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'La Beauté': Art and Dialogism in the Poetry of Baudelaire

Jennifer Yee[1]

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Abstract Studies of Baudelaire's poem 'La Beauté' have generally agreed that it has a key role to play in our understanding of his aesthetic theories, but have differed wildly in how this role is interpreted. The present study brings together arguments that see the speaker of the poem, Beauty, as a statue, along with those that understand the poem as being fundamentally ironic. Situating 'La Beauté' in the context of Baudelaire's art criticism allows us to understand it as part of his engagement in debates within the visual arts. This gives us a new reading of Beauty's claims as voicing the positions of neo-classical idealism, and specifically those of nineteenth-century academic theorists influenced by the eighteenth-century German inventor of art history, Winckelmann. Recognizing the importance of Winckelmann in approaching this poem sheds light on the rejection of movement and emotion that is pronounced by Beauty, and which contradict Baudelaire's theoretical positions expressed elsewhere. The sonnet is thus incorporating the language of a speaker who is distinct from the lyric 'je' and cannot be reduced to a mask for him or a part of his divided self. This language and the position it expresses are framed within the sonnet, whose implicit irony leads to what Bakhtin calls double voicing. This approach offers a new reading of 'La Beauté' in formal terms as an example of Bakhtinian dialogism within lyric poetry.

Keywords Baudelaire · Aesthetics · Art theory · Beauty · La Beauté · *Les Fleurs du mal* · Anamorphosis · Dialogism · Bakhtin · Sculpture · Painting · Delacroix · Sonnet · Winckelmann · Ekphrasis

✉ Jennifer Yee
Jennifer.Yee@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk

[1] University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

There have been many studies of ‘La Beauté’, frequently inspired by its position in *Les Fleurs du mal* amongst what has been seen as a set of theoretical or programmatic poems including ‘L’Idéal’ and ‘Hymne à la Beauté’. It has even been interpreted as expressing ‘the absolute beauty which is the artistic soul of the entire book’ and ‘the goal of all [the poet’s] efforts’ (Mossop 1961, 105, 107). More recently some critical studies have however spotted what seems to the present writer blindingly obvious, notably that this sonnet is ironic. ‘La Beauté’, like so many other poems in *Les Fleurs du mal*, is ‘ironiquement sérieux’ (Vaillant 2007, 131). Indeed, of all the 1857 *Fleurs du mal*, it was the poem most appreciated by Flaubert, that great master of serious irony, though it is unlikely that we will ever know what exactly he liked about it.[1] Developing the still rather hesitant ‘ironic’ reading of ‘La Beauté’ in both formal and thematic terms, the present study will argue that this sonnet is an example of Baudelaire’s poetic dialogism, and at the same time demonstrate that it is to be read first and foremost in the context of his art criticism.

Recent work on Baudelaire’s prose poetry has emphasized the slipperiness of the narrator’s voice and the lack of a unified identity between the narrators of the individual pieces and the author (for example Scott 2005; Murphy 2014). That there is a parallel need to decouple the ‘je’ of *Les Fleurs du mal* from the historical author has long been argued (e.g., Mossop 1961, 5), but the argument for the sheer slipperiness of the verse poetry’s narrators is perhaps made most clearly by specialists of the prose poetry such as Steve Murphy (2014, 11) or Anne Jamison (2001). It is also from a recent critical approach to the prose poetry, by Maria Scott, that we can borrow the concept of anamorphosis. This concept is particularly useful in the case of a verse poem such as ‘La Beauté’, which has inspired—and still inspires—such conflicting interpretations. ‘Anamorphosis’, Scott writes, ‘takes advantage of the mental blind-spots of readers. Anamorphic works of art may be totally, partially, or not at all legible to a frontal gaze, but what they have in common with one another is their inscription of an image that reveals itself only to an angled gaze’ (2005, 10). In the case of ‘La Beauté’, working towards an anamorphic reading of this kind requires us first to situate it within Baudelaire’s repeated preference for dramatized speakers.

Roland Barthes argues that the theatricality of Baudelaire’s work is to be found not in his abortive theatrical projects, but everywhere else in his œuvre, including *Les Fleurs du mal*: ‘Tout se passe comme si Baudelaire avait mis son théâtre partout, sauf précisément dans ses projets de théâtre […] La théâtralité de Baudelaire […] fuse partout où on ne l’attend pas’ (1993, 1196). Russell S. King analyses this theatricality as evidenced above all in dialogue, though he defines the latter a little reductively as identifiable by the presence of quotation marks (1973, 114–15). Baudelaire’s poetry is in fact deeply theatrical in the sense of giving dramatic voice to different personae; but whereas in true theatre the actors give unmediated voice to their lines, the voices of his poetry are contained, or doubled, by the language of the poem. It would be reductive to look at his use of dialogue without understanding it as dialogic or double-voiced.

[1] Flaubert, letter to Baudelaire, 13 July 1857 (1980, vol. 2, pp. 744–55).

As Barbara Johnson observes, '[l]a plupart des *Fleurs du mal* mettent en scène une apostrophe directe et spéculaire de la deuxième personne par la première personne.' In contrast to this 'dialogue intersubjectif', or even 'intrapsychique', she argues, in the prose poetry an observer-narrator relates an anecdote concerning the external world to 'vous' (1979, 66–67). Such dialogue in *Les Fleurs du mal* often takes the form of the poetic speaker addressing the 'tu' or 'vous' of his female addressee, or—more rarely and briefly—her voice replying (e.g. 'Semper Eadem', 'Confession', 'Sonnet d'Automne', 'Métamorphoses du vampire'). There are however a great many poems where the 'je' addresses someone else. At times the addressee is part of his split self, or a 'mask' for the self (Richter 1990, 16): his soul, muse, pain or inspiration. At others the addressee is the reader or mankind. And in some poems the speaker addresses what are apparently distinct entities: Andromaque ('Le Cygne'), his mother ('Je n'ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville', 'La Servante au grand cœur dont vous étiez jalouse'), old women ('Les Petites vieilles'), skeletons ('Le Squelette laboureur', 'Danse macabre'), his cat ('Le Chat'), worms ('Le Mort joyeux'), God, Jesus or the Devil ('Les Phares', 'Le Reniement de Saint Pierre', 'Les Litanies de Satan'), Death ('Les deux bonnes sœurs'), Venus ('Voyage à Cythère'), or matter, woods, ocean, night, the moon ('Spleen' LXXVI, 'Obsession', 'La Lune offensée').

In addition, Baudelaire's liking for what Wayne Booth, in discussing prose, calls 'dramatized narrators' (1983, 152) is hardly in doubt. In a smaller number of poems, or parts of them, the speaking voice itself is clearly not that of the poetic 'je', but of another character, demons, an object or an embodied property (notably 'Bénédiction', 'L'Horloge', 'Châtiment de l'orgueil', 'Tout entière', 'La Pipe', 'L'Âme du vin', 'Le Vin de l'assassin', 'La Béatrice', 'L'Amour et le crâne', 'La Voix', 'L'Imprévu', 'Le Voyage', 'Le Masque', 'Le Rebelle', 'Femmes damnées'). This is also the case of 'La Beauté'. And here, though there is dialogue (in the sense that there is an implicit addressee), it can less evidently be called 'intrapsychique'.

Critics have often found this poem mysterious because it appears to contradict many Baudelaireian precepts (a useful overview of these approaches is given by Heck 1981–1982, 85). One solution was to understand the speaker as not being the poet, but a Greek statue (Prévost, quoted by Mossop 1961, 95; Mathias 1977, 32), which is certainly a useful step. More recently some critics have followed a brief suggestion by Ruff (1955, 296–97) and acknowledged the role of irony in this sonnet (for example Heck 1981–1982; Miller 1993; Jamison 2001). This is by no means always the case. The longest existing study of 'La Beauté', by Paul Mathias, does not read it as ironic, seeing Baudelaire as 'le prêtre et le prophète de la Beauté' (1977, 17). A more recent study by Jérôme Thélot sees Beauty as a courtesan and, mysteriously, the victim of concealed violence (1993, 377–88). Developing the ironic reading further, I shall argue that 'La Beauté' is to be understood as a dramatic monologue and an example of dialogism in lyric poetry.

Dialogism, or the splitting of the poetic voice, has often been seen as falling *between* different sonnets, notably between 'La Beauté' and 'Hymne à la beauté'—poems whose titles appear to echo each other, but whose speaking personae make contradictory pronouncements—and also between 'La Beauté' and the two sonnets that follow it, 'L'Idéal' and 'La Géante' (Miller 1993). Pierre Laforgue emphasizes

the importance of ‘L’Idéal’ in relation to ‘La Beauté, stressing the divergence between the two. For him, the ‘je’ of each sonnet is an antithetical reflection of the other, with no dialogue possible between them, and he hesitates between various reasons for this impossibility. One explanation is chronological: his hypothesis is that ‘La Beauté’ was written long after ‘L’Idéal’ (Claude Pichois, in contrast, argues that ‘La Beauté’ might date to as early as the 1840s, because he sees it as evoking an unattainable ideal (Baudelaire: I, 872)[2]). Laforgue also suggests an aesthetic explanation, with ‘La Beauté’ looking at sculpture while ‘L’Idéal’ is interested in pictures, and he does, helpfully, read ‘La Beauté’ in the context of Baudelaire’s art criticism. And finally, ‘sous l’angle fantasmatique, rien qui puisse montrer une parenté entre les deux poèmes’ (Laforgue 2000, 51–52). He seems, in short, a little mystified by ‘La Beauté’, perhaps because he reads the two sonnets in a (failed) dialogue with each other rather than understanding each of them as containing internal dialogism.

It is this dialogism, in the Bakhtinian sense, that will provide the key for my reading of ‘La Beauté’. Paul Miller, who does cite Bakhtin and argue for a ‘dialogic’ reading, unfortunately uses the term as though it meant ‘dialectic’ and understands ‘La Beauté’ as having a dialectical relation with the sonnets that follow it, ‘L’Idéal’ and ‘La Géante’. He does not engage fully with Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossic texts as ones in which different languages have a conflicting, or even polemical, relation to each other. Nor does he really demonstrate that this approach can be applied to (some) poetry as well as the novel. And he does not discuss the heteroglossic nature of Baudelaire’s ‘La Beauté’, that is, the double-voicing, or polemical incorporation of a separate language within the language of the poem.

Bakhtin famously argues that dialogism is the characteristic of the novel and not of poetry. His exclusion of poetry is however hedged about with exceptions and near-misses that he appears to feel in all honesty obliged to recognize, but which don’t do his theory any favours. Exceptions are ‘low’ poetic genres such as satire or comedy, whereas he sees lyric poetry as characterized by the ‘direct and unmediated intention’ of words. He does admit that this ‘naivety’ may be presented as a thing in itself and thus ‘dialogized’, but without ‘setting the tone’ for the poem (Bakhtin 1981, 287, 278). Bakhtin’s view that there is no heteroglossia in poetry may have been nuanced even further towards the end of his life (Richter 1990, 11–12).

My reading of ‘La Beauté’ for its dialogism will begin with its immediate neighbours in *Les Fleurs du mal*, since the proximity argument, as we have seen, is often invoked by critics. Those who claim that ‘La Beauté’ should be read together with the sonnets that follow it, ‘L’Idéal’ and ‘La Géante’, as in some way programmatic for Baudelaire’s aesthetic approach, tend nevertheless to neglect the poem that precedes it, ‘Châtiment de l’orgueil’. This poem includes dialogue giving the direct voice of a theologian whose hubris leads him to madness, and who ends up wandering the streets and fields, the butt of children’s mockery. If we follow the argument of proximity, then, the reader ought to approach ‘La Beauté’ prepared to

[2] References to Baudelaire’s works, henceforth given in the text, are to Claude Pichois’s 1975 edition of the *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard ‘Pléiade’, 2 vols.).

take the speaker's voice as possibly risible, and certainly distinct from the voice, language and opinions of the poetic 'je'.

In arguing for links between 'La Beauté' and the poem that follows it, 'L'Idéal', Miller asks whether the phrase 'ces beautés' in the first line of the latter poem might refer back specifically to the title of the preceding poem, though he wisely concludes that this remains ambiguous (1993, 322–23). In fact the two sonnets make fun of very different approaches to beauty. 'L'Idéal' begins:

Ce ne seront jamais ces beautés de vignettes,
Produits avariés, nés d'un siècle vaurien,
Ces pieds à brodequins, ces doigts à castagnettes,
Qui sauront satisfaire un cœur comme le mien. (I: 22)

The term 'vignettes' marks the speaker's rejection of stereotyped illustrations produced in books—produced all the more cheaply thanks to revolutions in print technology in his own 'siècle vaurien' (on the century's bad taste in illustrations see also II: 652)—so that, like many of Baudelaire's comments on aesthetics, it concerns the visual arts as well as poetry. The stereotyped images that are mocked are the clichés of the earlier Romantic generation. In Baudelaire's line of fire is first and foremost Alfred de Musset's 1829 poem 'L'Andalouse', noted for her 'pied dans son brodequin noir' and whose fingers might easily be supposed to wield castanets. Baudelaire had a particular dislike of Musset, but among the many descendents of the latter's Andalusian beauty are of course Mérimée's 'Carmen' (1845) and (after Baudelaire's time) Bizet's 1875 opera of that name and the 1883 illustrations or 'vignettes' of Musset's works by Eugène Lami.

The third line of 'L'Idéal' is, then, a counter-example to Bakhtin's view that poetry is 'illuminated by one unitary and indisputable discourse' and that the poet cannot oppose 'his own intentions to the language that he uses […and] cannot turn it into an object to be perceived, reflected upon or related to' (1981, 286). Here we have the language of earlier Romanticism, cited by the poem or, in other words, treated as an object. Its status as object is emphasized by the syntactic repetition from one hemistich to another. But Baudelaire's mockery of the ideals of the 1820s/1830s generation does not mean that we should take the very different ideal expressed in 'La Beauté' at face value.

La Beauté

Je suis belle, ô mortels! comme un rêve de pierre,
Et mon sein, où chacun s'est meurtri tour à tour,
Est fait pour inspirer au poète un amour
Éternel et muet ainsi que la matière.
Je trône dans l'azur comme un sphinx incompris;
J'unis un cœur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes;
Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,
Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris.
Les poètes, devant mes grandes attitudes,
Que j'ai l'air d'emprunter aux plus fiers monuments,
Consumeront leurs jours en d'austères études;

Car j'ai, pour fasciner ces dociles amants,
De purs miroirs qui font toutes choses plus belles:
Mes yeux, mes larges yeux aux clartés éternelles! (I: 21)

There are, as both Francis S. Heck and Miller point out, certain traits of 'La Beauté' that should immediately alert the reader to the need for ironic distance, notably its somnolent, sing-song rhythm. The tautology of Beauty defining herself in the first line as 'Je suis belle' is given further over-emphasis by the clunky internal rhyme that immediately follows, [ɛl] in 'Je suis belle, ô mortels', echoed shortly afterwards by 'Éternels', a pairing picked up repetitively in the sestet with 'belles' and 'éternelles'. The repetition of 'je' (eight times, of which three as anaphora) emphasizes the speaker's pompous sense of self-importance. The expression 'mes grandes attitudes' suggests the dramatic poses of classical theatre (Jamison 2001, 269) or even childish boastfulness, apparent also in the pejorative sense of the verb in 'Je trône' and the adjective 'fiers'. The polysyndeton in 'Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris' is pedantic and over-emphatic. In other words the language of the sonnet is that of an authoritarian speaker accustomed to striking pretentious poses. But we need to be careful to distinguish the speaker from the poem: here the 'nominal speaker' (Beauty) is betrayed by a set of intentions that run counter to her own, something that is 'the case even when the dramatized speaker [her]self is monologically authoritarian by inclination' (Richter 1990, 19). Her arrogance is undermined by the double-voicing that directs a hidden polemic at her pronouncements.

Now 'La Beauté' was long read as proclaiming Baudelaire's adherence to Parnassian aesthetics, or, since this interpretation is hard to sustain, as expressing the sufferings of the poet fascinated by the fatal temptation of Beauty (see notes by Pichois, I: 871 and Fairlie 1960, 37). When it has been read ironically it is sometimes seen as a *parody* of Parnassian aesthetics. This is notably the case in Heck's article, though he does acknowledge that the term 'Parnassian' wasn't used until 1866 whereas 'La Beauté' was published in 1857. Heck gets round this by seeing Baudelaire as mocking 'l'art pour l'art' more generally, but suggests that 'La Beauté' is a parody of Leconte de Lisle's 'Bhaghavat' (1981–1982, 93, 88), apparently on the grounds that both poems mention swans. Baudelaire did publish a piece on Leconte de Lisle, though not until 1861; in it he praises, among other things, Leconte de Lisle's aesthetic relativism, his ability to capture movement in animals ('Bhaghavat' is a good example of this) and his rhymes that respond to the human love of symmetry broken by surprise (II: 177–79). It is hard to see these traits of the founder of Parnassian poetry as being satirized or even parodied in Baudelaire's 'La Beauté'. Certainly, Baudelaire does make fun of 'L'École païenne' in 1852, but by that he means something rather different.

A closer examination of the language that is in fact being parodied—and thus held up dialogically for the purposes of internal polemic—in 'La Beauté' reveals that the context on which to draw is that of Baudelaire's art criticism. It is only when we read it in this light that it becomes clear that Beauty's pronouncements do not situate her '"above" all schools' of art (Mossop 1961, 101), but as an embodiment of one of them. Baudelaire was engaged in a polemic with a much

more long-term opponent than Parnassian poetry. Where 'L'Idéal' mocks the clichés of Romantic beauty, 'La Beauté' gives us the voice of neo-classical beauty and, in more general terms, Platonic idealism.[3] This concerns not only rigid traditions of versification in poetry, but also—indeed primarily—debates in the visual arts.

In the 1840s and 1850s the rejection of neo-classicism in art was not the foregone conclusion it might now seem to us. There was an ongoing combat against a disciplinary control that was policed by specific institutions in the form of the Académies. One should remember that Baudelaire was an art critic with an enthusiastic parti-pris in the much-discussed opposition between Delacroix and Ingres, and that he emphatically rejected the latter's classicism. After Delacroix, he championed the cause of the minor artist Constantin Guys, praising the very traits by which the latter most departed from neo-classical norms. The characteristics evoked in 'La Beauté' tick off, one after the other, the pet hates Baudelaire expressed in his art criticism.

In particular, Baudelaire is rejecting the precepts of Winckelmann, the great eighteenth-century German pioneer of Art History and theorist of neo-classical aesthetics, and his modern followers ('un Winckelmann moderne (nous en sommes pleins, la nation en regorge, les paresseux en raffolent)', *Exposition universelle, 1855*, II: 576). Winckelmann had a system, something Baudelaire was always very wary of (II: 577). For Winckelmann art should seek to portray the ideal, and the best source for that was not the observation of nature but Classical Greek sculpture. So Beauty is indeed a statue, but not a single or literal statue: she is, rather, an embodiment of the classical ideal. Like a 'rêve de pierre', she adopts a pose 'Que j'ai l'air d'emprunter aux plus fiers monuments'. These proud monuments are those ornamented with sculpture, and indeed in which sculpture plays a subordinate role just as Beauty's poses are merely borrowed; this is one of the reasons given by Baudelaire for seeing sculpture as a mere complement to other arts, not to mention that he also deemed it boring (II: 488). To achieve the classical ideal meant embarking on 'd'austères études' to imitate the Ancients rather than looking at the outside world; one thinks of the 'esprits académiques de tout genre qui habitent les différents ateliers de notre fabrique artistique' (II: 578).

In Baudelaire's *Salon de 1846* the question of idealisation in art is addressed, particularly in chapter 7, 'De l'idéal et du modèle', which denounces neo-classical idealism (II: 455–56). He argues against the adoption of an absolute, universal, ideal: 'l'idéal absolu est une bêtise. Le goût exclusif du simple conduit l'artiste nigaud à l'imitation du même type.' (II: 455). Now Winckelmann's argument in favour of contemporary artists imitating the ancient Greeks was based on the belief in a single, universal ideal that had already been achieved by the Ancients. For him the Greeks were, in real life, more beautiful than the Moderns because of their constant exercise and life outdoors (Baudelaire pays homage to this irrevocably lost beauty in 'J'aime le souvenir de ces époques nues'). At the same time, however 'the supreme law recognised by the Greek artists was that people should be faithfully

[3] On Baudelaire as the enemy of Platonic idealism, see Brix (2001), though he does not discuss 'La Beauté'.

depicted, yet at the same time *beautified*'; the intention was 'to work *towards a more beautiful and perfect nature*' (Winckelmann 1985, 37, my emphasis). Not slavish imitation of nature, but idealisation based on observed models, was the classical rule. Given that the modern artist no longer has access to Greek athletes as models, the best solution is to imitate, or mirror, ancient sculpture: thus Beauty's eyes are mirrors, but idealising mirrors 'qui font toutes choses plus belles' rather than simply reflecting the outside world. It would be misleading to understand such mirrors as representing pure mimesis, and in the earlier, 1857 version of the poem her eyes even improved on 'les étoiles' rather than things in general.

In 1855 Baudelaire wrote that if everyone pursued beauty according to the 'règles des professseurs-jurés' it would in fact disappear, because all the variety of the world would be reduced to a 'vaste unité, monotone et impersonnelle, immense comme l'ennui et le néant' (II: 578). While this 'vaste unité' might seem to echo the sonorous unity of 'Correspondances' ('Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,/ Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté') the deeper unity of synaesthesia draws on natural sensations to go beyond them, uniting them in a mysterious totality, while the classical unity of the single aesthetic ideal is reductive and monotonous. Indeed, the neo-classical theorist—'un de ces *modernes professeurs-jurés* d'esthétique', an 'insensé doctrinaire du Beau' (II: 577, emphasis in the original)—would be unable to detach himself from his single fanatical ideal enough to recognize any artistic form that did not correspond to the aesthetics of ancient Greece (Baudelaire's example is taken from Chinese art). The imaginary theorist has 'oublié la couleur du ciel' (presumably reducing the blurred and cloudy skies of which Baudelaire was so fond to an idealizing neo-classical metonymy such as 'l'azur'), 'la forme du végétal' (perhaps in favour of a 'rêve de pierre'), and 'le mouvement et l'odeur de l'animalité' (we'll come to movement in a moment). His paralysed fingers can no longer run 'avec agilité sur l'immense clavier des *correspondances!*' (II: 577, emphasis in the original). The shadowy depths of the unity offered by 'Correspondances' are very different from the tautologically white figure of Beauty ('cœur de neige'/'blancheur des cygnes') standing out starkly against her azure background.

Later, in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), Baudelaire rejects the idea that the ideal woman corresponds to the classical ideal. Certainly, she is a stupid idol, but '[c]e n'est pas, dis-je, un animal dont les membres, correctement assemblés, fournissent un parfait exemple d'harmonie; ce n'est même pas *le type de beauté pure*, tel que peut le rêver le sculpteur dans ses plus sévères méditations […] Nous n'avons que faire ici de Winckelmann et de Raphaël' (II: 713, my emphasis). Guys, who he is holding up as the painter of modern life, 'négligerait un morceau de la statuaire antique' in favour of English painters such as Reynolds and Lawrence, renowned for their fluid depictions of contemporary life with blurred contours and visible brushstrokes (II: 714). Women must be portrayed not just as bodies, but with their clothes and accessories, in order to capture the changing nature of beauty. Indeed, Baudelaire's famous definition of modernity situates it in the ever-changing and contingent. True art must combine this with the eternal, unchanging ideal: 'La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable.' (II: 695). The 'clartés éternelles' offered by Beauty in the sonnet, and the eternal unchanging love she inspires, are thus only half

the story, and to pursue that ideal alone would be like blinding oneself to the modernity and contingency that are essential parts of true art. Or indeed like devoting oneself to a ‘sphinx incompris’, an ideal that is not accessible to mortal comprehension.

If the artist/poet were to pursue the eternal and unchanging ideal exclusively, this pursuit would kill off the poetic voice entirely. Poets would be rendered ‘muet[s]’ if they were ‘dociles’ enough to accept the diktats of neoclassical prosody and to let themselves be ‘fascin[és]’ by rigid idealism. It is no longer the case in English, but in French, of course, the first meaning of ‘fasciner’ is still to immobilize someone through a procedure like hypnotism or sorcery, perhaps by the fixed, staring gaze of a snake or the gleam of a mirror used as a trap. These poor trapped poets are both the subject of Baudelaire’s mockery and echoes of himself.[4] In 1852 Baudelaire wrote that he and other ‘hommes de bonne foi’ felt ‘brisés par cette comédie dangereuse’, the preposterous attempt to adhere to classical ideals (II: 49). He clearly feels bruised by his struggles with idealism in ‘La Beauté’, where each poet pursuing this impossible ideal ‘s’est meurtri’ against her marble breast. So too, in the prose poem ‘Le Fou et la Vénus’, that key Baudelairean alter-ego the poor jester in his ridiculous outfit, charged with keeping kings (or bourgeois readers) amused, ‘lève des yeux pleins de larmes vers l’immortelle Déesse’, silently pleading with her ‘je suis fait, moi aussi, pour comprendre et sentir l’immortelle Beauté!’, only to be ignored by her marble eyes (I: 283–84).

If the Beauty who is speaking in the poem is the eternal ideal of neo-classical, universalist aesthetics, then it might seem surprising that the love inspired by her should be ‘Éternel et muet ainsi que la *matière*’ (my emphasis). But Baudelaire is also rejecting neoclassical aesthetics’ emphasis on formal—or material—properties over inner truths. In his mockery of ‘L’École païenne’ (1852) he warns of this danger: ‘S’environner exclusivement des séductions de l’art *physique*, c’est créer de grandes chances de perdition. Pendant longtemps, bien longtemps, vous ne pourrez voir, aimer, sentir que le beau, rien que le beau. Je prends le mot dans un sens restreint. Le monde ne vous apparaîtra que *sous sa forme matérielle*. Les ressorts qui le font se mouvoir resteront longtemps cachés.’ (II: 47, my emphasis). The exclusive cult of matter, or material form (‘Plastique! plastique!’, II: 48), excludes the inner truth provided by the visionary imagination. Inspired by Daumier’s caricatures of the new neo-paganism, he also mocks the gap between the ideal Venus, ‘ces statues de marbre’, and the needs of contingent everyday life. ‘Buvez-vous des bouillons d’ambroisie? mangez-vous des côtelettes de Paros? Combien prête-t-on sur une lyre au Mont-de-Piété?’ (II: 47). The contrast is one he takes up in the prose poems ‘Perte d’auréole’ and ‘La Soupe et les nuages’. Idealism is incapable of responding to the accidents of the bustling modern city (with its omnibuses and dangerous roads, I: 352), the needs of everyday life (such as eating one’s soup, I: 350) and those other, more violent contingencies of contemporary Parisian life, such as revolutions, barricades, and bloodshed (II: 46).

[4] On this double subjectivity of laughter, which is both at the expense of someone else and an identification with that person, see Vaillant (2007, 145).

We have seen that Baudelaire's aesthetics valorise the contingent and transient. These are of course summed up in movement, which is rejected virulently in the last two lines of the sonnet's octave. These lines are also key to understanding how Beauty gives voice to the neo-classical aesthetic principles that the sonnet expresses with polemical intent. In her declaration 'Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,/ Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris' Beauty is articulating Winckelmann's position, elaborated in his famous analysis of the Laocoön sculpture. Winckelmann rejected expressivity, which he saw as the opposite of beauty, because Greek sculpture is only concerned with the eternal and passion is fleeting. The adjective 'still' in German can mean either tranquil or immobile, and the two concepts are closely linked for Winckelmann: 'the universal and predominant characteristic of the Greek masterpieces is a noble simplicity and tranquil grandeur, both in posture and expression.' In their calm stillness, Greek figures reveal 'a great and dignified soul', and this precludes violent distortion or actions and postures that are too passionate and uncontrolled. 'The calmer the state of a body, the fitter it is to express the true character of the soul'; the soul is 'great and noble only in the state of unity, the state of rest' (Winckelmann 1985, 42–43).

Now Pichois's notes in the Pléiade edition (I: 872) go to great lengths to explain why the speaker of 'La Beauté' hates movement despite the fact that Baudelaire admires it elsewhere. Such apparent contradictions disappear once we understand that Beauty is articulating Winckelmann's position. Baudelaire was of course not alone in questioning Winckelmann's rejection of violent emotion and movement: he was influenced by discussions with his hero and role model, Delacroix himself, who in 1854 published an article in which he denounced the way modern academic schools of art tried to teach 'le beau comme on enseigne l'algèbre', preaching a single model that required artists to 'éviter les expressions compliquées ou les mouvements violents, capables de déranger l'harmonie des traits ou des membres' (Delacroix 1923, 25). Baudelaire's earlier writings on art already reflect the influence of Delacroix, in particular his fulsome praise of precisely the qualities—movement, expression—that are excluded by Beauty in the poem. The painterly treatment of colour, writes Delacroix's young admirer, creates a sense of constant movement in which all things are 'changées de seconde en seconde par le *déplacement* de l'ombre et de la lumière […] agitées […] en perpétuelle vibration, laquelle fait *trembler les lignes* et complète la loi du *mouvement* éternel et universel.' (*Salon de 1846,* II: 422, my emphasis). This is inverted almost word for word by the pronouncements of Beauty, who declares 'Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes'. The static verbs of 'La Beauté' (suis, est fait, trône, unis, hais, ai l'air, ai) also present a marked contrast to the impression of constant flux that Baudelaire so admired in Delacroix's painting. Indeed, Baudelaire's deprecation of sculpture is partly due to its lack of colour and movement (II: 434, 487–89).

Winckelmann emphasizes line, or what he calls contour, which in its noblest and most precise form can be learned from the Greeks alone (1985, 39–40). This eighteenth century valorisation of line fed into the nineteenth century's revisiting of the old idea that there was a conflict between colour and drawing (the Venetian versus Florentine schools; Rubens versus Poussin). In the somewhat reductive view that there were two opposed camps around Ingres on the one hand and Delacroix on

the other, supporters of the ‘school’ of Ingres valorised firm line or contour. In his 1855 denigration of Ingres Baudelaire reworks the idea of the conflict between colour and drawing, seeing it rather as a conflict between broken/fluid lines and hard contours, or between movement and stasis. He points to the absence of imagination and movement in Ingres’s paintings, again in contrast to Delacroix (II: 585).

Baudelaire’s praise of the contingent and transitory, and of movement, are accompanied by an aesthetics of surprise. Far from the unique classical ideal, true beauty is to be found in variety and ‘l’étonnement’, and ‘*Le Beau est toujours bizarre*.’ (II: 578, emphasis in the original). Later, in *Fusées*, his supposed ‘Journaux intimes’, he notes: ‘Ce qui n’est pas légèrement difforme a l’air insensible;—d’où il suit que l’irrégularité, c’est-à-dire l’inattendu, la surprise, l’étonnement sont une partie essentielle et la caractéristique de la beauté.’ (I: 656). This praise of the irregular and of surprise is typical of Baudelaire’s writings on art, but the internal polemic within ‘La Beauté’ transposes these arguments to the realm of poetry. Here the double meaning of ‘Je hais le movement qui déplace les lignes’ comes into play. That line is of course an illustration of its own precept, being a complete clause with no disruption from enjambment. In fact there is, by Baudelaire’s standards, relatively little enjambment in this sonnet, and where there is a strong enjambment, i.e. with a subject/verb split, it is motivated or mitigated. After the volta, when the sonnet turns to look at the effect on poets, it is they, rather than Beauty herself, who are disturbed by the enjambment (‘Les poètes […] Consumeront leurs jours’) and the unity of the poet subjects and their action is interrupted by Beauty’s ‘grandes attitudes’. Where the subject and verb are split between lines 2 and 3 (‘Et mon sein […] Est fait’) the enjambment appears to offer an opening only for a repetitive, narrow modulation of the sounds [e] and [ɛ], sounding monotonously over lines 2–4 (et, s’est, est, fait, inspirer, poète, éternel, et, muet, matière).

Elsewhere in his verse poetry, although he does adhere to classical forms (*Les Fleurs du mal* is dominated by the Alexandrine, with the octosyllabic and decasyllabic metres coming a distant second and third), Baudelaire does make considerable use of enjambment. If ‘La Beauté’ was written in the 1850s, as seems likely, then he was also writing prose poetry at the same time, and thus intermittently questioning the integrity of the poetic line. Like painted lines, the poetic line must incorporate surprise, breaking up the Alexandrine’s stately monotony, and escaping the ‘rêve de pierre’. In fact the advantage of having rules in the first place would seem to be that breaking them creates an effect of surprise; ‘prosody must not simply generate pattern, expectation that the pattern will continue, and then satisfaction of that expectation, but must also use that expectation to create the conditions for surprise, irregularity and frustration of pattern’ (Chesters 1988, 105). One of Baudelaire’s drafts for a preface to *Les Fleurs du mal* argues that the human need ‘de monotonie, de symétrie et de surprise’ is immortal (I: 182). But symmetry without surprise would be deathly, and already in 1846 both painters and poets are seen as needing to escape the pursuit of the ideal in favour of the broken line: ‘Les poètes, les artistes et toute la race humaine seraient bien malheureux si l’idéal, cette absurdité, cette impossibilité, était trouvé. Qu’est-ce que chacun ferait désormais de son pauvre *moi*,—de sa ligne brisée?’ (II: 455). In

other words the 'ligne brisée' is both artistic, poetic, and metaphysical (Chesters 1988, 104–5). Delacroix uses the same expression in his essay of 1854, expressing his admiration for Rubens's 'lignes brisées et décousues' (1923, 26).

Winckelmann famously praised the unknown artist of the Laocoön for maintaining the serenity and human dignity of the main figure's face despite his struggles, and used this as part of his argument against excessive expressivity in art. This is the opinion that Beauty is echoing in her claim that 'jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris'. Now Baudelaire was a great early theorist of laughter, a subject explored in his essay 'De l'essence du rire et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques' (published in1855), and his interest in the comic is also evident in other writings on caricature, a subject dear to his heart from at least 1845. In treating caricature as an artistic genre he feels he has to defend against possible objections 'que voudraient sans doute malicieusement soulever certains professeurs jurés de sérieux, charlatans de la gravité, cadavres pédantesques sortis des froids hypogées de l'Institut' (II: 526), terms resonant of the attack on modern Winckelmanns that we have already seen in his rejection of neo-classical idealism. Baudelaire argues that '[l]e rire et les larmes' are both born from the fallen condition of humanity, and did not exist in Eden; they are a means to comfort us in our pain; and laughter is essentially diabolical in nature because based on a (fleeting and contingent) sense of superiority to others. In paradise we knew joy but not laughter, and the face of humanity was 'simple et uni'; 'le rire qui agite maintenant les nations ne déformait point les traits de sa face' (II: 528). The narrow idealised beauty praised by neo-classical 'professeurs jurés', with its unmoving and unmoved features, is an inherently flawed attempt to portray humanity in a prelapsarian state. This is the pompous Beauty who hammers home her point, repeating her simple syntax over two hemistiches, 'Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris'.

Of course, once we read 'La Beauté' as a spoof of modern Winckelmannian criticism, then it is itself funny. It could be called a poetic caricature, and as we know caricature was a genre highly respected by Baudelaire. Nor should we find it surprising that the admirer of Daumier might on occasion doff his halo, put down his cup of ambrosia, and turn the lyric itself to the purposes of caricature. Alain Vaillant has even argued that Baudelaire is the first poet to construct 'la totalité d'un système poétique cohérent autour du rire' and to have sketched out, 'sur les ruines du lyrisme romantique, un lyrisme du rire' (2007, 146–47). But the laughter is, as always with Baudelaire, in part at his own expense, for he himself has paid tribute to the ideals, and the rigid classical metre, that he mocks. Like the 'Étranger' in the prose poem of that name, he would willingly have worshipped Beauty had she truly been 'déesse et immortelle' (I: 277)—but, the implication is, she is not.

Roberto Calasso claims that the allegorical speaker in 'La Beauté' 'seems to anticipate, lucidly, the parody of itself' (2013, 66). There is certainly some truth in this, but his phrasing ignores the split between the sonnet and the speaker. Beauty, the speaker in the poem, is an allegory of absolute beauty; the poem 'La Beauté' is a parody of an allegory. Understanding it as such potentially challenges us to nuance our conception of how Baudelaire uses allegory: in this instance he comments on it

and frames it even as he uses it.[5] More specifically, in this poem Baudelaire situates allegory between the visual and the verbal. Beauty is a statue and an allegory, while 'La Beauté' is an ekphrastic representation of an allegory. Rather than *ekphrastic description* however, here we have *ekphrastic dialogism*. And the sonnet upstages the statue, since its irony undermines the language of modern Winckelmanns. The poem also trumps Beauty herself in another way. Theorists of the relations between visual and verbal arts, since Lessing, had emphasized that the pictorial arts portray objects in space while language portrays movement over time (see overview by Wettlaufer 2003, particularly 64–65). Beauty says that she hates movement, but by representing her through her own language the poem 'La Beauté' reinscribes her, willy-nilly, in (verbal) movement. A dialogical reading of this poem is thus key to understanding Baudelaire's fluctuating position in the old 'paragone' debate over the relative superiority of the verbal or visual arts. Such a reading is also essential if we are to situate 'La Beauté' firmly in the context of Baudelaire's art criticism and his responses to idealism. But the sheer range and contradictions of critical interpretations of this poem suggest its anamorphic quality. Our understanding of it will depend on whether we listen to the voice of Beauty alone, or to the double-voiced polemic in which the poem situates her language.

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[5] In a similar light, the poem 'L'Allégorie' can be understood as an allegory of allegory itself: with exaggeratedly feminine forms, this perfect but somewhat tawdry figure of speech is over-used or debauched, sluttishly trailing her hair in the wine. Ultimately allegory is 'inféconde' but nevertheless 'nécessaire à la marche du monde', which helps to explain why Baudelaire uses it so much but doubles it with irony.

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