, noting that Delacroix did not provide a source in the Salon pamphlet: "Contrairement à la coutume, aucun nom d'auteur ne suit le texte du livret du Salon et un tel procédé peut justifier l'outrance de la représentation par une prétendue source littéraire que le peintre aurait simplement suivie à la lettre" (*Delacroix*: 79). Paris: Hazan, 1993.

scintillating and lush as the flesh, jewels, and nudes may be, they are secondary to the paradoxically light-producing source of this dark and mysterious "point optique".

With this fixed eye, Delacroix offers a challenge to the poet, and Hugo was quick to respond to it with a Mazeppa who ends up in the realm of Saturn's moons. Boulanger's version of Mazeppa merely upheld the distinction between the fixed, pregnant moment in painting and the movement of narrative in the epic poem: Mazeppa's horse is just about to take off, and we see the gaping hole of the page's mouth as he resists this moment with all his might. This is the "Laocoön" moment *par excellence*, the moment of the sigh, complete with ropes that might as well be snakes.[328] Delacroix, however, chooses a different kind of moment, the one that comes after heightened anticipation, that is, the descending fall into chaos; it is, in other words, the moment that Lessing had denied the painter. Yet this turbulent movement is countered by a strong sense of order in his representation of the despot. Delacroix, in other words, was not obedient to the distinction between word and image, but emulated Hugo's theory of poetry in the "Preface to *Cromwell*". With the size of the canvas, the attention to color, the *dramatic* treatment of history, Delacroix expands, combines, yet concentrates. In a word, he achieves "le tout" as the light of flames and chaotic violence meet the mysterious black point of the eye's pupil. Michèle Hannoosh's commentary on the role of poetry in Delacroix's oeuvre and how it affected his art reflects Hugo's highly picturesque but dynamic imagination: "The pictorial must be reconsidered, reconceived in terms of the natural instability, the "literary" temporality, of the imagination".[329] Not

[328] See Lessing's description of the *Laocoön*, chap. 5.
[329] Chap. 1 from *Painting and the Journal of Eugène Delacroix* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995).

quite at ease with painting's "intrusion" into the poet's privileged sphere of freedom, Hugo thus problematizes Delacroix's appropriation of a poetic imagination with an implicit reminder of the painter's limitations. In the end, Hugo's "Mazeppa" cannot be physically represented in its movement outside the "monde réel", as colors do not exist in a dark and unexplored space. Genius belongs exclusively to the poet, who breaks all surface contingencies:

> Ainsi lorsqu'un mortel, sur qui son dieu s'étale,
> S'est vu lier vivant sur ta croupe fatale,
> Génie, ardent coursier,
> En vain il lutte, hélas ! tu bondis, tu l'emportes
> Hors du monde réel, dont tu brises les portes
> Avec tes pieds d'acier ! (103-108)

The poet's recognizance of the "real world" is an equally vital aspect of his genius. The poem does not end here, but with a return to the "real" story of Mazeppa (a real figure from history) as he falls off his horse: "Enfin le terme arrive…il court, il vole, il tombe, / Et se relève roi!". If the poet is the "king" of art, it is because he can represent the full process of fluctuation between earth and sky. Hugo's "Mazeppa", then, can also be read as a critique of Delacroix's sense of grandeur. As the *Orientales* come to a close, after wavering between impulse and constraint throughout, we fall back on the "point optique", not of a legendary king, but of the poet himself. The eye in "Novembre" is not a symbolic eye, as in "Mazeppa" or *Sardanapale*; instead, it is an eye that takes in the realities of Paris and the poet's hearth: "O ma muse! en mon âme alors tu te recueilles, / Comme un enfant transi qui s'approche du feu" (5-6). After traversing the Napoleon myth in "Buonaberdi" and "Lui", thereby learning the lessons of what a limitless imagination leads to, the poet returns to a humble and intimate Sainte-Beuvien autumnal

landscape whose "brume inonde le ciel bleu" (3). The sunset that the poet has been contemplating all along declines: "Ton soleil d'orient s'éclipse" (8), and the highly experimental forms morph into the calm and traditional alexandrine. Though the poem's evocation of cold and darkness comes as a surprise, the poet has been leading up to this moment all along: a general pull from East (the land of Canaan) to West (Paris) has occurred throughout the volume, reflecting the "reality" of a sun that must set as well as the poet's acknowledgement of his time and place. In the end, we learn that the landscape at stake in the *Orientales* is the poet's own.

Yet, the diorama continues. Though the poet looks back with melancholy on what his diorama once produced –

> Alors s'en vont en foule et sultans et sultanes,
> Pyramides, palmiers, galères capitanes,
> Et le tigre vorace et le chameau frugal,
> Djinns au vol furieux, danses des bayadères,
> L'Arabe qui se penche au cou des dromadaires,
> Et la fauve girafe au galop inégal ! (13-18)

– he already looks forward to what it will project in the future. As the culmination of ten years of increasing experimentation with form, colors, theatricality, and the representation of history of all periods, the *Orientales* move on to the equally luminous but now pastel representation of the poet's memories. Having reached a zenith, which for the public was particularly exemplified by *Hernani* (1830), Hugo forecasts his own decline. However, he does not conceive of a "fall" in the sense of Lamartine's favored trope of the fallen angel, but as a highly aware artist who embraces the natural rhythms of human experience within history or nature. In "Novembre", the poet's muse is a muse with a small 'm', the familiar prism of his own mind that now turns to memory: school days, his parents, Madrid, Napoleon, and his first experience of love. At the end of the

poem, and thus the volume, the swarm ("essaim") of "Djinns" metamorphoses into a hive of fragile butterflies, colorful but almost immaterial, hovering but silent:

> Mais surtout tu te plais aux premières amours,
> Frais papillons dont l'aile, en fuyant rajeunie,
> Sous le doigt qui la fixe est si vite ternie,
> Essaim doré qui n'a qu'un jour dans tous nos jours. (55-60)

The bee-poet featured in the preface of *Cromwell*, having extracted the nectar of the Orient's colors, will now move to the lyric representation of the poet's personal landscape. This is why modern readers such as Millet and Charles-Wurtz have missed the mark in their focus on the fragmentation of the poet's "je" in Hugo's earlier poetry. "Enthousiasme" (*Les Orientales*) may suggest dissolution in its abrupt turn from the militant poet of the odes to the humble pastoral one, but the poet is adhering to a natural law that actually strengthens his voice and sense of consciousness. He states as much in the preface to his following volume of poems, *Les Feuilles d'automne*: "L'art, et l'auteur de ce livre n'a jamais varié dans cette pensée, l'art a sa loi qu'il suit, comme le reste a la sienne" (712). Unlike the painter, the poet can represent the Greek war ("Et nous verrons soudain des tigres ottomans / Fuir avec des pieds de gazelles!" 11-12) *and* a country farm at the same time; he is both a Delacroix and a Constable:

> J'aime ces chariots lourds et noirs, qui la nuit,
> Passant devant le seuil des fermes avec bruit,
> Font aboyer les chiens dans l'ombre. (46-48)

It is, in fact, the poet who does *not* recognize this law of change who falls prey to insubstantiality. In 1830, the same year that saw *Hernani*, Lamartine's voice is still broken in the ironically entitled "Novissima verba", where the earth's sun is but a pale copy of God. In what could very well be a concerted response to Hugo's recuperative emphasis on the image and on the imagination as a "miroir de concentration",

Lamartine's poem (which explicitly uses the verb 'concentrer') portrays the eye as ineffective in its design to capture the world's concrete truths. The poem even evokes the foyer, or hearth, that is featured in Hugo's "Novembre", where the whole diorama of the Orient is centered. But here, imagination is figured as illusion:

> Quand l'homme ose toucher à ce divin miroir,
> Il se brise en éclats sous la main des plus sages,
> Et ses fragments épars sont le jouet des âges !
> Chaque siècle, chaque homme, assemblant ses débris,
> Dit : Je réunirai ces lueurs des esprits,
> Et, dans un seul foyer concentrant la lumière,
> La nature à mes yeux paraîtra tout entière !
> Il dit, il croit, il tente, il rassemble en tous lieux
> Les lumineux fragments d'un tout mystérieux,
> D'un espoir sans limite en rêvant il s'embrase,
> Des systèmes humains il élargit la base,
> Il encadre au hasard, dans cette immensité,
> Système, opinion, mensonge, vérité !
> Puis, quand il croit avoir ouvert assez d'espace
> Pour que dans son foyer l'infini se retrace,
> Il y plonge ébloui ses avides regards,
> Un jour foudroyant sort de ces morceaux épars !
> Mais son œil, partageant l'illusion commune,
> Voit mille vérités où Dieu n'en a mis qu'une !
> Ce foyer, où le tout ne peut jamais entrer,
> Disperse les lueurs qu'il devant concentrer,
> Comme nos vains pensers l'un l'autre se détruisent,
> Ses rayons divergents se croisent et se brisent,
> L'homme brise à son tour miroir en éclats,
> Et dit en blasphémant: Vérité, tu n'es pas ! (248-272)

For Lamartine, the poet's prism is futile and the rainbow "unwoven". In a telling difference, Lamartine's poet, continuing his ironic appropriation of the prism, proceeds to represent his memories as Hugo does in "Novembre". His "diorama", however, cannot last long without a fixed aperture, and the poem accordingly ends soon after, lost in "flots" and ellipses.

Refusing to fall prey to this silence, Hugo remains firm. With the bravado of *Hernani* and the *Orientales* behind him, he turns to the paradoxically more arduous task of imaging the self, his memories, and his constantly varying experiences. Throughout the 1830s, though his landscapes are idyllic and his portraits of love serene and intimate, it is to this poet that the romantics turned in their ideal of a heroic art. In a poem addressed both to Louis Boulanger and Sainte-Beuve, Hugo revels in a poetry confined to home. If the rainbow disappears, it is not the physical one that reflects the natural operations of light, but the ideal one of God's promise:

> Restons où nous voyons. Pourquoi vouloir descendre,
> Et toucher ce qu'on rêve, et marcher dans la cendre ?
> Que ferons-nous après ? où descendre ? où courir ?
> Plus de but à chercher ! plus d'espoir qui séduise !
> De la terre donnée à la terre promise
> Nul retour ! et Moïse a bien fait de mourir !
>
> Restons loin des objets dont la vue est charmée.
> L'arc-en-ciel est vapeur, le nuage est fumée.
> L'idéal tombe en poudre au toucher du réel. ("A mes amis L.B. et S.-B." 55-63)

Sainte-Beuve, who continued to champion the Hugo of *Les Feuilles d'automne* throughout his career, would strongly influence writers of the next generation who adhered to a model of art that was anchored in the real world:

> Pour moi, le tour du monde est le tour de la ville où je suis; je touche mon horizon de tous les côtés; je me coudoie avec le réel. Ma vie est celle du coquillage sur le banc de sable, du lierre autour de l'arbre, du grillon dans la cheminée. – En vérité, je suis étonné que mes pieds n'aient pas encore pris racine. (Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*: 62)[330]

[330] Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966. First published in 1835.

Chapter 3

The Cerebral Imagination in Baudelaire's "Tableaux parisiens"

> You must do some violence to yourself to get out of the *Idea*.
>
> Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*

Introduction.

§I. After *Les Orientales*: Hugo's Prismatic Eye in Nature (1831-1840)

After *Les Orientales*, the fertile exchange between the eye and the mind's eye was met with tension as Hugo 'retired' his poetry into nature and intimate life. While the images in *Les Orientales* are for the most part based on the poet's representation of history or legends, those in *Les Feuilles d'automne* (1831) – which pick up where *Les Orientales* leave off in a real Parisian "Novembre" – depend on immediate views of nature, contemporary events, or the poet's memories: "C'est un regard mélancolique et résigné, jeté ça et là sur ce qui est, surtout sur ce qui a été" (*Œuvres poétiques* I: 715).[331] In the second poem of the volume, Hugo advises his friend, the painter Louis Boulanger, to contemplate what lies at his feet: "Ne levez pas vos yeux si haut que l'horizon, / Regardez à vos pieds" ("A M. Louis B." 27-28).[332] In the poems that follow, the titles alone present the poet as a passer-by ("J'étais au Carrousel, passant, avec la foule")[333] who haphazardly takes in different people, events, and landscapes: "Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne", "À un voyageur", and "Dicté en présence du glacier du Rhône" are a few examples that run in succession.

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[331] '*Oeuvre poétiques*' will henceforth be abbreviated *OP*.
[332] Granted, Hugo's instruction is literal: he is telling the painter, who was traveling in the Loire Valley, to look down at his father's former house at Blois. Nonetheless, the focus of the artist's gaze on his immediate surroundings would become increasingly important to Hugo throughout this period.
[333] From the third poem, "Rêverie d'un passant à propos d'un roi".

But how does the poet expect to create out of the already created? How does he avoid a mimetic enterprise while at the same time resisting the temptation of stars and vapor? In his poems from the 1830s, Hugo navigates the fluctuations between the two impulses. Most notably, "Soleils couchants", which was inspired by the same viewing of a sunset that Hugo claimed had inspired *Les Orientales*, appears in *Les Feuilles d'automne*; but by recalling his previous project, "Soleils couchants" underscores how nature now resists the unhindered picturesque imagination that Hugo had celebrated in the preface to *Les Orientales*.[334] Introducing "Soleils couchants" with an epigraph from Nodier's *Contes de la veillée*, "Merveilleux tableaux que la vue découvre à la pensée", Hugo allows no interference between the eye's perception of the sunset and the way the poet's mind interprets this viewing. Away but not far enough away from the city ("Ce Paris, à la voix cassée, / Bourdonne encor trop près de moi" 82-83), with little reference to his actual surroundings, and with no project guiding him, there is little to distract the poet from the sky.[335] Yet, despite his intimacy with nature, this is not a realistic portrayal of a sunset. The reader instead follows the drama of how the poet filters dreams out of clouds, and how his dreams, in turn, counteract and even metamorphose these natural forms.[336] In *Les Orientales*, a theatrical diorama, the distinction between art and nature was clear; but in *Les Feuilles*, the natural and unpredictable diorama of the chameleon-like clouds now represents the mysterious inner dynamics of the poet's imagination.

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[334] Léon Emery notes that, after 1830, "Hugo est surtout frappé par l'opposition entre l'homme et la Nature" (33), and adds: "l'observation est pour Hugo bien autre chose qu'une jouissance esthétique" (34). *Vision et pensée chez Victor Hugo* (Lyon, n.d.).

[335] In his preface, Hugo had described his poems as fallen leaves, or as "ces pages qu'il livre ainsi, au hasard, au premier vent qui en voudra" (*OP* I: 714). In contrast to *Les Orientales*, no discernible process of creative invention can thus be traced in *Les Feuilles d'automne*.

[336] According to Albouy's notes on the poem, the first five parts are seen as exemplifying the "ode pittoresque" that was prominent in the later version of the *Odes et Ballades* and *Les Orientales*, while the sixth is read as "le passage […] à l'ode rêveuse" (*OP* I: 1392).

Hugo trades color for a dramatic chiaroscuro: “on le voit quitter les féeries multi-colores des *Orientales* pour les dramatiques combinaisons du blanc et du noir, pour les troubles suggestions des éclairages enveloppés, crépusculaires et brumeux” (Emery 38). The amorphous forms appear etched and even architectural, which blurs the distinction between nature and invention:

> L’œil croit voir jusqu’au ciel monter, monter toujours,
> Avec ses escaliers, ses ponts, ses grandes tours,
> Quelque Babel démesurée ! (120-122)

While at first tempted to adopt the Lamartinian impulse to go beyond (“Oh! sur des ailes dans les nues / Laissez-moi fuir! laissez-moi fuir !” 91-92), the poet in “Soleils couchants” recognizes that the clouds are “trompeurs” (111). He thus attempts to lend them discernable shape and stability through formal invention. The title, which suggests multiple viewings of sunsets, suggests that the poet “sketched” these poems in ‘plein air’, similar to the Impressionist artist who experiments repeatedly to capture atmospheric effects. Divided into six sections, each one displays different syllabic patterns and rhyme schemes; some read slowly and deliberately, while others are quick and passionate. Yet, just as the tower of Babel would never be completed, nature will ultimately prevent the full expression of the poet’s invention: “Le soleil s’est couché ce soir dans les nuées” reads the first line of the final section. In contrast to *Les Orientales*, the poet’s imagination in “Soleils couchants” can no longer be traced: “Plus de fixité dans le regard, nul défilé cinématographique” (Emery 39). In the last section of the poem, the poet thus meditates on nature’s triumph: time may engulf seas, mountains, rivers, and forests, but like the clouds, these will all metamorphose and have a fresh start. The poet, however,

can do nothing but submit to his mortality: "Mais moi, sous chaque jour courbant plus bas ma tête, / Je passe […]" (135-136).

In the most notable poem of the book, Hugo nonetheless affirms the imagination's strength by adopting the determined agency of flowing water. In "La Pente de la rêverie", the poet's imagination flows like the Seine: "La Seine, ainsi que moi, laissait son flot vermeil / Suivre nonchalamment sa pente" (27-28). Emery notes the general shift in Hugo's 1830s poetry from the act of seeing to that of contemplation, but more precisely, Victor Brombert remarks that the shift occurs in this one poem at line 31: "Alors, *dans mon esprit*, je vis autour de moi" (emphasis mine).[337] The eye strains in "Soleils couchants", but it sees everything in "La Pente". Even if the poem presents a diorama of the poet's invisible "âme", it is paradoxically clearer and more complete than the real view of clouds: "Tout, comme un paysage en une chambre noire / Se réfléchit avec ses rivières de moire" (65-66). Brombert remarks on the paradoxical completeness that results from this occultation: "For the mind can begin to see only when the eyes no longer gaze at sensuous surfaces" ("The Rhetoric of Contemplation" 55). Constantly rendered uncertain and unfinished in "Soleils couchants", the poet's creative agency in "La Pente de la rêverie" is traced from start to finish.[338] The inverse of *Les Orientales*, "La Pente" is the internal and yet-to-be expressed imagination ("Or, ce que je voyais, je doute que je puisse / Vous le peindre" 105-106), a vivid stream of visions ("flot vermeil") that remain below the surface:

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[337] See "The Rhetoric of Contemplation: Hugo's 'La Pente de la rêverie'". In *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry*, ed. C. Prendergast (op. cit.): 48-61. For Brombert, this is a poem in which "the expression 'my mind's eye' ('yeux de ma pensée', l. 41) thus takes on its full meaning" (55).

[338] Brombert fleshes out this "story" of the mind's eye by tracing the progression of verb tenses throughout the poem: "The trajectory of the poem leads from the present, to the imperfect, to the preterite and finally to the summed-up experience in the pluperfect associated with the return: 'Car il *avait* au fond *trouvé* l'éternité'" (Ibid 55-56).

> Mon esprit plongea donc sous ce flot inconnu
> Au profond de l'abîme il nagea seul et nu,
> Toujours de l'ineffable allant à l'invisible… (139-141)

Jean Gaudon, noting how Hugo's creative imagination mediated between nature and 'rêverie', describes this "methodological observation" as a safeguard against the poet's vaporization. Balancing a potentially vagrant imagination with the "fixed" act of seeing preserves artistic consciousness, even in Hugo's visionary poems of exile:

> D'un côté, donc, le champ de l'observation, la vision d'Eve, l'humanité, la nature ; de l'autre, le surnaturel, le regard tourné vers le dedans, la contemplation. Loin d'être considérée comme une forme dégradée ou imparfaite de la voyance, *l'observation trouve ainsi une justification méthodologique* : elle devient une nécessité thérapeutique, la précaution sans laquelle il n'est pour l'esprit une naufrage et catastrophe. (40-41 – emphasis mine)[339]

Similarly, Pierre Albouy, who refers to Hugo's creative but ordered process as "cette logique de l'imagination qui organise images et personnifications" (*La Création mythologique* 151), asserts that Hugo's physical encounters with landscapes during his travels along the Rhine propelled the creation of his mythology: "Le voyageur voit la mythologie naître à neuf, une véritable étude, *in vivo*, au contact de l'imagination et de la nature" (85).[340] Each experience with a landscape yielded the chance for the poet to create an unfolding myth: "Si, insoucieux des théories alors à la mode, Hugo fait naître le mythe des titans de la contemplation d'un paysage caractérisé, c'est qu'il vient de

[339] *Le Temps de la contemplation: L'Œuvre poétique de Victor Hugo, des "Misères" au "Seuil du gouffre", 1845-1856* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969). Albouy refers here to a phrase from Hugo's *Promonotorium somnii*: "Lestez votre raison de réalité, et jetez-vous à la mer ensuite".

[340] A good example is from letter 29 of *Le Rhin* (1842), where Hugo recounts his descent from Lorraine into Alsace along "la fameuse côte de Saverne". Hugo blurs the distinction between the "chose vue" and the dream, and describes the landscape as "un panorama magique entrevu au clair de lune". He continues: "Ces spectacles inachevés ont peut-être plus de prestige encore que les autres. Ce sont des rêves qu'on touche et qu'on regarde" (314). In Laffont's *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 13 (*Voyages*). Jean-Bertrand Barrère, in *La Fantaisie de Victor Hugo*, also discusses the influence of travel on Hugo's poetic imagination, but goes back earlier to Hugo's trip to the Alps with Charles Nodier in 1825. Barrère cites Isidore Taylor's *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques de l'ancienne France* (to which Nodier contributed) as an important source of inspiration. See vol. 1, 101-110.

découvrir lui-même, pour son compte, la mythologie toujours vivante dans la nature, où la fable n'attend, pour ressusciter, que le regard du voyageur doué d'imagination" (Ibid 83-84). Even if Hugo's poet narrates his imagination through to its visionary end ("Si mon cerveau fragile / S'étonne, je persiste"),[341] he also makes it clear that nature remains its generator:

> Comme tous les poètes qui méditent et qui superposent constamment leur esprit à l'univers, il laisserait rayonner, à travers toutes ses créations, poèmes ou drames, la splendeur de la création de Dieu. On entendrait les oiseaux chanter dans ses tragédies; on verrait l'homme souffrir dans ses paysages. (Preface to *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, 1840)[342]

§II. Baudelaire's Imagination: "The Working Brain"

Two decades later, in all three of the famous poems that Charles Baudelaire dedicated to Victor Hugo - "Le Cygne", "Les Sept vieillards", and "Les Petites vieilles"[343] - we certainly see "l'homme souffrir dans ses paysages" ("Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie / n'a bougé!").[344] Baudelaire's landscape, however, is an artificially constructed Paris (which Hugo had fled in "Soleils couchants"), and his famous swan, playing a leading part in a modern tragedy of loss and alienation, speaks ("disait") rather than sings. While Hugo's suffering in *Les Rayons et les Ombres* eventually meets a blue sky of optimism and calm (Preface), the sky in "Le Cygne", accentuating the swan's severance from his native lake, is "ironique et cruellement bleu" (26).

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[341] "Sagesse" (272-273), *Les Rayons et les Ombres*.
[342] *OP* I: 1020.
[343] All part of the "Tableaux parisiens", a section that Baudelaire inserted into the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1861). This will be the edition used throughout the chapter.
[344] "Le Cygne" (29-30). All references to Baudelaire are from the 2-vol. Pléiade edition, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-1976). Henceforth, *Œuvres complètes* will be abbreviated *OC* with the accompanying volume number.

What explains this dislocation from the lyric voice? Much has already been made of Baudelaire's city experiences and how he translated them into poetic form.[345] Walter Benjamin above all has considered the demoralizing effects of the shocks of city life and the lyric dissonance that results from these material disturbances: "The failure of the shock defense" leads to Baudelaire's "harsh image […] in which the artist, just before being beaten, screams in fright. This duel is the creative process itself" ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" 163).[346] Modern critics in Benjamin's lineage have analyzed Baudelaire's urban poems as structured by allegories that are figural instead of symbolic, which effectively fragment the self and depersonalize the lyric voice. For Paul de Man, the dialectic between "identity and difference" is a process "self-consciously verbal and mediated by language" (245), and what appears to be a generative nature in Baudelaire's famous "Correspondances" is the "illusory resuscitation of the natural breath of language, frozen into stone by the semantic power of trope" (247).[347] Ross Chambers has analyzed the poem "Le Jeu" as an allegory of the indeterminate "je", noting how both the diurnal and nocturnal cycles in the "Tableaux parisiens" provoke "le dédoublement, et détournement de soi" (67) by placing the communicability of discourse into doubt.[348] Still others, adopting an historical view, situate Baudelaire as the first modern poet; in reaching silence or aporia within the din of modern life ("Ils traversent ainsi le noir

[345] Antoine Compagnon provides a general overview of Baudelairean criticism, from the poet's time to ours, in the first chapter of *Baudelaire devant l'innombrable*, entitled "Légendes des *Fleurs du Mal*" (Presses de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003).
[346] In *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968). Benjamin is referring to Baudelaire's "Le *Confiteor* de l'artiste" (*Le Spleen de Paris*).
[347] "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric", in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (op. cit.)
[348] "'Je' dans les Tableaux parisiens de Baudelaire". *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 9 (1980-1981): 59-68. According to Chambers, the "day" poems highlight the poet's acute awareness of his decrepit and soulless surroundings, while the "night" poems feature the poet's allowance for his dreams to flourish and give meaning to this void.

illimité, / Ce frère du silence éternel"),[349] Baudelaire paradoxically makes the very condition for poetic expression possible and opens the way to Mallarmé and Rimbaud:

> Nulle Olive ou Délie dans *Les Fleur du mal*. Nul mythe qui vienne accroître entre la parole et le monde sensible une distance. La vérité de parole est directement issue de cette rencontre, pour la première fois dans nos lettres consciente et nue, du corps blessé et du langage immortel. (Yves Bonnefoy)[350]

My chapter will focus specifically on the role of the creative imagination in Baudelaire's lyric urban poems and how he conceptualized it to resist the century's "universalizing" tendencies: Parnassianism, Realism, a budding Impressionism, the popularity of prose and genre painting, democratization and the ruling bourgeoisie, secularization, and technological and industrial developments were all forms of the same shift toward the annihilation of the artist. If there was one person who had come to represent all these forms for Baudelaire, it was Victor Hugo: "L'heure du changement d'âge est venue. Nous assistons, sous la pleine clarté de l'idéal, à la majestueuse jonction du beau avec l'utile" (*William Shakespeare* III.II : 437).[351] As André Guyaux observes, Hugo had become not only a symbol of French poetry, but of the nineteenth century: "En critiquant Hugo, Baudelaire critique ce XIXe siècle dans lequel il a 'le fatigant bonheur de vivre'.[352] Hugo n'est pas seulement un homme, c'est aussi un chef, un père, un

[349] "Les Aveugles" (9-10), in *Les Fleurs du Mal*.
[350] "Les Fleurs du Mal", in *L'Improbable et autres essais* (Mercure de France, 1959).
[351] Here, Hugo distinguishes between a "human" eighteenth century and an "ideal" nineteenth century.
[352] The phrase comes from an open letter that Baudelaire wrote to *Le Figaro* (14 Apr. 1864), though published anonymously, in which he barely contains his anger at having been left out of, along with others, a celebration in honor of the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's birthday. In his view, the event is instead a self-congratulatory tribute to Hugo's "petite coterie" (Hugo's son François-Victor had just translated Shakespeare's complete works, which prompted Hugo to write his mammoth essay to which I refer in this section). Baudelaire imagines the event will concern anything but Shakespeare, notably, a toast in honor of Hugo's essay, a toast to Denmark (not in honor of Hamlet, but of the Danes who had recently succumbed to the Prussians in the Second Schleswig War), a toast to Jean Valjean, and "enfin à toutes les stupidités propres à ce XIXe siècle" (*OC* II: 229).

symbole" (147).[353] In a letter he wrote to Hugo, precisely when he would have been working on "Le Cygne", Baudelaire confides that he consciously positioned himself as Hugo's antagonist:

> Je sais vos ouvrages par cœur, et vos préfaces me montrent que j'ai dépassé la théorie généralement exposée par vous sur l'alliance de la morale avec la poésie. Mais en un temps où le monde s'éloigne de l'art avec une telle horreur, où les hommes se laissent abrutir par l'idée exclusive de l'utilité, je crois qu'il n'y a pas grand mal à exagérer un peu dans le sens contraire. J'ai peut-être réclamé trop. C'était pour obtenir assez. (Sept. 1859; *Corr* I: 597)

Hugo, a symbol of his increasingly homogenized society, was for Baudelaire a poet who lacked lyrical sensibilities: "Tout chercheur d'idéalité pure en matière d'art est un hérétique aux yeux de la Muse et de l'art" (letter to Alphonse de Calonne, 8 Jan. 1859; *Corr* I: 537). Framing this opposition specifically in terms of the imagination, I argue that Baudelaire believed that Hugo was relieving the tension between the artist and the world. While Hugo presented the imagination as a deep abyss – "Or, c'est là une vérité que nous avons indiquée déjà et que les penseurs savent, l'imagination est profondeur. Aucune faculté de l'esprit ne s'enfonce et ne creuse plus que l'imagination ; c'est la grande plongeuse"[354] – Baudelaire recovered the imagination's human aspects. No longer allowing the imagination to fluctuate, Hugo had, according to Baudelaire, dissolved its natural expanding and contracting dynamic in his poems of exile. The din and obscurity of the "real world" was gradually abolished, not by the poet's "pensée", but by a theoretical "intelligence humaine": "Oui, méditons sur ces vastes obscurités. La rêverie est un regard qui a cette propriété de tant regarder l'ombre qu'il en fait sortir la clarté" (Ibid I.V.1 : 334). In the preface to *La Légende des siècles* (first series, 1859),

[353] "Baudelaire et Victor Hugo". *George Sand et son temps*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Slatkine, 1993): 143-156.
[354] *William Shakespeare* (II.II.2: 343).

though Hugo emphasizes that the book is just a beginning, he already announces the end: "ces poëmes, divers par le sujet, mais inspirés par la même pensée, n'ont entre eux d'autre nœud qu'un fil, ce fil qui s'atténue quelquefois au point de devenir invisible, mais qui ne casse jamais, le grand fil mystérieux du labyrinthe humain, le Progrès" (566).[355]

The sacrifice of the poet to the collective, for Hugo, was necessary for this utopian model to be realized,[356] but Baudelaire's lyric urban poems react to this drive toward the ideal with an acute sense of nostalgia and idiosyncrasy. Continuing in his letter to Hugo cited above, Baudelaire explains that his essay on Théophile Gautier (1859) was designed in part to revive the Hugo of the 1830s: "J'ai voulu surtout ramener la pensée du lecteur vers cette merveilleuse époque littéraire dont vous fûtes le véritable roi et qui vit dans mon esprit comme un délicieux souvenir d'enfance" (*Corr* I: 597). Baudelaire, in a now outmoded romantic gesture, resituated the inventive faculty of the artist as the generator of art, and his modern poetry paradoxically looks back to a previous model that recaptures and above all refuses to dissolve the tension between reality and invention:[357]

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[355] In "Poésies II", *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5; (Paris: Laffont, 1985). Hugo ends his preface with a clear ending to his project in mind; despite appearances, *La Légende* should not read as disparate fragments: "le drame de la création éclairé par le visage du créateur, voilà ce que sera, terminé, ce poëme dans son ensemble" (568).

[356] In his discussion of Hugo's "Solitudines Coeli", Gaudon points out that Hugo was aware that his utopian social model could not be realized. However, I would point out that he reacts to this recognition by exchanging one ideal for another: "Le rêve prend ainsi une autre forme. Ce n'est plus la version flamboyante et aérienne de l'utopie, mais la sourde promesse du repos éternel".

[357] In *Art of the Modern Age*, Jean-Marie Schaeffer defines what he calls "the romantic syndrome" as "disorientation and nostalgia". Fundamentally conservative, the romantics attempted "to reverse the movement of the Enlightenment toward a secularization of philosophical and cultural thought" (9). This is similar to how I read Baudelaire as responding to Hugo and to his century in general. My study is also informed by Paul de Man's "Lyric and Modernity", which resists historical criticism's emphasis on Baudelaire's modernity: "He is not the father of modern poetry but an enigmatic stranger that later poets tried to ignore by taking from him only the superficial themes and devices which they could rather easily 'go beyond'" (*Blindness and Insight* 184). In his edition of the *Salon de 1859* (2006), Wolfgang Drost observes that Baudelaire considered himself romantic residue: "Baudelaire, plein de nostalgie, fait partie de ceux qui ont survécu au romantisme" (125).

> Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
> Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!
> Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves
> Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant. ("Les Sept vieillards", *Les Fleurs du Mal*: 1-4)

My study shows how Baudelaire's "Tableaux parisiens" seek to reestablish the fertile tension between eye (the real) and imagination (the infinite) by eliminating interferences of romantic clichés or philosophies of art. Baudelaire's re-embodied imagination, symbolized throughout his oeuvre as a 'cerveau' that processes experience, is almost concretized in the "Tableaux parisiens" as the poet seeks to restore the romantic dynamic that Hugo had left behind. Baudelaire's imagination is a potent cerebral energy that combines physical sensation with analytical vigor, a psychological 'tour de force' that eliminates all that is sentimental, superficial, or metaphysical in romanticism. Hugo described the poet's brain as independent from the self and body – "Le cerveau plonge en Dieu. C'est-à-dire dans l'infini"[358] – but James Lloyd Austin shows how Baudelaire reembodies the creative imagination. Important critical works from Baudelaire's most important period (the essay on Gautier from 1859, the one on Hugo from 1861, the preface to Poe's *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, as well as journal entries) culminate in "l'affirmation que l'activité créatrice de l'imagination, qui découle de la perception intuitive des correspondances, reflète et continue, sur le plan humain, l'Imagination divine qui a créé l'univers" (175).[359] Acknowledging that this transfer of the imagination to the individual's brain represented a fall ("Serré, fourmillante, comme un million

[358] *William Shakespeare* (I.II.1: 263).
[359] *L'Univers poétique de Baudelaire* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1956). For Hugo, the 'cerveau' was not enough alone to make the poet's genius: "laissons au cerveau ce qui est au cerveau, et constatons que l'œuvre des génies est du surhumain sortant de l'homme" (*William Shakespeare* I.II.1: 263).

d'helminthes, / Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons" ("Au lecteur" 21-22), Baudelaire nonetheless based his poetry on this loss. Baudelaire situated the imagination as the mediating force that, as much as it strives to reach beyond, is always prey to the counterforce of external contingencies. Similar, for example, to Stendhal's portrait of the artist in *Histoire de la peinture en Italie*, Baudelaire's modern poet clings to the ever-shifting variances of temperament and sensibilities to ensure originality:

> Les Giorgion, les Corrège, les Cantarini, ces hommes rares qu'étouffe aujourd'hui le grand principe du siècle, "être comme un autre", portèrent cette habitude, fille de l'amour, de sentir une foule de nuances, et d'en faire dépendre son malheur ou sa félicité, dans l'art qui fait leur gloire. (162)

While Stendhal, however, was concerned with the effect of impressions on the artist's and spectator's heart and passions, Baudelaire, particularly in his later poems, relocated the source of art from the heart to the mind. In a process of condensation that resists romanticism's connotations of transcendence, infinite expansion, sentimentality, or the harmonious relationship between artist and nature, Baudelaire contains the imagination within the folds of the poet's brain. Baudelaire compresses both Lamartine's melodic (transcendent) and Hugo's dioramic (theatrical) or, later, cosmic imagination into the dark interior of the mind that maintains a dynamic of action and reaction.

Working to unify memories, actual experience, the creative impulse, and formal constraints into a single impression, Baudelaire's imagination is tortured as it constantly works against itself: "250 francs ce n'est pas assez, pour un cerveau qui n'accouche qu'avec le forceps. L'esprit de combinaison et d'analyse est le plus lent de tous, et toujours mécontent de lui-même" (to Calonne, 8 Jan. 1859; *Corr* I: 537-538).[360] Hugo

[360] Calonne founded the *Revue contemporaine*, in which Baudelaire published his "Mangeur d'opium". In this letter, Baudelaire discusses his project for "L'Art philosophique," (posthumous, 1868) whose principal

persists and sees his way out of the stimulation of his "fragile brain", but Baudelaire never overcomes the experience of its turbulence and stress.

My study will consider how Baudelaire countered the threat of the creative faculty's ruin evoked in "Le Cygne" ("ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts" 10) with a spark of the mind (what Poe calls "electrification") that occurs as initial impression and the subsequent workings of the imagination meet: "De la vaporisation et de la centralisation du *Moi*. Tout est là" (*Journaux intimes*; *OC* I: 676). This entry from "Mon cœur mis à nu" is often cited, and much critical attention has been devoted to Baudelaire's dialectical impulse and the paradox of an imagination that demands constraint: "il se disperse tout en restant prisonnier de lui-même" (Brombert).[361] Instead of looking at the overall trajectory of these movements, however, I will locate the meeting point of these two dynamics, or the split second just after 'vaporisation' and just prior to 'condensation'. I argue that this is where we have access to the state of mind of Poe's convalescent, or to what Baudelaire called the "moelle cérébrale de l'enfant" ("Morale du joujou"), which takes the form of a blinding flash at the center of his most important lyric project. Sainte-Beuve, Gautier, Théodore de Banville, Paul Valéry, and Yves Bonnefoy have all suggested that Baudelaire's principal struggle as a poet was to find his own voice in Hugo's wake; but it is this universalizing and vaporizing "Océan"

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aim was to admonish art that purported to deliver a message. After faulting the Germans for what he perceived as an art based primarily on instruction, Baudelaire warns: "L'art philosophique n'est pas aussi étranger à la nature française qu'on le croirait. La France aime le mythe, la morale, le rébus ; ou, pour mieux dire, pays de raisonnement, elle aime l'effort de l'esprit" (*OC* II : 601). Hugo's *Légende des siècles*, which presents the history of humanity as a myth to instruct contemporary readers on its patterns and tendencies, was published in the same year that Baudelaire was working on his essay.

[361] "Claustration et infini chez Baudelaire," in *Baudelaire: Actes du colloque de Nice (25-27 mai 1967)*. (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1968): 49-59. Brombert goes on to explain why the city, with its fixed stone but ambulatory figure of the 'flâneur', exemplifies this paradox: "Sécurité du port, sécurité de la prison et de la rêverie, sécurité du réduit qui permet d'entrevoir le paysage urbain. Car la ville – ce 'rêve de pierre caressé par la brume' – lui offre le confort d'une fixité lapidaire et anti-naturelle, en même temps que le spectacle du mouvement et de la liberté" (58).

that was first necessary for Baudelaire's original, if short-lived, lyric to make its impact. At once a story of Baudelaire's aim to condense the epic into the more potent and suggestive form of the sonnet, or a vast, generative nature into a decrepit city street, or the spiritual symbol into the deadening figure of allegory, the "Tableaux parisiens" also recount a critical story of how the modern poet, unburdened of romantic clichés and pseudo-philosophies, intensifies his cerebral imagination to the fullest. The following passage is long, but length is the point when Banville defends his claim that "Baudelaire est le seul qui ne doive rien à Victor Hugo," since Baudelaire had to eliminate everything that Hugo had already incorporated and processed. Banville is thus led to refocus Baudelaire's poetry from being contingent on an "anxiety of influence" to the poetic imagination itself:

> Le chanteur des *Orientales* avait tout fait, tout inventé, tout ressuscité, l'histoire, la légende, les épopées, l'ode pindarique, les splendeurs d'Homère, la religieuse horreur d'Eschyle, l'épouvante des théogonies, la gloire des héros, les rois sur les trônes et les révoltes dans les cavernes, toutes les figures de l'homme social; les femmes désolées et charmantes, les grands vieillards aux cheveux de neige, et les grâces naïves de l'enfant; pour exprimer son sujet, c'est-à-dire: tout, il fondit, amalgama dans sa main puissante tous les rythmes et tous les mètres, le vers musical de l'Orient, le grand hexamètre pareil à la mer tumultueuse, toutes les strophes lyriques, l'ironie de Villon et la ruisselante joaillerie de la Renaissance ; il avait pris toutes les parts, en disant : parce que je me nomme Lion. Après lui, il fallait l'imiter, le recommencer, s'inspirer de lui, ou n'être pas. […] Baudelaire résolut ce problème qui, en apparence, ne comportait pas de solution, en s'abandonnant et en se confiant à l'originalité de son génie. Son décor pompeux, raffiné, compliqué, splendide, où il n'y a pas de place pour le végétal irrégulier, et où parmi les jaspes et les porphyres et les étoffes superbement tragiques, asservis à la loi du rythme, les métaux frissonnants et polis représentent les eaux dormantes, et où il n'y a pas d'autres fleurs que des fleurs coupées, ne se trouve nulle part dans la vie réelle, et il est sorti tout entier de l'imagination du poète. (383-384)[362]

[362] From "Baudelaire", *La Revue contemporaine* (25 Mar. 1885). Banville's remarks are especially interesting, since he remained a fervent supporter of Hugo throughout his career.

But what is the Baudelairean imagination? While many take Baudelaire's primary emphasis on the imagination for granted, simply associating it with arbitrary fantasy or the dream-inducing effects of artificial stimulants, my study will show how the poet worked just as hard at specifying and illuminating its role as he did on the formal aspects of his poems.[363] Hardly a given, despite his unqualified 'éloge' of its powers, the role of the imagination in Baudelaire's corpus evolves over time and incorporates strains of multiple philosophies.[364] While Hugo gradually pushed the imagination into abstract domains, Baudelaire distilled theories of the imagination from his contemporaries and predecessors and established an imagination that (re)incorporated the senses, resituated the poet in a specific landscape, and centered itself above all in human experience. Hugo had sought to transcend the immediate for the sake of proclaiming a universal message, thereby detaching the lyric voice from its traditional role as individual expression. In "Hugo, ou le Je éclaté", Albouy situates this rupture in *Les Contemplations* (1856), which appeared only one year prior to the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*:

> Avec l'exil et, essentiellement, *les Contemplations*, [Hugo] élabore une nouvelle poétique, qui diverge de celle de l'harmonie et que nous définirons comme une poétique de la transcendance ; si, avant l'exil, les voix s'épanchaient par les fissures du moi que, du même coup, elles colmataient et, pour ainsi dire, enrobaient, maintenant, dans l'exil, la voix

[363] For this reason, I do not agree with Austin's assertion that Baudelaire "subordonna ses qualités de sensibilité et d'imagination à une volonté de perfection artistique, à la recherche d'une densité nouvelle" (*L'Univers poétique de Baudelaire* 58).

[364] Garnet Rees is one of the few who notes that Baudelaire's theory of the imagination "evolved gradually through his criticism and correspondence, as well as in his verse" ("Baudelaire and the Imagination" 203). His study is also singular in how it places the imagination in historical context, accounting for the general suspicion of the imagination in seventeenth-century French thought, but also for its more practical function in early romantic French literature: "The French Romantics have other preoccupations and do not accord to the imagination the same over-riding qualities nor do they seek to rehabilitate it. The *Préface de Cromwell* launches the battle cries of *liberté*, *vérité*, *passion*, and *nature*; its preoccupations seem to be more practical than theoretical, there is much more insistence on the aims of literature than on the rôle of the imagination in poetic creation" (206). Rees's study appears in *Modern Miscellany: Presented to Eugène Vinaver*, ed. T.E. Lawrenson, F.E. Sutcliffe and G.F.A. Gadoffre (Manchester UP, 1969): 203-215.

> non seulement jaillit de la rupture, mais assure la rupture, est, elle-même, rupture. (54)[365]

The figure of the prism that Hugo featured in the preface to *Cromwell*, which represented the transformative powers of the mind, no longer seemed to be operative. For Baudelaire, Hugo's prophesying verse had become a "habitude" similar to the way classical tragedy had become routine for Stendhal in the early decades of the nineteenth century, since one book of poems led logically to the next. As Poe suggests, however, the poet's mind was infinite in its own right: "Some of the most profound knowledge – perhaps all very profound knowledge – has originated from a highly stimulated imagination. Great intellects *guess* well" ("A Chapter of Suggestions").[366]

In this chapter, I argue that Baudelaire ultimately theorized the imagination as a cognitive processing of real experience and memory, but also as an aesthetic filtering of romanticism, the tropes that it spawned, and the reactions it provoked (particularly Realism). Baudelaire's development of the faculty of imagination appears throughout his critical works, and I will show that its culminating synthesis takes place in striking form in the "Tableaux parisiens". Just as the *Salon de 1859* and essay on Wagner (1861) focus on the 'cerveau intime' as it confronts ethereal forms of clouds, music, and the scaffolding of a metamorphosing Paris, the "Tableaux parisiens" purge romantic clichés - as well as the solid forms of the city and its passing figures - in order to arrive at a single originary spark of the creative imagination. Baudelaire brings back the clouds that Hugo's perpetual "Pente" had left far behind, and condenses them into the latent but accumulating energy of a storm cloud. As the poet emerges from his 'mansarde' and

[365] *Romantisme* 1-2 (1971): 53-64.
[366] Cited in Rees (207).

navigates the city streets, he eventually arrives at a critical moment of self-consciousness – a bolt of lightning – that leaves no room for mediation between the artist and his working faculty of the imagination. It turns out that Baudelaire's heroic artist is not the one who pounds the pavement for inspiration, but the one who dares to confront his own creative faculty. While this confrontation is short-lived and leads to blindness and ultimate disillusion, it at least realizes a *romantic* lyric poem – "ciel livide où germe l'ouragan" – that managed to be *modern* even in 1861.[367]

My study takes a chronological approach to emphasize how this storm was brewing well before "A une passante" appeared. I will begin by examining the period 1840-1846, between the publication of Hugo's *Les Rayons et les Ombres* and Baudelaire's *Salon de 1846*. Showing how a growing 'méfiance' of Hugo's works had become commonplace, I will consider the particular way that Baudelaire sought to remedy this crisis of romantic poetry by emulating artists and writers who went out of their way to distinguish themselves from Hugo and, in certain poems, by recalling and containing the fluctuating imagination that had once appeared in Hugo's 1830s verse. I will then trace the development of the Baudelairean imagination in his critical work, and how it came to rely increasingly on the artist's mental processing of experience and memory. In the concluding section of the chapter, my reading of the "Tableaux

[367] "A une passante" (7). I will therefore not be considering Baudelaire's prose poems (*Le Spleen de Paris*), since my focus is on Baudelaire's attempt to render modern and culturally relevant what was increasingly viewed as an outmoded genre. For Benjamin, the "conditions for a positive reception of lyric poetry have become less favorable" due to a change in the structure of readers' experience ("On Some Motifs" 156). A host of modern critics (Barbara Johnson, Suzanne Bernard, Sonya Stephens, Richard Terdiman, Jérôme Thélot and Debarati Sanyal) have read Baudelaire's prose poems as his critique or even violent exorcising of the lyric and its associations with essence, unity, pure art, and hegemonic discourses. In "Poetry and its Double: Two 'Invitations au voyage'" (in Bloom, ed., *Charles Baudelaire*), Johnson reads the lyric version of the poem as a u-topia, a moment of seduction temporarily deferred until the prose version situates "*its* dialogue […] between the lyric illusion of dialogic reciprocity and symmetry and the ironic asymmetry that disrupts and displaces that illusion". However, I read this moment of seduction, which takes the form of a passing woman, as both occurring ("La douceur qui fascine") *and* being disrupted ("et le plaisir qui tue") within the "Tableaux parisiens" themselves.

parisiens" will recount what I see as a critical story of the Baudelairean imagination as it applies specifically to the form of lyric poetry. By purging metaphysical tendencies - which appear in the form of clichés, systems, and philosophies of art - Baudelaire resituated the imagination in an originary state of blindness that can make no presuppositions. In his recapturing of the dark but heightened state of the child's mind, Baudelaire realizes, however fleetingly, that originary moment from which an authentically romantic work of art can emerge, where the suggestion is more complete than a philosophy of art. Of " Le Cygne ", considered to be his most important poem, Baudelaire simply says: "Ce qui était important pour moi, c'était de dire vite tout ce qu'un accident, une image, peut contenir de suggestions" (to Victor Hugo, 7 Dec. 1859; *Corr* I: 623).

Part I.

Baudelaire's Romanticism: Memory as Renewal

> Vous avez trouvé le moyen de rajeunir le romantisme.
>
> Flaubert to Baudelaire, 13 Jul. 1857

> Une fois, dans un journal, j'ai été accusé d'ingratitude envers les chefs de l'ancien Romantisme, à qui je dois tout, disait d'ailleurs judicieusement cet infâme torche-cul.
>
> Baudelaire to Sainte-Beuve, 21 Feb. 1859

My study will begin by examining how Baudelaire positioned himself as a romantic in the beginning years of his career. By 1845, when he published his first work (his *Salon* of the same year), it was more the norm than the exception to question Hugo's status as the century's leading poet, and Baudelaire followed suit with an added vehemence. However, Baudelaire's criticism stood apart because his model of modern

art was nostalgic for the very recent age of the 1830s. Hardly any time had elapsed since the 'golden age' of romanticism, but the young Baudelaire – through the figures of Sainte-Beuve, Delacroix, Balzac, Stendhal and Chateaubriand – emphasized the role of memory and melancholy in his early formulation of the imagination, constituting an 'ars poetica' that paved the way for the dialectical operation of "Spleen et Idéal" and thus the crucial function of irony in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857). Baudelaire's early *Salons* formulate an aesthetic that both expunged Hugo from questions of modern art and bolstered the dynamic of the imagination with the artist's perpetual interaction of 'naïveté' and 'volonté'. Baudelaire thus affirmed the enduring relevance of a creative imagination based on the conflict between artist and experience.

1. Hugo: The Academic Romantic

The year 1840, which marks Hugo's last volume of published poems prior to *Les Châtiments* (1853), is the same year that Baudelaire sent his first (known) letter to France's most prominent poet. Though mostly crafted with rhetorical phrases of flattery and self-deprecation, Baudelaire nonetheless singles out his superior's courage and originality: "je vous crois bon et généreux, parce que vous avez entrepris plusieurs réhabilitations, parce que loin de céder à l'opinion, vous l'avez souvent réformée, fièrement et dignement […]. […] je vous aime comme on aime un héros" (25 Feb.).[368] An avid reader of contemporary literature, Baudelaire informed his mother that Hugo was one of only two writers whom he read with enthusiasm: "Il n'y a que les drames, les poésies de Victor Hugo et un livre de Sainte-Beuve (*Volupté*) qui m'aient amusé" (3 Aug. 1838; *Corr* I: 61).

[368] *Correspondance*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1973); vol. 1, 81-82. From now on, references to Baudelaire's *Correspondance* will be abbreviated *Corr* with the accompanying volume number.

However, Baudelaire's tone changed sharply in his first published works: "M. Victor Hugo […] est un ouvrier beaucoup plus adroit qu'inventif, un travailleur bien plus correct que créateur" (*Salon de 1846*; *OC* II: 431).[369] In his brief but provocative entry on Louis Boulanger in the *Salon de 1845*, Baudelaire also provides the inverse criticism and faults Hugo for his unbridled inspiration instead of his technical prowess:

> Voilà les dernières ruines de l'ancien romantisme – voilà ce que c'est que de venir dans un temps où il est reçu de croire que l'inspiration suffit et remplace le reste; - voilà l'abîme où mène la course désordonnée de Mazeppa. – C'est Victor Hugo qui a perdu M. Boulanger – après en avoir perdu tant d'autres – c'est le poète qui a fait tomber le peintre dans la fosse. Et pourtant M. Boulanger peint convenablement (voyez ses portraits) ; mais où diable a-t-il pris son brevet de peintre d'histoire et d'artiste inspiré ? est-ce dans les préfaces ou les odes de son illustre ami ? (Ibid 366).

By 1846, it had become common for critics to question Hugo's status as the century's modern, or romantic, poet.[370] Coming off as too romantic, in the stereotypical sense of vague or eccentric, *Les Burgraves* struck critics as formulaic and even threw romanticism into crisis: "Où tendent ces banalités fantasmagoriques dont le boulevard du Temple a depuis longtemps épuisé le dernier secret? Sait-on ce que M. Victor Hugo a voulu prouver, et le sait-il lui-même?".[371] The same critique of exaggeration applied to Hugo's

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[369] Later, Baudelaire would explicitly describe Hugo's poetry as sculptural (*Exposition des Beaux-Arts*, 1855). This rhetoric continued well into the twentieth century. Like Baudelaire (and Balzac), Marcel Proust distinguished between the poet and the poem. While Hugo writes the better poem, Proust claims that Baudelaire is the better poet because his art expresses tension and mystery: "Victor Hugo fait toujours merveilleusement ce qu'il faut faire; on ne peut pas souhaiter plus de précision que dans l'image du croissant; même les mouvements les plus légers de l'air, nous venons de la voir [in "Booz endormi" from *La Légende des siècles*], sont admirablement rendus. Mais là encore la fabrication – la fabrication même de l'impalpable – est visible. Et alors au moment qui devrait être si mystérieux, il n'y a nulle impression du mystère" (619). "A propos de Baudelaire", in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). Paul Valéry, in "Situation de Baudelaire" (*Variété II*), calls Baudelaire France's most important poet but adds that he is not the best one.

[370] The notion that Hugo went too far with form and artistic conceits developed from the start of his career. In *Baudelaire et Hugo* (1970), Léon Cellier cites Stendhal's commentary on Hugo's *Odes* ("il est exagéré à froid ") as well as Heinrich Heine's ("Victor Hugo est forcé et faux…il est essentiellement froid").

[371] Cited in Raymond Pouilliart's introduction to *Les Burgraves* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985). The introduction gives a detailed account of not only the making of the play and its reception, but of the general

most recent volumes of poems. Prominent critics and writers lamented the ideas and conceits that were encroaching on genuine portraits of human nature. Charles Magnin, in his review of *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, points to the obscure haze brought about by Hugo's loose references to an amalgam of ideas:

> La critique qui a reproché à M. Hugo d'étendre l'opulente draperie de son langage sur des sentimens qui ne sont pas vrais, et sur des idées qu'une patiente méditation n'a pas eu le temps de rendre siennes, me semble, au moins sur ce dernier chef, avoir raison contre le poète. Ce n'est pas que M. Hugo ne touche à beaucoup d'idées; au contraire: il prend, notamment dans ce dernier volume, des opinions et des systèmes de toutes mains. Platonisme, mysticisme, panthéisme, catholicisme, toutes ces doctrines lui servent de thèses et se trouvent jetées pêle-mêle, non-seulement dans le courant du volume, mais souvent dans le même morceau, et quelquefois dans la même strophe. (733)[372]

Similar to the way early French romantic poets had faulted Byron for allowing the individual to be swept away by emotion and inspiration,[373] Baudelaire demonstrates the extent to which Hugo's shadow extended over not only one particular painter, but over a generation of artists who still clung to an "old" romanticism. Hugo, like Byron, had become the leading representative of a school where art fit a certain type, and Baudelaire was already looking back with nostalgia to the Hugo of *Marion de Lorme*, whose profession of faith in a new poetry - "l'auteur de ce drame espère tout de ses jeunes contemporains, même un grand poète" - had proclaimed the work of art's singularity and disinterestedness: "aujourd'hui que Charles X est plus oublié que Louis XIII, l'auteur a

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development of Hugo's theatrical works. The play is set in 12th-century Germany and recounts the return of Emperor Barberossa. It is plain to see why critics viewed the play as formulaic, in its familiar emphasis on "couleur locale", the representation of Medieval history, and its "foreigness". The article in question is from *Le National* (13 Mar. 1843).

[372] *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1 Jun. 1840): 729-748.

[373] Lamartine's poem "L'Homme" from the *Méditations* is wary of Byron's spirit of revolt ("Mais que sert de lutter contre sa destinée?" 31), while Hugo is mainly preoccupied with the poet's "capricious imagination": "Son génie ressemble trop souvent à un promeneur sans but qui rêve en marchant, et qui, absorbé dans une intuition profonde, ne rapporte qu'une image confuse des lieux qu'il a parcourus" ("Sur Lord Byron", *Litt. et phil. mêlées*: 158; first published in *La Muse française*, Jun. 1824).

donné sa pièce au public, et le public l'a prise comme l'auteur la lui a donnée, naïvement, sans arrière-pensée, comme chose d'art, bonne ou mauvaise, mais voilà tout" (Preface to *Marion de Lorme* 684).[374] Now, Hugo sounded like a different poet altogether in his preface to *Les Burgraves*, a "responsible" one less concerned with tracing the dynamic of the poetic imagination than with his duty to communicate an idea: "Faire constamment effort vers le grand, donner aux esprits le vrai, aux âmes le beau, aux cœurs l'amour, ne jamais offrir aux multitudes un spectacle qui ne soit une idée, voilà ce que le poëte doit au peuple".[375] Baudelaire's simultaneous targeting of what he perceives as Hugo's overemphasis on form as well as inspiration thus stems from the same cause: a poet who 'runs away from himself' both by trading the pen for the chisel and by fleeing the fluctuations of the creative imagination. As the recent *Les Rayons et les Ombres* and *Les Burgraves* strongly suggested, Hugo was moving even further toward metaphysical systems and thus eliminating concrete elements of the individual's experience in the world:

> De ce que toute expression vraiment poétique est la révélation d'un nouveau rapport découvert entre le monde physique et le monde moral, s'ensuit-il que l'initiative sociale et religieuse appartienne de nos jours aux poëtes, et qu'ils doivent aborder de front les problèmes métaphysiques et sociaux? Non, assurément. (Magnin, "*Les Rayons et les Ombres*": 738)

[374] In vol. 8 ("Théâtre I") of Hugo's *Œuvres complètes* (Laffont, 1985). In Baudelaire's first letter to Hugo, he specifically credits his young age for his identification with *Marion de Lorme*: "si vous saviez combien notre amour, à nous autres jeunes gens, est sincère et vrai – il me semble, (peut-être est-ce bien de l'orgueil) que je comprends tous vos ouvrages" (*Corr* I: 81).

[375] Like *Le Rhin*, *Les Burgraves* also has a blatant political motive of uniting France and Germany: "Quelles que soient les antipathies momentanées et les jalousies de frontières, toutes les nations policées appartiennent au même centre et sont indissolublement liées entre elles par une secrète et profonde unité". Stendhal specifically banished any reference to politics from his model of romantic art: "L'effet produit par toute idée politique dans un ouvrage de littérature; c'est un coup de pistolet au milieu d'un concert" (*Racine et Shakespeare*).

Hugo now contradicted the essential tenet of his definition of the modern lyric in the preface to *Cromwell*, which called for the resistance of the individual ("concentration") to the movement of History: the impossibility of representing *Cromwell* on the stage was its 'raison d'être': "C'est pourquoi, désespérant d'être jamais mis en scène, il [l'auteur] s'est livré libre et docile aux fantaisies de la composition, au plaisir de la dérouler à plus larges plis, aux développements que son sujet comportait" (103). Hugo once placed the poet's imagination on view, but by the time of *Les Burgraves*, the idea is represented instead.

2. Baudelaire's Nostalgia: Imagination as 'Volupté'

From the start, Baudelaire gravitated to the writers whom critics had singled out as modern.[376] Sainte-Beuve in particular had defined his role as a critic by remaining outside of Hugo's sphere of influence.[377] The impetus of contemporary reviewers' negative reactions to Hugo is rooted in his review of *Les Chants du crépuscule* (1835), where Sainte-Beuve suggests that Hugo's output of poems had become inflated and mechanical. No longer an "éblouissant" prism, the metaphor for Hugo's poetry was now, in Sainte-Beuve's words, a green house: "un inconvénient est à craindre […]: c'est qu'au lieu de réfléchir fidèlement dans les vers les nuances vraies qui se succèdent dans l'âme,

[376] Gautier was one of them, but I will focus on Baudelaire's relationship to Sainte-Beuve for the following reasons: first, though less examined and thus less well-known, the influence of Sainte-Beuve on Baudelaire's poetry during this period and as a whole is far-reaching. Baudelaire may have dedicated *Les Fleurs du Mal* to Gautier, and written two important essays on the poet-critic, but some (most notably André Gide) have pointed to the ambivalence and irony associated with this supposed kinship. Second, Gautier continued to support Hugo unreservedly, while Baudelaire scorned Hugo's status as the leading romantic poet. Gautier was important for shaping Baudelaire's early writings on art and on Delacroix in particular, but Sainte-Beuve, even if he did somewhat distance himself from Baudelaire, was even more so regarding specific questions of how the poet's imagination operates, urban themes, as well as for his affirmation of a modern poetry that distanced itself from Hugo's contagion. As late as 1862, Baudelaire confesses to Sainte-Beuve that he is still an "amoureux incorrigible des *Rayons jaunes* [from *Joseph Delorme*] et de *Volupté*" (*Corr* II: 219).

[377] Of course, Hugo and Sainte-Beuve's increasingly strained relationship was in no small part due to Sainte-Beuve's affair with Hugo's wife Adèle. However, as Michel Brix has convincingly shown in *Hugo et Sainte-Beuve* (2007), their animosity was principally rooted in Sainte-Beuve's refusal to praise Hugo's work unreservedly, which had become the 'modus operandi' of Hugo's Cénacle. For Brix, the last straw was Sainte-Beuve's review of Hugo's *Chants du crépuscule* (1835), to which I refer above.

on ne crée, on ne force un peu, on n'achève exprès des nuances qui ne sont qu'ébauchées encore" (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1835).

Graham Robb, one of the few to have examined in detail the early phase of Baudelaire's career, notes how Baudelaire gravitated to Sainte-Beuve precisely because of the poet-critic's isolation: "Sainte-Beuve, comparé à Hugo, à Lamartine ou à Musset, est moins prostitué par les louanges de la jeune génération, moins compromis par des imitateurs".[378] In the heritage of Stendhal and Chateaubriand, Sainte-Beuve analyzed the passions and state of mind of the self with scrutiny, thereby keeping lofty ideas at bay by focusing on the destabilization that results from the disconnect between heart and mind.[379] In his novel *Volupté* (1834), Sainte-Beuve's narrator and alter-ego Amaury cautions against the century's "hygienic" drive toward systems: "Une affaire d'hygiène, d'économie, de régularité. Il y a dans tout ceci un oubli profond du côté le plus essentiel et le plus délicat" (155).[380] Anchored instead in memory, the novel, like Chateaubriand's *René*, features the protagonist recounting his experiences of youth prior to his double

[378] *La poésie de Baudelaire et la poésie française, 1838-1852* (Paris: Aubier, 1993). Analyzing in detail Baudelaire's poems of youth, Robb concludes that, as they became less improvisational, they increasingly showed "la nouvelle direction que prenait la poésie de Baudelaire; une autre influence se précise: celle de Sainte-Beuve" (34).

[379] In his section of *Histoire de la peinture* entitled "Comment l'emporter sur Raphaël ?" (which Baudelaire specifically cites in the *Salon de 1846*), Stendhal answers: "Dans les scènes touchantes produites par les passions, le grand peintre des temps modernes, si jamais il paraît, donnera à chacun des personnages la beauté idéale tirée du tempérament fait pour sentir le plus vivement l'effet de cette passion" (CI ; 296). Brix shows how Sainte-Beuve, in distinction to Lamartine and Hugo, did not inherit Mme de Staël's model of literature as moving toward the divine, but instead adopted Stendhal's "contestation du romantisme platonicien" (61): "Le critique avait mis en garde le poète – et à travers lui la nouvelle école – contre un mysticisme et un corps de doctrine dans lesquels une société, quelle qu'elle soit, ne pouvait se reconnaître […]. Les *Odes et ballades* relèvent encore trop – regrette le critique – de l'esprit de système et trop peu de sincérité" (66). Earlier, Stendhal had attributed Hugo's success as a poet to his adherence to the 'ultras': "son parti lui procure un fort grand succès. L'on ne peut nier, au surplus, qu'il ne sache fort bien faire des vers français; malheureusement, il est somnifère" (in a review of the *Odes et Poésies sacrées* [sic: diverses] ; *New Monthly Magazine*, Mar. 1823). As I showed in the previous chapter, however, Sainte-Beuve lauded Hugo's *Orientales* for promoting an imagination that, freed from this "esprit de système", had succeeded in producing what Brix describes as "une poésie libérée de toute arrière-pensée mystique, providentialiste ou historique" (69). The underlying insinuation in his later reviews, however, is that Hugo had betrayed romanticism's sincerity and freedom.

[380] Ed. André Guyaux (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

exile to America and the priesthood: “Tout, pour Sainte-Beuve, se résume en un mot où l’être double s’unifie: mémoire […]. Nul n’a plus que lui conçu l’œuvre littéraire comme un miroir d’éternité” (Ibid 8).[381] At once an historical novel and a love story, Amaury recounts his sense of ennui despite the excitement of passion that surrounds him. Even during the “glory days” of Napoleon, and in the thick of an intrigue to depose the newly proclaimed Emperor (the story takes place in 1804), Amaury is hampered by indifference: “La France avec l’Angleterre déjà, bientôt avec l’Europe, recommençait ses chocs turbulents; j’en avais, de ce que j’appelais ma lâcheté inactive, pour tout le temps de ma jeunesse” (175).[382] Even in close and daily proximity to the object of his affection, he cannot act upon his desire: “Mon amour serpentait par ces faux-fuyants sinueux, comme une eau sous l’herbe qui la dérobe” (92).[383] Sainte-Beuve’s “volupté” is a spleen-like, viscous substance that slowly penetrates the body and defeats the mind’s reasoning and good intentions: “elle a saisi votre chair, elle flotte dans votre sang, serpente en vos veines, scintille et nage aux bords de vos yeux; un regard échangé où elle se mêle suffit à déjouer les plus austères promesses” (35). This distinguishes Amaury

[381] In Guyaux’s “Préface”.

[382] Amaury is from Brittany and thus in Chouan territory. Again, the novel emphasizes the resistance of memory (the nostalgia for a pre-Revolutionary France) against the tide of current history (the Emperor). Here, the influence of Lamennais is evident. In 1804, Amaury finds himself caught between two centuries and two modes of being: the passive subject and the energetic but solitary and secularized self. The contrast between Amaury and his protector M. de Couaën appears distinctly in chapter VI, when the two converse: while for Couaën it is a law of nature for the individual to merge with the whole, Amaury, noting that “M. de Couaën n’avait pas le sentiment des temps modernes”, distinguishes himself as an individual “hors de ligne”. This corresponds to Sainte-Beuve’s ‘prise de position’ against Hugo’s abstractions. Like Rousseau, Amaury focuses on the consciousness of the inner self against the turbulence of water’s movement: “ D’innombrables cercles nébuleux, dans l’étendue de l’Océan visible et de l’Océan des âges, vibraient autour d’un seul point de ma pensée et m’environnaient d’un charme puissant ” (97). The self may waver, but the awareness of the self, never.

[383] Unbeknownst to M. de Couaën, Amaury is in love with his wife. The highly fraught tension between Amaury and Mme de Couaën was a thinly veiled allusion Sainte-Beuve’s relationship with Adèle Hugo. Reminiscent of Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*, Sainte-Beuve’s characters live in a stifling but highly volatile space from which they cannot escape and in which they cannot act upon their emotions. “ J’eus toujours le goût des intérieurs ”, Amaury somewhat cryptically remarks. Each day, life goes through its normal routines despite the emotional toll of stifled passion.

from René, whose melancholy was more thematic than pathological; referring to Chateaubriand's story, Amaury observes: "- Et pourtant mon mal était bien à moi, moins vague, moins altier et idéal que celui que j'admirais, et, sous ses transformations diverses, tenant à un motif plus défini" (178).

A letter that Baudelaire sent to Sainte-Beuve, dated approximately from the beginning of 1845, is significant not only in its tribute to Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté,* but also for its explicit references to Stendhal and Chateaubriand.[384] Beginning his letter by referring to Stendhal's predilection for establishing intimacy with his reader, Baudelaire takes this idea of deep familiarity to the highest level and eliminates any question as to whom Baudelaire looked most for inspiration: "Car je suis vis-à-vis de vous [Sainte-Beuve] comme un amant" (*Corr* I: 118). Most likely written to congratulate Sainte-Beuve on his recent election to the Académie (1844), the letter includes a poem that honors the poet-critic in its evocation of 'volupté' as well as in its conjuring of a vein of romanticism with which Hugo had always had problematic associations.[385] Stendhal, in

[384] *Corr* I: 116-118. Much like Stendhal, Chateaubriand was wary of philosophical systems that deterred the artist from expressing a clear train of thought: "Je suis persuadé qu'on peut toujours dégager une pensée des mots qui la voilent, à moins que cette pensée ne soit un lieu commun guindé dans des nuages: l'auteur qui a la conscience de ce lieu commun n'ose le faire descendre du milieu des vapeurs, de crainte qu'il ne s'évanouisse" (preface to vol. XXVIII of his *Œuvres complètes*, 1828). In his article on Hugo's *Odes*, Stendhal had also stressed the artist's role of clearly articulating his thoughts: "Nous avons à Paris quatre mille jeunes littérateurs qui font bien le vers français: il y en a trois ou quatre, peut-être, qui sont parvenus à faire passer leurs pensées dans leur vers; ce n'est pas une petite affaire". In this vein, *Volupté* follows the unpredictable twists and turns of the protagonist's mental reflections, what the narrator calls "le fond flottant de ma pensée" (79). To distinguish them from Chateaubriand, however, I would add that Sainte-Beuve and Stendhal's "pensée" is less concerned with shaping a discourse and more oriented toward the expression of feelings and psychological drama.

[385] See Barat, "Deux styles romantiques" (Chap. V), in *Style poétique et révolution romantique* (op. cit.). According to Barat, Hugo was one of Stendhal's principal targets in the 1825 section of *Racine et Shakespeare*: "Le vrai romantique à ce moment, c'est Stendhal, bien plutôt que Victor Hugo, qui vient justement de renier le romantisme; et la vraie question, c'est 'la tragédie nationale en prose', plutôt que l'ode, l'élégie et le poème" (142). René Bray focuses on the political divide between the two, positioning Hugo as the leader of the 'ultra' romantics and Stendhal as the head of the liberal romantics (*Chronologie du romantisme* 82). In terms of an aesthetic divide, Stendhal was closer to what Bray calls the "esprit encyclopédique" of the eighteenth century, which accounts for the work of art's effects on the senses and

contrast to Hugo's vast meditations on nature and society, called for a modern art centered on the capturing of the "moeurs" of the artist's age: "Veut-on vraiment connaître Michel-Ange? Il faut se faire citoyen de Florence en 1499. […] Il fut par excellence le représentant de son siècle, et, comme Léonard de Vinci il ne devina point les douces mœurs d'un autre âge" (CXLV: 377). Steeped and even stuck in an urban milieu, there are no traces of fantasy or even nature in Baudelaire's poem: "les murs noiricis", "des blancs pigeons", "les filles amoureuses", and "les soirs italiens" evoke a specific atmosphere, and the "mystère profond" is not a mystical abstraction but the poet's physically palpable "douleur" as he contemplates the pain of love's pleasure:

> […] Tous les êtres aimés
> Sont des vases de fiel qu'on boit les yeux fermés,
> Et leur cœur transpercé que la douleur allèche
> Expire chaque jour en bénissant sa flèche.

Baudelaire provides a vague portrait of the city, one of both pleasure and melancholy, that corresponds to the vacillation between illusion and disillusion that occurs as Amaury explores Paris: "Mille propos de miel ou de boue m'accueillaient au passage; mille mortelles images m'atteignaient; je les emportais dans ma chair palpitante, courant, rebroussant comme un cerf aux abois, le front en eau, les pieds brisés, les lèvres arides. Une telle fatigue amenait vite avec elle son abrutissement" (113). The disarray that Amaury observes during his frequent wanderings through Paris corresponds to his inner stirrings, and likewise, Baudelaire's poet-narrator privileges memory and his particular reality in order to arrive at a sensual and highly personal evocation of the universal experience of love.

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passions, while Hugo was, in his poems, preoccupied with the "grande tradition" of neoclassical French poetry and, in his early novels, heavily marked by the vogue for fantasy and the macabre.

Baudelaire is sure to inform Sainte-Beuve that his lines were written 'naïvement', a seemingly innocent or self-deprecating disclosure that is, in fact, a critical term that was circulating in contemporary art criticism and prominently featured in Baudelaire's first *Salons*.[386] Reestablishing a sense of naïveté by recalling his (recent) youth, Baudelaire, like Amaury, thus distinguishes himself from Hugo's academic romanticism by recapturing an aesthetic that was more contingent on the world and its effects on the self. Baudelaire's narrator recalls memories at three junctures: in the beginning third of the poem, he recounts his past as a young student forced to study classic literature in a stifling environment of 'ennui': "- Nous traînions tristement nos ennuis, accroupis / Et voûtés sous le ciel carré des Solitudes" (Ibid 116). Second, it describes the moment when the narrator's first reading of *Volupté* – like Amaury's reading of *René* – jolted him out of his 'ennui' and quenched the aspiring poet's thirst, not only for mystery, but for the the suggestion of physical pleasure:

> J'en ai tout absorbé, les miasmes, les parfums,
> Le doux chuchotement des souvenirs défunts,
> Les longs enlacements des phrases symboliques,
> - Chapelets murmurants de madrigaux mystiques ; (*Corr* I : 118)

This moment, however, is left far behind due to the slow workings of 'volupté's poisonous aftereffects:

> Tout abîme mystique est à deux pas du Doute -
> - Le breuvage infiltré, lentement, goutte à goutte,
> En moi qui dès quinze ans vers le gouffre entraîné,
> Déchiffrais couramment les soupirs de René,
> Et que de l'inconnu la soif bizarre altère,

[386] See Stéphane Guégan, "Naïveté et modernité autour de 1846: Baudelaire lecteur de Gautier ?". In *Baudelaire et quelques artistes: Affinités et résistances* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997).

- A travaillé le fond de la plus mince artère. (Ibid 117-118)[387]

Formally a victim of 'ennui', the poet is now a victim of his own desire. Finally, signaled by the transitional "Et depuis" toward the last quarter of the poem, Baudelaire, considering the aesthetic implications of 'volupté', underscores the tension experienced by a modern poet who depends on works from the past.[388] Baudelaire positions himself squarely in the confused state of an ongoing present, symbolized by the slow drips of the "breuvage inflitré" of Sainte-Beuve's 'volupté', which always recalls a mysterious origin where there is no "rayon" to the "ombre":

> Et depuis, soit au fond d'un asile touffu,
> Soit que, sous les soleils des zones différentes,
> L'éternel bercement des houles enivrantes,
> Et l'aspect renaissant des horizons sans fin,
> Ramenassent ce cœur vers le songe divin, -
> […]
> - J'ai partout feuilleté le mystère profond
> De ce livre si cher aux âmes engourdies (Ibid)

The poem encapsulates Baudelaire's paradoxically nostalgic model of modern art that was centered on a self distinct from and resistant to the collective:

> Les enfances venues en plein siècle et que tout prédispose à l'opinion régnante, s'y épuisent plus vite et confondent longtemps en pure perte leur premier feu dans l'enthousiasme général. Le trop de facilité qu'elles trouvent à se rendre compte de ce qui triomphe, les disperse souvent et les évapore. La résistance, au contraire, refoule, éprouve, et fait de bonne heure que la volonté dit *Moi*. (*Volupté* 37-38)

With his focus on the "je", his navigation of the city landscape, and the decrepit state of the modern poet, Baudelaire resituates the poem in the realities of modern life as well as

[387] "Or comment, avec ces goûts réglés, cette frugalité d'imagination et dans cette saine discipline, l'idée de volupté vint-elle à s'engendrer doucement ? Car elle naquit dès lors, elle gagne peu à peu en moi par mille détours et sous de perfides dissimulations" (*Volupté* 39).

[388] In his preface, Guyaux observes that this is the uneasy situation inhabited by *Volupté*: "Ecrit au début de la monarchie de Juillet, *Volupté* est encore préromantique et déjà postromantique. Le sentiment le ramène en arrière ; la lucidité le porte en avant" (8).

in the inner fluctuations of the mind, body, and passions. 'Volupté', a symbol of the artist who resists the status quo and the individual's surrender to systems of thought, poisons ideas:

> Si nous entrons dans la sphère vive et spirituelle, dans celle des idées, là tout contrecoup est un désastre, toute déperdition une décadence. De ce point de vue, lequel n'a rien d'imagination, je vous jure, qui dira combien dans une grande ville, à de certaines heures du soir et de la nuit, il se tarit périodiquement de trésors de génie, de belles et bienfaisants œuvres, de larmes d'attendrissement, de velléités fécondes détournées ainsi avant de naître, tuées en essence, jetées au vent dans une prodigalité insensée. Tel, qui était né capable d'un monument grandiose, coupera, chaque soir, à plaisir, sa pensée, et ne lancera au monde que des fragments. Tel, en qui une création sublime de l'esprit allait éclore sous une continence sévère, manquera l'heure, le passage de l'astre, le moment enflammé qui ne se rencontrera plus. (*Volupté* 156)

3. Baudelaire's Early *Salons* and "la quête du neuf"

Baudelaire takes 'volupté', or what shapes the moral character of Sainte-Beuve's Amaury, and applies it to questions of aesthetics and the situation of art in 1845. Anticipating his famous remark on creating poetry out of Paris ("Tu m'as donné ta boue et j'en ai fait de l'or")[389] as well as his adoption of irony as the motor of his art in "L'Héautontimorouménos" ("C'est tout mon sang, ce poison noir!" 18), the young Baudelaire, unlike Hugo, is far from seeing his art as leading to blue skies: "L'art cruel qu'un Démon en naissant m'a donné, / - De la douleur pour faire une volupté vraie, - D'ensanglanter son mal et de gratter sa plaie" (*Corr* I: 118).[390]

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[389] This was from a project for an epilogue to the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*. One stanza in Baudelaire's poem to Sainte-Beuve clearly anticipates poems that would later be included in the "Tableaux parisiens", such as "Crépuscule du soir" or "Crépuscule du matin":

> – Et puis venaient les soirs malsains, les nuits fiévreuses,
> Qui rendent de leur corps les filles amoureuses,
> Et les font aux miroirs – stérile volupté –
> Contempler les fruits mûrs de leur nubilité – (Ibid 117)

[390] Hugo wrote in his preface to *Les Rayons et les Ombres*: "On trouvera dans ce volume, à quelques nuances près, la même manière de voir les faits et les hommes que dans les trois volumes de poésie qui le précèdent immédiatement et qui appartiennent à la seconde période de la pensée de l'auteur, publiés, l'un

Baudelaire's early and never-published poem, which encapsulates all the elements of his definition of romantic art (naïveté, memory, melancholy, and modern life) represents the affirmation of a modern poet who eliminates Hugo from the romantic equation. His subsequent early Salon writings highlight and theorize all of these elements, forming an 'ars poetica' that, though dealing primarily with painting and prose, clears the way for a romantic poetry unburdened of metaphysical pretentions and centered instead on the artist's experience. Baudelaire sought to recover the youthful energy, now deadened by an old-fashioned romanticism, that Sainte-Beuve describes as a "chaleur du cerveau" that creates new worlds: "Dans toute âme qui de bonne heure a vécu, le passé a déposé ses débris en sépultures successives que le gazon de la surface peut faire oublier ; mais, dès qu'on se replonge en son cœur et qu'on en scrute les âges, on est effrayé de ce qu'il contient et de ce qu'il conserve : il y a en nous des mondes !" (*Volupté* 51-52). Baudelaire will continue to turn to the fluctuating dynamic of 'volupté' in his first *Salons*, establishing 'naïveté' as the main criterion for art while at the same time highlighting the suggestiveness of modern and urban life in its contradictory impulses of glamour and decrepitude.

Salon de 1845

As he works to recover an authentic romantic state of mind in the *Salon de 1845*, Baudelaire situates naïveté as the essential trait of the artist. However, Baudelaire does not mean 'naïveté' in the same way as romantic precursors such as Rousseau or Wordsworth:

> - Such, verily, is the first
> Poetic spirit of our human life;

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en 1831, l'autre en 1835, et le dernier en 1837. Ce livre les continue. Seulement, dans *les Rayons et les Ombres*, peut-être l'horizon est-il plus élargi, le ciel plus bleu, le calme plus profond" (*OP* I: 1021).

> By uniform controul of after years
> In most abated or suppressed, in some,
> Through every change of growth or of decay,
> Pre-eminent until death.
> From early days,
> Beginning not long after that first time
> In which, a Babe, by intercourse of touch
> I held mute dialogues with my Mother's heart,
> I have endeavoured to display the means
> Whereby the infant sensibility,
> Great birthright of our Being, was in me
> Augmented and sustained. (*The Prelude*, Book II: 275-288)

Baudelaire's naïveté does not suggest a return to innocence, but a recognition of the artist's natural and vagrant temperament. In the *Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire provides a footnote on the word, explaining : "Il faut entendre par la naïveté du génie la science du métier combinée avec *le gnôti séauton*, mais la science modeste laissant le beau rôle au tempérament" (*OC* II: 431). Naïveté is not a sentiment, but a state of mind disposed to process something new out of the world: "*Naïveté* [for Baudelaire] is always associated with strength or *force* with a certain single-mindedness or faith which direct the creative energies of the man of genius into his art" (J.A. Hiddleston 5).[391] The romantic artist recognizes the conflict between imagination and intention, and works hard to make the creative process look easy:

> Donc, quand nous disons que ce tableau est bien dessiné, nous ne voulons pas faire entendre qu'il est dessiné comme un Raphaël; nous voulons dire qu'il est dessiné d'une manière impromptue et spirituelle ; que ce genre de dessin […] rend parfaitement le mouvement, la physionomie, le caractère insaisissable et tremblant de la nature, que le dessin de Raphaël ne rend jamais. (*Salon de 1845*; *OC* II: 355-356)

Far from innocent, then, Baudelaire's naïveté is a natural disposition that belies willfulness and carries no connotations of sentimentality; children, for example, are more imaginative because they are closer to original sin in their raw state of curiosity and

[391] "In Search of an Aesthetic", in *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).

impulsiveness: “Il y a si peu d’amusements qui ne soient pas coupables!” (“Le Joujou du pauvre”).[392] Recapturing the child’s imagination ironically meant sacrificing the notion of purity and seamlessness to situate art in a mysterious and ‘voluptuous’ origin. Baudelaire describes the dark chamber of the child’s mind as representing the most powerful of imaginations creating a dramatic and moving picture out of the banal or ordinary.[393] In his essay “Morale du joujou” (1853), the unaffected inner workings of the child’s imagination spontaneously and grandiosely supplement an everyday chair:

> Tous les enfants parlent à leurs joujoux; les joujoux deviennent acteurs dans le grand drame de la vie, réduit par la chambre noire de leur petit cerveau. Les enfants témoignent par leurs jeux de leur grande faculté d’abstraction et de leur haute puissance imaginative. Ils jouent sans joujoux. […] – Mais la diligence, l’éternel drame de la diligence joué avec des chaises: la diligence-chaise, les chevaux-chaises; il n’y a que le postillon de vivant! L’attelage reste immobile, et cependant il dévore avec une rapidité brûlante des espaces fictifs. (*OC* I: 582-583)[394]

Baudelaire explicitly makes the connection between the toy and the work of art, again emphasizing speed: “Cette facilité à contenter son imagination témoigne de la spiritualité de l’enfance dans ses conceptions artistiques. Le joujou est la première initiation de

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[392] In *Le Spleen de Paris*.

[393] In Hugo, the child is sacred due to his or her innocence, but never emulated as a model for his poems. Hugo’s emphasis on growth and progress contradicted any return to naïveté. Instead, the child is significant for what he will become: “Laissez grandir ce petit sérieux”, the narrator advises the mother in “*Tentada via est*” (*Les Voix intérieures*, 1837).

[394] This passage resonates with a chapter in Rabelais’ *Gargantua*, when the young title character receives a wooden horse. The toy quickly becomes the instrument of his imagination: “l’on lui fit un beau grand cheval de bois, lequel il faisait penader, sauter, voltiger, ruer & danser tout ensemble, aller le pas, le trot, l’entrepas, le gallop, les ambles, le hobin, le traquenard, le camelin, et l’onagrier. Et lui faisait changer de poil […], de bailbrun, d’alezan, de gris pommelé, de poil de rat, de cerf, de rouen, de vache, de zencle, de pecile, de pie, de leuce. Et lui-même d’une grosse traîne fit un cheval pour la chasse, un autre d’un fût de pressoir à tous les jours, et d’un grand chaisne une mule avec la housse pour la chambre. Encore en eut-il dix ou douze à relais, & sept pour la poste. Et tous mettait coucher auprès de soi” (Chap. XI, “Des chevaulx factices de Gargantua”). Both passages stress how readily the child’s imagination changes a single and otherwise inert object’s form and function, and propels it into movement (which Rabelais reinforces even more by the choppy movement of language, as if it were coming out of an excited and breathless child’s mouth). We know that, after Baudelaire’s death, Mme Aupick presented Charles Asselineau with her son’s copy of a Rabelais volume (E. Crépet, *Charles Baudelaire*: 334, n. 1).

l'enfant à l'art […]" (Ibid 583). Recapturing an impulsive imagination based on unexpected circumstance is what ensures the artist an original work of art each time.[395]

After establishing a mindset of naïveté by deflating myths and decrying romanticism's decrepitude, Baudelaire formulates his running thesis: "M. Delacroix est décidément le peintre le plus original des temps anciens et des temps modernes" (*OC* II: 353). While such a pronouncement was surely meant to be provocative, there is a calm reasoning behind it.[396] Because Delacroix is "sans cesse en quête du neuf" (Ibid), it follows that he is always, at any point in time, original. Time has already faded the Devérias or the Boulangers, but Delacroix's paintings retain their freshness. Vernet's vast and sensational but contrived romantic painting *Prise de la Smalah* is purely decorative compared to Delacroix's small and unpretentious but profoundly moving *La Madeleine dans le désert*.[397] Reminiscent of the recent and recurring criticisms leveled against Hugo, Baudelaire faults Vernet for his mechanical and even sculptural approach: "Cette peinture africaine est plus froide qu'une belle journée d'hiver. […] M. Horace Vernet a suivi la même méthode" (Ibid 357-358). Delacroix's *Madeleine*, by contrast, is not only a romantic painting, but a microcosm of 'volupté': "Nul, à moins de la voir, ne peut imaginer ce que l'artiste a mis de poésie intime, mystérieuse et romantique dans

[395] Baudelaire's romantic model of the imagination shows how Hugo's had become classical in its emphasis on thought at the expense of temperament: "Such a definition [of Romanticism] contrasts strongly with what might be called the classical view which saw imagination, like memory, as the handmaid of the intellect, providing images of past experience for it to work upon; without it, the intellect would never make headway, but would always be starting anew" (Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory*: 40).

[396] There was certainly nothing new about praising Delacroix (Gautier, Thoré, Asselineau, and others were adamant supporters), but Baudelaire takes this praise to a new level: "Aucun des amis de M. Delacroix, et des plus enthousiastes, n'a osé le dire simplement, crûment, impudemment, comme nous" (*OC* II: 353).

[397] Specifically, Vernet's painting lacks color harmony: "M. Horace Vernet n'a donc jamais vu les Rubens, les Véronèse, les Tintoret, les Jouvenet, morbleu!..." (Ibid 358).

cette simple tête" (Ibid 354).[398] Madeleine's head contains the potent essence of mystery that Delacroix reflects in his masterful harmonizing of color. Unlike Vernet, Delacroix does not use color to *try* to be romantic, but to translate the effects of this mystery's tumultuous dynamic: "les tons, loin d'être éclatants ou intenses, sont très doux et très modérés; l'aspect est presque gris, mais d'une harmonie parfaite. […] M. Delacroix est plus fort que jamais, et dans une voie de progrès sans cesse renaissante, c'est-à-dire qu'il est plus que jamais harmoniste" (Ibid).[399] The struggle to achieve accurate tones reflects the more profound and internal struggle to represent an imagination in flux: "Je n'aime point la peinture raisonnable. Il faut, je le vois, que mon esprit brouillon s'agite, défasse, essaye de cent manières, avant d'arriver au but dont le besoin me travaille dans chaque chose" (Delacroix, *Journal*; 7 mai 1824).[400] Baudelaire's reference to Delacroix's "progrès sans cesse renaissante" is thus subtly ironic; in distinction to Hugo's insistence that each volume of his poems mark a stage of development, Baudelaire portrays Delacroix's imagination struggling earnestly with each painting. There should be nothing expected or smooth about an authentic romantic work of art, and the fact that Delacroix was not yet a member of the Academy attested to his great stature: "Il a le droit d'être toujours jeune, car *il ne nous a pas trompés, lui, il ne nous a pas menti* comme quelques idoles ingrates que nous avons portées dans nos panthéons" (Ibid – emphasis mine).[401]

Salon de 1846

[398] In the *Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire will place Delacroix "à la tête du romantisme". *Madeleine dans le désert*, which represents not a precise place (despite its title), but a mood or expression, is thus the very symbol of this position.
[399] For his part, the prominent art critic Thoré predicted: "Dans un siècle, cette tête de la *Madeleine* vaudra plus cher que *la Bataille de la Smahla*" (cited in Ferran: 35).
[400] At the same time, Delacroix, like Baudelaire, placed emphasis on 'naïveté': "Une poignée d'inspiration naïve est préférable à tout". The quote is cited in Pierre-Georges Castex's *Baudelaire critique d'art* (9), but the date of the journal entry is not provided.
[401] Given the influence of Sainte-Beuve in the early formation of his theory of modern art, as well as his comments on Louis Boulanger, this is no doubt a reference to Hugo.

Baudelaire had once praised Hugo's defiance of collective taste, but in the *Salon de 1846*, he extols the courage it takes for the artist to confront his own mind instead:

> Pour un pareil homme, doué d'un tel courage et d'une telle passion, les luttes les plus intéressantes sont celles qu'il a à soutenir contre lui-même ; les horizons n'ont pas besoin d'être grands pour que les batailles soient importantes ; les révolutions et les événements les plus curieux se passent sous le ciel du crâne, dans le laboratoire étroit et mystérieux du cerveau. (Ibid 429)[402]

Baudelaire reiterates the interaction between 'naïveté' and 'volonté', this time referring to the painter's scientific qualities but adding that 'naïveté' is what makes him complete: "Delacroix est, comme tous les grands maîtres, un mélange admirable de science, - c'est-à-dire un peintre complet, - et de naïveté, c'est-à-dire un homme complet" (Ibid 435).[403] Delacroix's 'naïveté', for example, explains why he succeeds in producing romantic art out of decorative painting: his channeling of Christianity's inherent melancholy sustains a certain unity of effect, achieved by his harmonization of colors, that naturally resolves formal problems of space and perspective.[404] Also resisting the stereotype that Delacroix's paintings were pure fantasy, Baudelaire grounds them in nature as well as in memory: "cette peinture, qui procède surtout du souvenir, parle surtout au souvenir" […].

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[402] Both André Ferran's edition of the *Salon de 1845* (Toulouse, 1933) and David Kelley's edition of the *Salon de 1846* (Oxford, 1975) are good resources for uncovering Baudelaire's primary influences, his principle theoretical concerns, and for highlighting Baudelaire's singularity as an art critic. Kelley shows how, avoiding Gautier's tendency to describe at length the external details of paintings, or Stendhal's concentration on the emotional effect of the painting on the viewer, Baudelaire "essaie surtout de transmettre une impression synthétique des qualités propres à l'univers intérieur de l'artiste qui se reflètent dans chacune de ses œuvres" (I.4). "Même lorsqu'il s'agit de Delacroix, Kelley rightly notes, "Baudelaire prête très peu d'importance aux tableaux exposés au Salon".

[403] In "Morale du joujou", Baudelaire stresses the near simultaneity of deliberation and action when recounting the moment when, as a child, he arrived at choosing just one toy from a whole roomful: "Avec cette admirable et lumineuse promptitude qui caractérise les enfants, chez qui le désir, la délibération et l'action ne font, pour ainsi dire, qu'une seule faculté, par laquelle ils distinguent des hommes dégénérés, en qui, au contraire, la délibération mange presque tout le temps, - je m'emparai immédiatement du plus beau, du plus cher, du plus voyant, du plus frais, du plus bizarre des joujoux" (*OC* I: 582).

[404] Between 1842 and 1846, Delacroix painted the circular ceiling of the Senate's new library at the Luxembourg palace.

[…] les chefs-d'oeuvre ne sont jamais que des extraits divers de la nature" (Ibid 434).[405] For Baudelaire, the mental operations that take place as the artist processes texts and his milieu, and not the specifics of subject matter, is what the romantic work of art captures:

> We can see that when a poet composes a text, his or her memory selects elements, or dynamic patterns, either from literary texts or from the visible world, transforms them, and assembles them in a mnemonic space, a metaphoric field, whose creative pressure or coherence is the consequence of the "generative idea" […]. (Nicolae Babuts 22)[406]

Delacroix's small but potent *Dante et Virgile* (1822) is, in this respect, a metaphor for the modern condition as it is portrayed in Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté*, what Baudelaire calls "le drame, - le drame naturel et vivant, le drame terrible et mélancolique, exprimé souvent par la couleur, mais toujours par le geste" (*OC* II : 441). Baudelaire's portrait of Delacroix is also reminiscent of Stendhal's ideal painter; Delacroix, like Michelangelo before him, processes Dante to express the "generative idea" of the human condition of sorrow and torment: "Comme le Dante, Michel-Ange ne fait pas plaisir, il intimide, il accable l'imagination sous le poids du malheur, il ne reste plus de force pour avoir du courage, le malheur a saisi l'âme toute entière. […] Ce n'est jamais l'objet qu'il nous montre, mais l'impression sur son cœur" (*Histoire de la peinture* 446-447).

The *Salon de 1845* was more descriptive in its contempt for art's current situation, but the *Salon de 1846* is prescriptive in two ways: first, it removes Hugo's poetry from its commonplace associations with romantic art; second, it emphasizes Stendhal's pronouncement that romantic art must incorporate "ce qui se passe tous les jours sous nos

[405] Kelley describes Baudelaire as having a "vision très personnelle de la réalité".
[406] *Baudelaire: At the Limits and Beyond* (Newark: U of Delaware Press, 1997). Resisting modern deconstructionist and structuralist theories, Babuts reclaims the unity of Baudelaire's self by focusing on the poet's processing of experience and memory.

yeux".[407] Reiterating the familiar complaint that Hugo focused on form at the expense of all the rest, Baudelaire, like Adolphe Thiers before him, underscores Delacroix's "imagination poétique".[408] While Hugo's poems are academic and "cold", Delacroix's paintings invite the viewer's faculties to be transported: "Si ma définition du romantisme (intimité, spiritualité, etc.) place Delacroix à la tête du romantisme, elle en exclut naturellement M. Victor Hugo" (Ibid 430). Delacroix, in distinction to Hugo, appropriates the mindset of the curious and impetuous child: "Ses œuvres, au contraire, sont des poèmes, et de grands poèmes naïvement conçus, exécutés avec l'insolence accoutumée du génie" (Ibid). Hugo is a painter in the artisanal sense of the word, but Delacroix possesses the suggestiveness of the poet whose visual effects paradoxically favor mystery: "Trop matériel, trop attentif aux superficies de la nature, M. Victor Hugo est devenu un peintre en poésie; Delacroix, toujours respectueux de son idéal, est souvent, à son insu un poète en peinture".[409]

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[407] In his second chapter "Qu'est-ce que le romantisme?", Baudelaire specifically refers to Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare*, whose third section is entitled "Ce que c'est que le romanticisme".

[408] Thiers wrote a favorable review of Delacroix in *Le Constitutionnel* (11 May 1822), which Baudelaire cites at length here. Tired of the same rhetoric passing back and forth, and somewhat tempering his acerbic tone in the previous *Salon*, Baudelaire seeks to hone his critical skills in the *Salon de 1846* and to provide a solid foundation for his writings on Delacroix: "En entrant dans cette partie, mon cœur est plein d'une joie sereine, et je choisis à dessein mes plumes les plus neuves, tant je veux être clair et limpide, et tant je me sens aise d'aborder mon sujet le plus cher et le plus sympathique" (Ibid 427). Baudelaire wants to appear as a serious critic rather than a gushing reviewer. This is what set Baudelaire apart from Gautier, who was often accused of being too generous in his reviews. What distinguishes Baudelaire even more from Gautier are the attacks he levels against Hugo. While Gautier praised Delacroix unreservedly, and also called attention to the painter's poetic sensibilities ("c'est un poète en même temps qu'un homme d'exécution"), this was not at the expense of the poet; Gautier even claims that Hugo's *Orientales* inspired Delacroix's paintings: "Son style est moderne et répond à celui de Victor Hugo dans les *Orientales*: c'est la même fougue et le même tempérament. – Le *Sardanapale* ressemble singulièrement au *Feu du ciel*, *le Massacre de Scio* à la *Bataille de Navarin*; les deux odes sont peintes comme les deux toiles. Une crudité fauve et splendide fait ressortir tous les tons, la touche a l'ardeur furieuse de la phrase" (Salon de 1836; in *Correspondances esthétiques sur Delacroix* 21).

[409] Michele Hannoosh has investigated Delacroix's 'poetry envy', arguing that Delacroix applied the properties customarily associated with poetry (above all, mobility) to painting. For Delacroix, "The pictorial must be reconsidered, reconceived in terms of the natural instability, the 'literary' temporality, of the imagination" (53). *Painting and the Journal of Eugène Delacroix* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995).

Baudelaire's ideal, however, depended on the fleetingness of modern life, and though Delacroix was in his view the preeminent Romantic, his paintings were by no means representations of modern subjects. Balzac, however, acknowledged that the familiar and contemporary – what *seemed* banal – was worthy of epic treatment.[410] Balzac follows the turbulent temperament of his century as well as the tension between the individual's heart and mind that Hugo seemed to have resolved. Balzac himself, while reiterating the general sentiment that Hugo was 'old' or out of style, went beyond formal questions when explaining Hugo's fall from a more authentic 1830s romanticism. After the *Burgraves* debacle, he wrote to Mme Hanska: "Il y a surtout une absence de *cœur* qui se fait de plus en plus sentir. Victor Hugo n'est pas *vrai* " (19 Mar. 1843 – emphasis Balzac's).[411] Likewise, in *Modeste Mignon*, the poet Canalis' talent lies only in the material aspects of his art, what the narrator calls "la sécheresse de cette nature si poétique par l'expression poétique seulement".[412] He continues: "La vérité de ce proverbe populaire, l'habit ne fait pas le moine, est surtout applicable à la littérature. Il

[410] Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (Salon of 1831), which represents street fighters in Paris during the July Revolution, is a notable exception but remained an anomaly. Besides, it reflects more the tradition of history painting in its emphasis on allegory. In the "Avant-Propos" to *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac distinguishes himself from traditional novelists and historians by accounting for *all* social facts rather than select ones: "J'accorde aux faits constants, quotidiens […], aux actes de la vie individuelle […] autant d'importance qu'alors les historiens en ont attaché aux événements de la vie publique des nations. J'ai eu cent fois à faire ce que Richardson n'a fait qu'une seule fois" (17). In the Pléiade edition of *La Comédie humaine*, vol.1.

[411] Balzac's full assessment of *Les Burgraves* fits the general consensus. The poetry was to be admired, but the subject matter and manner of presentation were not palatable for modern tastes: "J'étais à la première représentation des *Burgraves*. Il y a de la magnifique poésie, mais Victor Hugo est décidément resté l'enfant sublime, et ne sera que cela. C'est toujours les mêmes enfantillages de prison, de cercueil, d'invraisemblances de la dernière absurdité. Comme histoire, il n'en faut pas parler; comme invention, c'est de la dernière pauvreté. Mais la poésie enlève. C'est Titien peignant sur un mur de boue. […] Notre pays est fanatique du vrai; c'est le pays du bon sens. Il fait, dans un temps donné, justice de ses idoles". In *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, vol. 2 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1906).

[412] Published in 1844, only a year before the *Salon de 1845*, *Modeste Mignon* features the poet Canalis, who Maurice Regard aptly calls "le Tartuffe du sentiment, de la diction, de l'inspiration" (458). Canalis is an amalgam of stereotypically romantic poets (Lamartine, Vigny, with Chateaubriand and Musset mixed in), and Regard adds: "De Hugo Balzac a retenu le front démesuré et la conception du poète parleur d'idées, et même, sur le manuscrit, deux prénoms: Victor-Marie" (Ibid 460). *Modeste Mignon* is in the first volume of the *Comédie humaine* (Gallimard, 1976).

est extrêmement rare de trouver un accord entre le talent et le caractère" (518). Balzac's emphasis on 'heart' and 'truth' (in the sense of naturalness) echoes Stendhal's definition of romantic art, and in a review of *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1838), Balzac admires Stendhal's reduction of the intrigue to a simple "drame intérieur": "C'est le jeu de passions privées, voilà tout".[413] In this respect, Delacroix's *Dante et Virgile* complements Balzac's portraits of modern characters, lending them a "generative idea" that allows the seemingly mundane to be eternal. The narrator in *Modeste Mignon* observes: "la plupart des drames sont dans les idées que nous nous formons des choses".

Balzac was the perfect answer to Baudelaire's almost anxious presentiment at the end of the *Salon de 1845* that "l'héroïsme *de la vie moderne* nous entoure et nous presse", and that the "real" painter would be the one who will know how to "arracher à la vie actuelle son côté épique, et nous faire voir et comprendre, avec de la couleur ou du dessin, combien nous sommes grands et poétiques dans nos cravates et nos bottes vernies" (Ibid 407). Prefiguring his famous theory of modern art in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* by about fifteen years, Baudelaire takes two models of contemporary artists to form a dialectic between the eternal (Delacroix) and the transitory (Balzac). Both are needed to achieve the suggestiveness necessary for a renewal of romantic art: "Qu'est-ce que l'art pur suivant la conception moderne? C'est créer une magie suggestive contenant à la fois l'objet et le sujet, le monde extérieur à l'artiste et l'artiste lui-même" ("L'Art philosophique"; *OC* II : 598). Though Balzac "paints" familiar places and types, it is the general evocation of an atmosphere tainted by modern society's vices that unifies each volume. Processed through the artist's 'cerveau', an apparently mundane contemporary

[413] *La Revue parisienne* 3 (25 Sept. 1840). Goethe said of *Werther*, "I had lived, loved, and suffered much. That was it" (*Conversations with Eckermann*).

France appears as a new world that, as Baudelaire suggests in the *Salon de 1846*, the painting or novel attempts to translate: "La vie parisienne est féconde en sujets poétiques et merveilleux. Le merveilleux nous enveloppe et nous abreuve comme l'atmosphère; mais nous ne le voyons pas" (*OC* II: 496). This "merveilleux" lies in a latent state that waits for the workings of the artist's imagination and execution: "La nature", Delacroix wrote in his *Journal*, "a mis en dépôt dans les grandes imaginations futures plus de nouveautés à dire sur ses créations, qu'elle n'a créé de choses" (14 May 1824). Balzac echoes both Delacroix and especially Sainte-Beuve by using the more concrete image of the brain as the organ that mediates between the real and the 'merveilleux', between idea and execution, between illusion and disillusion: "dans les Arts la main de l'homme continue sa cervelle" (*Modeste Mignon* 518). The ideal artist renders the microcosm that takes shape in his skull: "Le cerveau, ses produits en tous genres […] sont un monde à part qui fleurit sous le crâne" (Ibid). By referencing the neckties and polished boots of modern life, Baudelaire is not calling for a realism subservient to details, but for the universal "metaphoric field" that evokes the underlying melancholy of the "heroism" of modern life. Balzac's novels explain why black, the color of mourning, is the contemporary shade of choice in fashion:

> Car les héros de l'*Iliade* ne vont qu'à votre cheville, ô Vautrin, ô Rastignac, ô Birotteau, - et vous, ô Fontanarès, qui n'avez pas osé raconter au public vos douleurs sous le frac funèbre et convulsionné que nous endossons tous; - et vous, ô Honoré de Balzac, vous le plus héroïque, le plus singulier, le plus romantique et le plus poétique parmi tous les personnages que vous avez tirés de votre sein! (*OC* II: 496)

Part II. The Romantic Imagination: "comme un cœur qui palpite…"

> Il rayonne ! il jette sa flamme
> Sur l'éternelle vérité !
> Il la fait resplendir pour l'âme

D'une merveilleuse clarté !
Il inonde de sa lumière
Ville et déserts, Louvre et chaumière,
Et les plaines et les hauteurs !
A tous d'en haut il la dévoile ;
Car la poésie est l'étoile
Qui mène à Dieu rois et pasteurs !
V. Hugo, "Fonction du poète", *Les Rayons et les Ombres*

Mais le lendemain! le terrible lendemain!
Baudelaire, *Les Paradis artificiels*

In *Modeste Mignon* and *Illusions perdues*, both published in this period, Balzac shows the extent to which poetry was threatened with extinction in the modern age. In the latter, when the protagonist Lucien Chardon visits a book seller in Paris, the reaction to his offer of a manuscript of sonnets is a genuinely surprised if hostile "Pour qui me prenez-vous?". Stendhal's theory of modern art played no small role in undermining the poet's ability to keep up with the times, or to capture the nuances of nature and human nature. Poetry, due to its formal exigencies and incapacity to 'color in', seemed increasingly irrelevant to a modern theory of art whose ideal was the immediate and natural representation of passion, modern life, and psychological drama. In *Histoire de la peinture*, Masaccio is the first painter to find expression because he lends his paintings not only a sense of flesh and blood, but also intellect and emotion: "Il faut des os, il faut du sang à la machine humaine pour qu'elle marche. Mais à peine prêtons-nous quelque attention à ces conditions de la vie pour voler à son grand but, à son dernier résultat: penser et sentir" (XX: 130).[414] The romantic artist's striving for the immediate expression of his 'pensée intime' seemed to require the more practical genres of painting

[414] Stendhal draws quite heavily from Diderot, who remarked on the challenge of the portraitist to capture likeness in his criticisms of Van Loo's portrait of Diderot: "J'ai un masque qui trompe l'artiste; soit qu'il y ait trop de choses fondues ensemble; soit que, les impressions de mon âme se succédant très rapidement et se peignant toutes sur mon visage, l'œil du peintre ne me retrouvant pas le même d'un instant à l'autre, sa tâche devienne beaucoup plus difficile qu'il ne la croyait" (*Salon de 1767* 82-83). In *Diderot et Baudelaire, critiques d'art*, Gita May has shown how Stendhal was an important intermediary between the art criticism of Diderot and Baudelaire (Geneva: Droz, 1973).

and the novel. In the "Avant-Propos" to the *Comédie humaine*, Balzac explains that his project's need to be carried out in prose is due to his principal subject of vice and all its complexities and detours; virtue, by contrast, only requires the static pose of a Raphael painting. Referring to Richardson's *Pamela*, he observes that "Lovelace a mille formes, car la corruption sociale prend les couleurs de tous les milieux où elle se développe" (17). "L'art moderne a une tendance essentiellement démoniaque," Baudelaire likewise noted ("Théodore de Banville"; *OC* II: 168).[415] For its part, painting had an advantage over poetry owing to its condensed form and fast brushstroke, the stamp of the eternal *and* the rapid speed of execution that together produced a greater effect or stimulus for "l'imagination la plus voyageuse". In a striking difference from Hugo's striving for visual exhaustiveness ("Il faut tout dire"), painting's very constraints lead to a powerfully evocative end product.[416]

By the early 1840s, as critics wondered what had happened to the dramatic and inventive lyric that Hugo once called for in the prefaces to *Cromwell* ("[l'auteur] a eu bien plutôt l'intention de défaire que de faire des poétiques" 98), there was the pervasive sense that romantic, or modern, poetry was in crisis.[417] It is not a surprise, then, that Baudelaire's first publication was a piece of art criticism, since talking about painting had

[415] Baudelaire, in a letter to his mother not long after the *Salon de 1846* appeared, even described the novel as "pure imagination" and expressed his desire to write one: "A partir du jour de l'an, je commence un nouveau métier, - c'est-à-dire la création d'œuvres d'imagination pure, - le Roman. Il est inutile que je vous démontre ici la gravité, la beauté, et le côté infini de cet art-là" (4 Dec. 1847; *Corr* I: 145).

[416] In a journal entry, Delacroix shows his concern for preserving the essence of what he calls the "vraie pensée", which requires saying less than more: "Quand j'ai fait un beau tableau, je n'ai pas écrit une pensée…L'écrivain dit presque tout pour être compris. Dans la peinture, il s'établit comme un pont mystérieux entre l'âme des personnages et celle du spectateur. Il voit des figures, de la nature extérieure ; mais il pense intérieurement, de *la vraie pensée* qui est commune à tous les hommes : à laquelle quelques-uns donnent un corps en écrivant : *mais en altérant son essence déliée*. Aussi les esprits grossiers sont plus émus des écrivains que des musiciens ou des peintres" (8 Oct. 1822 – emphasis mine).

[417] In the introduction to *La Poésie de Baudelaire*, Robb illustrates how romantic poetry had become conventional: "Les poètes obéissent à des conventions relativement peu nombreuses qui gouvernent non seulement la versification et les formes poétiques, mais aussi les idées, les images, les phrases elles-mêmes" (10).

become a way to assert poetic sensibilities. J.A. Hiddleston describes Baudelaire's predilection for the more concentrated and powerful effects of painting as resulting from a new strain of romanticism that had its roots in Sainte-Beuve:

> La nouvelle poésie romantique, sous l'impulsion que lui donne Sainte-Beuve dans *Les Poésies de Joseph Delorme*, use de plus en plus de moyens propres à la peinture, art éminemment concret et suggestif. De même que chez Delacroix le drame spirituel se traduit concrètement dans et par l'agitation des formes et des étoffes et par le jeu des couleurs, dont la fonction n'est nullement documentaire, de même la poésie, en passant des épanchements romantiques à l'évocation de sensations, développe une force suggestive beaucoup plus grande. (188)[418]

Curiously, Hiddleston leaves out Hugo's famously picturesque, or painterly, *Orientales*. Baudelaire may have been making every effort to leave Hugo out of the romantic equation, but the paradox remained that what he wanted to achieve as a poet was what Hugo had already performed; Sainte-Beuve, after all, had described *Les Orientales* as a major achievement of French romantic poetry.[419] Baudelaire, I argue, wants to revive the tension between the picturesque (the finite) and song (the infinite) that Hugo had lost, but, against the grain of a century preoccupied with the novel, in the medium of poetry.[420] The following sections, by examining the specific ways that Baudelaire recaptured a genuine Hugolian imagination, will examine how he seeks to contain its threatened

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[418] "Baudelaire et l'art du souvenir", in '*Les Fleurs du mal': L'Intériorité de la forme* (Paris: SEDES, 1989): 187-195. Like Babuts, Hiddleston sees Baudelaire's poems as processing literary and cultural traditions that, through the more concentrated effects derived from painting (images, immediacy), he renders more illuminated for the reader's memory. He explores this in more length in the more recent *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (1999; op. cit.).

[419] In his preface to *La Double vie* (1859), Charles Asselineau wrote: "Le brouillard du marais bourgeois est tombé, et sur le sommet de la montagne, c'est toujours *La Comédie humaine*, *Les Orientales*, *Stello*, *Volupté*, *La Comédie de la mort* ". A friend and collaborator, Asselineau had been in frequent close contact with Baudelaire from the start of his career. Baudelaire wrote a review of and annotated the preface for *La Double vie*, a collection of short stories (see *OC* II: 92-102). The passage cited here is left unmarked, suggesting that Baudelaire agreed, or, at the very least, had no strong objections. Given his correspondence and critical essays on literature from this later period, Baudelaire's list would have no doubt been quite similar.

[420] "*Ah ! pourquoi suis-je né dans un siècle de prose* !", Baudelaire cries in his notes for "L'Art philosophique" (*OC* II: 607).

essence. I will then show how these conflicting impulses operate in certain poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, as the poet makes the case for an original lyric whose freshness depends on memory.

1. "Le Coucher du soleil romantique"

While enjoying a period of convalescence at his mother's house in Honfleur, Baudelaire informed his editor Poulet-Malassis that, "pour remettre mon cerveau à l'endroit", he has just reread Chateaubriand's *Les Natchez* out of his extreme disenchantment with the century: "Je deviens tellement l'ennemi de mon siècle que *tout*, sans en excepter une ligne, m'a paru sublime" (29 Apr. 1859; *Corr* I: 568). Baudelaire's rereading not only of Chateaubriand, but of an earlier Gautier, reflects the artist's emulation of the child's brain in "Morale du joujou" that was meant to revive a now barely discernible romantic lyric tradition. Tellingly, Baudelaire's reading of what he viewed as genuinely romantic works occurred at the moment when he was drafting his modern urban poems ("Le Cygne", "Les Sept vieillards", "Les Petites vieilles"): "Nouvelles *Fleurs du mal* faites. A tout casser, comme une explosion de gaz chez un vitrier" (Ibid).

Yves Vadé has examined the irony in using romantic expression, despite its apparent "newness", to reflect the poet's effort to recuperate what has long been lost: "Genre écrit se présentant comme parole: le lyrisme romantique s'inscrit d'abord dans cette contradiction" ("L'Emergence du sujet lyrique" 12). Lamartine is at the forefront of Vadé's analysis because of the poet's emphasis on musicality: "le sujet lyrique lamartinien semble ne point 'chanter' en poète professionnel qui entonnerait une ode (à la manière d'Hugo dans son premier recueil), mais simplement en homme sensible donnant

l'illusion de se confondre avec l'auteur lui-même" (Ibid 13). If Hugo comes into this discussion of the viability of lyric poetry in the nineteenth century, however, it is specifically in reference to *Les Contemplations*, where he performs the sacrifice of the self's voice for the sake of the "'je' poétique" (language): "L'émergence d'une voix lyrique se confond avec cet effacement du sujet" (73).[421] Hugo's determining contemplation comes at a cost that he accepts in advance: "Traverser le tumulte, la rumeur, le rêve, la lutte, le plaisir, le travail, la douleur, le silence; se reposer dans le sacrifice, et, là, contempler Dieu" (Preface to the *Contemplations*: 26).[422] Though the apocalyptic but penultimate poem "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre" leads to the intimate "A celle qui est restée en France" (a poetic headstone in remembrance of his daughter Léopoldine), his meditation on his daughter's untimely death points to peace, silence, and far-off horizons: "Dormez, vous qui saignez; dormez, vous qui pleurez! / Douleurs, douleurs, douleurs, fermez vos yeux sacrés!" (VIII.37-38). There is no sustained evocation of the pleasure-pain of 'volupté', nor of the poet's consciousness of the limits of the imagination, and the poet relinquishes any contact with with his surroundings: "Paix à l'Ombre! Dormez! dormez! dormez! dormez!" (VIII.21). No voice, however, can express what happens in the aftermath of this silence, and responding to a question he formulates at the beginning of his essay on *Les Fleurs du Mal* – "Qu'a inventé Baudelaire, dans l'art, qui le distingue de Hugo?" (31) – Yves Bonnefoy later suggests that this sacrifice of the voice for discourse led to a void for which Baudelaire had to somehow dramatically compensate: "Le mensonge du discours est qu'il supprime l'excès. Il est lié au concept, qui cherche dans l'essence des choses qu'elles soient

[421] Dominique Rabaté, "Enonciation poétique, énonciation lyrique". Rabaté's study, like Vadé's, is in *Figures du sujet lyrique* (op. cit.).
[422] *Les Contemplations*, ed. Pierre Laforgue (Paris: Flammarion, 1995).

stables et sûres, et purifiées du néant. L'excès, lui, est le craquement de l'essence, oubli de soi et de tout, joie autant que souffrance par néant" (30-31).[423] For Bonnefoy, Hugo's sense of plenitude and fulfillment ("Toujours nous arrivons à cette solitude, / Et, là, nous nous taisons, sentant la plénitude !" VIII.19-20) needed a swift call back to reality: "Le concept cache la mort" (Ibid 32).

Hugo's sacrifice of "poésie" for the "poème" was directly related to his utopian political ideals. Preserving poetry in the nineteenth century, which for Hugo came in the form of melding it into a homogenizing process of democratization, meant silencing its song; his voice was now just one of the masses, a universal chorus as opposed to a unique refrain: "Nul de nous n'a l'honneur d'avoir une vie qui soit à lui. Ma vie est la vôtre, votre vie est la mienne, vous vivez ce que je vis; la destinée est une" (Preface to *Les Contemplations* 26). But just as Baudelaire rejected the ideals of the self's harmony with nature, of eternal rest, or of the artist's pursuit of the infinite, he also resisted the intrusion of politics into the lyric poem. Writing to Nadar "La politique, mon cher ami, est une science sans coeur" (16 May 1859; *Corr* I: 579), he made it a point in his poems to preserve the heart's rhythm and recuperate a sense of intimacy. He does not associate the heart with sentimentality, which he scorned, but understands it in the metaphoric sense of vitality or essence; the heart represented the lost but essential component of the lyric's 'volupté'. "Le Coucher du soleil romantique" is Baudelaire's famous illustration of the "coeur qui palpite", the symbol of the systolic-diastolic action of the imagination that had once kept the romantic lyric robust:

> Je me souviens!...J'ai vu tout, fleur, source, sillon,
> Se pâmer sous son œil comme un cœur qui palpite…
> - Courons vers l'horizon, il est tard, courons vite,

[423] "*Les Fleurs du Mal*", in *L'Improbable et autres essais* (Mercure de France, 1959).

Pour attraper au moins un oblique rayon! [424]

2. The Bottle to the Essence: Baudelaire's Containing of the Imagination

Hugo's emblematic "Tristesse d'Olympio" (*Les Rayons et les Ombres*), which features the fluctuating poetic imagination, would have no doubt served as a significant object of Baudelaire's remembrance.[425] The poem narrates Hugo's turn to a landscape of personal significance, but also his turn to Lamartine's meditation on loss in "Le Lac".[426] While Lamartine had sacrificed the landscape and the memory it contained for the projection of his voice beyond the horizon, Hugo's poet insists on the landscape's specific characteristics, as well as on its ironic plenitude and brilliance:

> Les champs n'étaient point noirs, les cieux n'étaient pas mornes;
> Non, le jour rayonnait dans un azur sans bornes
> Sur la terre étendu,
> L'air était plein d'encens et les prés de verdures (1-4)[427]

There is something charged and 'voluptuous' about this apparently idyllic scene:

> Il entendait frémir dans la forêt qu'il aime
> Ce doux vent qui, faisant tout vibrer en nous-même,
> Y réveille l'amour, (25-27)

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[424] "Le Coucher du soleil romantique" is the opening poem of *Les Epaves* (Brussels, 1866), a collection mainly comprised of Baudelaire's condemned poems from the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857). It was first published in 1862 (*Le Boulevard*, 12 Jan.).

[425] Though Baudelaire never refers to the poem specifically, he would have known it well: "Il constitue, en effet, une des pièces majeures du romantisme français des années 1820 à 1840, sous son aspect le plus connu" (Albouy; *OP* I: 1577). "Tristesse d'Olympio" was one of the poems selected for Eugène Crépet's anthology *Les Poëtes français* (1861-1863), for which Baudelaire wrote an essay on Hugo. Despite his reserves concerning Hugo's lack of poetic sensibilities, Charles Magnin singled out the poem as one of the notable exceptions in his review of *Les Rayons et les Ombres* (op. cit.).

[426] Lamartine's poem had recounted a missed encounter, while Hugo's relates his solitary pilgrimage to 'le hameau des Metz', a cottage located close to his family's summer retreat at Les Roches that his mistress Juliette Drouet had occupied. Hugo and Drouet met each day in the summer of 1834.

[427] The meter as well as the descriptive strategy at the beginning of Hugo's poem resonates strongly with Lamartine's "Poésie, ou Paysage dans le golfe de Gênes" (*Les Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, 1830):

> La lune est dans le ciel, et le ciel est sans voiles;
> Comme un phare avancé sur un rivage obscur,
> Elle éclaire de loin la route des étoiles
> Et leur sillage blanc dans l'océan d'azur. (1-4)

However, the moonlight playing upon a wavering ocean in Lamartine's poem, represented by a frequently changing meter, turns into an insistent sun striking a "fixed" valley in Hugo's poem. The irony of sunshine in a landscape pervaded with the poet's melancholy anticipates Baudelaire's "Le Cygne".

An even deeper irony, however, lies in the poet's appropriation of nature's generative but destructive forces: he establishes his own creative energy, figured several times as a pulsating heart, as eternally fecund. Unlike Lamartine, who cast his eyes upward but never did make meaningful contact with what lay beyond the horizon, Hugo instead penetrates his immediate surroundings to get to the "âme" that serves as a mollifying shadow to the cruel sun. The poet's creative agency, like the flow of the Seine in "La Pente de la rêverie", takes the form of a bleeding heart that spreads throughout the landscape-poem:

> L'air était plein d'encens et les prés de verdures
> Quand il revit ces lieux où par tant de blessures
> Son cœur s'est répandu ! (4-6)

The poet thus redeems the hemorrhaging wound of memory with the fluid insistence of his language. The reciprocity between lake and sky, as well as between all the changing forms in the landscape and the linear ravine, are the result of a "long contemplation":

> Il contempla longtemps les formes magnifiques
> Que la nature prend dans les champs pacifiques ;
> Il rêva jusqu'au soir ;
> Tout le jour il erra le long de la ravine,
> Admirant tour à tour le ciel, face divine,
> Le lac, divin miroir ! (37-42)

In response to the destruction always threatened by nature's workings ("Dieu nous prête un moment les prés et les fontaines […] Puis il nous les retire" 127-131), Hugo suggests plenitude even as the blood spills:[428]

[428] Throughout *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, urns, ponds, and fountains abound. In the pivotal "Tristesse d'Olympio", while the poet wonders whether the urn "encor conservait la liqueur" (the urn not only serving as a metaphor for memory, but for the poet's essence, or his language), the final lines of the final poem, "Sagesse", answer in the affirmative: the half-formed verse that the poet carries "en mon esprit" will be completed by the scent of the plains, the cloud's shadow and the "bruit des fontaines" (288). But in "Tristesse", Hugo still sustains the tension.

"Ô douleur! j'ai voulu, moi dont l'âme est troublée,
Savoir si l'urne encor conservait la liqueur,
Et voir ce qu'avait fait cette heureuse vallée
De tout ce que j'avais laissé là de mon cœur ! (49-52)

The poet's emphasis on liquid (pond, lake, fountain, tears, flood, blood, streams, oasis) gradually fills "ce désert si beau" (110).

The poem's featured voice, which Lamartine in "Le Lac" had displaced to his absent lover's ghostly soliloquy, now comes from the poet himself as he gazes at the landscape. The poet does not seek to suspend time, but, on the contrary, he underscores an imagination that is in the process of developing and performing on the landscape.[429] The rhythm of the poem is steady and sustained (alexandrines for the most part), and free of Hugo's customary mannerist use of the enjambment; in addition, the use of the imperfect tense, along with allusions to the act of walking ("Pâle, il marchait"; "il erra le long de la ravine"; "il erra tout le jour") as well as the adverb "jusqu'au" ("Il rêva jusqu'au soir"), insist on time's gradual passing and the corresponding workings of the creative faculty. Hugo emerges from Lamartine's impasse by emphatically accepting nature's impulse to change:

Eh bien! oubliez-nous, maison, jardin, ombrages!
Herbe, use notre seuil ! ronce, cache nos pas!
Chantez, oiseaux! ruisseaux, coulez! croissez, feuillages!
Ceux que vous oubliez ne vous oublieront pas. (135-138)[430]

His meditation on absence does not merely seek to recapture a past memory, but the mysterious source of memory itself:

"Comme quelqu'un qui cherche en tenant une lampe,
Loin des objets réels, loin du monde rieur,

[429] Perhaps the most famous line from all of Lamartine's poetry is the "O temps, suspends ton vol!" emitted by his absent lover.
[430] The end of "Le Lac," which is in the form of a prayer that requires the repeated use of the subjunctive, leaves us much less reassured.

> Elle arrive à pas lents par une obscure rampe
> Jusqu'au fond désolé du gouffre intérieur ;
>
> Et là, dans cette nuit qu'aucun rayon n'étoile,
> *L'âme, en un repli sombre où tout semble finir,*
> *Sent quelque chose encor palpiter sous un voile…*
> *C'est toi qui dors dans l'ombre, ô sacré souvenir !*" (159-166 – emphasis mine)

The faint lamp leads to the bleeding heart (memory) that still faintly beats: "Mais toi, rien ne t'efface, Amour!" (147). In a crucial distinction to Lamartine, Hugo's use of the ellipsis does not signify the unfinished or the vague, but the time that passes between his contemplation of nature and what he uncovers from it ("sous un voile"). Although he is enclosed in a "gouffre intérieur", the poem's final destination of the "sacré souvenir" necessarily recalls the physical landscape. Mystery depends on external contingencies, and throughout the poem, the imagination processes the interplay between the observation of movements in nature, the stirrings of love, and stored mental images.

Baudelaire, eager to recapture the sensual interaction between the artist and his surroundings, as well as the melancholy that arises from the conflict between present moment and memory, remobilizes the dynamic that Hugo sustained in "Tristesse d'Olympio" in much more concentrated form. At the heart of the first section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* ("Spleen et Idéal") lie, precisely, Baudelaire's figurations of hearts that spill out only to pull their fluid back in.[431] These poems form the heart of the tension that operates in "Spleen et Idéal," in which the expansions of the poet's 'rêveries' are

[431] "L'Harmonie du soir", "Le Flacon" and "Le Poison" were first published together, among a few others, in the *Revue française* (20 Apr. 1857); in the same year, they again appeared together, in the same order, in the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (43, 44, 45 out of 77 in "Spleen et Idéal"). They are also poems 43-45, but out of 85, in the 1861 edition. The point is to show that Baudelaire never separated them, and that they serve in both editions as a crux to the first section.

continually deflated by memory or reality.[432] In "Harmonie du soir", I argue, this reality can be intepreted as the setting sun of romanticism that well anticipates "Le Coucher du soleil romantique". The poem prominently features flowers, the symbol of Baudelaire's own art, whose scent's evaporation serves as a metaphor for expiring romantic tropes (nature, music, sunsets, Catholic objects of worship): "Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir" (2, 5). In the form of a pantoum that recalls through repetition, the poem evokes an age at its apex that saw the publication of Hugo's *Orientales* (1829).[433] This is the moment just before decline, a charged moment of 'volupté' before its fated dissipation: "Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige / Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir" (1-2). Music, or the lyre, is at its most expressive. Heart and voice are one: "Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige" (6). The poet confuses past and present, as all of the verbs in the poem are in the present tense (the ongoing) with the exception of 'noyer' (finality): "Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige" (12, 14). An echo of 'vertige', the 'fige' fixes the potentially disorienting vertigo, while the rays of the sun's light congeal into a scab that resists the disk's decline. The "valse" gives form to the "vertige" of the violin's music; likewise, the monstrance and the incense burner contain as much as they release (or display) the memory of the sacred. An embodiment of a lost Communion that is heavily underscored by its tight form, the poem preserves

[432] In "L'Ouverture des *Fleurs du Mal*", James Lawler describes this perpetual movement of contraction and decontraction: "Le conflit de l'énergie spirituelle et de l'ironie crée le mouvement fondamental, le rythme essentiel qui est comme la systole et la diastole de la pensée". In *Dix études sur Baudelaire*, ed. M. Bercot and A. Guyaux (H. Champion, 1993).

[433] Baudelaire was no doubt inspired by Hugo's note on the 'pantoum' for the poem "Nourmahal la Rousse" in *Les Orientales*. The pantoum is composed of a series of quatrains, where the second and fourth lines of each stanza are repeated as the first and third lines of the next, until the last stanza. See Dominique Billy, "'Harmonie du soir' et la postérité formelle de la note XI des 'Orientales'", in *Studi francesi* 50 (Jan.-Apr. 2006): 73-90.

and contains this heightened moment. If the sun has declined, the memory of it shines forth within the poet himself:

> Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
> Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige !
> Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige…
> Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir ! (13-16)

Through the figure of the monstrance, the poet has recaptured the "sacré souvenir" left behind in Hugo's "Tristesse d'Olympio". If romanticism is expiring under the sway of Hugo's color-drained metaphysical poetry, Baudelaire's 'true blue' romantic heart ("Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir") beats on.

The following poem "Le Flacon" also features the poet's containing and sensualizing of a more genuine romantic lyric. Like Hugo's *Orientales* of thirty years before ("un coffret venu de l'Orient / Dont la serrure grince et rechigne en criant" 3-4), the perfume that the bottle contains is old but still strong due to its intense concentration: "Il est de forts parfums pour qui toute matière / Est poreuse. On dirait qu'ils pénètrent le verre" (1-2). No matter how faded it may seem ("dans une maison déserte quelque armoire / Pleine de l'âcre odeur des temps, poudreuse et noire"), the perfume that remains in the old bottle subsists and still triggers the imagination:

> Voilà le souvenir enivrant qui voltige
> Dans l'air troublé ; les yeux se ferment; le Vertige
> Saisit l'âme vaincue et la pousse à deux mains
> Vers un gouffre obscurci de miasmes humains; (13-16)

In distinction to "Harmonie du soir", "Le Flacon" is more substance oriented and self-referential. Emblematic objects in "Harmonie" that emitted wavering notes or rays (the flower, the violin, the sun) now concentrate into the extracted and potent material of perfume. Vestiges of sacred myth still remain in "Harmonie", but in a process of

compression that moves from hymn to the concentration of perfume, the poet now secularizes and personalizes the theme of memory. The monstrance mediated in "Harmonie", but the poet now explicitly compares himself to a perfume bottle that contains the essence of a lost love. The perfume bottle, in turn, symbolizes the poet's mind that encapsulates memory and whose matter mediates between a present of loss and a past of voluptuousness. A residue of the imagination that works to negotiate the interpenetration of past and present, the perfume is at once material and vaporous. The mind's potent but latent energy is dramatized as shadow and light, sleep and flight, and ethereal and material collude. Colors emerge out of a substance whose properties otherwise attract smell:

> Mille pensers dormaient, chrysalides funèbres,
> Frémissant doucement dans les lourdes ténèbres,
> Qui dégagent leur aile et prennent leur essor,
> Teintés d'azur, glacés de rose, lamés d'or. (9-12)

Mobile in its immobility, colorful in its darkness, the "mille pensers" heighten memory into a persistent presence. And like a perfume that has once been smelled, this memory comes as close as possible to capturing the original impression or experience: "Parfois on trouve un vieux flacon qui se souvient, / D'où jaillit toute vive une âme qui revient" (7-8). The poet reminds his readers that this essence is still there, and that it will be his enduring function to preserve it:

> Ainsi, quand je serai perdu dans la mémoire
> Des hommes, dans le coin d'une sinistre armoire
> Quand on m'aura jeté, vieux flacon désolé,
> Décrépit, poudreux, sale, abject, visqueux, fêlé,
>
> Je serai ton cercueil, aimable pestilence!
> Le témoin de ta force et de ta virulence,
> Cher poison préparé par les anges! liqueur
> Qui me ronge, ô la vie et la mort de mon cœur! (21-28)

At once salubrious and poisonous, this perfume-poison reestablishes the romantic dynamic that Hugo had dissolved, but now with exclusive emphasis on its effects on the body and mind. In the form of a poem, it is Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté* in its most concentrated and hence more powerful form. In "Le Flacon", which centers on the matter of the 'cerveau', we arrive at a point where the two impulses of expansion (perfume) and contraction (poison) coincide.[434] The mind is the hinge that must mediate these conflicting movements, or that must always remain conscious of the inevitable return of disillusionment. This return is precisely what happens, and with striking effect, in the following poem "Le Poison". The poem enacts the running thesis of Baudelaire's *Paradis artificiels*, where the infinite expansion induced by intoxicants (which are often portrayed as producing the same effects as the imagination) meets a cruel and abrupt end: "Hélas! les vices de l'homme, si pleins d'horreur qu'on les suppose, contiennent la preuve (quand ce ne serait que leur infinie expansion!) de son goût de l'infini; seulement, c'est un goût qui se trompe souvent de route" (*OC* I: 402). Even more focused on the body than "Le Flacon", this poem moves from the imagination's colorful workings of the mind to the spleen-inducing physical response that they provoke. The first two stanzas again highlight concentrated substances - wine and opium – but, in distinction to the perfume, they lead to physical harm more than to melancholy musings. Baudelaire continues the process of concentration, moving from the ethereal to the body: the refrains

[434] Mira Levy-Bloch shows how these opposing movements take form in a later poem, "Le Jet d'eau" (1865), where the jet figures "la conscience du poète qui circule dans le monde afin de se retrouver, de connaître son MOI, mais ne le trouve jamais définitivement, puisque le mouvement du jet d'eau est éternel" (48). Levy-Bloch illustrates how the structure of the poem reflects this dynamic. See "Le mouvement de l'imagination baudelairienne", *Dalhousie French Studies* 16 (Spring-Summer 1989): 37-63. "Le Jet d'eau" is very similar to "Le Flacon" and "Le Poison" in its emphasis on eyes, liquid, and the symbiotic relationship between 'volupté' and melancholy: "Votre pure mélancolie / Est le miroir de mon amour" (35-36).

of the violin, the rays of the setting sun, the scent of perfume, the dreams inspired by opium, all of these condense into the stark and imposing reality of a pair of reflecting eyes. The containing body of the perfume bottle morphs into the eyes of the lover who, in turn, produces the poet's source of spleen:

> Tout cela ne vaut pas le poison qui découle
> De tes yeux, de tes yeux verts,
> Lacs où mon âme tremble et se voit à l'envers…
> Mes songes viennent en foule
> Pour se désaltérer à ces gouffres amers. ("Le Poison" 11-15)

Yet, the process of concentration continues further. While the tears, though poisonous, quench his proverbial thirst and inspire his dreams, the poisonous fluid in the following stanza becomes the saliva that brings poet and lover into physical contact: "Tout cela ne vaut pas le terrible prodige / De ta salive qui mord" (16-17). More than the self-reflexive gaze, Baudelaire moves beyond this Petrarquian trope to the terrible reality of a destructive kiss (for which saliva is a repulsive metonymy).[435] As in Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté*, as in Stendhal's portrait of the artist, and as in Baudelaire's account of Delacroix's struggle between 'naïveté' and 'volonté, the poison comes from the poet himself as he falls prey to illusion. The romantic poet, always subject to this self-inflicted poison, is thus always in a state of convalescence:

[435] Baudelaire also plays with romantic tropes here: bodies of water, as he discusses in *Les Paradis artificiels*, are often represented by artists who, like those under the influence of hashish, have the "ivresse cérébrale" of expansive imaginations. Not only does "Le Poison" bring the poet back to his own memories, but in terms of lyric poetry, to Lamartine's lake ("Le Lac") and Hugo's ravine ("Tristesse d'Olympio"). Baudelaire's "gouffre", however, appears in the ironically tiny form of tearing eyes ("gouttes") and drops of saliva, representing a brusque and potent return to reality that corresponds to his warnings concerning the false sense of grandeur and mystery provided by these reflecting bodies: "L'eau s'étale comme une véritable enchanteresse, et, […] je n'affirmerais pas que la contemplation d'un gouffre limpide fût tout à fait sans danger pour un esprit amoureux de l'espace et du cristal, et que la vieille fable de l'Ondine ne pût devenir pour l'enthousiaste une tragique réalité" (*OC* I: 431-432). Baudelaire makes an allusion here to Goethe's poem "The Fisherman", in which the narcissistic protagonist (the contemplator of water sees his own image) falls victim to the seduction of the sea. As I will discuss in more detail below, Goethe would be a significant source for Baudelaire's preservation of consciousness in the creative imagination.

> Or, la convalescence est comme un retour vers l'enfance. Le convalescent jouit au plus haut degré, comme l'enfant, de la faculté de s'intéresser vivement aux choses, même les plus triviales en apparence. Remontons, s'il se peut, par un effort rétrospectif de l'imagination, vers nos plus jeunes, nos plus matinales impressions, et nous reconnaîtrons qu'elles avaient une singulière parenté avec les impressions, si vivement colorées, que nous reçûmes plus tard à la suite d'une maladie physique, pourvu que cette maladie ait laissé pures et intacts nos facultés spirituelles. L'enfant voit tout en *nouveauté* ; il est toujours *ivre*. ("Le Peintre de la vie moderne"; *OC* II: 690)

The poison is the ironic "resetting of the brain", or the poet's emulation of the child's fresh mental processing, that is necessary for the romantic lyric to be sustained. It ensures the preservation of the perfume (the color- and scent-producing matter of the mind) that would otherwise evaporate. Baudelaire's ideal was not mystical reunion or transcendence – the poison serves as a reminder – but an art that always sustains an awareness of this lingering residue.

Part III. Baudelaire's "fêtes du cerveau": The Imagination as Faculty

> Nature, enchanteresse sans pitié, rivale toujours victorieuse, laisse-moi !
> Baudelaire, "Le *Confiteor* de l'artiste"

By the mid-1850s, as realist theories of art began to have serious currency (Champfleury had been promoting Courbet since 1848, and his journal *Le Réalisme* appeared in 1856), Baudelaire stressed even more urgently the modern artist's preservation of unique expression. Reiterating the critical importance of 'naïveté' with increased vigor in the *Exposition universelle* of 1855, Baudelaire attacks philosophical or ideological systems that produce works of art devoid of feeling and intelligence. Again echoing Stendhal, Baudelaire's seemingly simple approach to art is ironically fraught with difficulty: "Pour échapper à l'horreur de ces apostasies philosophiques, je me suis orgueilleusement résigné à la modestie: je me suis contenté de sentir; je suis revenu

chercher un asile dans *l'impeccable naïveté*" (*OC* II: 578 – emphasis mine). Art is not the translation of nature on canvas, but that of a cerebral energy, or what occurs "sous le ciel du crâne" as it processes nature: "La Poésie est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, c'est ce qui n'est complètement vrai que dans un autre monde" ("Puisque réalisme il y a"; *OC* II: 59).[436]

As the stakes got higher, Baudelaire theorized an imagination that, lodged in the brain more than the heart, was even faster and more powerful in its effects. Symbolized by light rather than a viscous fluid, the imagination was a medium between the world and "another world" more than the evocation of feeling. This section will examine Poe's influence on Baudelaire's theory of the imagination, and show how a more physiological and analytical approach to art enabled a romantic aesthetic to speak more directly to modern sensibilities. To remain eternal, Delacroix needed to be processed not only through the poet's acute sense for melancholy (sentiment), but through his highly perceptive and active mind: "Comme la nature perçue par des nerfs ultra-sensibles, elle [la peinture de Delacroix] révèle le surnaturalisme" (Ibid 596). Art's expression tires and wounds more than it provides pleasure, as Baudelaire suggests in an unsigned notice to the first version of *Les Fleurs du Mal*: "Ce qui nous paraît ici mériter l'intérêt, c'est l'expression vive et curieuse *même dans sa violence* de quelques défaillances, de quelques douleurs morales que, sans les partager ni les discuter, on doit tenir à connaître comme un des signes de notre temps" (emphasis mine).[437]

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[436] It has been determined that Baudelaire's notes on Realism date from the same year as the *Exposition universelle* (*OC* II: 1109-1110). As he does to Hugo in the *Salon de 1845*, Baudelaire faults Champfleury not so much for his theories, but for how they contaminated certain artists (notably, Courbet) and formed a cult: "Le canard lancé, il a fallu y croire" (Ibid 57).

[437] This first version appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1 Jun. 1855), the same year as the *Exposition universelle*. The poem "Le Guignon", which appears in this first version, stresses the enormity of the

Equipped with Poe's writings, Baudelaire began to reflect more on the role of the artist's mind, condemning artists who adhered to systems as "lazy" due to what he viewed as their uncritical enterprise:

> Le sacrifice héroïque que M. Ingres fait en l'honneur de la tradition et de l'idée du beau raphaélesque, M. Courbet l'accomplit au profit de la nature extérieure, positive, immédiate. Dans leur guerre à l'imagination, ils obéissent à des mobiles différents ; et deux fanatismes inverses les conduisent à la même immolation. (Ibid 586)

In his early *Salons*, "volonté" stood for the artist's deliberateness in matters of execution, but now Baudelaire applied the term to the artist's awareness of how the imagination operates in the brain more than how it is translated on canvas. For Baudelaire, Poe's rigorous attention to form *and* analysis exemplified best the performance of the artist's mind in both its relinquishing of discourse and synthesizing of experience.[438] Poe analyses 'perverseness', for example, in the same way that Sainte-Beuve explores 'volupté': in an inductive manner, both rely only on empirical evidence of these conditions' destabilizing effects when seeking to establish their ultimately inexplicable cause:

> Of this spirit [PERVERSENESS] philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart – one of the indivisible primary

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artist's task in facing these "douleurs" along with the century's emphasis on systematic progress. Again, the heart is not enough:

> Pour soulever un poids si lourd,
> Sisyphe, il faudrait ton courage !
> Bien qu'on ait du cœur à l'ouvrage,
> L'Art est long est le Temps est court. (1-4)

[438] Paul Valéry stresses the degree to which Poe inspired the role of the "intelligence critique" in Baudelaire's concept of the imagination: "Le démon de la lucidité, le génie de l'analyse, et l'inventeur des combinaisons les plus neuves et les plus séduisantes de la logique avec l'imagination, de la mysticité avec le calcul, le psychologue de l'exception, l'ingénieur littéraire qui approfondit et utilise toutes les ressources de l'art, lui apparaissent en Edgar Poe et l'émerveillent" ("Situation de Baudelaire" 131).

> faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. ("The Black Cat" 599)[439]

Since he never strayed from the movements of the heart *and* mind, Poe had the best hold on the creative imagination, and Baudelaire desperately wished to emulate this grasp to counter what he viewed as trite styles and vacuous philosophies: "Par une concentration extrême de sa pensée, et par l'analyse successive de tous les phénomènes de son entendement, il est parvenu à surprendre la loi de la génération des idées" (*OC* II: 276).[440] As Poe's narrator declares in "Mesmeric Revelation": "Abstractions may amuse and exercise, but take no hold on the mind. Here upon earth, at least, philosophy, I am persuaded, will always in vain call upon us to look upon qualities as things. The will may assent – the soul – the intellect, never" (718). Baudelaire thus interpreted Poe's imagination, not as an arbitrary producer of fantasy, but as a mediating agent that the artist must strengthen and hone. "Du sein d'un monde goulu, affamé de matérialités, Poe s'est élancé dans les rêves" (*OC* II: 321), but he nonetheless submits "l'inspiration à la méthode, à l'analyse la plus sévère" (Ibid 331).[441] Not only did Poe's art mediate between artist and nature, but between the artist and his own mind.

Poe provided a model for a refreshed romanticism that preserved contemporary art from the succumbing to sentimentality, metaphysical jargon, and systems. Nature on its own was not enough, but neither was the heart or philosophy. Jonathan Culler has shown, for example, that Poe's "aesthetics of compression" provided an effective way for Baudelaire to circumvent Hugo: "Baudelaire's invention of Poe is part of an attempt to

[439] All references to Poe are from *Poetry, Tales & Selected Essays* (The Library of America, 1996).
[440] *Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages* (1852).
[441] *Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe* (1857).

displace Hugo and leave a place for his own poetry" ("Baudelaire et Poe" 65).[442] Culler focuses on the succinct form of Baudelaire's prose poems, but his general point is that Baudelaire's attraction for Poe "lies above all in the combination of a romantic discourse with a lucidity permitting a critique of that discourse" (Ibid 69). Baudelaire's affinity for Poe, then, not only has to do with formal questions, but is also rooted in a theory of the imagination that refuses to abandon the artist's consciousness. Baudelaire "compresses" the imagination, which had become a bulky and awkward concept in modern philosophy and aesthetic theory, and situates it in the poet's active brain. His increasing emphasis on 'correspondances' and 'analogie universelle' present the imagination as an inductive faculty that synthesizes the mind's workings into a unified impression, which suggests a "monde nouveau d'idées, monde qui fera partie intégrante de lui-même" (*OC* II: 576).[443] In a revealing letter to Alphonse Toussenel, Baudelaire qualifies what might otherwise seem to be an unabashed pronouncement of literary mysticism by insisting on the mediating role of the poet's intelligence, or scientific faculties: "Il y a bien longtemps que je dis que le poète est *souverainement* intelligent, qu'il est *l'intelligence* par excellence, - et que *l'imagination* est la plus *scientifique* des facultés, parce que seule elle comprend l'analogie universelle, ou ce qu'une religion mystique appelle la *correspondance*" (21 Jan. 1856; *Corr* I: 336).

As James Lloyd Austin shows, however, Baudelaire did not unreservedly adopt Swedenborg's postulated unity of spirit and matter. In fact, Austin demonstrates the intense struggle Baudelaire underwent when aiming to meet this ideal, and shows how his poem "Correspondances" enact failure: "La réalité lui refuse les moyens d'atteindre

[442] In *Abhandlung: Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* (100): 61-73.
[443] *Exposition universelle* (1855).

l'idéal entrevu dans l'extase initiale" (*L'Univers poétique de Baudelaire* 99).[444] Showing how Baudelaire extracts out of things rather than grasps at an invisible sphere of conjecture, Austin continues: "Il ne s'agit plus d'une symbolique qui, voyant dans la nature une théophanie, extrairait, presque mécaniquement, et selon un programme édifiant prescrit à l'avance, les images d'une réalité céleste, mais d'un symbolisme plus libre, plus créateur, cherchant à pénétrer le 'mystère de la vie', à tirer la 'morale des choses'" (163). More recently, Karin Westerwelle has argued that Baudelaire's essay on Wagner, which she reads alongside of Baudelaire's essay "L'Art philosophique", is an implicit critique rather than an endorsement of "l'intelligibilité universelle": "L'intérêt principal de l'article sur Wagner consiste en la problématique de la construction de l'universel comme structure de la conscience" (125).[445] Locating a rupture in the transition from quatrains (Nature as a symbolic structure) to tercets (nature itself) in the famous "Correspondances", Westerwelle, like De Man and Culler, notes a shift from vertical to horizontal correspondences in which the poet's processing of the world – rather than the achievement of unity of nature with a mystical universe – becomes the site of focus: "Baudelaire est engagé dans un processus de 'traduction' beaucoup plus précis

[444] Austin provides a brief history of the theory of correspondences in the first part of his study (I.1). Balzac, especially his *Louis Lambert* (1832), was an important source for propagating theories of the symbol and "l'illuminisme swedenborgien". Austin demonstrates how Baudelaire distilled Swedenborg's theory of correspondences into questions of art: "Après un salut à Swedenborg et à Lavater, Baudelaire généralise enfin ces idées d'analogie, de correspondances et de physiognomonie en se servant de termes qui relèvent exclusivement de l'esthétique, et surtout de l'esthétique littéraire, voire de la rhétorique" (164-165).

[445] "Baudelaire, critique de Wagner: Le Problème des 'Correspondances'", in *Baudelaire et l'Allemagne, l'Allemagne et Baudelaire* (Paris: H. Champion, 2004): 117-147. Notably, there is an explicit shift in Baudelaire's Wagner essay from the tracing of 'volupté's movements to the analysis of 'volupté': "Je résolus de m'informer du pourquoi, et de transformer ma volupté en connaissance avant qu'une représentation scénique vint me fournir une élucidation complète" ("Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris"; *OC* II: 786).

et détaillé: les facultés de l'âme, l'imagination comme faculté réceptive ou force productive et le souvenir entrent en jeu" (Ibid 141).[446]

An immense *a posteriori* intellectual exercise, Baudelaire's imagination creates a world by extracting from the one that is already there. This process of extraction becomes the running theme of the *Exposition universelle* of 1855:

> Tout le monde conçoit sans peine que, si les hommes chargés d'exprimer le beau se conformaient aux règles des professeurs-jurés, le beau lui-même disparaîtrait de la terre, puisque tous les types, toutes les idées, toutes les sensations se confondraient dans une vaste unité, monotone et impersonnelle, immense comme l'ennui et le néant. La variété, condition *sine qua non* de la vie, serait effacée de la vie. (*OC* II: 578)[447]

Emphasizing that the mind procceses nature, recalls memories, and thus resists the expansion of fantasies and ideals, Baudelaire (re)adopts a model of the imagination that recognizes human contingencies. Like Chateaubriand, Stendhal, and Sainte-Beuve, Baudelaire points to the spontaneous feelings that arise from the individual's experience of his surroundings. Yet, Baudelaire goes further by "dissecting" these landscapes and subjecting them to an analysis of their "complex truth":

> Peu d'hommes ont, - au complet, - cette grâce divine du cosmopolitisme; mais tous peuvent l'acquérir à des degrés divers. Les mieux doués à cet égard sont ces voyageurs solitaires qui ont vécu pendant des années au fond des bois, au milieu des vertigineuses prairies, sans autre compagnon que leur fusil, contemplant, disséquant, écrivant. Aucun voile scolaire,

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[446] De Man ("Anthropomorphism and Trope") and Jonathan Culler ("Intertextuality and Interpretation: Baudelaire's 'Correspondances'"), both point to the poem's ironic treatment of romantic tropes. Culler argues that the *Exposition universelle* raises "the question about the incompatibility of works of art and aesthetic doctrine", thereby signalling that the poem cannot be read as affirming the "so-called doctrine of vertical correspondences". In *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry* (op. cit.): 118-137. While De Man and Culler's studies focus on tropes and language, at stake for Westerwelle is Baudelaire's emphasis on the artist's faculties, or what she calls a "subjectivité ironique".

[447] This passage supports Culler's argument that the poem "Correspondances" is in fact a critique of Swedenborg's metaphysical doctrine:

> 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. (5-8 – emphasis mine)

> aucun paradoxe universitaire, aucune utopie pédagogique, ne se sont interposés entre eux et la complexe vérité. (Ibid 576)[448]

This destruction, however, levels new terrain for the expression of the artist's way of seeing and processing reality. The Realists, in Baudelaire's view, were smug in their pretense of capturing a literal nature on canvas, as if there were no drama of tension between the artist and his subject, and more crucially, between the artist and his own mind. This "real" but opaque reality interferes at every turn, and Baudelaire describes the difficult conversion process of creating a new world by using the analogy of "un homme du monde, un intelligent" who navigates a distant country:

> Si l'accoutumance est plus ou moins longue, plus ou moins laborieuse, la sympathie sera tôt ou tard si vive, si pénétrante, qu'elle créera en lui un monde nouveau d'idées, monde qui fera partie intégrante de lui-même, et qui l'accompagnera, sous la forme de souvenirs, jusqu'à la mort. (Ibid)

As his letter to Toussenel states, the century's faith in progress (of which the school of Champfleury and Courbet was symptomatic) amounts to a paradoxically artificial doctrine that overrides the human condition of errancy and decrepitude: "Toutes les hérésies auxquelles je fais allusion tout à l'heure ne sont, après tout, que la conséquence de la grande hérésie moderne, de la doctrine *artificielle*, substituée à la doctrine naturelle,

[448] Chateaubriand serves as a good example of this solitary voyager. Filled with preconceived notions and expectations, there are several occasions in his *Voyage en Italie* (1804) where, upon opening a window, the narrator is overwhelmed not by the view itself but by his particular state of mind as he contemplates the view. Each opening of the window parallels Baudelaire's resetting of the brain: "Aussitôt que le jour a paru, j'ai ouvert mes fenêtres. Ma première vue de Tivoli dans les ténèbres était assez exacte ; mais la cascade m'a paru petite et les arbres que j'avais cru apercevoir, n'existaient point". Each viewing of a landscape provokes the mind's synthesis of various experiences, or what Baudelaire calls "la complexe vérité" : "Le lieu est propre à la réflexion et à la rêverie: je remonte dans ma vie passée; je sens le poids du présent, et je cherche à pénétrer mon avenir". A key factor in Chateaubriand's processing of these scenes is the recent death of a close friend; as Maurice Regard points out, Chateaubriand's travel memoirs match no other of the period because of his representation of mind over matter: "Chateaubriand dépasse la technique littéraire ou les simples habitudes visuelles" (in *Œuvres romanesques et voyages*, vol. 2). Rousseau, particularly his *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, is an important source in his general meditation on this problem of interferences (memory, experience) and how they impede any predetermined discourse or, in the case of Chateaubriand and particularly Baudelaire, a particular style or aesthetic.

- je veux dire la suppression de l'idée du *péché originel*" (*Corr* I: 337).[449] The doctrine of original sin is of course theological, but it corresponds nonetheless to what might be called an 'original' and *undoctrinaire* romantic imagination rooted in the mysterious workings of the brain as it filters the artist's time and place:

> *Le beau est toujours bizarre.* […] Je dis qu'il contient toujours un peu de bizarrerie, de bizarrerie naïve, non voulue, inconsciente, et que c'est cette bizarrerie qui le fait être particulièrement le Beau. […] Or, comment cette bizarrerie, nécessaire, incompressible, variée à l'infini, dépendante des milieux, des climats, des mœurs, de la race, de la religion et du tempérament de l'artiste, pourra-t-elle jamais être gouvernée, amendée, redressée, par les règles utopiques conçues dans un petit temple scientifique quelconque de la planète sans danger de mort pour l'art lui-même ? (*Exposition universelle*; *OC* II: 578-579)

Here reclaiming Hugo's famous allowance for the 'laid' or 'bizarre' in the work of art for the sake of capturing a truer reality (preface to *Cromwell*), Baudelaire now uses the same argument to expose Hugo as having "progressed" into an Ingres or a Courbet, or "un grand poète sculptural qui a l'oeil fermé à la spiritualité" (Ibid 593). Baudelaire's spirituality, however, is not a desire for purification or transcendence, but implies instead

[449] Toussenel, author of *L'Esprit des bêtes: Le monde des oiseaux, ornithologie passionnelle* (1853-1855) – a copy of which he sent to Baudelaire – was a disciple of Fourier. While for the Fouriéristes the correspondences between humans and nature, and between humans and a "loi supérieure" (Love), were a given (Toussenel writes in his introduction to *L'Esprit des bêtes: zoologie passionnelle*: "Les sages ont appelé cette puissance passion, du mot latin *pati*, qui veut dire subir, pour exprimer l'idée de la passivité de l'homme et de son obéissance forcée à la loi supérieure" 3), Baudelaire insists in response that the imagination is a mediator that struggles to form these correspondences. In his letter, Baudelaire also reveals his disdain for the Fouriéristes' 'passive' faith in progress: "Qu'est-ce que le *Progrès indéfini* ! qu'est-ce qu'une *société* qui n'est pas aristocratique !" (Ibid 336). The word 'aristocratique' is an important indicator that Baudelaire had an affinity for Chateaubriand's 'dandysme', or sense of detached control; when referring to Chateaubriand in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire writes: "Le dandysme, qui est une institution en dehors des lois, a des lois rigoureuses auxquelles sont strictement soumis tous ses sujets, quelles que soient d'ailleurs la fougue et l'indépendance de leur caractère" (*OC* II: 709). In *Voyage en Italie*, Chateaubriand makes it clear that he does not let himself get caught up in the "buzz" and excitement of Italy's already legendary tourist spots; he admits to having been once carried away by the "charms" of nature while traveling in America, but now, similar to Baudelaire's presentation of Poe, he concentrates on the "puissantes réflexions" that certain places inspire. Both Poe and Chateaubriand, by extension, have nothing to do with Lamartine or Musset's romanticism: "Ils n'ont pas assez de volonté et ne sont pas assez maîtres d'eux-mêmes" (*Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages*; Ibid 274).

the recognition of human perverseness. Baudelaire's 'laid' is the attribute of curiosity: "Victor Hugo connaissait-il ce mot?" he asks facetiously in one of his essays on Poe.[450]

Omitting myths, ideologies and borrowed philosophies, Baudelaire thus condenses Swedenborg's emphasis on vertical correspondences into the microcosm of the mind's turbulent energy.[451] And, though he inherited Chateaubriand's belief in the spiritually demoralizing effects of contemplating nature, he instead secularizes this experience and emphasizes the resulting physiological responses and mental processes that form the "matter" for producing a new work of art. Referring to Baudelaire's prose poem "Les Fenêtres", Babuts examines Baudelaire's intense focus on the mind's transformation of reality that in fact never leaves this reality behind:

> More than anything else, it is a statement about a cognitive experience, which mimics its own production. The narrator is more intent on marking the stresses of the mitotic division between the material and the symbolic chromosomes of reality, that is, the transformations of reality within the bounds of his experience, than of telling the story of the woman. (45)[452]

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[450] In *Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages* (*OC* II: 272). Baudelaire asks this question in the past tense because, as the notes in the Pléiade edition indicate, the word appears in *Marion de Lorme* when the jester L'Angely exclaims "Je vis par curiosité". The link between original sin and Baudelaire's theological variant of Hugo's model of the 'beau' and the 'laid' is established straightaway in the dedicatory poem of *Les Fleurs du mal*:

> Nos péchés sont têtus, nos repentirs sont lâches;
> Nous nous faisons payer grassement nos aveux,
> Et nous rentrons gaiement dans le chemin bourbeux,
> Croyant par de vils pleurs laver toutes nos taches. ("Au lecteur" 5-8)

[451] In his notes to the *Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe* (1857), Jean-Luc Steinmetz also explains how Baudelaire made doctrines on the theory of correspondences his own. If "les correspondances et les analogies" are "mots familiers pour Baudelaire, l'un venant de Swedenborg, l'autre de Fourier, il saura en faire une doctrine originale" (in *Ecrits littéraires*, 2005).

[452] While Hugo created legends that move from earth to the skies ("Le mendiant" comes to mind, where a poor man's hole-ridden clothes appear as constellations to the narrator; *Les Contemplations*, V.9), Baudelaire's legend in "Les Fenêtres" depends on his viewing of the woman and the cognitive process that transforms this viewing: "Avec son visage, avec son vêtement, avec son geste, avec presque rien, j'ai refait l'histoire de cette femme, ou plutôt sa légende". There is no transcending what he sees through his window, which is a closed and illuminated figure that mirrors the poet's active mind ("Dans ce trou noir ou lumineux vit la vie, rêve la vie, souffre la vie") but a translation of his imagination. Théodore de Banville points out in his 1885 essay (op. cit.) that, while Hugo pities victims who appear almost as allegories (the jester, the prostitute, the servant), Baudelaire's subjects are more real and his pity thus more profound: "le poète des *Fleurs du mal* plaint tout ce qui vit et respire" (384).

Much like the effects of stimulants in Baudelaire's *Paradis artificiels*, the effects of hypnotism or "mesmerism" described by Poe involve a sensory intensification of the real world - "the external organs of sense, yet perceives, with keenly refined perception, and through channels supposed unknown, matters beyond the scope of the physical organs" (717) - whose process is lodged in the brain.[453] In "Mesmeric Revelation" (notably, the first Poe story that Baudelaire translated), the brain clearly mediates, or provides 'correspondences', between the sensible and supersensible.[454] As in Baudelaire (though more concerned with science than aesthetics), achieving this mediation requires multiple processes, organs, and faculties:

> You will have a distinct idea of the ultimate body [God] by conceiving it to be entire brain. This it is not; but a conception of this nature will bring you near a comprehension of what it *is*. A luminous body imparts vibration to the luminiferous ether. The vibrations generate similar ones within the retina; these again communicate similar ones to the optic nerve. The nerve conveys similar ones to the brain; the brain, also, similar ones to the unparticled matter which permeates it. The motion of this latter is thought, of which perception is the first undulation. This is the mode by which the mind of the rudimental life communicates with the external world; and this external world is, to the rudimental life, limited, through the idiosyncrasy of its organs. But in the ultimate, unorganized life, the external world reaches the whole body, (which is of a substance having affinity to the brain, as I have said,) with no other intervention that that of an infinitely rarer ether than even the luminiferous; and to this ether – in unison with it – the whole body vibrates, setting in motion the unparticled matter which permeates it. It is to the absence of idiosyncratic organs, therefore, that we must attribute the nearly unlimited perception of the ultimate life. To rudimental beings, organs are the cages necessary to confine them until fledged. (725)

[453] Baudelaire describes the effects of hashish as "absolument rien que le naturel excessif" (*OC* I: 409), and those of opium as a concentration of "ce qui a été disséminé" (Ibid 466).
[454] The translation appeared in *La Liberté de penser* (15 July 1848). In his introduction to the work, Baudelaire emphasizes Poe's "règlement de l'inspiration" and how Poe and authors such as Diderot, Laclos, Hoffmann, Goethe and Balzac "décalquent la nature, la pure nature. – Laquelle? – La leur" (*OC* II: 247). This reiterates Balzac's emphasis on the work of art as a translation of the microcosm of the brain, or what Baudelaire describes in the *Salon de 1846* as "le laboratoire étroit et mystérieux du cerveau".

Likewise, in the domain of aesthetics, the point of Baudelaire's *Exposition universelle* is to fledge all "rudimental" artists who base art on doctrine. Combining Poe's emphasis on intellect with Delacroix's suggestive aesthetic gives him an effective way to "compress" the sequence of the artist's encounter with an object and the resulting mental operations it triggers. In the opening paragraphs, Baudelaire sets up a scenario in which the imagination would best be stimulated: what would the modern Winckelmann say in response to a "produit chinois"?[455] What, in other words, would a "poète sculptural" (Hugo) discover in a "produit étrange, bizarre, contourné dans sa forme, intense par sa couleur, et quelquefois délicat jusqu'à l'évanouissement?" (*OC* II: 576). The answer depends on this imaginary Winckelmann's willingness to "reset" the brain and then produce something out of this sudden and bizarre encounter. With this interaction of "naïveté" and "volonté", the imagination – a medium like luminferous ether, which connects the subject with the "luminous body" of the mind – becomes the initially destabilized but almost immediately afterwards responsive faculty that traces the psychological effects of the sudden or curious event.[456] The romantic artist is not a wide-eyed child, but an "homme du monde" who also rapidly deliberates and synthesizes as he receives impressions: "la sympathie sera tôt ou tard si vive, si pénétrante, qu'*elle créera en lui un monde nouveau d'idées* […] " (*OC* II: 576 – emphasis mine).

[455] Winckelmann (1717-1768) was the famous German neo-classicist who centered his theories of art on ancient sculpture and the 'beau idéal'. This passage is again reminiscent of "Morale du joujou", where the child is suddenly confronted with a toy. In "Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages", Baudelaire describes Poe as having "le cerveau fécond de l'enfance" (Ibid 258).

[456] Many of Poe's stories are motivated by this process. In "The Black Cat", the author is able to reason and write even though his nerves are rattled:

> The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity. (598-599)

Delacroix once again meets Baudelaire's criteria for the modern and creative artist; only, in the *Exposition universelle*, instead of being paired with Balzac and his depiction of a transient modern life, he is now filtered through Poe's concern with the mind's workings: "Et remarquez bien que ce n'est jamais par la grimace, par la minutie, par la tricherie de moyens, que M. Delacroix arrive à ce prodigieux résultat; mais par l'ensemble, par l'accord profond, complet […]" (Ibid 596). Impression and execution are almost simultaneous, since Delacroix's brain is disposed to producing a harmonious effect:

> On dirait que cette peinture, comme les sorciers et les magnétiseurs, projette sa pensée à distance. Ce singulier phénomène tient à la puissance du coloriste, à l'accord parfait des tons, et à l'harmonie (préétablie dans le cerveau du peintre) entre la couleur et le sujet. Il semble que cette couleur, qu'on me pardonne ces subterfuges de langage pour exprimer des idées fort délicates, pense par elle-même, indépendamment des objets qu'elle habille. (Ibid 595)

Due to Delacroix's compressing impulse, his imagination does not expand or relinquish the experience of nature to the idea of the infinite, but rather condenses nature's infinite possibilities into an amplified and unique reality. Toward the end of the *Exposition universelle*, Baudelaire, with the aid of Poe's theory of the supernatural as the imagination's heightening of the external world, describes how Delacroix translates this process on canvas:

> […] qui n'a connu ces admirables heures, véritables fêtes du cerveau, où les sens plus attentifs perçoivent des sensations plus retentissantes, où le ciel d'un azur plus transparent s'enfonce comme un abîme plus infini, où les sons tintent musicalement, où les couleurs parlent, où les parfums racontent des mondes d'idées ? Eh bien, la peinture de Delacroix me paraît la traduction de ces beaux jours de l'esprit. (Ibid 596)

Baudelaire's repeated use of the adverb "plus", as well as the prefixes "re", "sur", and "ultra" represent the energy of the mind that leads to the artist's original perception.

Freed from all metaphysical theories and schools of art – as well as without the aid of artificial stimulants – the physical workings of the imagination lead to an original and unique representation of the world through the artist's intense scrutiny of objects and natural phenomena. For Baudelaire, the imagination is "real" in its perpetual resistance and opacity, of its interplay of light and shadow: "Tout bon poëte fut toujours *réaliste*" ("Puisque réalisme il y a"; *OC* II: 58).

Part IV. "Tableaux parisiens": The Romantic Imagination's 'Sturm und Drang'

> Ville qu'un orage enveloppe.
> V. Hugo, "A l'Arc de Triomphe", *Les Voix intérieures*

I will show in this final section that Baudelaire's "Tableaux parisiens" represent the poet's critical story of the imagination, or the shift from an imagination that traces the heart's rhythms to the mind's tumultuous processing of memory and experience. Concentrating on the mind's faculties and their impact on Baudelaire's lyric poetry, rather than the role of history (Benjamin) or language (Chambers), I will show how Baudelaire foregrounds the "cerveau" in his claim for a refreshed imagination. The poet's nostalgia for romanticism may be fetishized in this later period, but he is also bitterly resigned: Baudelaire, by 1859, presents romanticism as a memory rather than a tenable aesthetic.[457] In *Au-delà du romantisme* (1998), Michel Draguet taps into the most melancholy aspect of Baudelaire's later writings on art: "A partir de 1855 Baudelaire fera de Delacroix l'ultime fleuron d'une tradition désormais inconciliable avec une conscience contemporaine" (34). Though as late as 1859 Baudelaire still pines for the ruin- and lake-

[457] Susan Blood detects this shift: "All this faith in youth and the potential of the times is lost to the *Salon de 1859*. The old tolerance of aesthetic failure…has become a condemnation. […] Romanticism itself is no longer spoken of as a fresh and timely expression, but as a memory" (818). "Baudelaire Against Photography: An Allegory of Old Age", *Modern Language Notes* CI (1986): 817-837.

filled romantic landscapes in the manner of Paul Huet or Chateaubriand, he also proposes a neo-romantic landscape of the city. It is in Paris that the artist can best represent "l'intime du cerveau" due to a highly charged mind that is refreshed at every turn. The suggestion of atmosphere was no longer enough, and Baudelaire looks to represent the microcosm of the "working brain" (Keats): "Harnachements, scintillements, musique, regards décidés, moustaches lourdes et sérieuses, tout cela entre pêle-mêle en lui; et dans quelques minutes, le poème qui en résulte sera virtuellement composé" (*Le Peintre de la vie moderne*; *OC* II: 693).

Before turning to the "Tableaux parisiens" to show how he enacts this raw and "livewire" imagination in the form of poetry, I will first show how Baudelaire distilled existing theories of imagination – drawing particularly from Poe, Coleridge, and Goethe – into one that dispenses with all mediation between the artist and his brain's processing of experience. With a rejuvenated mind of a convalescent that has healed from the opium-like effects of swollen systems, the Baudelaire of 1859 is equipped with a sharpened consciousness of his immediate surroundings. Baudelaire articulates his sense of having possession of the imagination even when confronted by the "chaos" of clouds or of the city: "Le vertige senti dans les grandes villes est analogue au vertige éprouvé au sein de la nature. – Délices du chaos et de l'immensité" (*OC* II: 607).[458] But surface is not enough; even more a"hero" of modern life than the sketch-artist Constantin Guys, it is Baudelaire who can produce a *poem* out of Paris by translating, not only the city's "délices", but also the cerebral aftershocks they induce. The high level of

[458] "Notes diverses sur 'L'Art philosophique'".

experimentation in “Tableaux parisiens” deconstructs the lyric, while the poet at the same time blinds the eye in his powerful dramatization of the poet’s “fêtes du cerveau”.[459]

1. The Imagination Distilled

Though it is well known that Poe was Baudelaire’s most important influence, less acknowledged are Poe’s own sources and how they influenced Baudelaire indirectly but significantly. Poe, for example, inherited Coleridge’s philosophy of art in which the imagination unifies the ‘working of the mind’. The imagination, as Baudelaire is likewise careful to observe, is not pure fantasy but a synthetic process in which the mind discerns the hidden unity in the world: “L’Imagination est une faculté quasi divine qui perçoit tout d’abord, en dehors des méthodes philosophiques, les rapports intimes et secrets des choses, les correspondances et les analogies” (*Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe*; *OC* II: 329). Nor does the imagination amount to the accumulation of knowledge, but to an ‘a posteriori’ train of thought that the artist translates into the strongest impression possible: “Les honneurs et les fonctions qu’il confère à cette faculté lui donnent une valeur telle (*du moins quand on a bien compris la pensée de l’auteur*), qu’un savant sans imagination n’apparaît plus que comme un faux savant, ou tout au moins comme un savant incomplet” (Ibid – emphasis mine). Freed from discourse, the imagination is endlessly creative; in Coleridge’s words: “As soon as it [the mind] is fixed on one image, it becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination…*The grandest efforts of poetry are where*

[459] Ulrich Baer, asking whether “blindness could serve as the basis of poetic experience itself”, provides a critique of de Man that accounts for Benjamin’s grounding of Baudelaire’s poetic experience in history: “What this productive tension involves, at bottom, is that the poet should empty his eyes of the sights offered by the world in order to seize that world all the more strongly” (110). See *Remnants of Song: Trauma and Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan* (Stanford, 2000), especially chapter 3: “Blindess and the Sky”.

the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected" (*Shakespearean Criticism* – emphasis mine).[460] The point is not to say that Baudelaire drew directly from Coleridge, because there is little evidence that he did,[461] but rather to highlight Baudelaire's similar double gesture of relocating an imagination that is both psychological and metaphysical into the workings of the brain itself, and of applying the faculty's powers of combination above all to poetry.[462]

Baudelaire thus deconstructed and resynthesized the faculty of the imagination itself. More than any other French romantic poet, Austin shows, Baudelaire was familiar with an amalgam of different theories of the imagination that circulated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: "Plus qu'aucun des quatre grands poètes romantiques français, Baudelaire est l'héritier de la tradition poétique illustrée par Goethe, Schiller, et leurs successeurs en Allemagne, et par Wordsworth and Coleridge,

[460] Cited in Engell (op. cit.), 353.

[461] Baudelaire implicitly reveals his knowledge of Coleridge with his reference to Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) in the *Salon de 1859*. Like Poe, Crowe investigates supernatural phenomena and the theory of correspondences. Baudelaire quotes a passage that echoes Coleridge's *Biographia literaria*, in which he distinguishes 'fancy' from the "esemplastic power" of the 'imagination': "'By imagination, I do not simply mean to convey the common notion implied by that much abused word, which is only *fancy*, but the *constructive* imagination, which is a more higher function, and which, in as much as man is made in the likeness of God, bears a distant relation to that sublime power by which the Creator projects, creates, and upholds his universe'" (*OC* II: 624). Baudelaire uses this citation to defend his own theory of the imagination that is based on the creative capacities of the mind. However, it should be pointed out that Baudelaire's theory of the imagination, as I am stressing here, is based on an amalgam of theories and artists and is not only inspired by Crowe but nuanced by Poe, Delacroix, Goethe, and other precursors. Richard Beilharz examines the distinction between Baudelaire and Crowe in more detail, as well as the distinction between Crowe and Coleridge. In an important difference, Crowe does not distinguish between a 'primary' (creative) and 'secondary' (dissolving) imagination, but Baudelaire - like Coleridge – does. Pichois' notes on Crowe in the Pléiade edition are helpful for tracing the different strands of theories of imagination that Baudelaire may have inherited from Crowe (*OC* II: 1393-1394), as is Beilharz's article "*Fantaisie* et *Imagination* chez Baudelaire, Catherine Crowe et leurs prédécesseurs allemands" (in *Baudelaire: Actes du colloque de Nice*, op. cit.: 31-40).

[462] Contrary to Beilharz's skepticism, Garnet Rees (op. cit.) compellingly argues that Baudelaire's theory of the imagination is inherited primarily from Coleridge, at least as it was handed down to him by Poe and Crowe. We know from a letter that he had at least planned on reading Coleridge: "Je n'ai pas oublié votre Coleridge," he wrote to Sainte-Beuve, "mais je suis resté un mois sans recevoir mes livres, et parcourir les 2 400 pages de Poe est un petit travail" (21 Feb. 1859; *Corr* I: 554).

Byron, Shelley et Keats en Angleterre" (155).[463] Baudelaire, as Poe had done with Coleridge's philosophy of art, thus continues the process of "compressing" theories into a unified one of his own. And to an even greater extent than Coleridge and Poe, he highlights the impact of the exterior world on the synthesizing mental faculties of the creative imagination. Goethe, in this respect, seems to be a particularly important source for Baudelaire's more mature writings and poems.[464] In *Conversations with Eckermann*, Goethe shares with his protégé what he believes to be the foundation of good poetry:

> The world is so great and rich, and life so full of variety, that you can never want occasions for poems. But they must all be *occasioned*, that is to say, reality must give both impulse and material. A particular event becomes universal and poetic by the very circumstances that it is treated by a poet. All my poems are occasioned poems, suggested by real life, and having therein a firm foundation. I attach no value to poems snatched out of the air. (18 Sept. 1823; 7)[465]

[463] Austin also points out that Victor Cousin and Théodore Jouffroy, through Sainte-Beuve, would have served as important intermediaries. Engell's lengthy study culminates with Coleridge because "In forming the concept of the imagination, Coleridge draws on nearly every other writer who discussed the subject" (328). "Others," Engell continues, "wrote pages on its proper and philosophic definition, but Coleridge distills, connects, and adds to the background with which he was so familiar". Similarly, as Alexander Schlutz shows, the metaphysics-phobic Poe reduced Coleridge's "philosophical method" to the workings of a plot: "while relying on Coleridgean ideas outlined in the *Biographia Literaria* and *The Friend*, [Poe] thoroughly remakes its unacknowledged sources, hiding a dependency that is ultimately a springboard to something new" (196-197). See "Purloined Voices: Edgar Allan Poe Reading Samuel Taylor Coleridge", *Studies in Romanticism* 47 (Summer 2008): 195-224.

[464] Austin notes: "Baudelaire est très proche de Goethe dans sa conviction que l'art suppose une étroite collaboration entre l'esprit humain et le monde extérieur" (145).

[465] Trans. John Oxenford (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984). Johann Eckermann transcribed the conversations he had with Goethe over the course of almost ten years. In *The Creative Imagination*, Engell shows how Goethe and Keats shared 'elective affinities', since both were attracted to as much as they were wary of the imagination's capacity to remove the subject from the 'real world': "A central theme in both poets is the individual imagination caught in the intractable conditions of a fallen world, a theme that includes the involvement of the poet in his art and the struggle of his self-conscious imagination to escape its own subjectivity, so tempted by the ease of self-expression in poetry, and to attain some sort of objectivity or truth" (278). Engell notes how both Keats's "Odes on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale" similarly point out the limit between reality and dream and "catch the imagination as it is questioning itself" (294). "Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is famed to do, deceiving elf" ("Ode to a Nightingale" 73-74). Keats in particular seems to foreshadow Baudelaire with his emphasis on the mind as a brain: "A rosy sanctuary will I dress / With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain" ("Ode to Psyche" 59-60).

A French translation of the *Conversations* appeared in 1863, for which Sainte-Beuve wrote a preface.[466] Citing one of his previous articles on the German poet, Sainte-Beuve reiterates Goethe's focus on reality by calling attention to his curiosity (what Baudelaire would call 'naïveté'), and by describing his creative process as the extraction of poetry out of the given world: "Grand naturaliste et poète, il étudie chaque objet et le voit à la fois dans la réalité et dans l'idéal. […] Goethe tirait de la poésie de tout; il était curieux de tout".[467] Goethe's creative imagination, in other words, seems to inform Baudelaire's.[468] Even anticipating Baudelaire's famous dialectic of the fleeting and the eternal, Goethe formulates a critical tenet outlined in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*:

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[466] *Conversations de Goethe pendant les dernières années de sa vie, 1822-1832*, 2 vols., trans. Emile Delerot (Paris: Charpentier, 1863). It was not a coincidence that Sainte-Beuve wrote the preface for this particular work, since much of Goethe's exposure to French literature in the late 1820s came from Sainte-Beuve himself: as the *Conversations* indicate, Goethe was an avid reader of *Le Globe*, a journal to which Sainte-Beuve contributed frequently.

[467] Sainte-Beuve cites his review of the *Lettres de Goethe et de Bettina* (1843), which appears in the *Causeries du lundi* (vol. 2) and is dated 29 Jul. 1850; it is possible that Baudelaire was familiar with this entry. In his important letter to Toussenel, cited above, Baudelaire explains that his "esprit philosophique" was an important factor in his art: "J'ai un esprit philosophique qui me fait voir clairement ce qui est vrai, même en zoologie, bien que je ne sois ni chasseur, ni naturaliste. – Telle est du moins ma prétention ; - ne faites pas comme mes mauvais amis, et n'en riez pas" (*Corr* I: 336). However, Baudelaire is sure to add that he sees nature, not through the tenets of doctrine, but through the eyes of a poet ; nature is idealized according to the individual's way of seeing: "L'*homme raisonnable* n'a pas attendu que Fourier vînt sur la terre pour comprendre que la Nature est un *verbe*, une allégorie, un moule, un *repoussé*, si vous voulez. Nous savons cela, et ce n'est pas par Fourier que nous le savons ; - nous le savons par nous-mêmes, et par les poètes" (Ibid 337).

[468] In his preface, Sainte-Beuve faults those who blamed Goethe's mixed reviews on Hugo, which appear throughout the *Conversations*, on literary rivalry. Though Goethe praised Hugo's later editions of the *Odes et Ballades* ("He has much objectivity" and "excellent images"), he scorned *Notre-Dame de Paris*. "Il n'aimait pas la littérature qui fait dresser les cheveux sur la tête," Sainte-Beuve explains, and in a not-so-subtle indictment of Hugo's contemporary works, he continues: "Que n'aurait-il [Goethe] pas ajouté et dit, s'il avait assez vécu pour lire tout Hugo et pour assister au développement colossal qui a suivi, et où qualités et défauts, de plus en plus grossis, se heurtent et se confondent?". Sainte-Beuve admires Goethe's "sagacité" and "divination", which is another way of saying that he agreed with Goethe's assessment that Hugo's "too great fertility had been highly prejudicial to his talent" (*Conversations*, 1 Dec. 1831: 338). Sainte-Beuve himself made the same observation in his review of *Les Chants du crépuscule* (1835; op. cit.). Baudelaire, who was in close contact with Sainte-Beuve especially when he was writing his urban poems, would have no doubt also come to Goethe's defense over Hugo's: "L'excessif, l'immense, sont le domaine naturel de Victor Hugo" he wrote in his 1861 essay on Hugo, "il s'y meut comme dans son atmosphère natale" (*OC* II: 137). The irony of this observation is apparent when contrasted with one of his private letters: "Il paraît que lui et l'Océan se sont brouillés," Baudelaire remarked on Hugo's upcoming move from Guernsey to Brussels in 1865, and continues, "Ou il n'a pas eu la force de supporter l'Océan, ou l'Océan *lui-même* s'est ennuyé de lui. […] je sens, je sais que je ne serai jamais si bête que lui" (to Narcisse Ancelle, 12 Feb.; *Corr* II: 460).

"Every situation – nay, every moment – is of infinite worth; for it is representative of a whole eternity" (3 Nov. 1823; 16).

However, Baudelaire's mental processing of reality is tortured compared to the classically inspired Goethe's: "Edgar Poe, ivrogne, pauvre, persécuté, paria, me plaît plus que calme et vertueux, un Goethe ou un W. Scott" (*OC* II: 288).[469] Maurice Barrès – well anticipating Valéry's famous essay on Baudelaire – describes this tormented energy best as an "analyse dans la sensation," and ascribes it to Baudelaire's original style of "savante concision, du marbre brûlant":

> Baudelaire est notre maître pour avoir réagi contre le matérialisme de Gautier…et contre tout le superficiel du romantisme. C'est par les *Fleurs du mal*, peut-être, que nous reviendrons à la grande tradition classique, appropriée sans doute à l'esprit moderne, mais dédaigneuse des viles couleurs éclatantes et de toutes les sauvageries plastiques…et rêvant d'exprimer en termes clairs et nuancés des choses obscures et toutes les subtilités intimes…Baudelaire dota notre langue des plus délicats procédés d'analyse. Dans le balancement perpétuel qu'on nomme le Progrès, les *Fleurs du mal*…déterminent…un des mille retours du moral sur la physique…Il demeure une psychologie et une langue baudelairiennes…Baudelaire et ses amis s'imposent comme les interprètes de la sensation…C'est la sensation qu'ils éveillent tout d'abord, ces poètes sensualistes, c'est elle qu'ils prétendent réaliser ; c'est encore les sens du lecteur qu'ils attaquent pour rejaillir de là dans l'entendement… Son cerveau s'enflamme, ses nerfs se détraquent, de sombres manies l'obsèdent…Et puis un désespoir morne, un dégoût de plomb… (62)[470]

Baudelaire vividly represents this torment in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*: "Il arrive même que des hommes tels que Daumier et M.G. [Guys], accoutumés dès longtemps à

[469] "Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages". In the preface to the *Conversations*, Sainte-Beuve also calls attention to Goethe's sense of calm.

[470] Cited in A.E. Carter's *Baudelaire et la critique française 1868-1917* (Columbia: U of South Carolina Press, 1963): 60-63. I am citing the passage as it is truncated in Carter's volume. Barrès's article "La Folie de Baudelaire" appeared in *Taches d'encre* (5 Nov. and 5 Dec. 1884). Carter notes how Gautier's "Notice" for the 1868 edition of Baudelaire's *Œuvres complètes* sealed the legend of Baudelaire as a decadent who overreached for certain effects. Barrès, who notably chides Gautier for his own overreaching ("les sauvageries plastiques") seems to want to provide a more qualified, clinical, and sensitive assessment of Baudelaire's poetry; in his study, Baudelaire's "folie" is more a heightened state of mind than a disorder, more reactive to external conditions than gratuitous or artificial.

exercer leur mémoire et à la remplir d'images, trouvent devant le modèle et la multiplicité de détails qu'il comporte leur faculté principale troublée et comme paralysée" (Ibid). Reality itself, in other words, ironically impedes the artist's representation of reality due to these violent interferences of the mediating imagination.

2. Convalescence

The powerful movements of the brain as they work against each other, and the way in which the artist sets out to depict these movements, are prominent features of Baudelaire's mature writings on art. In *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Constantin Guys's hurried sketches reflect the artist's intense and even aggressive effort as he seeks to provide at least some semblance of a unified impression:

> Maintenant, à l'heure où les autres dorment, celui-ci est penché sur sa table, dardant sur une feuille de papier le même regard qu'il attachait tout à l'heure sur les choses, s'escrimant avec son crayon, sa plume, son pinceau, faisant jaillir l'eau du verre au plafond, essuyant sa plume sur sa chemise, pressé, violent, actif, comme s'il craignait que les images ne lui échappent, querelleur quoique seul, et se bousculant lui-même. Et les choses renaissent sur le papier, naturelles et plus que naturelles, belles et plus que belles, singulières et douées d'une vie enthousiaste comme l'âme de l'auteur. La fantasmagorie a été extraite de la nature. Tous les matériaux dont la mémoire s'est encombrée se classent, se rangent, s'harmonisent et subissent cette idéalisation forcée qui est le résultat d'une perception *enfantine*, c'est-à-dire d'une perception aiguë, magique à force d'ingénuité ! (*OC* II: 693-694)

Yet, despite the violence, Guys maintains a "perception *enfantine*" throughout. Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" is a particularly important source here, since it details the state of mind necessary to maintain a heightened imagination even within the bustle of the city crowds: [471]

[471] In contrast, the painter Paul Chenevard, whom Baudelaire attacks in "L'Art philosophique", has what Baudelaire describes as a foggy brain due to the interference of his paintings' attempted portrayal of a "système de philosophie historique": "Dans ce cerveau les choses ne se mirent pas clairement, elles ne se réfléchissent qu'à travers un milieu de vapeurs" (Ibid 601).

> For some months I had been ill in health, but was now convalescent, and, with returning strength, found myself in one of those happy moods which are so precisely the converse of ennui – *moods of the keenest appetency, when the film from the mental vision departs* – the αχλυς ος πριυ επηευ – and the intellect, electrified, surpasses as greatly its every-day condition, as does the vivid yet candid reason of Leibnitz, the mad and flimsy rhetoric of Gorgias. (388)[472]

Similarly, like Poe's narrator who manages to analyze and sustain this electrified mental state despite the passing torrent of the crowd, Baudelaire is able to curb the powerful effects of Wagner's music with his resolve to process this music intellectually: "Si vous aviez été à Paris, ces jours derniers, vous auriez entendu les ouvrages sublimes de Wagner," Baudelaire wrote to Poulet-Malassis, "ç'a été un événement dans mon cerveau" (*Corr* II: 667). Citing this letter, Mary Breatnach examines how Baudelaire attempts to articulate this moment; using the word 'milestone' to translate 'événement', she argues that Baudelaire "needed to make his own of what he had heard: he needed to take possession of it psychologically" (57).[473] I argue, however, that this urge to appropriate took shape a bit earlier than the Wagner essay, particularly in the *Salon de 1859*, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, and, to an even greater degree, in the lyric poems written in 1859, the most important of which appear in the "Tableaux parisiens".[474] All written during a brief but intense period at his mother's home in Honfleur (1859), they are the result of Baudelaire's acute awareness of the effects of a strengthened mind on literary output. It is a striking paradox that Baudelaire, nature's avowed enemy, wrote his most important and famous poems on Paris as he enjoyed an ocean view and an expanse

[472] The Greek phrase is from Homer's *Iliad* (V, 127), when Athena clears the "clouds" from Diomedes' eyes to help him distinguish between gods and mortals.
[473] "Writing about Music: Baudelaire and *Tannhaüser* in Paris", in *Essays on the Song Cycle and on Defining the Field* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001): 49-63.
[474] Though not published until 1863, we know that Baudelaire was working on *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* as early as 1859.

of sky; but this was the point. Baudelaire's exceptional stay outside the city demonstrated that the mind's processing of Paris mattered more for the production of an original poem than his eyes' viewing of Paris.[475] Baudelaire went to Honfleur to convalesce, and he describes himself how he viewed this convalescence as a strengthening of the mind:

> Pour dire la vérité, je dois avouer que tous ces gens qui m'accablent ne sont pas tenus de devenir quelle solidité et quelle santé il y a dans mon cerveau. En somme, j'ai à peine montré la mesure de ce que je pouvais faire. La cruelle paresse ! La terrible rêverie ! La fermeté de ma pensée est pour moi-même un contraste pénible quand je songe à mes lambineries dans l'exécution. – Et c'est pour cela qu'il faut que j'aille à Honfleur. (to Mme Aupick, 13 May 1858; *Corr* I: 496)

Reflecting on the Maison-Joujou's influence on Baudelaire's 1859 poems, Richard Burton specifically refers to Baudelaire's recuperated imagination: "The unique alliance of the concentrative and dilative movements of his imagination that room and view made possible appear to have released in him depths of creativity that twenty years in Paris had failed to bring to fruition" (20).[476] Baudelaire's move to the sea does not correspond to the false sense of evasion he scorns in "Le Voyage" (written in 1859), but to the perfect romantic 'oasis' of expansion and concentration, and of the recapturing of memory. In 1859, the perfume still remains in its bottle (music condenses into the more concrete form of perfume – "Comme d'autres esprits voguent sur la musique, / Le mien, ô mon amour! nage sur ton parfum" 9-10) – of which the hair in "La Chevelure" (also written in 1859) serves as a reminder: "*Tu contiens, mer d'ébène, un éblouissant rêve* / De voiles, de rameurs, de flammes et de mâts" (emphasis mine). Though desacralized,

[475] The same applied to his writing of the *Salon de 1859*. In a letter to Nadar, he confesses that he only viewed the Salon once during a brief stay in Paris, but that this "method" was not a bad one as long as the critic has his wits about him: "Cette méthode, je le répète, n'est pas mauvaise, à la condition qu'on possède bien *son personnel*" (16 May 1859; *Corr* I: 578 – emphasis Baudelaire's).
[476] *Baudelaire in 1859: A Study in the Sources of Poetic Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988).

the moment evoked is nonetheless reminiscent of Hugo's excavation of memory while contemplating a landscape in "Tristesse d'Olympio". At first, Baudelaire's poet disperses his memories in the air ("Pour peupler ce soir l'alcôve obscure / Des souvenirs dormant dans cette chevelure, / Je la veux agiter dans l'air comme un mouchoir!" 3-5), but in the end he recaptures them in the solid form of gems:

> Longtemps ! toujours ! ma main dans ta crinière lourde
> Sèmera le rubis, la perle et le saphir,
> Afin qu'à mon désir tu ne sois jamais sourde ! (31-33)

If the poet becomes intoxicated when smelling these tresses, his sensibilities do not suffer: "*Je m'enivre ardemment* des senteurs confondues / De l'huile de coco, du musc et du goudron" (29-30 – emphasis mine). As a convalescent, Baudelaire preserves the imagination's cerebral essence by going back to the dynamic of earlier poems like "Le Flacon" and "Le Poison" and underscoring the tension between past and present, and between reality and dream.[477] In "Le Voyage", which serves as the necessary return to consciousness, the irony emerges that death's "poison" is the only way to transport:

> Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte!
> Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
> Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe ?
> Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau* ! (141-144)[478]

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[477] "Is a 'trip' a weakening or a concentration of the volitional powers?" Victor Brombert asks in his essay on "La Chevelure", and argues that "The dilemma is crucial to the poetic activity as understood by Baudelaire". "The Will to Ecstasy: The Example of Baudelaire's *La Chevelure*"; *Yale French Studies* 50 (1974): 55-63.

[478] It is for this reason that I do not agree with Burton's argument that "Le Voyage" is not an ironic response to Maxime Du Camp's celebration of travel as a sign of progress. Burton points out that there were two Du Camps, the one whose journal *Revue de Paris* was censored in 1858 and the one who was the enthusiastic traveler-poet, and argues that Baudelaire's poem seeks solidarity with the first. Historical contextualization aside, it is nonetheless difficult to detect a "victory for ecstasy" in a poem that ends in death: "O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre! (137). Neither do I subscribe to Burton's reading of "La Chevelure" which, as the inverse of "Le Voyage", Burton presents as ending in "anguish and despair". Burton is trying to highlight the rhythm of the Baudelairean imagination, but I think he has reversed the order of the dynamic. Also, "Le Voyage" would be the final poem of the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and placed in the section entitled "La Mort".

The apostrophe to the "cerveaux enfantins" (84) in the poem, then, is not an address to naïve travelers who leave only to look for post cards and souvenirs, but to those who confront the raw cerebral effects of being uprooted when searching for the new.

Likewise, the "fire that burns the brain" is the means to the original poem. In 1859, as one microcosm leads to the next - Paris to Honfleur, Honfleur to the Maison-Joujou, the Maison-Joujou to the room with a view, the room with a view to the chamber of the poet's mind - we are left only with the convalescent "cerveau enfantin" of the poet as it is confronted by its surroundings. Baudelaire relates this experience in the *Salon de 1859* when describing the experience of viewing Eugène Boudin's pastels, which he equates with seeing actual clouds:[479]

> J'ai vu. À la fin tous ces nuages aux formes fantastiques et lumineuses, ces ténèbres chaotiques, ces immensités vertes et roses, suspendues et ajoutées les unes aux autres, ces fournaises béantes, ces firmaments de satin noir ou violet, fripé, roulé ou déchiré, ces horizons en deuil ou ruisselants de métal fondu, toutes ces profondeurs, toutes ces splendeurs, me montèrent au cerveau comme une boisson capiteuse ou comme l'éloquence de l'opium. (*OC* II: 666)

Baudelaire, like Hugo in "Soleils couchants", shows how natural phenemona make an impression on the poet's mind. However, Baudelaire is less concerned with presenting the poet's "pensée" in the sense of discourse or the formal process of invention (here, Boudin's clouds do not turn into something discernable), than with translating the energy that results, not only when the brain is initially stimulated by an event or encounter, but also when the imagination struggles to amalgamate the ensuing turbulent movement of the mind's faculties. In the *Salon de 1859*, Baudelaire explains:

> Tout l'univers visible n'est qu'un magasin d'images et de signes auxquels l'imagination donnera une place et une valeur relative; c'est une espèce de pâture que l'imagination doit digérer et transformer. Toutes les facultés de

[479] Baudelaire saw these pastels while staying in Honfleur, which was Boudin's hometown.

> l'âme humaine doivent être subordonnées à l'imagination, qui les met en réquisition toutes à la fois. ("Le Gouvernement de l'imagination"; Ibid 627)

Boudin's sketches, in fact, are not enough; while they stimulate the imagination, the necessary 'volonté' of the artist has not yet formed: "Il [Boudin] sait bien qu'il faut que tout cela devienne tableau par le moyen de l'impression poétique rappelée à volonté" (Ibid 665). The subject of clouds is promising for a modern landscape painting, and Boudin has the necessary 'naïveté', but as Baudelaire states at the outset of his section on landscape painting, the artist's imagination must first account for the working and strengthening of the intellect:[480]

> Je sais bien que l'imagination humaine peut, par un effort singulier, concevoir un instant la nature sans l'homme, et toute la masse suggestive éparpillée dans l'espace, sans un contemplateur pour un extraire la comparaison, la métaphore et l'allégorie. Il est certain que tout cet ordre et toute cette harmonie n'en gardent pas moins la qualité inspiratrice qui y est providentiellement déposée ; mais, dans ce cas, faute d'une intelligence qu'elle pût inspirer, cette qualité serait comme si elle n'était pas. (Ibid 660)

Accordingly, the representation of the city rather than nature serves as the ideal model for landscape painting. In the city, the artist can better grasp what Goethe called the "objective", or an even more immediate and concretized reality than clouds. In fact, filtered through the "fire" of the imagination, the solid forms of Paris become amorphous like Boudin's clouds.[481] Charles Meryon's etchings of Paris, which in their attention to

[480] The section on landscape in the *Salon de 1859* is yet another example of Baudelaire's process of compression: Baudelaire rejects most landscape painting as stylized, and concentrates mostly on the little known works of Boudin and Meryon.

[481] In *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton, 1981), Burton Pike situates Baudelaire's urban lyric poems at a turning point in the representation of the city: "While the city bore the weight of a cultural way of seeing ('a pre-existing schemata', or a fixed point of view), nineteenth-century writers increasingly turned to the individual's particular way of seeing. The representation of the city was the result of the filtering of the poet's imagination, 'the increasing internalization of the external world'" (71).

form reflect the artist's 'volonté', perform the "drama" of the mind as it melds the solid forms of architecture into the sky:

> J'ai rarement vu représentée avec plus de poésie la solennité naturelle d'une ville immense. Les majestés de la pierre accumulée, les clochers *montrant du doigt le ciel*, les obélisques de l'industrie vomissant contre le firmament leurs coalitions de fumée, les prodigieux échafaudages des monuments en réparation, appliquant sur le corps solide de l'architecture leur architecture à jour d'une beauté si paradoxale, le ciel tumultueux, chargé de colère et de rancune, la profondeur des perspectives augmentée par la pensée de tous les drames qui y sont contenus, aucun des éléments complexes dont se compose le douloureux et glorieux décor de la civilisation n'était oublié. (Ibid 666-667)

Here, Baudelaire cites Hugo's "A l'Arc de Triomphe" (*Les Voix intérieures*) and the struggle it evokes of stone (the "ville") standing up to the ravages of time ("orage") as an exemplary form of this drama. Baudelaire's reference to Hugo, however, is not just an example of his nostalgia for the 1830s; also taking note of Hugo's contemporary drawings, which he describes as capturing "le mystère dans le ciel" resulting from a "magnifique imagination qui coule", Baudelaire presents architecture as the symbol of a strenthened 'volonté' that balances the modern artist's heightened 'naïveté'.[482]

3. "Tableaux parisiens"

Constantin Guys, however, is the exemplary artist of the age due to his greater sense of immediacy between artist and reality. In *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire further compresses the imagination into a faculty that confronts, in real time, city streets as opposed to more removed towers or rooftops. More than Méryon, Guys captures the "livewire" imagination that represents the collision of fleeting details with memory. The melancholy that comes from Guys's representations of Paris is not the

[482] Hugo's drawings were not published until 1863, but they were widely circulated prior to this date. His *Dessins* (published by Castel and engraved by Paul Chenay) included natural landscapes, but Hugo was, and still is, more well known for his architectural fantasies.

"douloureux" reflection on the rise and fall of civilizations (the romantic trope of the ruin), but the stress of a mind that strives to stay strong within the tumult:

> En fait, tous les bons et les vrais dessinateurs dessinent d'après l'image écrite dans leur cerveau, et non d'après la nature.
> […]
> Il s'établit alors un duel entre la volonté de tout voir, de ne rien oublier, et la faculté de la mémoire qui a pris l'habitude d'absorber vivement la couleur générale et la silhouette, l'arabesque du contour. Un artiste ayant le sentiment parfait de la forme, mais accoutumé à exercer surtout sa mémoire et son imagination, se trouve alors comme assailli par une émeute de détails, qui tous demandent justice avec la furie d'une foule amoureuse d'égalité absolue. (*Le Peintre de la vie moderne*; *OC* II: 698-699)

It remained a question as to how this "livewire" imagination could be represented in the fluid form of lyric poetry. Could Guys's aesthetic, which required only the quick strokes of the pen, apply to the poem? Though the city constantly made demands on the artist's sense of 'naïveté', Baudelaire's ideal of the lyric in his 1859 essay on Gautier seems to suggest that the quick pulse of the urban scene would leave no chance for a melody or even a steady beat:

> Sa poésie, à la fois majestueuse et précieuse, marche magnifiquement, comme les personnes de cour en grande toilette. C'est, du reste, le caractère de la vraie poésie d'avoir le flot régulier, comme les grands fleuves qui s'approchent de la mer, leur mort et leur infini, et d'éviter la précipitation et la saccade. La poésie lyrique s'élance, mais toujours d'un mouvement élastique et ondulé. Tout ce qui est brusque et cassé lui déplaît, et elle le renvoie au drame ou au roman de mœurs. Le poète, dont nous aimons si passionnément le talent, connaît à fond ces grandes questions, et il l'a parfaitement prouvé en introduisant systématiquement et continuellement la majesté de l'alexandrin dans le vers octosyllabique (*Emaux et Camées*). Là surtout apparaît tout le résultat qu'on peut obtenir par la fusion du double élément, peinture et musique, par la carrure de la mélodie, et par la pourpre régulière et symétrique d'une rime plus qu'exacte. (*OC* II: 126)

Yet, it seems that "Rêve parisien" of the "Tableaux parisiens" achieves this slow and steady tempo. Addressed to Guys, the octosyllabic poem's rhythm curiously flows like a

Gautier poem. Architecture (the poet's "volonté") and fluid (the poet's dream) work in harmony, producing the same effect of a "Babel démesurée" that appears in Hugo's "Soleils couchants":

> Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades,
> C'était un palais infini,
> Plein de basins et de cascades
> Tombant dans l'or mat ou bruni; (13-16)

But as time passes and this vision nears its end, it becomes apparent that this dream is not an unconscious and neverending stream, but the fleeting result of the poet's processing. No sun or celestial element is necessary in this picture, because the poet's "feu personnel" illuminates it instead:

> Nul astre d'ailleurs, nuls vestiges
> De soleil, même au bas du ciel,
> Pour illuminer ces prodiges,
> Qui brillaient d'un feu personnel ! (45-48)

The real "horror" that occurs in this poem is not when the poet wakes up in his hovel in Paris, but when he recognizes the "terrible nouveauté" that nothing in this picture calls out to the ears:

> Et sur ces mouvantes merveilles
> Planait (terrible nouveauté!
> Tout pour l'oeil, rien pour les oreilles!)
> Un silence d'éternité. (49-52)

Baudelaire's poem is only lyric in a formal sense, or just a shell of the poet's song that has been compensated with dazzling gems and metals further magnified by the surrounding metallicized liquid bodies. Baudelaire dedicates this poem to Guys, not because he emulates the manner of his drawings or even incorporates contemporary subjects, but because he ironically shows what poetry has become in a postromantic age

preoccupied with journals, trends, and snapshots. In the age of "Realism", everything must appeal to the eye in order to seduce effectively.

The "Tableaux parisiens", I argue, ironically incorporates lyric poetry as a romantic trope that must be critiqued for art to keep up with the times.[483] The high level of experimentation that takes place in key poems, particularly the ones addressed to Hugo, represents Baudelaire's deconstruction of poetry as music. Silence is the inevitable result of poetry's fall from aristocracy. Compared to the aloof majesty of Gautier's rhythm, Guys's drawings display an anxiety-ridden shimmer in their compensation for this loss. Public ceremonies are not important for what they commemorate, but for what they look like, "avec toute l'ardeur d'un homme épris d'espace, de perspective, de lumière faisant nappe ou explosion, et s'accrochant en gouttes ou en étincelles aux aspérités des uniformes et des toilettes de cour" (*Le Peintre de la vie moderne*: *OC* II: 705). A recurring image in *Les Fleurs du Mal* is the female figure who, like the one in the Gautier essay who proceeds slowly in a "grande toilette", takes the form of and moves in the manner of a majestic ship -

> Quand tu vas balayant l'air de ta jupe large,
> Tu fais l'effet d'un beau vaisseau qui prend le large,
> Chargé de toile, et va roulant
> Suivant un rhythme doux, et parasseux, et lent. ("Le Beau navire" 5-9)

- but Guys's women move hurriedly and sparkle:

> Elle est surtout une harmonie générale, non seulement dans son allure et le mouvement de ses membres, mais aussi dans les mousselines, les gazes, les vastes et chatoyantes nuées d'étoffes dont elle s'enveloppe, et qui sont comme les attributs et le piédestal de sa divinité; dans le metal et le mineral qui serpentent autour de ses bras et de son cou, qui ajoutent leurs

[483] See Graham Chesters, *Baudelaire and the Poetics of Craft* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), particularly chapter 8: "Experimentation and urban poetics, I: the limits of poetry". Though I do not go into the specifics of Baudelaire's prosody, Chesters' study has informed my reading.

étincelles au feu de ses regards, ou qui jasent doucement à ses oreilles. (*Le Peintre*; *OC* II: 714)

The operative "generative idea" in modern art is no longer the romantic preoccupation with suggesting an atmosphere, or a refrain of music, but the electricity or " feu " of the mind that "attacks" what the eye takes in. As the mind's violent role emerges in the "Tableaux parisiens", sight takes over sound in order for poetry to rival with the new modern art of sketching modern life. This emergence, however, does not take place in the form of a narrative; unlike Hugo's eye, Baudelaire's does not represent a steady process where reality slowly emerges into a dream or vast meditation. Rather, the "Tableaux parisiens" form a gallery of separate but complementary views of how the poet experiments with different modes of the imagination as he dismantles the traditional romantic landscape of ruins, skies and lakes. The imagination is not a given, but depends on a number of circumstances that the poet has to work through each time to arrive at and maintain a sharp sense of consciousness. I argue that, as Baudelaire repeatedly performs this process of experimentation - through which he eliminates romantic tropes and given models of the imagination with subtle but striking irony - he arrives at a critical moment in "A une passante", located at the center of the volume, when the perfect union of present, past, heart and mind occur. "A une passante" is the split-second moment in which the impulses of "vaporisation" and "condensation" meet, when both the poet's 'naïveté' and his analytic powers are in sync, and when lightning outdoes even Guys' effervescent sketches. What follows is a selection of poems that point to the energy required to attain this moment, and concluding remarks as to why it could not be sustained in the medium of lyric poetry. The storm of the mind – the "poison" to the "volupté" – overcomes the fluidity of the lyric, but this is what was required for poetry to

remain both relevant and original. It is what leads to the decrepit but modern sketch, watercolor, or prose poem: "L'énergie dans la volupté crée une malaise et une souffrance positive. Mes nerfs trop tendus ne donnent plus que des vibrations criardes et douloureuses".[484]

"Paysage", the opening poem of the "Tableaux parisiens", includes elements of the poetic urban landscape that Baudelaire had outlined in the *Salon de 1859*: bell towers, fog, celestial bodies and architecture intertwine to produce "la profondeur des perspectives augmentées par la pensée de tous les drames qui y sont contenus" (*OC* II: 667).[485] It is precisely this "pensée" that Baudelaire mobilizes in this poem, but he can do so only after eliminating romantic tropes. Appearing nostalgic in its subtle references to romantic predecessors, as well as in its emulation of a classical aesthetic, the poem is in fact the affirmation of a neo-romantic cerebral imagination that will extract a new and illuminated world out of his viewing of Parisian rooftops and gutters. An unaccustomed sense of resolve and optimism infuses "Paysage" as the poet unifies elements of his imagination into a coherent operation. More than a representation of landscape, the poem relays Baudelaire's formula for a romantic urban landscape set in verse, or the merging of Boudin and Meryon into lyric form.

The most notable aspect of "Paysage" is how it contains elements of surprise. First, the harmony and calm it conveys stand in stark contrast with the merciless clock pounding in "L'Horloge", the final poem of the previous section ("Spleen et Idéal"). "Paysage" is dissonant in its very composure:

[484] "Le *Confiteor* de l'artiste".
[485] "Paysage" was originally published in 1857, under the title "Paysage parisien", in *Le Présent* (15 Nov.). Baudelaire made a few changes to the poem before inserting it into the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Je veux, pour composer chastement mes églogues,
Coucher auprès du soleil, comme les astrologues,
Et, voisin des clochers, écouter en rêvant
Leurs hymnes solennels emportés par le vent. (1-4)

The strident clock is traded for the church bell's hymns, and the poet's will, which seemed to be compromised at the end of "Spleen et Idéal", is now resolute and intact. A hygienic process of transformation, so often alluded to in Baudelaire's journals, has apparently occurred.[486] The second surprise arises in the following lines, when we learn that this idyllic-minded poet is confined in a city garret:

Les deux mains au menton, du haut de ma mansarde,
Je verrai l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde ;
Les tuyaux, les clochers, ces mâts de la cité,
Et les grands ciels qui font rêver d'éternité. (5-8)

The 'lieu commun' of the city does not impede the poet's expansive mind; on the contrary, he fuses urban and celestial elements into a softly lit skyscape. Familiar romantic references – Chateaubriand's church bells, Hugo's "Soleils couchants", Hugo's famous bird's eye view – are at home with smokestacks:

Il est doux, à travers les brumes, de voir naître
L'étoile dans l'azur, la lampe à la fenêtre,
Les fleuves de charbon monter au firmament
Et la lune verser son pâle enchantement. (6-9)[487]

The poet also hints at a Lamartinian aesthetic that seeks to erase the actual blackened landscape for one purified by moonbeams, at the same time making reference to the serene pastoral genre:

Alors je rêverai des horizons bleuâtres,

[486] Baudelaire seems to have had "L'Horloge" on his mind when he wrote: "A chaque minute nous sommes écrasés par l'idée et la sensation du temps. Et il n'y a que deux moyens pour échapper à ce cauchemar, - pour l'oublier : le Plaisir et le Travail. Le Plaisir nous use. Le Travail nous fortifie. Choisissons" (*Journaux intimes*; *OC* I: 669).

[487] Baudelaire was an admirer of Whistler's, and refers to his watercolors of London as a "chaos de brumes, de fourneaux et de fumées tirebouchonnées; poésie profonde et compliquée d'une vaste capitale" ("Peintres et aquafortistes"; *OC* II: 740).

Des jardins, des jets d'eau pleurant dans les albâtres,
Des baisers, des oiseaux chantant soir et matin,
Et tout ce que l'Idylle a de plus enfantin. (17-20)

While clearly in the city, the poet, in the romantic and classical traditions, remains unconcerned by its realities. When the harsh effects of winter arrive, the poet responds by closing his shutters and resolving to build "féeriques palais" out of his own bleak and chilly space.

Likewise, the young Hugo had carried out his resolve to create "féeriques palais" (the Orient) out of his simple viewing of a sunset on the outskirts of Paris. But Gautier may serve as an even more significant source for Baudelaire's poem, not just in terms of theme, but for how it points to Baudelaire's departure from the "fog" of romantic tropes. Nostalgic for a return to Gautier's earlier poetry, which he expresses in his 1859 essay, Baudelaire's poem calls us back to *Albertus* (1833).[488] Gautier's early collection of poems, like Sainte-Beuve's *Joseph Delorme* but without the heavy emphasis on anecdote and psychological malaise, incorporates the urban landscape into the domain of romantic poetry. Gautier, in fact, goes out of his way in the preface to point out that all he has seen, he has seen out of his window. Like the poet in Hugo's "Novembre", he establishes a fixed point of view (an aperture) in his room in Paris from which his inventions will be projected: "Il [le poète] n'a vu du monde que ce que l'on en voit par la fenêtre, et il n'a pas eu envie d'en voir d'avantage" (i).[489] In an emphatic pronouncement of 'art for art's

[488] More of an elegy than a critical essay – "La France n'est guère poète" is the running motif (*OC* II: 124) – Baudelaire's *Théophile Gautier* [I] compares Gautier's early poetry (*Albertus*, *La Comédie de la mort*, and *España*) to a diamond, a perfect gem that time has buried. The irony is subtle: Baudelaire uses this analogy, which symbolizes perfection, when talking about poems that have little to do with the Hellenic aesthetic operative in the more recent and well-known *Emaux et Camées* (1852).

[489] It is important to note that *Albertus*, though its title refers to the long featured poem that recounts a legend, was in its first form a compilation of many poems with various themes. All of Gautier's poems can be found in Michel Brix's edition *Œuvres poétiques complètes* (Bartillat, 2004), but I refer here to the first edition of *Albertus* (Paulin, 1833) because Gautier's poems became scattered (and the original titles and

sake' that anticipates *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1836) as well as the preface to *Emaux et Camées*, Gautier, like the disillusioned post-1851 Baudelaire, clearly expresses his disinterestedness and apolitical stance: "Il n'a aucune couleur politique; il n'est ni rouge, ni blanc, ni même tricolore; il n'est rien, il ne s'aperçoit des révolutions que lorsque les balles cassent les vitres" (Ibid).[490] Gautier's poem "Paris" in particular expresses the poet's strong capacity for poetic invention within this constraint. At first, he seems to lament his plight, describing himself as an "aigle prisonnier" who yearns to fly to a pure space unaffected by city and society. The poem moves from the initial elements of an ethereal "landscape" (firmament, pure air, angel), to an earthly but sublime landscape (thunder, waterfalls, mountain peaks), to those of a calm country landscape (valley, breeze, cottage), all the while juxtaposing these revivifying scenes with the chaos, noise, and disturbing sights of Paris. The poem seems straightforward: this is a romantic poet who wants nothing to do with the ugly reality of his surroundings. Yet, the ending reveals the irony:

> Perpétuel contraste, éternelle antithèse,
> Paris, la bonne ville, ou plutôt la mauvaise,
> Longs grincements de dents et beaux concerts. Voilà !
> - Cependant moi, poëte et peintre, je vis là.

By having represented celestial, sublime and idyllic landscapes, Gautier has flaunted his ability to create beautiful landscapes out of the mundane view from his window. In the end, Gautier does not flee this view, but he embraces the obstacles it presents and

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epigraphs eliminated) as he compiled them into different collected volumes. Furthermore, the 1830s Gautier is the one that Baudelaire looked to with reverence.

[490] In *Baudelaire and the Second Republic* (1991), Richard Burton, by placing Baudelaire's poems in their historical context, underscores the poet's loss of a sense of self after 1848, and how "his withdrawal into the confines of his own room […] is a politically motivated response to the gathering political crisis" (319). See especially chapter 8, "The Revenge of Pluviosus: Baudelaire and the Agony of the Second Republic". In 1852, referring to the 1851 coup d'Etat, Baudelaire famously and emphatically wrote to Narcisse Ancelle that "LE 2 DECEMBRE m'a *physiquement dépolitiqué*" (5 Mar.; *Corr* I: 188).

celebrates his role as both poet and painter. As he does in his preface, the poet affirms that his place is, indeed, at his window: creating these "purely literary" views out of the "incroyable chaos" takes energy enough.

But Baudelaire plays with the reader's expectations to an even greater degree in "Paysage", and Ross Chambers notes how even "le titre 'Paysage' est presque ironique" ("Trois paysages urbains" 38).[491] Baudelaire's poem is more the representation of a state of mind than of a landscape. Certain specific elements of the urban landscape appear, but they form a backdrop while the poet's "volonté", or what he would like to produce out this landscape, is foregrounded. Despite all suggestions of a hushed classicism or an elegiac meditation, this is a poet who must *work*, instead of merely articulating the images stored in his mind's eye, for his art to flourish. Baudelaire, closing his shutters, goes further than Gautier's closing of windows in the preface to *Emaux et Camées*.[492] Without any transparency, the poet in "Paysage" is left only with the dark chamber of his mind. The real "Emeute" takes place inside his own brain as he tries to create an atmosphere, not out of Paris, but out of the effects the city has produced on his inner sensibilities. Gautier made poetic creation look effortless ("il [le poète] aime mieux être assis que debout, couché qu'assis," he confesses in the preface to *Albertus*), but

[491] In *L'Ironie littéraire* (Hachette, 1996), Philippe Hamon has detailed how Baudelaire parodies elegiac stereotypes in "Paysage" (99-101). As early as 1854, Baudelaire had reversed the romantic trope of the artist who pines for the country while confined in the city; in an oft-cited letter that he wrote to Fernand Desnoyers, whose language is Chateaubriandesque, Baudelaire presents himself instead as a poet confined in nature: "Dans le fond des bois, enfermé sous ses voûtes semblables à celles des sacristies et des cathédrales, je pense à nos étonnantes villes, et la prodigieuse musique qui roule sur les sommets me semble la traduction des lamentations humaines" (*Corr* I: 248). Desnoyers was editing a volume in honor of the Forest of Fontainebleau, but Baudelaire sent him two urban poems because, as he explains, "je suis incapable de m'attendrir sur les végétaux" (Ibid). Though he doesn't say so explicitly, Baudelaire's gesture was a protest against Fouriérisme and the cult of realism: "mon âme est rebelle à cette singulière religion nouvelle" (Ibid).

[492] Sans prendre garde à l'ouragan
Qui fouettait mes vitres fermées,
Moi, j'ai fait *Emaux et Camées*.

Baudelaire represents the poet hunched over his desk. Baudelaire's poet is Balzac's demystified but ideal one – "Or les succès littéraires ne se conquièrent que dans la solitude et par d'obstinés travaux" - that only a handful succeed in becoming:[493]

> L'Emeute, tempêtant vainement à ma vitre,
> Ne fera pas lever mon front de mon pupitre ;
> Car je serai plongé dans cette volupté
> D'évoquer le Printemps avec ma volonté
> De tirer un soleil de mon cœur, et de faire
> De mes pensers brûlants une tiède atmosphère. (21-26)

These last lines represent a condensation, in lyric form, of Baudelaire's theory of the imagination as he had developed it over the course of a decade. Beginning the poem with an abrupt "Je veux", the narrator invokes the imaginative child's sense of impulse and spontaneity as he clutches at this captivating "joujou" of the urban landscape. Yet, rendering this view into a work of art is no child's play; Gautier himself, in his essay on Balzac, noted the "supreme" challenge that a familiar and immediate environment imposed on the creative imagination: "Balzac, comme Gavarni, a vu ses contemporains; et dans l'art, la difficulté suprême c'est de peindre ce qu'on a devant les yeux".[494] Despite Baudelaire's allusion to "Tout ce que l'Idylle a de plus enfantin", there is nothing

[493] Lucien de Rubempré's downfall in *Illusions perdues* is his lacksadaisical approach to work. Not even the poet is exempt from the daily grind, and in this passage ("La Soirée dans un Salon, la Soirée au bord de l'eau") Balzac presents a version of Baudelaire's exchange between 'naïveté' and 'volonté'. Lucien may have a poetic disposition, but he lacks the drive to execute the idea. Pierre-Georges Castex locates Baudelaire's unwavering admiration for Balzac in the novelist's unlimited energy; more than the novels themselves, Baudelaire sought to emulate the work behind them: "Balzac lui apparaissait comme le modèle de cette énergie dont il a voulu faire, lui aussi, la valeur la plus haute" (151). "Balzac et Baudelaire", *Revue des sciences humaines* 89 (1958): 139-151. Despite his reserves, Baudelaire admired the same quality in Hugo, and when *La Légende des siècles* appeared, Baudelaire wrote to his mother, "Ce Victor Hugo est infatigable" (10 Oct. 1859).

[494] The essay first appeared in *L'Artiste* (1858), and then as its own pamphlet in 1859.

childish about a poet bent over his desk as he endeavors to meet this challenge.[495] Baudelaire's poet dreams –

> Alors je rêverai des horizons bleuâtres,
> Des jardins, des jets d'eau pleurant dans les albâtres,
> Des baisers, des oiseaux chantant soir et matin, (17-19)

– but he also executes. The emphasis on "volonté", while seeming to correspond to the aloof Parnassian model of the "idée fixe" championed by Banville, Leconte de Lisle and Gautier, does not have to do with the poem's plasticity but with the poet's setting out to eternalize the transitory. In the end, "Mes pensers brûlants" intrudes on the poem's 'volupté', and it seems that the resulting "tiède atmosphère" will come at a cost: signaling the influence of Poe, Baudelaire alludes to the analytical and technical prowess necessary to make this a "dream" poem. Despite the apparent calm of his solitude, Baudelaire appears to emulate Delacroix's and Guy's anxious brush and pen strokes as they aim to create harmony out of a stimulated mind. What we have in the end is not just a dream, but the poet stating his ideal of extracting ("tirer") something *out* of the dream ("une tiède atmosphère"). Far from losing himself in this landscape, Baudelaire provides a forceful summation of his theory of modern art in these last lines of "Paysage".

But is this ideal achieved? The following poem "Le Soleil" appears to be a natural continuation of "Paysage", as it represents the sun, or "pensers brûlants", that the poet intends to pull from his heart.[496] Disruptive shifts occur, however: it is clear that this is more than a "tiède atmosphère", and the poet now finds himself in the city street.

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[495] In the original version of the poem, Baudelaire also made reference to his chair: "Je ne lèverai pas le front de mon pupitre, / Et ne bougerai plus de l'antique fauteuil". This source of comfort is removed in the 1861 version, perhaps to distinguish himself from Gautier's sense of ease.

[496] "Le Soleil" was first included as the second poem in the 1857 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. It followed "Bénédiction", whose ending refers to the poet's crown as being made of "pure light". This light, then, would be understood as the sun's rays hitting the city in "Le Soleil". Now coming after "Paysage", however, the context is decidedly less mystical.

Contrary to the gentle effects of the moon and the spring season in "Paysage", and to the poet's retreat, the sun and poet are now out in full strength. As the poet abolishes any distance – whether literal or metaphoric – between himself and a Parisian 'faubourg', his imagination is directly confronted by the city's pavement. Both sun and poet work hard, even violently, to generate an illuminated landscape out of this bleak reality:

> Quand le soleil cruel frappe à traits redoublés
> Sur la ville et les champs, sur les toits et les blés,
> Je vais m'exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime,
> Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime,
> Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés,
> Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés. (3-8)

The struggle suggested by the poet's "front" in "Paysage" is now rendered more explicit, as the series of jolts indicate ("Flairant", "Trébuchant", "Heurtant"). In distinction to his earlier 'faubourg' poems, notably "Le Vin des chiffonniers", Baudelaire emphasizes the poet's conscious determination as he sets out to produce a poem.[497] A fallen Apollo as well as a de-mystified Romantic, this sun-poet confronts his surroundings to do his work: "Soyons donc vulgaire dans le choix du sujet, puisque le choix d'un sujet trop grand est une impertinence pour le lecteur du XIXe siècle", the sardonic Baudelaire concludes in his essay on Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857). However, he is in earnest when reiterating in the same essay that art represents the imagination and execution more than the subject matter: "Nous étendrons un style nerveux, pittoresque, subtil, exact, sur un canevas banal. Nous enfermerons les sentiments les plus chauds et les plus bouillants dans l'aventure la plus triviale" (*OC* II: 80). In "Le Soleil", this juxtaposition produces pleasant results:

> Ce père nourricier, ennemi des chloroses,

[497] "Souvent […] Au cœur d'un vieux faubourg […] On voit un chiffonnier qui vient, hochant la tête, / Buttant, et se cognant aux murs comme un poète" (1-6).

Eveille dans les champs et les vers comme les roses ;
Il fait s'évaporer les soucis vers le ciel,
Et remplit les cerveaux et les ruches de miel.

The title of Baudelaire's own enterprise, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, seems to lose meaning here as the poet emphasizes plenitude and growth. The creative energy of bees and sap that Hugo had figured prominently in the preface to *Cromwell* return, and the poet seems once again on the verge of creating a "monde à part" out of Paris.[498]

The sun, however, is too effective in its strength. Its sanitizing force is a form of destruction, as it sterilizes the essential element of the "laid", or of "douleur", that is the essential trait of modern art. Neither "Paysage" nor "Le Soleil", then, have all the elements of the Baudelairean imagination that crystallize in the *Salon de 1859* and *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*. The first poem details the necessary ingredients, but the poet's experiences and memories are lacking in this hermetic space; the second incorporates the experience of the city, but lacks the processing and analysis necessary to produce a unique poem. Comparing Baudelaire's "Correspondances" to his urban poems, De Man remarks that the icon of the central trope of anthropomorphism "is that of the architectural construct, temple, beehive, or columbarium" ("Anthropomorphism and Trope" 247). Both poems reflect tropes of the imagination that, despite appearances and the very title "Tableaux parisiens", look more to received notions of poetry than personal experience for inspiration. The reality of the poet, outdone in inverse ways by the sun in "Le Soleil" and by the poet's darkened retreat in "Paysage", has not yet fully emerged. Unlike the sun, which strikes both city and country, the poet is confined and limited in his powers: the street, according to Ross Chambers, stands as a sign for the "narrow limits"

[498] Hugo uses the verb "tirer" to describe the bee's extracting of pollen before producing the honey.

imposed by language.[499] Once day appears and the poet emerges to execute his ideal from the night before, obstacles immediately appear. If the sun manages to produce flowers, the poet's "poison" will inevitably resurface to destroy them. If the poet bathes in a warm 'volupté' in "Paysage", ennui will inevitably return. The formal aspects of "Le Soleil" are at odds with the poet's abrupt trips and jabs: emphasizing length with long words and stretched lines ("Le long du vieux faubourg où pendent aux masures / Les persiennes"), and a certain repetition that suggests monotony ("Sur la ville et les champs, sur les toits et les blés"), the poem suggests a certain futility in contrast to the poet's earnest momentum.

The same clash between movement and stasis occurs much more dramatically between "A une mendiante rousse" and "Le Cygne". The poet seems to carry out his ideal of rendering the transitory eternal in "A une mendiante", when, during his wanderings, he presents a shabby streetwalker as an idealized beautiful queen (here, "ennoblir" is reminiscent of the poet's process of hygiene in "Le Soleil", where the poet explicitly refers to himself as a king). As she slips his grasp, however, he comes to an abrupt and demoralizing halt in "Le Cygne". Once again at the brink of success, the poet shows how attempts to capture an ideal removed from the cognitive processing of experience (in "A une mendiante", Baudelaire veils the city experience in Renaissance topoi) are ruses. "Le Cygne" is the first poem of the "Tableaux parisiens", however, in which the poet appears conscious of his mind, not as a vessel of "pensers", but as an entity actively filtering his surroundings. Memory, which had been absent since "Spleen

[499] See "Baudelaire et l'espace poétique: A propos du 'Soleil'", in *Le Lieu et la formule* (Neuchâtel, 1978): 111-120.

et Idéal" due to the poet's descent and movement within the city, returns; but now, it is part of the active process of the imagination rather than an inert container.[500] The poet's memory is raw material, and this "poison" of a recuperated past confronts, not only the new facades and straight lines of a Haussmannized Paris, but also any residual urge to mythologize Parisian scenes (such as the romanticizing of the cityscape, or faith in the cleansing role of the poet). In "Spleen", memory had been a confused echo, but here it emerges in the form of a sustained hum of "m"'s that appear in prominent words and that are often visually and audibly doubled or tripled.[501] In contrast to the feverish and earnest movement of the preceding poems, the poet here remains anchored in his past:

> Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie
> N'a bougé ! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,
> Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,
> Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs. (29-32)

The three poems dedicated to Hugo in "Tableaux parisiens" represent Baudelaire's most formidable challenge as a poet. Hugo, a living symbol of his century, represented the ideal of progress that the modern poet ironically had to resist in order to process unique works. Baudelaire's solution, I argue, is to condense all elements into the

[500] In his famous "Spleen" poems, the poet describes his memory as a vast and immobile tomb:

> J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans.
>
> Un gros meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans,
> De vers, de billets doux, de procès, de romances,
> […]
> Cache moins de secrets que mon triste cerveau.
> C'est une pyramide, un immense caveau,
> Qui contient plus de morts que la fosse commune. ("Spleen" LXXVI)

[501] The number of instances is striking: Andromaque, miroir, immense, majesté, Simoïs menteur, ma mémoire, mortel, ménagerie, sombre, malheureux, mythe, comme l'homme, mélancolie, moi, image m'opprime, main, tombeau, femme, amaigrie, muraille immense, Jamais, jamais!, maigres, comme, matelots.

direct clash of the poet's present reality with memory. Notably, the "hum" of memory is countered by an abundance of hard consonsants (c, q) as the swan cranes its neck back:

> Vers le ciel quelquefois, comme l'homme d'Ovide,
> Vers le ciel ironique et cruellement bleu,
> Sur son cou convulsif tendant sa tête avide,
> Comme s'il adressait des reproches à Dieu ! (25-28)

There is no interference or subterfuge (fairy palaces, blooming flowers, the image of the heroic artist), no description of Paris, not even the poet's familiar protective irony, but simply the poet's realization that his urban poetry has been lacking in authenticity. This is what Goethe meant when he said that violence had to be done to "get out of the Idea"; Baudelaire had reached "that point where you must break through to the high and difficult part of art – apprehension of what is individual" (*Conversations*, 29 Oct. 1823: 14). The personal experience of memory above all has been absent, and in response to Hugo's "Rêveries d'un passant à propos d'un roi" (*Les Feuilles d'automne*), where, also in front of the Carrousel, the poet describes history as "ce flot qui n'a pas de reflux", a flood of memories in Baudelaire's "Cygne" – triggered, notably, by his encounter with a "nouveau Carrousel" – stands against this forward moving tide. Contrary to the preceding poems that open the section, "Le Cygne" emphasizes a fixity that serves as a dam to Hugo's "Pente de la rêverie", where the Seine mobilized the poet's vision.[502] Baudelaire compresses this "landscape" into his view of the Louvre - the only site mentioned by name in the "Tableaux parisiens" – which is a central location not only in Paris but also in Baudelaire's life and literary production (the *Salon de 1845* is rooted here). Against Hugo's infinitely flowing poetry, "Le Cygne" compresses all myths, ideas

[502] The poet sits at his desk in "Paysage", but this is the first time that the poet comes to a stop while out in the city.

and tropes into Memory.[503] The role of anecdote thus emerges prominently as he seeks to find his own lyric voice within this reality: "Là, je vis, un matin […]" (14). "Le Cygne" is the anguished recuperation of the "real" Baudelaire who starts from the destabilizing point of experience rather than the assured one of philosophies, schools of art, or tropes.

The poet's immobilizing disorientation in front of a changing Paris is a metaphor for the situation of the late romantic poet that poets and critics from Baudelaire's time to ours have examined and reexamined: where to go next? The sign of the modern yet romantic poet, the poet of "Le Cygne" is the outsider who tries to locate a source. Realizing that the waters have dried up, the majestic swan now robbed of its nobility (here, the stereotype of the poet who "ennobles" reality vanishes) strains his neck to look back. The swan is the romantic poet in exile, the poet who realizes that poetry itself has become a myth in an age of progress.[504] What is the poet to do in the wake of Hugo's vaporizing impulse, which was doing to poetry what Haussmann's systematic hygienic and expansive transformation was doing to Paris?[505] "Le Cygne" represents Baudelaire's

[503] As Victor Brombert points out, Baudelaire's memory represents layers of memories: "Présent, passé composé, imparfait, preterit, plus-que-parfait – les temps de l'indicatif défilent, nous séparent progressivement du moment de la méditation-évocation, et nous rapprochent cependant du temps évoqué. Derrière le Paris du XIXe siècle et le vieux Paris, se profile l'ombre d'Andromaque : d'abord, inévitablement, celle de Racine, mais surtout l'ombre virgilienne, celle qu'Enée rencontre au troisième livre de l'*Enéide*". "'Le Cygne' de Baudelaire : Douleur, souvenir, travail", *Etudes baudelairiennes* III: 254-261.

[504] And not Hugo's voluntary and posturing kind of exile. Chambers remarks that Hugo would have been implicated in the list of exiles who were "ridicule et sublime" in Baudelaire's poem. See "Baudelaire's Dedicatory Practice" in S*ubStance* 56 (1988): 5-17.

[505] Hugo was no supporter of Haussmann, but the point is to show how Baudelaire would have viewed both as symbols of a progress-oriented century. In his chapter on "Le Cygne", Richard Terdiman notes that, in 1859, "'change' itself still *seemed* like change, it had not yet become routinized or transparent. The aggressive refashioning of the city still possessed its transformative force – even its virulence. In the moment of 'Le Cygne', the remaking of the city had not yet demolished the memory of the city it remade. It still figured a dialectic, not an ontology" (119). "Le Cygne" reflects the rawness of this still recent memory, particularly one that had to do with poets. The razing of the Quartier du Doyenné meant the evacuation of a group of artists, the members of the Bohème. Even if the demolition of the Old Carrousel had taken place prior to when Haussmann assumed control, he nonetheless became a target and overall

genuine start to the "Tableaux parisiens", then, not only because it is the first new poem in the collection, but because it marks the true situation of the poet.[506] The poem is a recognition not only of reality, but also of the realities that come with producing modern poetry. The poet simply stands awkwardly before Paris's most dominating structure, wondering what might be left to work with after all myths and veils have been taken away. How can poetry be made out of the Seine, or out of an anesthesizing boulevard?

Memory, however melancholic and immobilizing, releases the "flot" that will counter the dryness of the swan's (lyric poetry's) dried source. A renewed "flot vermeil", "Le Cygne" picks up where "Tristesse d'Olympio" had left off with its "coeur répandu". While Goethe had lamented the paucity of subjects for modern artists – "It is because modern artists have no worthy subjects, that people are so hampered in all the art of modern times. From this cause we all suffer. I myself have not been able to renounce my modernness" – Baudelaire situates the faculty of memory itself as a subject for the modern poem.[507] In an optimistic reading, Richard Burton attributes the flow of water that runs through these "Hugo poems" of 1859 to a newfound sense of creativity during

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symbol of the violent upheaval: "the old Paris was conceived by Haussmann's antagonists as randomly charming, haphazard, and disparate. For them, Haussmann had violently undone this familiar and appealing character" (120).

[506] Françoise Chenet-Faugeras instead sees an important shift ("scission") taking place in "Paysage", explaining that the poem represents landscape's liberation from being a construct in the tradition of 'in situ' landscapes: "Ce n'est plus le regard éloigné mais le regard de la proximité tant spatiale qu'affective, une sorte de myopie sentimentale sensible aux petits détails 'vrais' parce qu'ils révèlent la partie intime et secrète de la ville. […] Le flâneur regarde les interstices, les fissures, et creuse le vide" (34). In "L'Invention du paysage urbain", *Romantisme* 83 (1994): 27-37. This break, in her view, enables the poet to emerge as a 'flâneur': "on entrendra donc par paysage urbain, le spectacle de la ville au quotidien, vu par le promeneur qui, sans hiérarchiser, prend en charge le réel non plus d'un regard circulaire et englobant dans une volonté de totalisation immédiate, mais au rythme de la marche, en intégrant le temps dans sa perception" (Ibid). As I have shown above, however, these initial poems to the "Tableaux parisiens" appear as artifacts themselves in their emphasis on literary tropes. Ross Chambers rightly distinguishes Baudelaire from the *flâneur* who seamlessly and uncritically navigates the city streets: "Baudelairean encounters aren't simply occasions for the exercise of idle curiosity or mild bewilderment, let alone smug enjoyment of modern life's bizarreries. They're awkward and troubling cases of mutual ignorance producing instances of double, sometimes multiple, misprision" ("Baudelaire's Paris").

[507] *Conversations* (3 Nov. 1823; 15).

the poet's stay in Honfleur; but I read the liquid as the still persistent 'volupté' – represented in the form of a splenetic sap or melancholic tears – that drips its immobilizing venom against any resolve to idealize the Parisian landscape. After "Le Cygne", the poet starts from experience and not from the Idea; but as Goethe had cautioned, this change amounted to a violent upheaval. In fact, the aftershocks of the change that reverberate throughout the rest of the "Tableaux parisiens" throw the entire enterprise of poetry into doubt. Mystery, for example, represented by a thick, yellow fog in "Les Sept vieillards", creeps through every nook and cranny in the capital. Instead of inviting the poet, it turns out to be alienating and disease-like: "Un brouillard sale et jaune inondait tout l'espace" (9). The poet is powerless against its effects.[508] Like Sainte-Beuve's Amaury, the poet lacks the reason, or the 'volonté', to tame the inner turbulence of his mind's eye; and unlike Hugo, he does not have a system in place to smoothe over its disturbing effects. In the end, the poet must return to his sheltered space in "Paysage":

> Exaspéré comme un ivrogne qui voit double,
> Je rentrai, je fermai ma porte, épouvanté,
> Malade et morfondu, l'esprit fiévreux et trouble,
> Blessé par le mystère et par l'absurdité ! (45-48)

In "Les Petites vieilles", however, the poet is abruptly back on the streets with a sense of obvious resolve:

[508] This is in clear distinction to Hugo's poet, who, as Baudelaire makes it a point to emphasize in his essay on Hugo, is at home in mystery: "Comment le père en a-t-il pu engendrer la dualité et s'est-il enfin métamorphosé en une population innombrable de nombres? Mystère ! La totalité infinie des nombres doit-elle ou peut-elle se concentrer de nouveau dans l'unité originelle ? Mystère ! […]" (*OC* II: 137). Citing this passage, Pierre Laforgue underscores the irony and argues that Baudelaire subtly crosses over into pastiche: "Manifestement les préoccupations de Hugo ne sont pas celles de Baudelaire et ce dernier n'a absolument pas dans l'idée de pénétrer le mystère des choses à la suite de Hugo ; au contraire, il travaille ironiquement à opacifier le mystère hugolien, qui est en fait pour Baudelaire le mystère de la poésie de Hugo elle-même. Ce qui revient à dire en fin de compte que cette poésie échappe à toute tentative de définition : la poésie de Hugo ? – Mystère !" (974).

Dans les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales,
Où tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements,
Je guette, obéissant à mes humeurs fatales,
Des êtres singuliers, décrépits et charmants. (1-4)

This poem evokes the poison's condensation of the perfume's expanse, or the death-bound "Voyage" that halts the intoxicating one of "La Chevelure". It is clear that this is a poet who, after having recovered from an excess of mystery in "Les Sept vieillards", is now in the heightened state of the convalescent ("je guette"). The veil of mystery has departed, and the poet's sharpened eye allows him to illuminate and process old women into a mystery of his own. The flow of water throughout these poems continues, but now it is channeled into the eyes of the old women; recuperating Andromaque's tears from "Le Cygne", the poet here de-mythologizes them into the lament of real widows he encounters on the street and in parks. Like the gaze he had exchanged with his lover in "Le Poison", the poet sees himself reflected in the eyes of these "monstres disloqués":

- Ces yeux sont des puits faits d'un million de larmes,
Des creusets qu'un métal refroidi pailleta…
Ces yeux mystérieux ont d'invincibles charmes
Pour celui que l'austère Infortune allaita ! (33-36)

It is this identification that allows him, through his own faculty of memory, to recuperate their past. Like the decrepit poet of 1861, who stands as romantic residue against monumental figures of progress – Hugo, Haussmann, Napoléon III, Nadar, the bourgeoisie – the poet of "Les Petites vieilles" produces a vibrant yet melancholy image of a past of plenitude. He does not memoralize or allegorize these women, but rather illuminates their past to make it resonate in the present:

[…] Tout cassés
Qu'ils sont, ils ont des yeux perçants comme une vrille,
Luisants comme ces trous où l'eau dort dans la nuit;
Ils ont les yeux divins de la petite fille

Qui s'étonne et qui rit à tout ce qui reluit. (17-20)

Baudelaire famously said that, in writing "Les Sept vieillards" and other poems from this period, he had gone beyond the limits of poetry. Many have used Baudelaire's declaration to explain his turn to the prose poem, following Benjamin's suggestion that lyric poetry was no longer possible in a mechanical age. However, I see Baudelaire as making his observation in formal terms: in "taking on" Hugo's formidable technical mastery, Baudelaire was vamping his own skills in execution ("volonté") to balance his heightened "naïveté". But could it be that "Les Petites vieilles" is *too* perfect, too sharp, too knowing? Even Poe's protagonist, despite his lucidity, had failed to make real identification with the object of his ambulatory quest in "The Man of the Crowd", and Baudelaire's prose poem "Les Foules" suggests the dispersal of the self despite its acuity. In Baudelaire's poem, 'volonté' has overwhelmed the poet's essential outlook of 'naïveté' (the eyes with which he identifies in the poem are, tellingly, "eagle eyes": "Son oeil parfois s'ouvrait comme l'oeil d'un vieil aigle" 59). As too much mystery had alienated the poet of "Les Sept vieillards", the one in "Les Aveugles" is alienated by his own sharp sense of consciousness. Though he has overcome the overwhelming sense of stasis in "Le Cygne" through his mastery at irony, he is now (ironically) blinder than than blind. Surmounting the obstacle of Hugo, and along with it the weight of literary tropes, has led to a void:

> […] O cité!
> Pendant qu'autour de nous tu chantes, ris et beugles,
> Eprise du plaisir jusqu'à l'atrocité,
> Vois ! je me traîne aussi ! mais, plus qu'eux hébété,
> Je dis : "Que cherchent-ils au Ciel, tous ces aveugles ? (10-14)

But this newfound blindness allows for the maximum impact of a flash that, in my reading of the critical story of the Baudelairean imagination, presents a "dépassement" of romanticism in general. In a poem that, upon first glance, would seem better suited to Guys' aesthetic than "Rêve parisien", "A une passante" recounts the story of a widow - in fashionable dress à la Guys - who passes in front of the poet's line of sight. Since my analysis of the Baudelairean imagination has been leading up to this poem, I will cite the sonnet in its entirety:

> La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
> Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
> Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
> Soulevant, balançant le festin et l'ourlet ;
>
> Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
> Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
> Dans son œil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
> La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.
>
> Un éclair…puis la nuit ! – Fugitive beauté
> Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,
> Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité ?
>
> Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici ! trop tard ! jamais peut-être !
> Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
> O toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais !

The first two stanzas concentrate all the key elements in Baudelaire's theories of modern art and the imagination. Out of all the poems in the "Tableaux parisiens", this is where the "objective" is at its most immediate. Beginning not only with the noun "rue", the first line, as a single and uninterrupted sentence, stands emphatically apart from the rest of the poem. The setting is clear, and it is loud and insistent. There is no distance between the poet and this street, and sitting at a café ("je buvais" can be read in both a literal and metaphorical way), he adopts the sharp eye and mind of Poe's convalescent in

"The Man of the Crowd". The poem, in its attention to elements of modern life – the turbulence of the city, fashion, the café – aims to render the fleeting eternal: a memory of Andromaque in de-mythified form, the woman who appears is a modern widow that, though "fugitive", has a "jambe de statue".[509] As in many of Baudelaire's poems, a gaze is exchanged between the poet and the passerby, setting up the familiar irony of a "pleasure that kills".

As the first eight lines progress, the process of concentration intensifies as we reach the forming eye of a hurricane at the exact center of the poem. Here, the irony and sense of consciousness normally associated with the poet seeing his reflection in tearful eyes is problematic. The exchange between eyes in "A une passante" is the most powerful of reciprocal gazes in Baudelaire's corpus due to its ambiguity. If the poet "drinks in" her eye (the imperfect tense stresses the passing of time), it must be the case that, however hurried, she returns the gesture. How else could he capture the eye's depth, as he does here? Ross Chambers calls this moment a "true exchange", a single instance in the "Tableaux parisiens" where the noise of the city creates the means for "a communication of an unmediated, or empathetic, kind, which has as its content human love. 'I' knows that he would have loved the woman, but he knows too that she knew it – that is, in his own eye also something was readable" (161).[510] Baudelaire's chosen metaphor for the woman's eye is indeed "readable" in all of the movement and color that it suggests. In the manner of a Delacroix painting or Boudin pastel, it is an atmospheric

[509] "A une passante" clearly owes some debt to Charles Asselineau's short story "La Jambe", which appeared in *La Double vie* (1858) (a book that Baudelaire reviewed). The narrator comes upon a woman "elegantly dressed in black", and "Un pan de sa robe qu'elle relevait de la main gauche laissait voir le bas d'une jambe admirablement tournée". Baudelaire, however, concentrates more on the woman's modernity with his focus on her accessories.

[510] See "The Storm in the Eye of the Poem: Baudelaire's 'A une passante'", in *Textual Analysis: Some Readers Reading*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York, 1986): 156-165.

landscape of clouds tinged with blue, green, purple, and black. The word "livide" can be used in different ways – pale (the "whites"), but also color (the iris, the pupil) - and Baudelaire fully exploits its complexity. But, in terms of the trope of reflecting eyes, what was normally placid water is now the eery calm during a storm. At the center of "A une passante" lies the essence of the poet's imagination, the concentrated perfume that awaits its expansion. It is the moment just after impression and just before the cerebral energy of the imagination begins its work. Though not explicitly reflected, this is the point: the eye of the storm is the "Moi" that lies between the processes of "vaporisation" and "centralisation".

This maximum tension between two moments is precisely what modern artists such as Guys could not capture in the form of the sketch or watercolor. Fast pen strokes could capture the surface aspects of modern life, and produce a general idea out of the particular, but they cannot evoke the latent, bottled-up "volupté" that forms the essence of the romantic work of art, or the depth of melancholy suggested by the complex nuances of the eye. Guys cannot lead his viewer to this heightened moment, but can only express the hurriedness of the city's and the woman's pace. His art can only be the suggestion of the eternal, and he can only "sometimes" be called a poet: "Quelquefois il est poète; plus souvent il se rapproche du romancier ou du moraliste; il est le peintre de la circonstance et de tout ce qu'elle suggère d'éternel" (*OC* II: 687).[511] In Guys, the cerebral imagination has outdone the tension between past and present, melancholy and the splendor of modern life, perfume and poison. The artist remains too aware, too

[511] We will recall that Baudelaire had, from the start, always and emphatically referred to Delacroix as a poet.

"naïve", too frantic, to be nostalgic. The "fêtes du cerveau" are too powerful for the romantic work of art to be sustained, or for the lyric poem to be sung.

After the explosive "éclair" in "A une passante", it is clear to the poet that he cannot remain nostalgic for this passing woman. He is aware of this even before she has fully passed: "trop tard! *jamais* peut-être!". The storm leaves as quickly as she has arrived. As in "Rêve parisien", she leaves nothing for the "oreilles": compared to the quatrains, the poet stammers more than he sings in the tercets. The present moment is not eternalized, because in Baudelaire's de-mythologized microcosm, "éternité" is an empty word, or, as Antoine Compagnon argues, ambiguous at best: "'L'éternel' baudelairien, cette autre face du beau, ce serait donc le nom d'une aporie, le signe de la résistance à la modernité dans l'assentiment à la modernité, un postulat ou une pétition de principe sans laquelle il n'y aurait pas d'art. […] on accepterait alors d'entendre l'éternel comme un signe vide, une inconnue algébrique" ("Baudelaire devant l'éternel").[512] The poet's "rebirth", an "assentiment à la modernité", means the death of romantic art. The lightning has evaporated the essence of the imagination, and any effort to contain it must now be relinquished. A sonnet, or what is left of the heroic epic, is both the potent reminder of the residue of romanticism and the disappearance of its trace.

The luxurious color of Delacroix may no longer be tenable with an imagination that flashes instead of illuminates (in the tradition of Abrams' famous lamp), but faded color nonetheless remains in the "Tableaux parisiens". Despite its difference in theme from a Guys drawing, Baudelaire does, in fact, allude to watercolor in "Rêve parisien":

> Et tout, même la couleur noire,
> Semblait fourbi, clair, irisé ;
> Le liquide enchâssait sa gloire

[512] In *Baudelaire devant l'innombrable*, op. cit.

Dans le rayon cristallisé. (41-44)

A less condensed material than oil, the new medium for art is a lighter and more capricious liquid. An 'eau de toilette' instead of a concentrated perfume, the substance of the imagination has faded to to the flash of its own "éclair". Modern art, a symptom of the "Coucher du soleil romantique" rather than a sign of progress, must resort to this diulted method to preserve the unique. Sketches and watercolors provide an accessible means, as well as a sense of solace, for an imagination that had to be overwhelmed to produce a modern poem:

> Il était naturel que ces artistes se tournassent surtout vers un genre et une méthode d'expression qui sont, dans leur pleine réussite, la traduction la plus nette possible du caractère de l'artiste, - une méthode expéditive, d'ailleurs, et peu coûteuse ; chose importante dans un temps où chacun considère le bon marché comme la qualité dominante, et ne voudrait pas payer à leur prix les lentes opérations du burin. ("Peintres et aquafortistes"; *OC* II: 738)[513]

The "Tableaux parisiens" thus end in chilly pink and green – "en robe rose et verte" ("Le Crépuscule du matin") – a pastel dawn that, better than nothing, brushes the "Seine déserte" with a hint of the bold and warm red and green that symbolize Delacroix in "Les Phares": "lac de sang hanté des mauvais anges, / Ombragé par un bois de sapins toujours vert" (29-30). As Sainte-Beuve was quick to remind caustic critics that Lamartine was the first romantic poet, Baudelaire provides the same sort of reminder to Manet. Critics often cite his famous letter to the painter, though without mentioning its explicit reference to romantic predecessors: "Avez-vous plus de génie que Chateaubriand et que Wagner? […] je vous dirai que ces hommes sont des modèles, chacun dans son genre, et dans un monde très riche et que vous, *vous n'êtes que le premier dans la décrépitude de votre art* " (11 May 1865; *Corr* II: 496-497). Manet's art, if it reflects what Baudelaire calls

[513] First published in *Le Boulevard*, 14 Sept. 1862.

"cette imagination vive et ample, sensible, audacieuse", is necessarily also a trace of what romanticism was:

> Delacroix est le plus *suggestif* de tous les peintres, celui dont les œuvres, choisies même parmi les secondaires et les inférieures, font le plus penser, et rappellent à la mémoire le plus de sentiments et de pensées poétiques déjà connus, mais qu'on croyait enfouis pour toujours dans la nuit du passé. (*OC* II: 745)[514]

[514] "L'Oeuvre et la vie d'Eugène Delacroix" (1863).

Conclusion

> J'ai essayé d'inventer de nouvelles fleurs, de nouveaux astres, de nouvelles chairs, de nouvelles langues. J'ai cru acquérir des pouvoirs surnaturels. Eh bien ! Je dois enterrer mon imagination et mes souvenirs ! Une belle gloire d'artiste et de conteur emportée !
>
> Arthur Rimbaud, *Une saison en enfer* (1873)

> Ici tout avenir et tout projet se dissipent. Le néant consume l'objet, nous sommes pris dans le vent de cette flamme sans ombre. Et nulle foi ne nous soutient plus, nulle formule, nul mythe, le plus intense regard s'achève désespéré. Restons pourtant devant cet horizon sans figure, vidé de soi.
>
> Yves Bonnefoy, "L'Acte et le lieu de la poésie", *L'Improbable* (1959)

"Le Crépuscule du matin", the final poem of Baudelaire's "Tableaux parisiens", symbolizes the dissipation of a romantic aesthetic that had once captured the poet's turbulent cerebral energy. Its faded colors lead to a monochrome grayness, which reflects the poet's turn from the physical aspects of the city and their effects on the mind to a more uniform and abstract presentation of the moral decrepitude of Paris and of the modern age in general: "Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux / Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux" (27-28). Baudelaire's frequent turn to the device of allegory in this period suggests a freezing of the landscape's vitality, or the immobilization of the underlying and transfiguring sap or fluid that had been a salient romantic trope from Wordsworth to Hugo. Patrick Labarthe considers how, under Baudelaire's eye, the panorama of Paris becomes an allegorizing tableau that drains the "substance" of mythical romantic landscapes:

> Cette simultanéité d'une présence si incarnée, si sensuelle, et d'un détachement interprétatif, est propre à la pratique allégorisante de Baudelaire et tranche ainsi sur l'aspect spectral du contemplateur hugolien, accoudé, dans l'Ode *A l'Arc de Triomphe*, au bord de Paris détruit, ou sur le tableau pompéien de Paris ville morte, aux dernières pages de la Préface de *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. Ce regard panoramique

> transmue en un texte qu'on a devant soi, sous les yeux, la ville qui ensorcelait : il permet ce coup d'œil dépassionné qui ferme par exemple *Les Tableaux parisiens*. (46)[515]

Baudelaire's subsequent essay on modern art, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), and his prose poems from *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869; posthumous), feature a poet who fails to connect ontologically or aesthetically with his surroundings as well as an imagination that is more animalistic than human.[516] The imagination strikes the reader more as a primate than a primary faculty; a reflex, it drives the artist and determines his behavior: "C'est à cette curiosité profonde et joyeuse qu'il faut attribuer l'œil fixe et animalement extatique des enfants devant le nouveau, quel qu'il soit, visage ou paysage, lumière, dorure, couleurs, étoffes chatoyantes, enchantement de la beauté embellie par la toilette" (*OC* II: 690). *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* appears more as an anthropological study than as a portrait of the artist: "La foule est son domaine, comme l'air est celui de l'oiseau, comme l'eau celui du poisson" (Ibid 691).[517] Guys is thus the antithesis of the dandy, an aloof and refined species threatened to extinction due to romanticism's decline,[518] given his unslakable thirst for capturing the transitory:

> […] car le mot dandy implique une quintessence de caractère et une intelligence subtile de tout le mécanisme moral de ce monde; mais, d'un autre côté, le dandy aspire à l'insensibilité, et c'est par là que M. G., qui

[515] "Paris comme décor allégorique", in *Baudelaire, Paris, l'allégorie*, eds. Jean-Paul Avice and Claude Pichois (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995).
[516] *Le Spleen de Paris* was not published as a collection until after Baudelaire's death (1867), but he published most of the poems separately in journals starting as early as 1855.
[517] Francis Moulinat, in his notes to this section of *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (III. "L'Artiste, Homme du monde, Homme des foules et Enfant") in Baudelaire's *Ecrits sur l'art* (Livre de poche, 1999), cites Rousseau's anthropologic *Discours sur la naissance de l'Inégalité*: "J'ose presque dire que l'état de réflexion est un état contre nature et que l'homme qui médite est un animal dépravé" (516). The processing mental faculties, which distinguish humans from animals, seem to be likewise excised from Baudelaire's theory of post-romantic art.
[518] "Le dandysme est le dernier éclat d'héroïsme dans les décadences; […]. Le dandysme est un soleil couchant; comme l'astre qui décline, il est superbe, sans chaleur et plein de mélancolie" (Ibid 711-712).

> est dominé, lui, par une passion insatiable, celle de voir et de sentir, se détache violemment du dandysme. (Ibid) [519]

Reversing the romantic trope of the landscape wanderer who transfigures objects of perception into a picture or poem, Baudelaire instead features the imagination as propelling the sketch artist through the city and producing only unfinished strokes and washed-out colors. Baudelaire does not go as far to suggest that the 'plein air' sketch is enough,[520] but the manner in which Guys produces the work of art is just as rapid and violent as how he observes and preys on the subjects of his drawings:

> […] celui-ci est penché sur sa table, dardant sur une feuille de papier le même regard qu'il attachait tout à l'heure sur les choses, s'escrimant avec son crayon, sa plume, son pinceau, faisant jaillir l'eau du verre au plafond,

[519] 1863, when this essay was published, was a watershed year. It was first and foremost the year that Delacroix died, and, though it appears upbeat and enthralled with modern life, Baudelaire's "case study" of the modern artist in *Le Peintre* can be read as an ironic response to his eulogistic essay on Delacroix, who appears as the pondering and "nuanced" dandy whom Guys is not: "Il possédait bien vingt manières différentes de prononcer '*mon cher monsieur*', qui représentaient, pour une oreille exercée, une curieuse gamme de sentiments. Car enfin, il faut bien que je le dise, puisque je trouve en ceci un nouveau motif d'éloge, E. Delacroix, quoiqu'il fût un homme de génie, ou parce qu'il était un homme de génie complet, participait beaucoup du dandy " ("L'œuvre et la vie de Delacroix"; *OC* II: 759). It was also the year in which the famous Salon des Refusés was held, where Manet exhibited *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and promptly created a scandal, even alienating critics who were normally sympathetic to the 'nouveauté' of modern art. 1863 also saw the first publication in book form of Hugo's drawings (published by Castel), which was welcomed by some as Hugo's necessary acknowledgement of the decline of poetry in the modern age. In her essay on the intersecting aesthetics of Manet, Baudelaire and Hugo in 1862, Therese Dolan shows how the drawings were seen as injecting new life into the romantic imagination: "The mixture of esthetics and politics in Hugo's writings sullied his romanticism and troubled his followers. The freedom of his drawings from polemics, their total dependence on imagination as the source of creation, allowed writers such as Philippe Burty to hail them as the visual equivalent of Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell*, the rallying cry of a pure romanticism" (*Word & Image* 16.2; Apr-Jun 2000). Finally, as I showed in my last chapter, Sainte-Beuve's introduction to Goethe's *Conversations with Eckermann* appeared in 1863, which undermined Hugo's status as the leading poet of the age and in effect accused him of having ruined the viability of a romantic aesthetic.

[520] Baudelaire compares the young Guys to a savage: "M. G., obsédé par toutes les images qui remplissaient son cerveau, eut l'audace de jeter sur une feuille blanche de l'encre et des couleurs. Pour dire la vérité, il dessinait comme un barbare, comme un enfant, se fâchant contre la maladresse de ses doigts et la désobéissance de son outil" (Ibid 688). While the older Guys is, for Baudelaire, much more savvy and refined, his primitiveness is still evident: "Aujourd'hui, M. G., qui a trouvé, à lui tout seul, toutes les petites ruses du métier, et qui a fait, sans conseils, sa propre éducation, est devenu un puissant maître à sa manière, et n'a gardé de sa première ingénuité que ce qu'il en faut pour ajouter à ses riches facultés un assaisonnement inattendu" (Ibid 688-689). The modern artist reflects Darwin's theory of 'survival of the fittest', where the programmed and relentless drive to reproduction dissolves any sense of harmony. While Guys is a self-made artist who works his way up from journalist to artist, Delacroix is one of the "rares élus" whose imagination is a shrine: "Son imagination, ardente comme les chapelles ardentes, brille de toutes les flammes et de toutes les pourpres" (*Salon de 1859*; *OC* II: 632).

> essuyant sa plume sur sa chemise, pressé, violent, actif, comme s'il craignait que les images ne lui échappent, querelleur quoique seul, et se bousculant lui-même. (Ibid 693)

The poet of "Paysage" in *Les Fleurs du mal*, bent silently and meditatively over his desk as he strives to create "romantic" and lyrical landscapes, is no more. In a sacrificial gesture, Baudelaire shows how a modern, mechanized imagination (which is in competition with the camera) destroys the fragile exchange between eye and mind. The curiosity that guides the artist's production is a mark of art's fallen condition: "La curiosité est devenue une passion fatale, irrésistible!" (*OC* II: 690).

In Baudelaire's prose poems, the poet's sense of a creative self, as well as his attempts at establishing an intimate connection with his surroundings, are dissolved by maxims, meditations, and further anthropological observations.[521] The post-lyric Baudelaire moves towards abstraction, but in the concise and intense form of prose poems that are set within his familiar Paris.[522] The title of the opening poem "L'Etranger" suggests on its own the split between the narrator and the world, despite his direct confrontation with his native city. There is no discernable medium or process that

[521] There are many studies that demonstrate the aggressive irony at work in Baudelaire's prose poems, but Jérôme Thélot's especially considers how this irony reflects analytic rigor. Using "Le Chien et le flacon" as an example, he shows how Baudelaire shatters the poet-reader (producer-consumer) relationship by confronting the trope of perfume with dog excrement. Baudelaire, according to Thélot, thus creates a neutral zone where the work of art is stripped of interest (tradition, flattery, political stance) and claims the possibility of an authentic poetry in the modern age: "Enfin l'image du don – du flacon au chien et du poème au lecteur - , en caricaturant la générosité et en insultant l'idée d'échange, garde en elle la mémoire d'un don réel, réciproque, dont elle traduit aussi, et malgré tout, la possibilité. – 'Le Chien et le flacon' n'est-il pas un poème d'amour, un poème posant l'amour pour vérité poétique ?" (*Baudelaire: Violence et poésie*: 38).

[522] Baudelaire thus demonstrates an inverse move from Hugo's contemplations of oceans and abysses, which took epic proportions in his poetry of exile. Suggesting that Baudelaire's prose poems reflect a "dissident rhetoric", Martine Bercot shows how Baudelaire critiqued not only an idealist romantic enterprise exemplified by Hugo and others, but also his own 1857 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*. While Bercot's casting of the first edition of *Les Fleurs* as idealist is reductive, I agree with her overall assessment that the prose poems undercut the romantic aim to reveal underlying secrets and analogies: "Baudelaire se tourne vers la poésie en prose et opte pour une langue contingente et sans récurrences, l'analogie arbitraire, la comparaison plus que la métaphore, lorsque l'idée d'une unité cachée et d'une vérité secrète du monde lui devient illusoire". See "Nouvelles *Fleurs du mal*: Idéalisme et désillusion", in *L'Intériorité de la forme* (op. cit.).

can shape the clouds he views into forms or symbols. Relinquishing the fertile model of the imagination in the *Salon de 1859*, which processes clouds into exotic architectural structures, Baudelaire's narrator can only stutter: "J'aime les nuages…les nuages qui passent…là-bas…là-bas…les merveilleux nuages!" (*OC* I: 277). What was once a principal motif in *Les Fleurs du mal* - his mistress's alluring but poisonous eyes that reflect the dialectical movement of the poet's 'Spleen et Idéal' - is now frozen into a commentary on social injustice.[523] Pangs of guilt that rise in the narrator as a trio of ragged onlookers gape at the new and glitzy café where he sits with his companion are met with a jolt. The tearing and stormy green eyes from before are now stony and cruel:

> Non seulement j'étais attendri par cette famille d'yeux, mais je me sentais un peu honteux de nos verres et de nos carafes, plus grands que notre soif. Je tournais mes regards vers les vôtres, cher amour, pour y lire ma pensée ; je plongeais dans vos yeux si beaux et si bizarrement doux, dans vos yeux verts, habités par le Caprice et inspirés par la Lune, quand vous me dites : 'Ces gens-là me sont insupportables avec leurs yeux ouverts comme des portes cochères ! Ne pourriez-vous pas prier le maître du café de les éloigner d'ici ?' (Ibid 319)

The narrator's wanderings and experiences in Paris do not form a fluid, generative process, nor a cohesive picture, but are brutally interrupted at each turn and shock his imagination into aporia. Reflecting instead the absurd condition of modern life, in which the ideals of transcendence, escape, and the creative work of art are in vain, the poet appears as a Sisyphus who dreams of fleeing Paris only to ask over and over again where he can possibly go: "Il me semble que je serais toujours bien là où je ne suis pas, et cette question de déménagement en est une que je discute sans cesse avec mon âme" ("Any

[523] See Sanyal, chap. 2: "Passages from Form to Politics: Baudelaire's 'Le Spleen de Paris'" (*Violence of Modernity*, 2006). In the same vein as Thélot, but focusing on how Baudelaire's supposedly disinterested poetics are "contaminated" by politics, Sanyal examines how Baudelaire reflects the violence of the city in the structure of his poems: "If the poet is indeed something of a symbolic *chiffonnier*, avidly gathering up the vestiges of modernity's symbolic production, Baudelaire also suggests that he fully participates in the smashing and reassimilation of this urban refuse, in the interwoven violences that make up the social fabric that the poet elsewhere claims to cut out of his poetry" (64).

Where Out of the World"; Ibid 356). The idea of landscape, whether it be Paris, Holland, or Jakarta, is null and void in Baudelaire's ironic treatment of its traditional form and connotations. Even the apparently lush and rich Dutch landscape in the prose version of "L'Invitation au voyage" amounts to the reflection of a violent pair of eyes that now swiftly wound instead of slowly secrete a seductive spleen. The use of clichés 'ad nauseum' ("un pays de Cocagne", "une Chine occidentale", "un *revenez-y* de Sumatra", tulips) leads to an allegory of cheap or unrequited love: "Ces trésors, ces meubles, ce luxe, cet ordre, ces parfums, ces fleurs miraculeuses, c'est toi" (Ibid 303).[524]

Baudelaire's dissolution of both the natural world and the creative imagination has led Michel Collot to situate his poetry as ushering in a "crise du paysage" whose reverberations are still felt in contemporary art and literature:

> Il vit et illustre exemplairement le douloureux passage d'un romantisme ouvert à toutes les tentations et tentatives de dépasser les limites de l'art, à une modernité confrontée à la vacuité et à l'inaccessibilité de cet horizon, qui fuit comme une transcendance à jamais vide ou illusoire. (*Poésie et paysage* 79)

Collot's study is illuminating in its thorough analysis of how French poets since Baudelaire have concentrated on responding to this crisis.[525] Rimbaud, to take a notable example, dramatically demonstrates the conflict between the modern poet's impulse to destroy traditional methods of representation and elements of the natural world and his

[524] Barbara Johnson: "The voyage to the land 'which one could call the Orient of the Occident' here becomes not the search for some faraway utopia, but the quest for what (dis)orients all return and all repetition, a quest, in other words, for what subverts the very *sense* – or direction – of the voyage". In "Poetry and its Double", op. cit. The pair of "traitres yeux" explicitly appears in the lyric version of "L'Invitation".

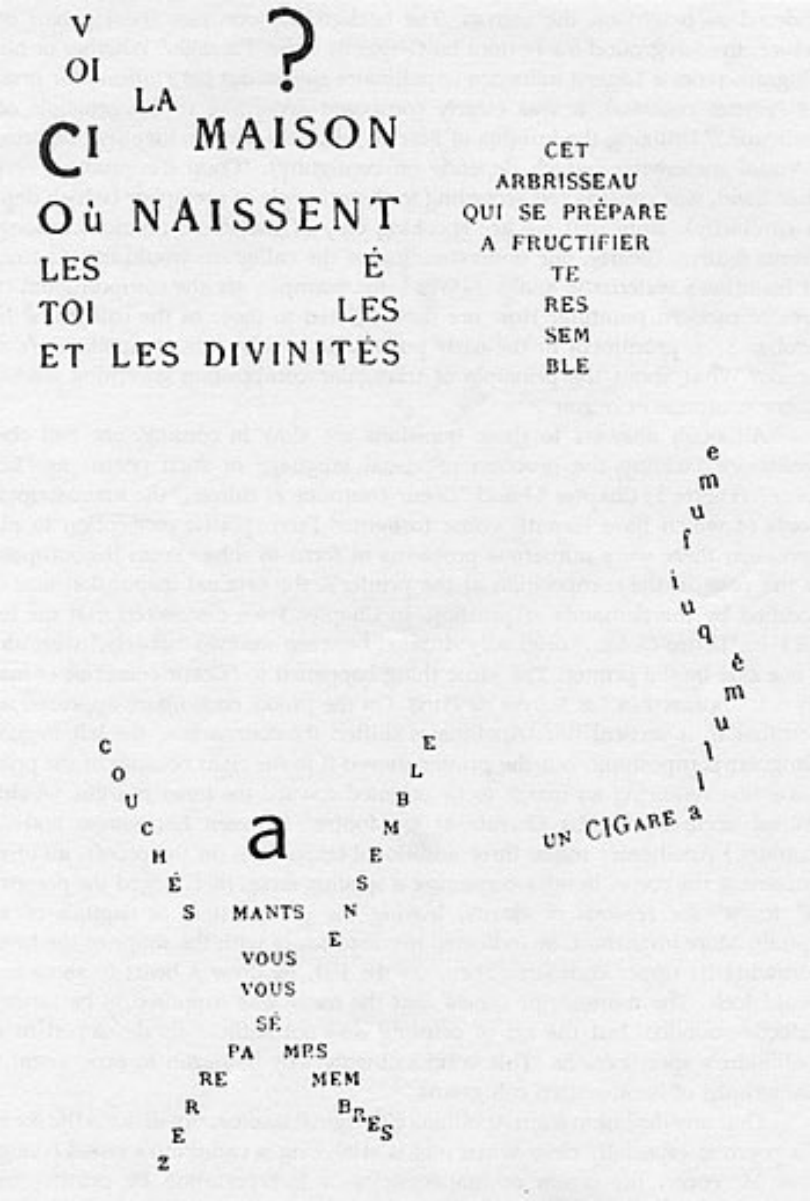
[525] Chapter 4, "Crise du paysage", details all facets of poets' and artists' solutions to the problem of landscape representation. Some touted a realist aesthetic as an antidote to the illusory romantic landscape, while others viewed the landscape as an artifact ("le paysage n'est jamais qu'une toile peinte" 81) that contested both the romantic and realist enterprise. From Monet to Kandinsky, the landscape demonstrates an increasing deterioration of figures, perspective, and images.

simultaneous desire to "refigure" the landscape as the pure product of invention: "Loin de nier leur défiguration, ce travail de refiguration prend appui sur elle pour renouveler entièrement la face de la terre et du sujet" (Ibid 94). His *Illuminations* (1886) can only compensate for the deceit and precariousness of the real world with the fragile and artificial medium of a 'painted plate'. Even more threatened to destruction than Baudelaire's bottled essence of perfume, the thin and brittle surface that symbolizes the ghostly colors of the romantic imagination shimmers intriguingly ("Des ciels gris de cristal"), but is constantly undercut by a more powerful and ruthless force: "Un rayon blanc, tombant du haut du ciel, anéantit cette comédie" ("Les Ponts").[526]

As readers who are well familiar with the recent history of world wars, the trauma of the Holocaust, the grand scale effects of terrorism, widespread pollution, and the depletion of natural resources, we are ironically at home with works of art that demonstrate the self's modern condition of fragmentation and the corresponding disintegration of our environment. If French poets of the first half of the nineteenth century experienced a strong sense of alienation and confusion, the stakes became radically higher in the following century due to rapid advances in technology and the phenomenon of globalization. Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1918; posthumous), to take a striking example, remove the landscape from its traditional role of representing a view of nature as well as its defining features of horizon or perspective.[527] Influenced by Cubism as well as by his experiences on the fronts during World War I, Apollinaire's "views" are pictorial only in how he arranges the typography of the poem. His "Paysage" amounts to

[526] Ed. Louis Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).
[527] Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

a view of a grouping of letters, and the signified objects that also serve as signifiers reflect the severance of poetry and language ("vous vous sépar[r]ez mes membres") from the physical world:



Though there is a clear suggestion of intimacy (the house), arousal (the flowering tree) and sexuality (the lovers and the post-pleasure cigar), the sensual experience is disturbed by the poet's pinning of letters and particularly by his splaying of the human figure. Scorned as an irresponsible form of escape, or as an uncritical or reactionary conservative

response to contemporary philosophies that probe the illusory effects of language and images, scenes from nature in the modern world seem quaint. The romantic landscape cannot be, since our world is now understood to be violently unstable, never in conformity with determined patterns, and immune to control: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist", reads the opening sentence of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1).[528]

This study has aimed, however, to nuance our tendency to dismiss romanticism as something of an irreconcilable or saccharin past. We commonly link romantic poetry to a creative imagination that is happily and uncritically free of rules and contingencies, but throughout I have consistently begged the question: what *is* the creative imagination? The answer has always led back to the poet's processing of an immediate and obstacle-ridden reality. Collot, who stands against the tide of structuralist readings that have shifted the agency of the poem from the self to language, affirms the *authenticity* of the imagination that poeticizes landscapes. He demonstrates how modern works starting with Baudelaire, and through Ponge, Gracq, and Jaccottet, reflect how the romantic landscape is not an empty rhetorical construct, but "un phénomène multidimensionnel, un véritable carrefour où se croisent les apports de la nature et de la culture, de l'histoire et de la géographie, de l'individu et de la société, du réel, de l'imaginaire et du symbolique" (*Paysage et poésie* 10). But even Collot, in his concern for the changing shape of landscape representation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pigeonholes Romanticism as promoting "vacuous" and "transcendent" theories. We should rather

[528] Ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1997).

take our cue from Baudelaire, who, in endeavoring to save romanticism from its decline, eliminated these tropes to recuperate art's essential conflictual dynamic between eye and mind. As Friedrich Schlegel said, romantic poetry is all poetry.

Contrary to our assumptions and common associations, romantic art is not simply the unabashed application of wild colors, or the effusive expression of emotion and dreams, or aimless wanderings within sublime landscapes: "Our easy and enthusiastic acceptance of imagination is […] a stumbling block when we attempt to understand writers of earlier periods because the word 'imagination' was associated for centuries with a sharply different set of powers, achievements, and challenges" (Lyons xi).[529] French romanticism – in its eclectic heritage of Aristotle, the Stoics, the common sense of Montaigne, the skepticism of Descartes, the Augustine-inspired Pascal, empirical philosophy, the metaphysics-wary Kant and the self-critical, Werther-weary Goethe – tells the story of the imposition of limits. I have shown how the imagination was a unique and critical construct to each poet, which, aside from the questions of their political leanings and particular historical circumstances, explains why it is risky to apply the term 'romantic' casually. French romantic landscapes, in fact, are more in line with our contemporary understanding of the work of art, not as a means to expression, but as the representation of the artist's conceptualization. Our understanding of the function of the imagination in Lamartine, Hugo and Baudelaire requires a fleshing out of the elements of the history of the idea they inherited and then processed into their own distinct formulation. Each of the poets in question, in a critical gesture, went back not only to their predecessors, but to their own former projects to gain a more cogent and resilient theory of art. Taking account of the roots while forming their own offshoots of

[529] *Before Imagination* (op. cit.).

the idea of the imagination was a way to assert and assure the seriousness and authenticity, as opposed to the lapsed consciousness, of a romantic enterprise.

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