READINGS: SYMBOLISM

Background: Eugen Weber, *Consciousness and Confusion*
Baudelaire, Various Poems

Background: Eugen Weber, CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONFUSION, *Movements, Currents, Trends*, pp. 203-208, 218-219.

The great positive message of the nineteenth century was one of human capacity, self-sufficiency, and progress. History appeared to be the story of man's increasing control over his environment and over himself. In a vulgar sense, the world was seen as a finite place with infinite possibilities, and this vision was translated into the politics, the economics, the literature, and the education of the time.

The Positivistic followers of Auguste Comte, of Taine, of Zola thought it possible to explain and rule the world. But a reaction against them soon developed-in England, in Germany, in France-that stressed anti-Positivistic factors such as the unknown, the mysterious, and the wonderful. The first notes of this reaction were sounded in France by Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Mallarme; in England by Walter Pater and Herbert Spencer; in Germany by Schopenhauer and Wagner who themselves harked back to earlier Romantics like Novalis and Holderlin. Largely ignored at first, the reaction persisted and grew through the 1870's, parallel to the then dominant Naturalism and Positivism, keeping up a running fire of dissent from the dominant view.

The great white hope of Positivistic doctrine had been that mystery could be destroyed and the unknown, source of superstition and its attendant ills, be driven out or, at least, back. Yet even in its heyday of the 1870s the strongholds of the unknown held fast and mystery soon began to reaffirm itself, partly because science had not kept the overweening promises that had been made on its behalf, and partly because then (and women even more) are seldom content with merely material explanations. Herbert Spencer, who had long opposed the Comtian conception of a world totally open to positive investigation and understanding, published his First Principles in 1862 the first part of which was devoted to establishing the notion of an Unknowable and the argument that the power behind the visible world must remain forever unfathomable for us. The 1870's saw the First Principles translated into German and French, and the Spencerian Unknowable became available on the continent to reinforce Hartmann's idea of the Unconscious-an all-powerful and intractable spirit that lay behind and was the prime mover of worldly reality-and also the pessimism of Schopenhauer which was beginning to make its mark in Germany and beyond. Schopenhauer's thought was not intentionally antiscientific, but his despair before the findings of science helped supplement the growing disillusion over its "failures." Meanwhile, the internal disagreements and rival theories of the scientists themselves spread doubt of the possibility of arriving at unique positive truths, and persuaded many that the wisest attitude would be an eclectic one in which the end would be experience for its own sake rather than a certainty of knowledge unattainable in any case. And the eclecticism that seems to be so dominant in the intellectual world of the time is matched by a similar, though hardly deliberately thought out, tendency in the conspicuous consumption of the bourgeois home, crowded with a mixed bag of curios, souvenirs, antiques, objets d'art, and cumbrous plants. The collections in the homes of Emile Zola and Anatole France, in which a medieval carving neighbored a canopic jar, an antimacassar a piece of buhl, a suit of armor a Renaissance sword, a Turkish carpet a set of antlers, not to forget the prints and photographs in ornate frames, the wonderfully camouflaged objects impersonating something else (wax fruit, paper flowers, murderous oriental daggers for opening letters, stuffed bears on which to hang coat or umbrella)-homes such as these mirrored not only a contemporary taste dominant from Balmoral to Buxtehude, but a contemporary mind increasingly cluttered and confused, decreasingly able or willing to differentiate or order.

Pessimism, eclecticism, taste for mystery, disbelief in the value of effective action, which made for the rise of such "decadent" movements as the Hydropats, the Hirsutes, the Zutistes (Phooey-ists), and Jemenfoutistes (Couldntcarelessers)-all these tendencies came together in a strong current of metaphysical idealism. Where the dominant preoccupation of the Realists had been the inventory and investigation of human society, the new men wanted to pierce through this superficial shell to the secrets of life. The former were interested only in objective reality, the latter were not a bit interested in surface reality and inclined to deny the very possibility of being objective. "Objectivity," writes the Symbolist review, "is nothing but vain appearance, that I may vary or transform as I wish."

This is the belief of many symbolists: reality, whether present or past, either is subjective or is not at all.

If that is so, if scientist and sociologist merely clamber precariously over an insignificant exposed part of the iceberg of reality, then our true interpreters and guides must be the poets and the artists who dive below the surface of the unknown and bring back with them snatches of a more profound truth unattainable by "positive" methods. Since these new discoveries, these new experiences, are in the domain of the senses, the emotions, the realm in which we approach closer to truth than through surface experience, the question of communication has to be reconsidered. Particularly in Wagner's operas, the poets found reason to think that their statements might borrow from song an escort of words chosen for the sake of their tone, their sonority, their evocative possibilities, and their capacity through some mysterious connection ("correspondance," or "analogy," as Baudelaire called it) to evoke the desired reaction by some apparently irrelevant allusion. "The most perfect creation of the poet," Wagner had written in 1860, "must be that which in its final conclusion would be perfect music." After 1885, the Revue Wagnerienne, devoted to this gospel, became one of the advance posts of the Symbolist movement.

It is tempting to see all this as a neo-Romantic reaction against the over-bold and boastful positive Realism preceding it. And yet the break between the two "movements" is not so clear: just as Realism grew out of certain tendencies in the Romantic quest for reality, so what we might for simplicity's sake call Symbolism grew out of the positive investigations of Realists and Naturalists. Man had set out to grasp the mechanism of the world and discover what made it tick. He started to take everything apart, and soon realized that his powers of observation, be they as controlled as you like, were not sufficient for the task. He started, then, to take apart his problems and the various objects of his research, the better to examine and depict them in detail. And, having gone as far as he thought he could in examining the objects of his sensations, he then turned back upon himself and began to examine these sensations for their own sake, and also the possibility of communicating them in suitable terms-that is, in a language of their own.

If reality is a collection of sensations-our own feelings about the things we seethen what can evoke it better, offer a readier access to its hidden worlds, than music? Thus it was that this vague and suggestive art form triumphed over every other - musicians putting verses to music, poets wanting their verses to be nothing but music, and painters trying to do as much with their works. In 1849, already, one of Murger's Bohemians had worked on a great symphony on the influence of blue on the arts. Now the tables were turned and painters like Whistler, Gauguin, Cezanne, or Odilon Redon, fascinated by the influence and the possibilities of music, adopted its terminology and tried to adapt its techniques. Redon called himself a symphonist (sic) painter, Gauguin spoke of harmonies of line and color which he called the music of painting, Cezanne painted an Overture to Tannhauser, and Whistler, when his Young Woman in White was refused by the Salon, accepted the suggestion that Symphony in White would be a better name for it and henceforth composed symphonies, nocturnes, and variations, all possessed of the evocative quality of the music he so much admired.

With the approach, the scale of apprehension also changed: notes, syllables, vowels, dots of color, acquired a significance they never had. Where Renaissance and Enlightenment had sought to see the world in perspective, as a whole, modern man tried to discover its secret in its details. The next step, Expressionism, need not surprise us: it is no more than a further advance toward subjectivism. For an Expressionist painter the object is simply a perception: it is a part of the perceiver, an aspect of his emotion, and thus varies from person to person and even within a person from moment to moment. The artist is no longer interested in the object, but in himself. He does not try to reproduce an impression, but rather the expression that he, the artist, confers, as it were, upon the object of his attention. Symbolism had sought to do much the same thing, but to this end it tried to borrow from nature itself the analogies that would enable it to express the relationship between subject and object, perceiver and perceived. For the Expressionist, every sensation, every emotion, becomes complicated and enriched by a whole mass of previous, until-then-forgotten sensations and experiences. Where the Impressionists tried to reproduce a surface perception, and the Symbolists the sensations this induced, the Expressionists sought to connect these sensations with our whole psychology. The difference may well be no more than a greater awareness in one than in another; it remains a difference nevertheless. Basically, however, it is more profound: where the Symbolists appealed to intelligence as well as to sensitivity, the Expressionists, abandoning reflection and style, emphasized the spontaneity of the psychiatrist's couch.

Another description of the Expressionistic approach has been furnished by Paul Tillich, in his essay on The Religious Situation.

The individual forms of things were dissolved, not in favor of subjective impressions but in favor of objective metaphysical expression. The Abyss of Being was to be evoked in lines, colors and plastic forms . . . . Naturally the movement turned back to older, primitive and exotic forms in which the inner expressive force of reality was still to be found untamed.

It was natural, as Tillich says, for men seeking to approach reality and find "natural" means for its expression to turn to the art of primitive societies which they believed free or freer of the hobbles an artificial civilization had imposed upon us. And, once again, pace Tillich, it seems to have been the French who led the way, with Cezanne, with the Fauves-the wild beasts, and the experimental Cubists grouped round Picasso and Braque. There is, here, an attempt (as all this great disintegrating movement is itself) to reconstitute a new order upon a more complete vision and control of reality. The Cubists take the classic model of reality to pieces, displace its elements, accentuate some to the point of caricature while leaving others out, and hope thereby to provide a truer presentation of their object than traditional methods can. But not of "the object" only: Cezanne attempts to seize as closely, as directly, as possible his own sense-impression of what he beholds, his "consciousness"-and in this he is at one with poets like Mallarme and musicians like Debussy in trying to render an inner experience or subjective feeling rather than some "objective" outer perception. Ever since Cezanne, painting is interested mainly in those particles of nature that the painter "digs" in his own way. It is the artist who creates the interest, the meaning, the value of his subject, and the interaction between him and it in a subjective universe is tremendously emphasized. Once upon a time, the problem of art was the relationship between men as a race and nature as a stable reality. Since nature is no longer stable, since its interpreter-man-is a subjective, fluctuating force, this is no longer so. An era that no longer believes in established principles, that discovers new laws, themselves all the time subject to modification, must fall back on a view of reality that will be as we have seen, subjective, eclectic, dialectic, and eventually purely pragmatic.

This is exactly what we find in every art form represented below. The dynamic force that runs like molten metal through Futuristic veins, the absurdity, anger, and dismay of the Dada and Surrealistic world, are evident enough, and it is not difficult to connect these manifestations with their times. And yet, in spite of this, henceforth art was no longer the expression of society as it had been, to the extent it had been, in the days of Rubens, of Poussin, of Chardin, or of Courbet: it became the expression of the artist as an individual. And while it goes without saying that the artist is the creature of his time, the multiplicity of reactions to a same experience in time, reflects the great discovery that a shared situation does not ensure a shared experience, and bears witness to the vast variety of views, visions, and responses that the new ideas caused to thrive side by side on the same muck-heap.

SYMBOLISM

The disintegrating possibilities of the Impressionistic approach have already been mentioned. Looking back, it seems clear how the most apparently Positivistic factors of the time contributed to the rise of a new idealism, not only by their failures, but by their perfection too. Thus photography, when it provided the public with a cheap substitute for painting or sculpture, helped change the direction or, at least, the reigning emphasis of the plastic arts by minimizing the need for those illustrations which the camera could henceforth provide much more cheaply, and concentrating the artist's interest increasingly upon interpretation and its problems.

Art, it soon was argued, should not try to imitate nature, but to discover the hidden meaning of things which are to the artist the signs, the symbols, of a deeper reality. Thus, the artist-explorer inquires into the hidden meaning of things and then tries to suggest it to others. But he cannot do this any longer by objective presentation. Before the ideas and sensations he has discerned can be communicated, they must be transposed into terms that will reach the public's inner ear or eye, its heart not its head. The artist must, in the words of Delacroix, seek to build a bridge between his heart and that of his listeners or his beholders.

Throughout the nineteenth century these ideas spread through Germany, England, and France. By the time Moreas published his Manifesto, poets like Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, painters like Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, had produced all, or much, of their work. To the would-be objective and scientific naturalist theories these men opposed a subjective and poetic point of view, a return to more openly romantic values, the artist playing the part of a magician, delving into the unconscious that French and German scientists like Hartmann and Charcot were exploring about this time, and exalting its importance. Once again, the connection

between scientific and artistic activities is striking. In 1885, an aspiring Viennese physician makes his first trip to Paris, there to study under the great neurologist, J. M. Charcot. Sigmund Freud would soon be thirty years old. In Glasgow, the anthropologist James Frazer, only two years older, is at this time preparing his majestic Golden Bough (published in 18go), in which he will point out the connection between the magic and the poetic approach, each of which uses analogy for its own ends.

What this could mean for the plastic arts appeared in 1888, when Pmile Bernard, whose ideas would seriously influence Gauguin-and through Gauguin the whole of modern art, decided that since the idea is the real form of things in the imagination, the painter should paint not things but the idea of a thing in the imaginationand this idea itself simplified to its essentials and divested of all insignificant details. Memory, said Bernard, does not retain everything: it retains only that which it finds striking. Thus, if you paint from memory instead of from objects before your eyes, or, at least, if you let those objects filter through your imagination and then paint the result, you can rid yourself of the useless complication of shapes and shades. All you will get is a schematic presentation: "all lines back to their geometric architecture, all shades back to the primary colors of the prismatic palette." In search of simplification, one sought the origins of everything, in pure color, and in geometry which provided "the typical form of all objective forms:"

This is how line and color become means of poetic allusion that enable a Gauguin to suggest ideas and feelings pictorially and, as he puts it, "clothe the idea in a form perceptible to the senses:" In Germany, Wagner had long since revived the leitmotif as a constant and significant reminder, the musical representation and symbol, of a person or theme. In France, both Baudelaire and Rimbaud had long explored the same territory and Rimbaud had endowed vowels with color: "A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green.-I regulated the form and movement of every consonant and, with instinctive rhythms, flattered myself that I had invented a poetical language accessible, sooner or later, to every sense." Soon after Moreas' Symbolist Manifesto, the connection between the ends of "decadent" poets and musicians and "PostImpressionistic" painters became clear. They all sought a language that could express and suggest feelings which they held to be as real and more significant than the objective surface realities that had concerned their predecessors. "Drop a syllable into a state of pure consciousness," as Herbert Read recently wrote, "and listen for the reverberations."

Imagination and simplification: does one really need much more to understand the artistic developments of the following years? Once the artist resorts to symbols to express his perceptions and his imagination in the widest sense, there is nothing to prevent the passage from one symbol to another in search of further and more effective simplification, nothing to prevent stretching the association between origin and effect, experience and end-product, to breaking point.

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SYMBOLISM.

European cultural movement that was at its peak in the last two decades of the 19th century, profoundly affecting the visual arts and inextricably bound up with music and literature.

1. Introduction.

Symbolism was first identified as a literary movement by Jean Moréas (1856–1910) in the Symbolist manifesto ('Le Symbolisme', *Le Figaro*, 18 Sept 1886). Symbolism in the visual arts was further defined by Albert Aurier as the 'painting of ideas' ('Les Symbolistes', *Rev. Enc.*, 1 April 1892). Its complex aesthetic was a mix of Platonic-inspired philosophy, mystical and occult doctrines, psychology, linguistics, science, political theory and such aesthetic issues as the relationship between abstraction and representation. While many Symbolists reacted against the materialism of 19th-century science and its implications (positivist philosophy, social Darwinism, artistic Realism), others sought to reconcile modern science with spiritual traditions. Ideas based on the rise of scientific psychology with its emphasis on individual freedom and the great interest in the occult, together with such practices as hypnosis, opened up a realm of psychic experience, which promised access to important realms of knowledge. Symbolism stressed feeling and evocation over definition and fact and emphasized the power of suggestion. Stéphane Mallarmé wrote in 1891, 'To *name* an object is to suppress three-fourths of the enjoyment of the poem that comes from the delight of divining little by little; to *suggest* it, there is the dream' (J. Huret: 'Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire', *Le Figaro*, 1891). It was felt that empirical science left no room for the spirit; however, psychological theory and occult doctrines explained perception and cognition as symbolic processes and indicated a spiritual path to understanding. These spiritual insights were obtained via intuition, fantasy, imagination and such subjective and irrational experiences as dreams, visions, hypnotism and alchemy. The realm of the irrational was approached through a variety of means, including drugs and such popular synthetic religious and spiritualist movements as theosophy and anthroposophy and the esoteric ideas of Eliphas Lévi (1810–75). Baudelaire's lines from his poem *Correspondance* (*Les Fleurs du mal*, 1857) illustrate the belief in the connection between nature and the soul: 'Nature is a temple of living pillars/where often words emerge, confused and dim;/and man goes

through this forest, with/familiar eyes of symbols always watching him.' All these notions were rooted in Romanticism and were revived later in Surrealism.

For most people, the clearest access to Symbolist ideas was through Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *A rebours* (1886). Des Esseintes, the disillusioned hero, withdraws into a private world where he celebrates all that is artificial and unnatural and surrounds himself with evocative works by Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon. While the novel was highly dramatized and exaggerated, it was highly influential in forming the popular idea of Symbolism.

2. Symbolism in the visual arts.

Symbolist critics in France saw both Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism as Symbolist. By the mid-1880s the original Impressionist aim of truth to visual experience had shifted: the artists had developed their technique to a point where the pictures appeared to be approximations of reality, rather than objective views of reality itself. Most Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings from this period emphasize texture and surface. The consequent denial of space and thus the denial of the illusion of reality in this style of painting is a major component of Symbolism in the visual arts; Impressionist as well as Neo-Impressionist pictures appear more suggestive than descriptive. Another basic feature of Symbolist art is an interest in spiritualism and in the Platonic notion that an ideal world lies beyond the world of appearances; important Neo-Impressionist notions of the relationship between style and meaning were based on the spiritualist ideas of Charles Henry.

Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, Edward Burne-Jones and Arnold Böcklin were important precursors for the artists who thought of themselves as Symbolists. Sharing an attraction to the Romantic subjects of the early 19th century and a concomitant lack of interest in Realist, Naturalist or Impressionist goals, the earlier generation were equally concerned with spirituality and revelation evoked via myth, religion and literature (e.g. Moreau's *The Apparition*, 1876; Paris, Louvre; *see* Moreau, gustave, fig. 2). Dedicated to an ideal level of expression, the ambition of which was to match that of the Old Masters, they were all independent individualists, who focused on their ideal, undistracted by the art that was going on around them. These concerns attracted a younger group with whom they came to co-exist.

France took the lead in the development of Symbolism, and Paul Gauguin played a seminal role. By 1885 his writings (H. Chipp: *Theories of Modern Design*, Berkeley, 1975, p. 58) reflected Symbolist interests. He believed that the emotional response to nature is more important than the intellectual; that lines, colours and even numbers communicate meaning; that intuition is crucial to artistic creation; and that one should communicate ideas and feelings derived from nature by means of the simplest forms, after dreaming in front of the subject. However, he was not able to translate these ideas into images until summer 1888, when he worked with Emile Bernard at Pont-Aven in Brittany, where he produced such works as *Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1888; Edinburgh, N.G.; *see* Gauguin, paul, fig. 2). At Pont-Aven he developed a new style, Synthetism, in which clear outlines define areas of pure colour arranged in flat planes. His work expresses the Symbolist belief in art as a form of language, together with the corollary that the most primitive form of language operates on a symbolic level. These notions, combined with envy of the natural spirituality of the uneducated and 'native' peoples and their distance from modern, decadent civilization, led Gauguin to try to re-create elemental forms of communication and the power of primitive artistic achievements. He wrote that artists should paint 'the mysterious centres of thought' (1880) and explained his approach to Symbolism in 1901 when he said, 'Puvis would call a painting *Purity*, and to explain it he would paint a young virgin holding a lily in her hand …. Gauguin, for the title *Purity*, would paint a landscape with limpid waters.'

Symbolism rejects traditional iconography and replaces it with subjects that express ideas beyond the literal objects depicted. The notion of the expressive potential of simplified forms and pure colour provided the freedom and directness that young, academically trained students were looking for, and it became one of the two stylistic options in Symbolism. Paul Sérusier relayed this message from Gauguin's teaching to students at the Académie Julian in Paris, including Paul Ranson, Maurice Denis, Edouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard; in 1888–9, this group became the Nabis. Their name, Hebrew for prophets, claimed clairvoyant status for the group and for the occult, religious, anarchist, genre and landscape subjects members explored in the new style.

Even the most commonplace scene by Vuillard or Bonnard could be Symbolist when considered in the context of statements by the Belgian writer, Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949); in an article in *Le Figaro* (2 April 1894), he described the artist as:

Seated in an armchair, listening simply to all the eternal laws which reign throughout his house, interpreting without understanding, all that there is in the silence of doors and windows and in the little voice of light, submitting to the presence of his soul and of his destiny … a good painter will show a house lost in the country, an open door at the end of a corridor, a face or hands at rest, and these simple pictures will have a power of adding something to our awareness of life.

Other artists followed the trend established by Gauguin, perhaps none so successfully as Edvard Munch, who charged his oeuvre with such strong personal meaning that his style and content became a source for Expressionism. A much more traditional stylistic approach, with strong occult associations, was housed in the Salons de la Rose + Croix in Paris organized by Joséphin Péladan. From 1892 to 1897 his salon welcomed work that subscribed to the illusionistic style of Renaissance art and was spiritual in subject; he specifically rejected anything that might have associations with Realism, such as portraits, landscapes or genre scenes, preferring 'Catholic Ideal and Mysticism … Legend, Myth, Allegory, the Dream, the Paraphrase of great poetry'. He was very influential; such artists as Carlos Schwabe, Fernand Khnopff, Ferdinand Hodler and Jean Delville

participated in his salons, and his example was followed by the similar Salon d'Art Idéaliste in Brussels. Nonetheless, such critics as Félix Fénéon responded negatively: 'Three pears spread on a tablecloth by Paul Cézanne are moving and sometimes mystical and all the Wagnerian Valhalla is as lacking in interest as the Chamber of Deputies if painted by them' (Halperin, 1970). The problem is that for a Symbolist work to be successful it has to be evocative and emotionally resonant; some artists relied on narrative or specific imagery to evoke a mood, while others relied more on style. Since each person is unique, what one person considers a masterpiece of evocation will strike another as silly or kitsch. That is why a definition of Symbolism remains so elusive. Since Symbolism has no comprehensive definition, recent literature is inclusive and defines the movement very broadly.

3. Characteristics of Symbolism.

Despite these problems of definition, there were certain interests all Symbolists shared. Music was highly admired for its evocative potential and abstract language; Richard Wagner was especially esteemed by Symbolists for his desire to unite all the arts into a single synaesthetic experience. Synaesthesia uses all the senses to create a universal harmony, giving unity to the variety of nature. Whether artists chose to use form, subject or both as their major aesthetic focus, their purpose was to render visible the invisible and to communicate the inexpressible. Whatever they touched was manipulated to create a psychological impact, to express ecstasy, ambiguity, mystification, revelation—all that is subjective, irrational, variable and subject to interpretation. They used a number of similar themes, including sleep and dreams, silence, stillness, meditation and a range of feelings about women from worship to hate (e.g. Khnopff's *Caresses*, 1896; Brussels, Mus. A. Mod.; for illustration *see* Khnopff, fernand). Symbolist fascination with and fear of sensual passion co-existed; often expressed by the image of the femme fatale, the resolution of this conflict also appears in the figure of the androgyne, a symbol for the resolution of opposites into a harmonious unity. At the artist's whim, flowers, animals (often composite ones like the sphinx) and landscape take on all sorts of meaning. Since these meanings are always personal, standard methods of exegesis are not satisfactory. Whereas precursors of Symbolism sometimes used traditional symbols, emblems and allegory, true Symbolism when it used images did not mean them to signify what they represented; they were signs of a deeper or higher level of consciousness. Symbolism was much more open-ended than the movements from which it drew inspiration. For example, Moreau's paintings were primarily didactic and sympathetic to exegesis, whereas Gauguin's were personal and were intended to be suggestive of meaning; even the titles of such works as *Where Do We Come From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897; Boston, MA, Mus. F.A.; see fig.) were designed to evoke rather than to describe. Similarly, such stylistic developments as Abstraction were not created for their own sake; rather, they were meant to suggest new and mysterious meanings. Periodicals spread the word, communication was rapid, and the groups were international in their outlook. That is why it is possible to point to artists who were working in a similar way all over Europe and in the USA. However, Paris always remained the heart of the movement.

Another common feature linking many Symbolists was their sympathy for socialism and especially anarchism. Artists and social critics shared a sense of disillusion with the world as it was and stressed the importance of individuality. Symbolism's suspicion of the scientific culture of the 19th century, with its belief in progress, occurred at the same time that bourgeois political culture was under attack, and there was a groundswell of interest in social and political problems. Just as the Symbolists were suspicious of the notion of objective reality, so the anarchists were completely opposed to contemporary forms of government. Both artists and politicians reacted to a period that was in the process of great change and flux. The Symbolist response to this climate can be seen in the creation of an art of enigmatic meanings requiring interpretation on a level beyond the literal. Like the anarchist solution of tearing everything down in order to let each individual operate independently, the Symbolist artists argued for highly individual creation and interpretation of works of art. Simultaneously, a distrust of surface reality appeared in the new field of psychiatry, with its claim that conscious thought and action are the result of unconscious forces accessible only through the indirect techniques of psychotherapy. Part of the Symbolist/anarchist attitude was hatred of the bourgeoisie, yet most of the participants in both movements were members of it, and the artists depended on it to support their activities through allowances or patronage, creating objects for the market economies of the day. Despite lip-service to the contrary, Symbolists were products of middle-class culture.

Symbolism played an important role in the development of modern art; the famous definition of painting formulated by Maurice Denis ('a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order') is a formula for Abstraction. Symbolism's stylistic strategy of de-emphasizing reality by means of simplifications, lack of clarity or exaggeration was utilized by 20th-century artists. Such modern artists as Kandinsky, Mondrian and František Kupka, who shared the spiritualist and occult interest in their most fashionable forms of theosophy and anthroposophy, were led to non-objective styles as the best way to depict the spiritual, as opposed to the real.

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JULIUS KAPLAN

BAUDELAIRE

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) early received a solid Catholic education and an initiation into the delights of the plastic arts. The one and the other haunted him for the rest of his life, a life soon afflicted with the chronic poverty and ill health that eventually brought him down at the age of 46. Untiring in his analysis of life and self, he soon became convinced that everything had a spiritual meaning, that every object, every gesture, every sound is the symbol of a universal analogy-"things having always expressed themselves by a reciprocal analogy since the day when God proffered the world as a complex and indivisible totality."

Between 1846 and the year of his death, Baudelaire's ideas became known to a literary and artistic elite. His "journalism," his essays, lectures, and reviews, would furnish the aesthetics, the basic attitudes, of Symbolism. By 1885, Leon Daudet tells us, all the older high-school boys knew Baudelaire by heart: "he affected all educated French youth, boys and girls."

The sonnet "Correspondances" ("Analogies") reflects these views. It empha. sizes, as Baudelaire always tried to do, the spiritual nature of reality and the almost-duty of poets to be seers, driving through external appearances and communicating the deeper relities and connections that externals can only cover or, at best, represent at second hand.

Correspondences

The pillars of Nature's temple are alive
and sometimes yield perplexing messages;
forests of symbols between us and the shrine
remark our passage with accustomed eyes.

Like long-held echoes, blending somewhere else
into one deep and shadowy unison
as limitless as darkness and as day,
the sounds, the scents, the colors correspond.

There are odors succulent as young flesh,
sweet as flutes, and green as any grass,
while others—rich, corrupt and masterful—

possess the power of such infinite things
as incense, amber, benjamin and musk,
to praise the senses' raptures, and the mind's.

To the Reader

Stupidity, delusion, selfishness and lust
torment our bodies and possess our minds,
and we sustain our affable remorse
the way a beggar nourishes his lice.

Our sins are stubborn, our contrition lame;
we want our scruples to be worth our while—
how cheerfully we crawl back to the mire:
a few cheap tears will wash our stains away!

Satan Trismegistus subtly rocks
our ravished spirits on his wicked bed
until the precious metal of our will
is leached out by this cunning alchemist:

the Devil's hand directs our every move—
the things we loathed become the things we love;

day by day we drop through stinking shades
quite undeterred on our descent to Hell.

Like a poor profligate who sucks and bites
the withered breast of some well-seasoned trull,
we snatch in passing at clandestine joys
and squeeze the oldest orange harder yet.

Wriggling in our brains like a million worms,
a demon demos holds its revels there,
and when we breathe, the Lethe in our lungs
trickles sighing on its secret course.

If rape and arson, poison and the knife
have not yet stitched their ludicrous designs
onto the banal buckram of our fates,
it is because our souls lack enterprise!

But here among the scorpions and the hounds,
the jackals, apes and vultures, snakes and wolves,
monsters that howl and growl and squeal and crawl,
in all the squalid zoo of vices, one

is uglier and fouler than the rest,
although the least flamboyant of the lot;
this beast would gladly undermine the earth
and swallow all creation in a yawn;

I speak of Boredom which with ready tears
dreams of hangings as it puffs its pipe.
Reader, you know this sqeamish monster well,
—hypocrite reader,—my alias,—my twin!

Jewels

My darling was naked, or nearly, for knowing my heart
she had left on her jewels, the bangles and chains
whose jingling music gave her the conquering air
of a Moorish slave on days her master is pleased.

Whenever I hear such insolent harmonies,
that scintillating world of metal and stone
beguiles me altogether, and I am enthralled
by objects whose sound is a synonym for light.

For there she lay on the couch, allowing herself
to be adored, a secret smile indulging
the deep and tenacious currents of my love
which rose against her body like a tide.

Eyes fixed on mine with the speculative glare,
of a half-tamed tiger, she kept altering poses,
and the incorporation of candor into lust
gave new charms to her metamorphoses;

calmly I watched, with a certain detachment at first,
as the swanlike arms uncoiled, and then the legs,

the sleek thighs shifting, shiny as oil,
the belly, the breasts—that fruit on my vine—

clustered, more tempting than wicked cherubim,
to undermine what peace I had achieved,
dislodging my soul from its rock-crystal throne
of contemplation, once so aloof, so serene.

As if a new Genesis had been at work,
I saw a boy's torso joined to Antiope's hips,
belying that lithe waist by those wide loins . . .
O the pride of rouge upon that tawny skin!

And then, the lamp having given up the ghost,
the dying coals made the only light in the room:
each time they heaved another flamboyant sigh,
they flushed that amber-colored flesh with blood!

Twilight: Daybreak

The morning wind rattles the windowpanes
and over the barracks reveille rings out.

Dreams come now, bad dreams, and teen-age boys
burrow into their pillows. Now the lamp
that glowed at midnight seems, like a bloodshot eye,
to throb and throw a red stain on the room;
balked by the stubborn body's weight, the soul
mimics the lamplight's struggles with the dawn.
Like a face in tears—the tears effaced by wind—
the air is tremulous with escaping things,
and Man is tired of writing, Woman of love.

Here and there, chimneys begin to smoke.
Whores, mouths gaping, eyelids gray as ash,
sleep on their feet, leaning against the walls,
and beggar-women, hunched over sagging breasts,
blow on burning sticks, then on their hands.
Now, the hungry feel the cold the worst,
and women in labor suffer the sharpest pains;
now, like a sob cut short by a clot of blood,
a rooster crows somewhere; a sea of mist
swirls around the buildings; in the Hôtel-Dieu
the dying breathe their last, while the debauched,
spent by their exertions, sleep alone.

Shivering dawn, in a wisp of pink and green,
totters slowly across the empty Seine,
and dingy Paris—old drudge rubbing its eyes—
picks up its tools to begin another day.

Hymn to Beauty

Do you come from on high or out of the abyss,
O Beauty? Godless yet divine, your gaze
indifferently showers favor and shame,
and therefore some have likened you to wine.

Your eyes reflect the sunset and the dawn;
you scatter perfumes like a windy night;
your kisses are a drug, your mouth the urn
dispensing fear to heroes, fervor to boys.

Whether spawned by hell or sprung from the stars,
Fate like a spaniel follows at your heel;
you sow haphazard fortune and despair,
ruling all things, responsible for none.

You walk on corpses, Beauty, undismayed,
and Horror coruscates among your gems;
Murder, one of your dearest trinkets, throbs
on your shameless belly: make it dance!

Dazzled, the dayfly flutters round your wick,
crackles, flares, and cries: I bless this torch!
The pining lover for his lady swoons
like a dying man adoring his own tomb.

Who cares if you come from paradise or hell,
appalling Beauty, artless and monstrous scourge,
if only your eyes, your smile or your foot reveal
the Infinite I love and have never known?

Come from Satan, come from God — who cares,
Angel or Siren, rhythm, fragrance, light,
provided you transform — O my one queen!
This hideous universe, this heavy hour?

A Martyr
Based on the drawing of an unknown master.
Among decanters, ivories and gems,
sumptuous divans
with gold-brocaded silks and fragrant gowns
trailing languid folds,

where lilies sorrowing in crystal urns
exhale their final sigh
and where, as if the room were under glass,
the air is pestilent,

a headless corpse emits a stream of blood
the sopping pillows shed
onto thirsty sheets which drink it up
as greedily as sand.

Pale as the visions which our captive eyes
discover in the dark,
the head, enveloped in its sombre mane,
emeralds still in its ears,

watches from a stool, a thing apart,
and from the eyes rolled back
to whiteness blank as daybreak emanates
an alabaster stare.

The carcass sprawling naked on the bed
displays without a qualm
the splendid cynosure which prodigal
Nature bestowed — betrayed;

pink with gold clocks, one stocking clings —
a souvenir, it seems;
the garter, gleaming like a secret eye,
darts a jewelled glance.

Doubled by a full-length portrait drawn
in the same provocative pose,
the strange demeanor of this solitude
reveals love's darker side —

profligate practices and guilty joys,
embraces bound to please
the swarm of naughty angels frolicking
in the curtains overhead;

yet judging from the narrow elegance
of her shoulders sloping down
past the serpentine curve of her waist
to the almost bony hips

she still is young! — What torment in her soul,
what tedium that stung
her senses gave this body to the throng of wandering, lost desires?

In spite of so much love, did the vengeful man
she could not, living, sate
assuage on her inert and docile flesh
the measure of his lust?

And did he, gripping her blood-stiffened hair
lift up that dripping head
and press on her cold teeth one final kiss?
The sullied corpse is still.

—Far from a scornful world of jeering crowds
and peering magistrates,
sleep in peace, lovely enigma, sleep
in your mysterious tomb:

your bridegroom roves, and your immortal form
keeps vigil when he sleeps;
like you, no doubt, he will be constant too,
and faithful unto death.

Get Drunk!
One should always be drunk. That's all that matters;
that's our one imperative need. So as not to feel Time's
horrible burden one which breaks your shoulders and bows
you down, you must get drunk without cease.

But with what?
With wine, poetry, or virtue
as you choose.
But get drunk.

And if, at some time, on steps of a palace,
in the green grass of a ditch,
in the bleak solitude of your room,
you are waking and the drunkeness has already abated,
ask the wind, the wave, the stars, the clock,
all that which flees,
all that which groans,
all that which rolls,
all that which sings,
all that which speaks,
ask them, what time it is;
and the wind, the wave, the stars, the birds, and the clock,
they will all reply:

"It is time toget drunk!

So that you may not be the martyred slaves of Time,
get drunk, get drunk,
and never pause for rest!
With wine, poetry, or vitrtue,
as you choose!"

"Carrion"
Remember, my soul, the thing we saw that lovely summer day?
On a pile of stones where the path turned off, the hideous carrion-
legs in the air, like a whore - displayed, indifferent to the last,
a belly slick with lethal sweat and swollen with foul gas.
The sun lit up that rottenness as though to roast it through,
restoring to Nature a hundredfold what she had here made one.
And heaven watched the splendid corpse like a flower open wide-
you nearly fainted dead away at the perfume it gave off.
Flies kept humming over the guts from which a gleaming clot
of maggots poured to finish off what scraps of flesh remained.
The tide of trembling vermin sank, then bubbled up afresh
as if the carcass, drawing breath, by their lives lived again
and made a curious music there - like running water, or wind,
or the rattle of chaff the winnower loosens in his fan.
Shapeless - nothing was left but a dream the artist had sketched in,
forgotten, and only later on finished from memory.
Behind the rocks an anxious bitch eyed us reproachfully,
waiting for the chance to resume her interrupted feast.
- Yet you will come to this offence, this horrible decay,
you, the light of my life, the sun and the moon and the stars of my love!
Yes, you will come to this, my queen, after the sacraments,
when you rot underground among the bones already there.
But as their kisses eat you up, my Beauty, tell the worms
I've kept the sacred essence, saved the form of my rotted loves!

"Spleen"
I am like the king of a rainy country
Rich, and yet powerless, young and yet most old

Who, distrustful of the bows his tutors make
Sits bored among his dogs as with his other beasts
Nothing can lift his spirits, neither hawk nor game
The dying subjects gathered to his balcony.
The grotesque ballad of his best-loved fool
No more distracts him in this sickness cruel.
His lilied bed is changed into a tomb;
The ladies of his court all lords might love
And yet they can no longer find shameless attire
To draw a smile from their young, wasted sire.
The alchemist who made him gold could not
Purge from his soul this corrupt element
And in a blood bath, as in ancient Rome,
Remembered by the mighty in their latter days
Knew not to warm this dazzled corpse
Where flows not blood but Lethe's waters green.

"Cats"
Fevered lovers and austere thinkers
Love equally, in their ripe season
Cats powerful and gentle, pride of the house
Like them they feel the cold, like them are sedentary
Friends of science and sensuality
They seek the silence and the horror of the shadows
Erebus had taken them for its funeral coursers
Could they to servitude incline their pride.
Dreaming, they take on noble postures
Great sphinxes stretched out in the depths of emptiness
Seeming to fall asleep into an endless dream.
Their fertile loins are full of magic sparks
And nuggets of gold like fine sand
Vaguely bestir their mystic pupils.

The Albatross
Often, to pass the time on board, the crew
will catch an albatross, one of those big birds
which nonchalantly chaperone a ship
across the biter fathoms of the sea.

Tied to the deck, this sovereign of space,
as if embarrassed by its clumsiness,
pitiably lets its great white wings
drag at its sides like a pair of unshipped oars.

How weak and awkward, even comical
this traveler but lately so adroit-
one deckhand sticks a pipestem in its beak,
another mock the cripple that once flew!

The Poet is like this monarch of the clouds
riding the storm above the marksman's range;
exiled on the ground, hooted and jeered,
he cannot walk because of his great wings

Guiding Lights
Rubens

Garden of Sloth, Lethe s fountainhead,
pillow of flesh where no dream is of love
but where life seethes and surges endlessly
like wind in heaven, sea within the sea;
Leonardo
A mirror somber in its distances
where charming angles with a mysterious
gentle smile appear beneath the shade
of pines and glaciers which enclose their realm;
Rembrandt
Sorry hospital echoing with sights,
adorned b one enormous crucifix,
where tearful prayers rise from excrement
and a sudden ray of winter sunlight falls;
Michelangelo
No man s land where every Hercules
becomes a Christ, where mighty phantoms rise
bolt upright from their graves and in the gloom
rend their shrouds by reaching out their hands;
Puget
Faun s impudence and a prize-fighter s rage,
jaundiced and weak, your great heart gorged with
that you could find the beauty in their crimes-pride
you, the convicts melancholy emperor;
Watteau
Festivities where many famous hearts
flutter like months as they go up in flame,
the chandeliers in this enchanted glade
cast a madness on the minuet;
Goya
Nightmare crammed with unfathomable things,
which roasting foetuses in a pan,
crones at a mirror served by naked girls
who straighten stockings to entice the Fiend;
Delacroix
Evil angels haunt this lake of blood
darkened b the green shade of the firs,
where under a stricken sky the trumpet-calls
like a fanfare by Weber fade away. . .
These blasphemies these ecstasies these cries,
these groans and curses, tears and *Te Deums*,
re-echo though a thousand labyrinths-
a holy opium for mortal hearts!
A thousand sentries pass the order on,
a cry repeated by a thousand messengers;
hunters shout it, lost in the deep woods;
the beacon flares on a thousand citadels!
This, O Lord, is the best evidence
that we can offer our dignity,
this sob that swells from age to age and dies
out on the shore of Your eternity!

Further Resources:
http://home.carolina.rr.com/alienfamily/flowers.htm