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THE PHILOSOPHY OF BAUDELAIRE'S POETRY

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Abstract:
This paper explores the poetics of Charles Baudelaire, one of the key figures of French symbolism, through the analysis of his poetic actions, themes, and influences. Baudelaire, known for his vision of a modern world shrouded in dark melancholy and despair, creates a poetic universe that transcends traditional aesthetic norms and lays the foundations of symbolist aesthetics. Through the analysis of Baudelaire's verses, we discover the complex relationship between beauty and evil, as well as the deep melancholy that permeates his poetry. Baudelaire's relationship to man and his view of human nothingness and conflict with the world are also explored, and thus we mark the inseparable connection between poetry and philosophy. Through the use of symbolic language and metaphors, Baudelaire creates poetic images that express existential anxiety and the inner struggle of man with himself. In addition, we analyze the role of poets in the development of Marxist aesthetics and political thought. Through it all, his poetry is a complex, deeply introspective, and universally relevant body of art, as summarized in the book *Flowers of Evil*, which continues to inspire and provoke readers around the world.

Keywords: symbolism; melancholy: vision of the modern world; poetry and philosophy: human nothingness

1. Introduction

Just as Mallarmé, (1985) began his admiration for Baudelaire in his characteristic style—*with pleasure, I plunged into the dear pages of Flowers of Evil*—so the boundless space of a new perception of life and death opens up to us. The introduction to that perception was created by the poet with his unusual and bold way of perceiving things. Opposing good and evil in his poetry, he strives to create a new poetic world devoid of traditional and manneristic restraints. The style presented by the poet is a beacon for creators whose works strive to break the chains of stereotypical myths, creating a unique style that we recognize today as symbolism. In this way, Baudelaire creates a *prayer* that tears the sky,

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breaks through the fog, and leaves the branches rot. An albatross stopped in flight can also be seen there, *and only somewhere far away are a few feathers from the wings of fallen souls*. Creatures of his fantasy fly through Baudelaire's sky, which are inconsistent with dogmatics (primarily ecclesiastical) and which are not the embodiment of what they should be. They are *angels as white as the host, who sing their ecstasy accompanied by harps that imitate their wings*.

However, the blue eyes of Baudelaire's angels do not radiate eternal light and bliss, but the vulgar heavenly blue. The poet first possessed imagination, which led him to the most refined searches for form and harmony in the interweaving of two eternal antipodes, beauty and evil. Valeri, (1985) describes him *as a demon of insight, a spirit of analysis, and the inventor of the latest and most seductive combinations of logic with imagination, mysticism with calculation, an incomparable psychologist, a literary engineer who deepens and uses all the means in art.* This is exactly how Baudelaire sees Edgar Allan Poe, who exerts a significant influence on its form. They both have a common theme of death, mysticism, and phantasms. Baudelaire is the *first seer, the king of poets, and the true God* (Rimbaud, 1985). With these words, which one great man of French literature expresses to another, a new cycle of poetry begins in this part of Europe, which will not only shake the foundations of the crumbling system of values and moral failure but will also find the roots of acceptability among the younger population eager for changes and constantly changing system values (perpetuum mobile), compared to the previous system *(*circulus vitiosus*).*

2. Spiritus movens of symbolism

Baudelaire is a poet of nausea and vertigo on the one hand and, on the other, of the attraction of the abyss and the magic of the bizarre. In this way, Baudelaire synthesizes symbol and form and achieves the task of finding a language. Baudelaire's problem is not language, but style, not corruption of language, but honesty and conscientiousness of expression, as he himself says: *Everything that is beautiful is the product of reason and calculation.*

It would be interesting to apply to Baudelaire's poetry his admiration for Wagner's method of organization by light motifs. His thought is obsessive and complex; it contains repetitions, places of insistence, and their connections. With this, the poet creates a fundamental alchemy, simultaneously listening to Wagner and his *Sad Madrigal*. One gets the impression that poetry becomes the light motif of Wagner's music (entry into *Valhalla*) and vice versa. However, entering Valhalla has its beginning and its end, thus forming a microcosm, while Baudelaire's poetry is infinite, without beginning and end, forming a macrocosm. The infinite is connected to imagination, and imagination has a complex but also transcendental meaning, to which Baudelaire adds his specific style. The taste of the infinite is the taste of morning, the taste of the world, and the taste of destiny. With this, the poet completes his opus in one trinity that forms an inseparable model of battle. This is evidenced by his poem *Les Correspondences* (infinite and mutual agreement, correlates of imagery, and mutual interchangeability). Everywhere and in everything (*partout et par*

tout). The question arises as to what is infinite in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. It is something that in folk poetry and folk tales has the closest definition of a **bottomless barrel**[ii]. And just when we have the impression that the end is coming, we simultaneously sense a new beginning. In the middle is the typical *circulus vitiosus*, a vicious circle in which the beginning and the end alternate, thus confirming the thesis of mutual substitutability.

Unlike the romantics, whose reality is a projection of their own sensibility (le paysage est un état d'âme), Baudelaire is all about himself. He, on the other hand, draws from his own experience a close connection between poetry and life—the fate of the poet and the fate of language. The world, as it is, rejects it as alien, superfluous, and harmful. And while Vinnie's solitary genius stops at allegorical images, suggesting a comforting and stoic dignity, Baudelaire sees the conflict with the world as the cause of all human drama. In this way, he exclusively ties his existential reality to the inevitability of that conflict, so such a confrontation seems completely merciless and lucid, while poetry constantly bears witness to the poet's essential connection with the world. Hence the expressions of new imaginary horizons in the entire poetry of Charles Baudelaire (Kovač, 1989).

« Morne esprit, autrefois amoureux de la lutte,
L'Espoir, dont l'éperon attisait ton ardeur,
Ne veut plus t'enfourcher ! Couche-toi sans pudeur,
Vieux cheval dont le pied à chaque obstacle butte. »

According to Giber, (1985), Baudelaire boldly engages his emotions, aware in advance of their doomed nature. In this manner, he invokes higher, unnamed forces to pacify his restless heart. The concluding verse suggests that his heart pulsates for the entirety of the literary movement he was a part of, leaving an enduring imprint. This serves as a manifestation of poetic consciousness. If one seeks to acknowledge what is owed to Baudelaire, who was somewhat marginalized among older literary works, it is the recognition of the stigmatization and malevolent fate, the insidious and treacherous pain, the icy blade within us that shapes our restlessness, fragility, and the burden of being poets. Baudelaire was the first to unveil this perspective, and it remains steadfast.

The poet's experience is not limited to examples from everyday life. Also, it does not limit itself to its symbolism, which can often be unpleasant for a puritanical listener. This is supported by his poem *Albatros*, which was included in all anthologies and received the best criticism from almost all critics, including those who were not in favor of him. With it, the poet wanted to add a new dimension to the symbolism. In it, he would describe the rise of man, who has a unique opportunity to fly unfettered, freed from the moral fences and bonds of earthly life, and who fights with his flight against those who would like to restrain, bind, humiliate, and trample him. With his flight, man, the

[ii]Literary phraseology from oral and written sources - which consists of phraseological units taken from various writings or traditions and which form a traditional part of European, but also specific folk traditions: stumbling block, bottomless barrel, promised land...

albatross, defies the system, glorifies freedom, and becomes the man who, in later times, will be a pillar of the working class in revolutionary periods.

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

It is safe to say that through this prism, Baudelaire opened the door to an important political and philosophical trend in contemporary history: Marxism. The question is: how? The answer is simple. Baudelaire offers man as he is: natural, free, sinful, and depraved. Precisely on the basis of this view of man, Engels (a faithful friend of Marx), often quoting the Roman comedian Terence, uttered the famous sentence in his capital work Anti-Dühring, which reads: *I am a man; I consider nothing that is human alien to me*. In this way, we recognize that Baudelaire was also a visionary of something that was at the center of attention in the new struggle: the working class for a better society. The man, as seen by Baudelaire, fits into the model of a revolutionary man who is not constrained by religion or by various doctrines that try to keep him in a subordinate position. Breaking shackles, throwing off the yoke, giving freedom of decision, and primarily being aware that man (of any gender) is the owner of his body are the common ideals of this poet and the system that will enter the scene in the first decade of the 20th century.

Marxist aesthetics liberates art from romanticized variations through integration and demystification. The modern conception of art, which stems from the affirmation of human autonomy, recognizes art as creativity, not imitation. The roots of romanticism can be found in Rousseau, where it is divided into two directions: one that strives for a mystical union with nature, and the other that refers to social compromise and building autonomy in the natural and social world. This conception of art, inspired by the work of Fichte and Goethe, was transferred to France, where Delacroix and Baudelaire laid the foundations of modern aesthetics, recognizing art as the creation of the *so-called second nature* (rogergaraudy.blogspot.com, 2017).

3. Baudelaire's homo erectus

The center of Baudelaire's interest is man—Hommo erectus—stripped down to his essence. He feels the need to translate into verse his visions, which are largely related to human nothingness, thus creating a new form of despair, more melancholic than any other, which is the source of inspiration for his poetry. In his native language, he does not find an analogy, that is, an adequate term to determine that state, which is why he adopts the English anatomical term spleen, which has its roots in the ancient Greek splēn, which literally means spleen, and according to Baudelaire's understanding, it refers to a void state of mind.

Namely, the Greeks, within the theory of humor, believed that the spleen poured into the body a black liquid, black bile, which is directly responsible for the appearance of melancholy and which gives rise to inexplicable sadness, the causes of which are unfathomable to us. For Baudelaire, the spleen becomes one of the essential anxiety-like components. *Les Limbes*, the second title planned for the collection *Flowers of Evil*, aims to highlight the anxiety and melancholy of contemporary youth. And what is melancholy, if not madness, rage, and disorder? It is then that he gives his spleen the meaning that psychology will give to depression. Baudelaire's poetry without a spleen is impossible because it reveals how difficult it is for him to live in his own world. Baudelaire's modernity lies in the remedy he finds for his melancholy, which is violence, which temporarily allows him to cope with his nausea more easily, as evidenced by the following lines:

> *« Que les fins de journées d'automne sont pénétrantes! Ah! pénétrantes jusqu'à la douleur ! car il est de certaines sensations délicieuses dont le vague n'exclut pas l'intensité ; et il n'est pas de pointe plus acérée que celle de l'infini… »*

In describing such a state, Baudelaire does not hesitate to include various lewd motifs and details in his poetry, as is the case in the poem *The Game*. He even shows envy for those he considers to be more evil than him, although in this poem he is an observer of the organization. Sherry, (1979) in his superb interpretation of *Flowers of Evil*, concludes: *"The poet's soft race made him a masculinist (un émasculé), a victim of a secret illness, subject to endless languor. From this point of view, the conclusion can be drawn that Baudelaire uses orgies to describe man as the most imperfect animal. In this way, orgies can be compared to a certain amount of sadism that could also be manifested in nature, for example, trampling flowers."*

On the other hand, his thought is explicit, especially in the effort to connect love and evil. This solidarity is evidenced by a quote from his diary: *« Une fois, il fut demandé devant moi, en quoi consistait le plus grand plaisir de l'amour. Quelqu'un répondit naturellement: à recevoir, et un autre: à se donner. — Celui-ci dit: plaisir d'orgueil; — et celui-là: volupté d'humilité. Tous ces orduriers parlaient comme l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ. Enfin, il se trouva un impudent utopiste qui affirma que le plus grand plaisir de l'amour était de former des citoyens pour la patrie. Moi, je dis: la volupté unique et suprême de l'amour gît dans la certitude de faire le mal. Et l'homme et la femme savent, de naissance, que dans le mal se trouve toute volupté »* (Baudelaire, 1999). This solidarity between love and evil, which opposes the Christian conception and idealism of Victor Hugo and paradoxically comes from the fall of Baudelaire, is responsible for the images that greatly shocked his contemporaries (of whom the poet asked nothing more than to be shocked). Such ambivalence makes hatred an inseparable companion of love and forces the lover to perceive his passion as a hard-to-bear addiction. This is evidenced by the final lines of the poem *A celle qui est trop qaie*.

« Ainsi je voudrais, une nuit,
Quand l'heure des voluptés sonne,
Vers les trésors de ta personne,
Comme un lâche, ramper sans bruit,

Pour châtier ta chair joyeuse,
Pour meurtrir ton sein pardonné,
Et faire à ton flanc étonné
Une blessure large et creuse,

Et, vertigineuse douceur !
A travers ces lèvres nouvelles,
Plus éclatantes et plus belles,
T'infuser mon venin, ma sœur ! »

When we talk about sadism, which is indisputable, we see how the poet takes on the role of a monster already in the poem *Le Revenant*, in order to give his beloved kisses as cold as moonlight and snake caresses, all in the desire to reign terror over her life and youth. This is what the interpreter Sherry, (1979) defines: "*It is about a rejected lover who seeks the sadistic pleasure of inflicting horror on a woman who rejects his wishes. Won't the victim scream in mortal fear? Wouldn't that scream be the pleasure of a weak person, deranged to the point of madness?*" (Baudelaire, 1979). Finally, the revival of sadism and erotic madness can be seen in the lyrics of the poem *Martyr*, where he describes and imagines with voluptuousness the scenes of a luxurious salon in which a naked woman lies with her head cut off:

« L'homme vindicatif que tu n'as pu, vivante,
Malgré tant d'amour, assouvir,
Combla-t-il sur ta chair inerte et complaisante
L'immensité de son désir? » (Baudelaire, 1999).

Already in the first lines, Baudelaire presents us with the evil deity of leprosy. The horror of life that the poet personally experienced was intense and immeasurably deep, so he was overwhelmed by the weight of time. He writes:

« Pluviôse, irrité contre la ville entière,
De son urne à grands flots verse un froid ténébreux
Aux pâles habitants du voisin cimetière
Et la mortalité sur les faubourgs brumeux... » (Baudelaire, 1896).

As the French writer Galland, (1969) pointed out, the poet wanted to give his poem the powers of Jupiter or Zeus. Here Pluviôse contemplates the primitive deities of rain and hurricanes. In a supernatural atmosphere, gloomy cold, rain, misery, mist, disease,

and mortality were represented as manifestations of divine wrath. The whole atmosphere reminds us of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities that were destroyed by the rain of fire. Josephus, in his writings (AD 37–100, Jewish Wars, Book 4, Chapter 8), describes Sodom and Gomorrah after the disaster:

> *"This area looks so sad, since it was burned, that no one is interested in coming here ... It used to be a very happy place, because of the fruits of the plants that grew there and the wealth of the former cities, and now everything is burned. This is the consequence of the impiety of their inhabitants, which was destroyed by fire; today we still see the remains of this divine fire, and the traces and shadows of these five cities are still visible, as well as the ashes in which are its fruits, which have a color as if they were for food; but, if you take them in your hand, they disintegrate into dust and smoke."*

The solution lay in leaving such an atmosphere and escaping from the world of rapid aging, death, and moral degradation. The spleen does everything to keep man trapped and chained to the body, with the soul trapped behind the bars of matter. Melancholy, which spread with the poet's impetuous spirit, made him run away from himself, believing that in this way he would free himself from the obsession with the spleen, but it was impossible to destroy the empire he had already established. Nothingness is actually much more than all of the above. It is a way of thinking, a way of living; it is the spirit of the times, in which there is no more truth, justice, or freedom, where everything is for sale. Times where there is no more God. You killed God, says Nietzsche, and people confirm it every day by their actions and inactions. To transform the world, whose dimensions are limited by space and time, seems possible for Baudelaire only in moments of poetic creation and tasting the unknown. Through an even more tragic phenomenon of the passage of time, the spleen would give the poet additional grief, ensuring the permanence of his eternal solitude. Therefore, the spiritual state of the poet, who plays the role of a prisoner in the world of matter, is already glimpsed in the second *Spleen*: *J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans./Un gros meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans... »* Living in such confinement seems completely chaotic. The walls are impassable, evil is omnipresent, and the poet is on the edge of the abyss. So, in the third scene, with the image of the fallen king, Baudelaire perfectly highlights the destructive force of that dark mood by giving contrasting images. *« Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux/riche, mais impuissant, jeune et pourtant très-vieux... »*

4. Heralds of the death of Baudelaire's poetry

The lives of beings and nature constantly remind us of death. The aging process, the consuming passage of time, the changing of the seasons, the transition from autumn to winter, dusk and night, all combine to sharpen our awareness of death. Autumn, penetrated by cold darkness, heralds death. It evokes images of shrouds, coffins, and graves in the poet's soul. As autumn wears on, he feels that his heart, *plein de choses funèbres,* is haunted by the mysterious presence of death, but he is also eager to hide

behind the screen of the autumn mist that hangs over his soul. He celebrates fins *d'automne, hivers, and printemps trempés de boue* (Boudelaire, 1999), because that gloomy landscape is in perfect harmony with his soul, which he will even compare to the wings of a crow: *Mon âme mieux qu'au temps du tiède renouveau / Ouvrira largement ses ailes de corbeau.* Death becomes our closest friend, and the departing images of reality, governed by the master of time, help to strengthen that anxious feeling, which Baudelaire calls the spleen.

Just as Njegoš in his *The Ray of the Microcosm*[iii] defined the soul idealistically and Platonistically as an idea and called it an electric spark, bringing it into connection with the nature of an electric spark (Deretić, 2005), so Baudelaire draws his idealistic philosophical understandings from unknown cosmic energy, which will transmit them into a firmly grounded metaphysical vision of the soul. The poet's vision of the soul is closer to the Platonic tradition than to Christianity. Plato, (1996), in his *Phaedo*, distinguishes four proofs of the existence of the soul. First, it confirms that the soul exists as an independent category and is independent of the body. If the soul already existed before, when it enters life and is born, it must arise from death and deadness and not from somewhere else. Then it must obviously exist even after it dies if it is to be reborn. This further confirms that the soul exists even after death, so that birth (reincarnation of the soul) could take place and thus continue the life process of birth and death.[iv] Already with the third proof, he points out the concern for death from a philosophical perspective. In this context, the soul is pure and, as such, separates from the body, not taking with it a single part of the body. So we also see with Baudelaire that she could liberate herself, if not finally liberate herself, during her lifetime. Just as it was philosophy for Plato, so Baudelaire, thanks to his poetic art and withdrawal into his own world of imagination, saw the significance of death. In the end, Plato proves that the mortal also dies with death (the body), while the immortal completely avoids death (the soul). Hence his displeasure at finding himself in this world of urges and suffering, so he seeks his deliverance by wandering through space and time. In the direction of Plato's thinking, the poet's thinking also undoubtedly goes. Just as Plato, (1996), in the *Phaedo*, tries to convince the reader that the human soul, that is, human reason, is eternity in time, Baudelaire tries to preserve the ontological superiority of the soul over the body during his lifetime, especially aware that it is promised immortality. But Baudelaire, who created the term modernity by opposing it to the Platonist idea, imitates pure Platonism when he sees beauty as a stone dream worthy of inspiring *un amour éternel et muet or Ainsi que la matière » that rules the sky (tel un Sphinx incompris*) (Mattéi, 2000).

But merciless time never forgives and takes everything away. Baudelaire tries to capture a world in which time no longer knows the phase of retention, wanting his spirit

[iii] Petar II Petrović-Njegoš, *The Ray of the Microcosm* (Serbian Cyrillic: *Луча микрокозма*, romanized: *Luča mikrokozma*) translated by Anica Savić Rebac, Svet Knjige, Belgrade 2013.

[iv] Plato's dialogue Phaedo or On the Soul is considered one of the most famous achievements of the human spirit. The usual dualistic division of the world into ideal and real, finite and infinite, perfect and imperfect, eternal and temporal, and the dichotomy of human beings into soul and body, intellect and feelings, are indispensable themes of traditional metaphysics that find their starting point precisely in the Phaedo.

to separate from his body and thereby immerse himself in the world of essences, although the body will still remain chained to time.

He will create a worldwide Ex-Nihil[v] in a perspective that one could describe as Platonic, an ideal world that is fundamentally opposed to nature. Thus, the two spheres strongly oppose each other. The world below (of this world), which is inhabited by boredom, and where the body plunges into the time that eats it: « *Ô douleur! Ô douleur! Le Temps mange la vie* (Baudelaire, 1999). The world above (otherworldly), which is inhabited by the ideal of beauty and the flight of spirit, is far from any perishability. The poet thus becomes a bridge that unites these two antagonistic worlds. Trying to freeze time, he remains immobile between the spleen and the ideal, so he finds salvation in poetic art.

« Être maudit à qui, de l'abîme profond
Jusqu'au plus haut du ciel, rien, hors moi, ne répond!
- O toi qui, comme une ombre à la trace éphémère... »

Time is irreversible, and man longingly observes his silhouette, which reminds him of a lost figure in the mist of the past. From the irreversibly flowing time, man is forced to learn a lesson. Time passes, and we are left with a moment, one day in a continuous cycle that invites us to live it, because the hands that most closely reflect our human condition and the inevitability of disappearance rush to remind us with their irritating sound: vis, vis vite, puisque tu vas mourir bientôt!

4. Conclusions

To enter the unknown abyss, not only to drown his nothingness there but to know the nothingness of all humanity, confirms the line from the epilogue: « *Je n'allais pas là pour répandre un vain pleur. However, acquaintance was not enough for the poet, and so he decides to transfer the yoke of humanity to his own back, carrying its burden, as it is expressed in the verse: Je voulais m'enivrer de l'énorme catin*. And indeed, here one can see the open interweaving of philosophy and poetry, which seem inseparable in Baudelaire. However, we can take Nietzsche as an example who, although he is not inclined to follow Baudelaire, takes the same interpretation and objects to Plato for debasing art in favor of dialectic. This can be summed up, from the perspective of Platonism, which witnesses the conflict between philosophy and poetry, in Nietzsche's formulation: "*Plato against Homer,"* meaning science against art, essence against appearance, or, following Hegel, seriousness, pain, labor, and patience of negation against superficiality, joy, laziness, instant image, and positivity of symbols. This division opened by Plato between poetry and philosophy would further guide Wagner to rediscover the beauty of the Greek flourishing and create an inspired work of art, and ask Nietzsche to help him "*establish a great Renaissance*" in which Plato would embrace Homer and where Homer, filled with Platonic ideas, became

[v]Nothing or nothingness (lat. nihil), is a term that describes the absence or non-existence of anything.

a truly great Homer (Mattéi, 2000). So, the intertwining of philosophy and poetry is, one would say, something that is impossible to separate in Baudelaire's poetry. Baudelaire, as a poet, succeeded in fulfilling his philosophical mission: to find a way to condense the antipodes into unity and to not separate evil from beauty, which can be identified with goodness—*dont le charme infernal me rajeunit sans cesse*. He closes the cover of these dualistic perspectives with verses; in a way, he plants them and leaves them in the ground like seeds that he has yet to emerge, proud of having fulfilled his duty, like a man and a saint, convinced that one day another poet will appear and continue his poetic tradition.

> *« Je t'aime, ô capitale infâme ! Courtisanes*
> *Et bandits, tels souvent vous offrez des plaisirs*
> *Que ne comprennent pas les vulgaires profanes. »*

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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