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THEORERTICAL BACKGROUNDS OF FRENCH PROSE POETRY: FÉNELON TO BAUDELAIRE

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Abstract

Though many theoreticians, throughout the centuries, have argued against prosodic devices being a necessary component of poetry, usually these two have been traditionally identified with one another by a great majority of practitioners and readers, alike. But, there have also been those who have thought and acted otherwise. In French literary history, Fenelon is an outstanding pioneer who, both in his creative and theoretical writings, citing the limitations imposed by rigid rules and drawing upon the example of the Bible, argued for the loosening of the rules and, in his *Télémaque*, created what was termed by others as prose poetry. This paper, using the critical writings of Fenelon, Baudelaire and others, tries to sketch the development of this genre within a period of almost two centuries and to show how, in each period, the practitioners and theoreticians helped modify the literary sensibility of their contemporaries.

Generally speaking, the division of literary history into periods, each bearing a specific, descriptive name, is a convenient device used by practitioners to refer to the general characteristics of any given period; they are not to be considered sacrosanct. These appellations and what they signify have been consistently questioned during the last fifty years by scholars and critics who, looking closely at the works produced in each of these periods, have systematically shown that human experience and the manifestations of that experience in various artistic forms represent an almost seamless, continuous and variegated entity, that, for instance, people's taste does not change overnight or within one or ten years to favor a renaissance rather than medieval sensibility. French classicism and locating its flowering and hegemony in the seventeenth century, is one such example. It is true that French literature of the

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seventeenth century, by and large, manifests strong 'classical' traits, but what is equally true is that *'préciosité'*, with all its innovations, as well as, what it inherited from the medieval traditions of courtly love, was also very active and productive during this period. A remnant of baroque sensibility and bearing close affinities with such other continental baroque movements as Gongorism and Marinism, *'précieux'* mentality can best be represented in Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie, histoire romaine* (1654-60). A forerunner of modern psychological novel, *Clélie* is a romantic adventure story which, in its vast scope (13,000 pages), subverts almost all the conventions of classicism, especially the all-important Aristotelian rules of the unity of action and the purity of genres.

Apart from such developments, which had their roots in the medieval past, there were also certain contemporary phenomena which contributed to the divergences from the classical tenets. Translation of the Bible and works from the literature of other countries, ancient and modern, were among the important sources of such phenomena. The role played by the Bible was especially crucial since, while it did not follow any of the classical and pseudo-classical rules, it appeared to all the readers to contain passages of great literary value. The Song of Songs and the Psalms, to mention only the two most famous examples from the Old Testament, applauded unanimously by readers as outstanding examples of lyrical poetry, are not in versified form and do not conform with the accepted norms of classical poetry. The gradual gravitation away from such conventions gaining ground in certain quarters can also be seen in the field of translation, an activity that gained a great deal of momentum during this period. Madame Dacier (c. 1651-1720), the most famous Greek scholar of her day, in 1681, translating Anacreon and Sappho, said that, in her opinion, prose was more capable of rendering faithfully the beauty of the original Greek poems (Clayton 6-7).

On the verse-poetry controversy, a question continuously addressed since Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Horace, there were some, notably Scaliger, who believed that versification was a necessary and, often, sufficient ingredient of poetry. This latter position was held, in theory and more importantly in practice, in varying degrees, by many seventeenth-century classicists, but was by no means a universally accepted rule. Some, buttressed by the authority of Aristotle's *Poetics* (IX, 2), argued along with Sir Philip Sidney that "it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet -- no more than a long gown maketh an advocate ..." (159).

Boileau (1636-1711), the acknowledged 'législateur du Parnasse' and the symbol of classicism at its most limited, is an outstanding example of the mixed nature of literary taste prevalent during this period. Though in his *L'Art Poétique* (1674) he discusses, among other things, the technical questions of versification and the purity of poetic genres and in his *Dialogue des héros de roman* (c.1666) attacks the *roman héroïque,* the dominant form of prose fiction in the seventeenth century, he is also significantly the translator of the pseudo-Longinian *Traité du sublime* which he published in 1674 together with his *L'Art poétique*. The *Traité* inaugurates a new trend in modern critical tradition with significant results for both the eighteenth century and the Romantic movement. The fact that Boileau is both the law-giver of French classicism and the popularizer of the first-century treatise ascribed to Longinus demonstrates once more the wisdom of exercising a great deal of caution in the application of labels and the use of generalizations.

A little over twenty years after the publication of Boileau's *L'Art poétique* and less than thirty years after his *Dialogue des héros de roman,* Fénelon (1651-1715) wrote his epoch-making heroic poem, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* in about 1695. In 1699, an unauthorized version circulated and became so popular that in that year alone it went into twenty reprints (Highet 337); the continued popularity of *Télémaque* can be further gauged by the fact that 250 editions came out until 1820 (Clayton 151). The compliment paid Fénelon by Chateaubriand in his statement in support of prose poetry is a good indication of the importance of Fénelon's achievement.

Chateaubriand, combining the theoretical authority of Aristotle with the practical example furnished by Fénelon, says: "On ne peut anéantir l'autorité d'Aristote et l'exemple du *Télémaque*" (Clayton 140).

In Chapter 9 of his *Poetics* Aristotle says: "A poet differs from a historian, not because one writes verse and the other prose (the work of Herodotus could be put into verse, but it would still remain a history, whether in verse or prose) ..." (18). Though this statement by itself is not conclusive enough, but taken in the context of the whole theory as expounded by Aristotle, it is fair to conclude that Aristotle does not consider the verse element as a necessary ingredient of poetry. There is a lot in *Télémaque* that undermines the authority of Aristotle, but, obviously, what Chateaubriand has in mind is the element of versification.

In his *Télémaque*, Fénelon combines the convention of Italian epic romance and the example set by Madame de Scudéry with "scenes and motives from Graeco-Roman epic, Greek tragedy and other fields of Classical literature" (Highet 337). But, the innovative aspect of his work lies in the kind of poetic prose he employs in the narration of the story, a kind of prose which has been termed as "prose harmonieuse" (Goré 54) and "harmonious, gently poetic prose" (Highet 338). Goré, in the introduction to his edition of *Télémaque,* noting this element, points out other salient aspects of the work:

> Pour situer cette prose harmonieuse dans son contexte véritable nous rappellerons comment A. Chérel voyait dans le merveilleux du *Télémaque,* non seulment une concession à la mode envahissante des contes de fées, mais un écho de ce domaine musical intermédiare entre les opéras de Quinault et la musique de Lulli (54).

The pervasive fairy tale atmosphere, imbued with the musical nature of this fabulous narrative, not only correctly describe Fénelon's *Télémaque* but, more importantly, single out two of the most important characteristics of the later development of this new genre, whose genesis in French literature is witnessed here. Fénelon did not suffice with the writing of *Télémaque*, but in 1714, in his influential *Lettre à l'Académie francaise,* containing the principles of his aesthetics, also provided the theoretical foundations for the works such as his own heroic poem. In the *Lettre*, which Saintsbury applauds as "the most valuable single piece of criticism that France had yet produced" (II, 306), Fénelon has shown "himself far more alive than Boileau to the real issues of literary aesthetics. His freely intuitive judgement ... often asserts itself fruitfully, as he proposes that taste should replace dogma as the all-sufficient guiding principle in the art of writing" (Cazamian 215).

The *Letter* is divided into ten sections, the fifth being devoted to the "projet de poétique", and it is this section which, for the sake of brevity, this paper is going to focus upon. Fénelon, beginning with the first paragraph, establishes a close relationship between religion and poetry, tells us how poetry, even before the art of writing was invented, worked as the medium through which man kept the memory of the origins of the world and then goes on to applaud certain parts of the Bible as first-rate poetry:

> Rien n'égale la magnificence et le transport des Cantiques de Moïse. Le Livre de Job est un poème plein de figures les plus hardies et les plus majestueuses. Le Cantique des Cantiques exprime avec grâce et tendresse l'union mystérieuse de Dieu époux avec l'âme de l'homme qui devient son épouse. Les Psaumes seront l'admiration et la consolation de tous les siècles et de tous les peuples ou le vrai Dieu sera connu et senti (33).

Having pointed out the importance of the Bible as poetry, in preparation for the ensuing arguments, he goes on to make the following significant conclusion:

> Toute l'Écriture est pleine de poésie dans les endroits même où l'on ne trouve aucune trace de versification (33).

The question Fénelon poses is this: Why is it that

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it seems impossible to him for French versification to attain perfection? It is obvious to careful readers that the works even of the greatest of French poets contain a lot of weak verses. If you leave out certain verses, you can see that the beauty of the work, as a whole, does not suffer. French poetry loses more than it gains from the use of rhyme:

> Notre versification perd plus, si je ne me trompe, qu'elle ne gagne par les rimes: elle perd beaucoup de variété, de facilité et d'harmonie (34).

Fénelon does not wish to abolish rhyme, because he believes that it would be a loss for French poetry as it is, but "je croirais qu'il serait à propos de mettre nos poètes un peu plus au large sur les rimes, pour leur donner le moyen d'être plus. exacts sur le sens et sur l'harmonie" (35). The loosening of the regulations governing the use of rhyme, not only leads to the creation of a more harmonious kind of poetry, but it also contributes to the greater perfection of the element of reason underlying the poem:

> En relachant un peu sur la rime, on rendrait la raison plus parfaite, on viserait avec plus de facilité au beau, au grand, au simple, au facile; on épargnerait aux plus grands poètes des tours forcés, des épithètes cousue, des pensées qui ne se présentent pas d'abord assez clairement à l'esprit (35).

To further highlight the difficulties created by rhyme, he compares the rhyme requirements of Alexandrine verse with those of odes and stanzaic poetry and concludes that, where the interweaving rhyme scheme of the latter categories permits greater variety and cadence, great Alexandrines, which require the pleasing sound and the greater variety and majesty, are often those that enjoy this perfecting element the least.

Apart from the weakening effect of the conventions of traditional versification, including rhyme, it is obvious that Fénelon sees a close relationship between 'beauty,' 'greatness,' 'simplicity,' and 'spontaneity' in poetry (35). Furthermore, to him, harmony means much more than simple poetic sound effects. The wider scope he assigns to harmony fits in well with the basic principle governing Fénelon's poetic taste, one which can be summarized in the notion of being 'natural,' of painting a life-like picture, of effacing the person of the poet and letting the work directly interact with the reader:

> Je demande un poète aimable aimable, proportionné au commun des hommes, qui fasse tout pour eux, et rien pour lui. Je veux un sublime si familier, si doux et si simple, que chacun soit d'aboud tenté de croire qu'il l'aurait trouvé sans peine, quoique peu d'hommes soient capables de le trouver. Je préfère l'aimable au surprenant et au merveilleux. Je veux un homme qui me fasse oublier qu'il est auteur .... Je veux qu'il me mette devant les yeux un laboureur qui craint pour ses moissons, un berger qui ne connait que son village et son troupeau, une nourrice attendrie pour son petit enfant. Je veux qu'il me fasse penser, non à lui et à son bel esprit, mais aux bergers qu'il fait parler (39-40).

The way in which Fénelon, in this passage, anticipates Wordsworth's advocacy of the use of the language of common men and, even more, that of Whitman's democratic, populist notions of poetry is very interesting. This is being written at the height of the reign of Louis XIV, the "sun king," at a time when literature was at its most aristocratic level. And we have Fénelon, an aristocrat himself, espousing the kind of literature which speaks directly to the simple peasants and shepherds.

In his *Réflexions critiques sure les aventures de Télémaque* (1717), Trublet reasserted the positions articulated by Fénelon in the *Lettre à l'Académie* and offered *Télémaque* as his proof:

> On peut être grand poète sans être versi-jicateur. Les aventures de *Télémaque* en sond une preuve évidente. Les tours poétiques et hardis, les idées gracieuses et touchantes, les peintures fortes et animées que M. Fénelon a répendues dans son Poème avec une espèce de

prodigalité, dédommagent avec usure de
la rime qui lui manque. (Clayton 152)

The "Peintures fortes et animées" which Trublet refers to are closely related to the growing tendency in the eighteenth century towards direct apprehension and faithful depiction of phenomena. In his *Dialogue sur l'eloquence,* Fénelon has also said that: "le Poésie n'est autre chose qu'une fiction vive qui peint la nature." The relationship between poetry and painting, discussed in detail in works such as *Dubos' Réflexions critique sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719) and the *Parallèle de la poésie et de la peinture, discours académique* (1737), led, among other things, to the popularity of descriptive poetry. This, aided by various contemporary developments, notably the flowering of psychological studies and the tendency towards assuming a more inward looking attitude, led, in turn, to the revival of lyrical poetry.

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Les Aventures de Télémaque typifies to a great extent the principles enunciated in the *Lettre à l'Académie*. No wonder, then that a controversy developed around it. Its popularity could not be ignored and, therefore, the question arose as to where in the scheme of literary genres it had to be placed and whether versification was indeed a *sine qua non* of poetry. Summarizing this debate that continued throughout the eighteenth century, Vista Clayton says: "In a word, verse was defended on the grounds of tradition, beauty and the *difficulté vaincue*; it was attacked in the name of truth, reason, nature and freedom" (151). The strict rules of versification imposed on poetry, on the one hand and the insistence on the inferiority of prose, on the other, seemed too arbitrary and unreasonable to the Age of Reason. "La Motte protested against the sacrifice of accuracy in the language of verse ... Remond de Saint Mard inveighed against the falsity and lack of sincerity engendered by the restrictions of versification: 'On fait tous les jours cent insultes à notre raison, par les sots égards qu'on a pour notre oreille'" (163).

There were other forces at work. National literatures had reasserted themselves and new voices were being heard from abroad. The new trends are too extensive to warrant a treatment, even in summary form here; René Wellek in Chapter One of the first volume of his *History of Modern Criticism* and Werner P. Friederich in Chapter Four of his *Outline of Comparative Literature* have adequately discussed it. Suffice it here to briefly mention two major writers who exerted a profound influence on the shaping of French sensibility at this time: Salomon Gessner (1730-1788) and James Macpherson (1736-1796).

Salomon Gessner, the Swiss writer, in his *Daphnis* (1754), *Idyllen* (1756) and *Der Tod Abels* (1758), celebrated the simple way of life of the rustic people and the city-dweller's longing for such a way of life, in poetic prose. The world of innocence and virtue which he depicted in his works represented the most cherished dreams of the latter half of the eighteenth century. Gessner's poetic prose was marked by the refined sentiment and acute sensibility which was beginning to launch the movement sometimes called Pre-Romanticism. As Clayton has pointed out, between 1765 and 1787, more than one hundred works by French authors were written in imitation of Gessner (53). At about the same time, James Macpherson's forgeries took Europe by a storm. The poems he claimed to have translated from the surviving works of Ossian, a third-century Scottish bard, fitted exactly the mood of the time. Furthermore, Macpherson's work offered the French a prose of a different kind from the others, including Gessner's. "Macpherson's poetic prose had real merits of imagination and rhythm not least in the descriptions of Scottish scenery" (Grierson 218). Its simple and rustic qualities were coupled with another quality which was diametrically opposed to the most cherished of the neoclassical virtues -- i.e., what was so well characterized by what they called the *difficulté vaincue*. This new quality was spontaneity, something that is going to gain increasing momentum until it becomes a hallmark of Romantic poetry.

Ossian's success, though not as rapid as that of

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Gessner's work, helped broaden the scope of the tradition of prose poem by introducing into it a somberness of tone which it lacked. This somberness had already manifested itself in the English poetry of the time, in the melancholy and reflective mood of the poetry of the so-called Graveyard poets, such as Edward Young (*Night Thoughts*; 1742) and Thomas Gray (*Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard*; 1751). The addition of this dimension to poetic prose demonstrated that it was capable of faithfully communicating the moods of "reverie and meditation" (Clayton, 65).

The epistolary novel also contributed to the development of prose as a vehicle for poetic ideas. Two outstanding examples of this genre which exerted a far-reaching influence are Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and Goethe's *Werther* (1774). The most significant aspects of these two novels for our purposes were the emphasis that was placed on individualism, passion and the lyrical description of nature in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and the brief and highly rhythmical quality of the letters in *Werther*. As Suzanne Bernard says, when in 1804 Senancour published his *Obermann*, he

> Peofitera des libertés d'un genre 'sans art et saus intrigue' pour réagir vigeoureusement contre les clichés du style pseudo-classique, 'l'émail des prés, l'azur des cieux, le cristal des eaux, 'et pour proposer 'des expressions qui pourront paraître hardies, des tournures pittoresques ou expressives, aussi audacieusement poétiques que les 'sons silencieux' des choses, ou 'la douce mélodie d'une terre qui voit le couchant': plus que Rousseau, et presque autant que Chateaubriand, Sénancour invente ainsi un style 'symboliste' où les senations sont mêlées les unes aux autres, et mêlées de sentiments, où le monde matériel et le monde spirituel se fondent – et le procédé d'art n'est ici que la forme d'une croyance profonde à l'harmonie d'un monde divin caché sous la représentation d'un monde visible.' Ainsi Sénancour contribue-t-il à créer un nouvel instrument poétique, dont Chateaubriand exploitera avec génie les possiblités: je veux parler de la prose lyrique, musicale, suggestive (25-26).

In Senancour and Chateaubriand we have the creative link between the rise of the poetic prose in Fénelon and the coming of age of prose poetry in Baudelaire. Bernard's above-quoted statement contains a number of the intellectual as well as the artistic developments which underlie Baudelaire's prose poetry: the emancipation from the dogmatic rules and the worn-out clichés of French classicism; the daring use of language to generate poetic meaning; the fusion of sensation and sentiments in order to evoke a macrocosmic-microcosmic relation through, what Bernard calls, a prose which is at once lyrical, musical and suggestive. The supporting intellectual background in Fénelon is based on a Catholicism nourished by the "eternal philosophy of Plato and St. Augustine" (Adam 113), in Chateaubriand on a view of Christianity which "is not only the one true religion but 'the most poetic religion and the religion most favorable to the arts" (Wellek, II 232) and in Baudelaire, among other things, on his interpretation of the Swedenborgian theory of correspondences (Jones, Chapter I).

In 1824, Victor Hugo summed up the contemporary literary scene in the statement that modern French literature is the work of prose-writers and, in 1828, E. Deschamps refined the statement further by saying that "la véritable poésie du XIXe siécle a fait invasion en France par la prose" (Bernard 43). This state of affairs is due more to the work of Chateuabriand than anyone else. His recognition of the time for verse epic has passed and the insightful fusion he effected between a prose style, invested with poetic potentialities and the devices of the narrative, led to the success of such works as *Atala* (1801), *René* (1802), *Les Martyrs* (1809), and *Les Natchez* (1826).

The kind of prose style he developed was also successfully employed in his *Le Génie du christianisme* (1802; of which *René* originally formed

a part) and, more importantly, his posthumously published *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (1849-1850). As Moeau says: "Le poéme en prose est devenu la forme naturelle, nécessaire, de Chateaubriand: ses *Mémoires* eux-mêmes subiront cette même transposition du mode narratif au mode poétique, d'où sont sortis *Les Natchez et Les Martyrs*" (23).

Chateaubriand is not the only Romantic writer to have contributed to the development of prose poetry. "Parts of the prose works of the great Romantics show the elements of rhythm, imagination and feeling fused in paragraphs of high intensity or concentration. A chapter in *Les Misérables* called 'L'Homme à la mer' is in this sense a prose poem. For his *Paroles d'un croyant* Lamennais chose a biblical style and manner and a form resembling that of the Psalms" (Jones 97). Neither was this limited to French Romantics.

One of the foreign works which has definitely influenced Baudelaire is the impassioned prose of *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822) of Thomas De Quincey, of which Baudelaire produced an adaptation years before he wrote the majority of his prose poems. But there is a marked difference between the kind of prose employed in this genre from Fénelon on down, on the one hand, and the prose developed by Baudelaire and his successors, poets such as Mallarmé, Rimbaud Claudel and Valéry. Therefore, for the sake of being more exact, in the opinion of this writer, perhaps one should apply the term 'poetic prose' to the works of the first group and reserve the appellation 'prose poem' for the works produced by Baudelaire and the later poets.

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Baudelaire's avowed model in writing his prose poems is *Gaspard de la muit* by Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841), a work which was published posthumously in 1842. A specimen of Romantic writing, reflecting the contemporary preoccupation with things mysterious and bizarre, *Gaspard de la nuit*, as its sub-title -- *fantaisies* à *la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* -- indicates, is deliberately pictorial in design. The most important contribution that Bertrand made, what probably most attracted Beudelaire's attention, was to substitute, for the lyrical abandonment and excessive freedom exercised by Romantic poets, a precise and controlled technique, one which would be suited for the creation of a well-organized, methodically followed production of an artistic form. In the first part of this paper, we saw how lyricism gradually found inroads into French literary sensibility. The logical outcome of that was the complete creative freedom exercised by the Romantics. Baudelaire, while recognizing the value of the contributions made by the Romantic worldview, was, at the same time, well aware of the shortcomings and the dangers inherent in artistic anarchy. For him, Romanticism is a way of feeling, a mode of apprehension, as he says in *Salon de* 1846:

> Le romantisme n'est précisément ni dans le choix des sujets mi dans la vérité exacte, mais dans la manière de sentir .... Pour moi, le romantisme est l'expression la plus récente, la plus actuelle du beau... Qui dit romanantisme dit art moderne - c'est-à-dire intimité, spiritualité, couleur, aspiration vers l'infini, exprimées par tous les moyens que contiennent les arts. Il suit de là qu'il y a une contradicrtion évidente entre le romantisme et les oeuvres de ses principaux sectaires. (*Oeuvres complètes* 230)

René Wellek, in his *History of Modern Criticism*, has the same thing in mind when he assigns an "important historical role" to Baudelaire's aesthetics in "transmitting romantic motifs to the later 19th century -- that is , 'romantic' not in the French sense of emotionalism, nature worship and the exaltation of the ego but rather the German and English romantic doctrine of creative imagination, a rhetoric of metamorphoses and the central role of the symbol" (IV 434-5).

In the note dedicating *Le Spleen de Paris* to Arsène Houssaye, Boudelaire acknowledges his debt to Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit* and adds a paragraph expressing his own ambition:

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> Quel est celui de nous qui n'a pas, dans ses jours d'ambition, rêvé le miracle d'une prose poétiuque, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubreauts de la conscience? (24)

This "longing for supernatural beauty" and the "aspiration toward mysticism," as Wellek calls it (IV, 437), is the result of a series of influences exerted by Poe, Gautier, Wagner and Swedenborg on Baudelaire. He, consequently, tried to translate his experiene into symbols of a transcendental reality. The romantic dimension of the above statement could be misleading, especially since it is coupled with the desire for a rhythmless, rhymeless poetic prose. But, the truth is far from this. It is true that Baudelaire, in his prose poems, has abandoned the conventions of versification, but, instead, has opted for a much more rigorously demanding form, one emanating from within the work itself. To create an artistic whole through the seemingly formless prose poem is a most difficult task. In his *Salon de* 1859, talking about "peinture romanesque," Baudelaire says that it is precisely in this genre that the painter should choose his material with care, because "la fantaisie est d'aurant plus dangereuse qu'elle est plus ouverte," and then he adds, "dangereuse comme la poésie en prose, comme le roman; ... dangereuse comme toute liberté absolue" (*Oeuvres complète* 407). Equating prose poem as a form with absolute freedom and implying the responsibility of the seropis artot; in dealing with such form by the reference to absolute freedom, Baudelaire shows his awareness of the potentialities as well as the dangerous pitfalls of the genre. To him, despite the seemingly easy-going form of the prose poem -- notice how he also mentions the novel right after it --, the successful prose poem is one which is carefully wrought and created with strict attention to every detail. In the great majority of Baudelaire's poems, and this includes both *Les Fleurs du mal* as well as *Les Petits poèms en prose*, we experience the artist's insistence to carefully choose the perfectly right means to produce the perfectly right effects. The conception of spontaneity, so close to the hearts of the Romantics, is replaced by 'control,' i.e., the conscious disposal of the material in accordance with a well-thought out strategy.

But the calculated control is not exercised at the expense of the poetic quality; it is, rather, precisely meant to create that aura of ambiguity and ambivalence which lends itself to the production of the suggestive imprecision which Baudelaire has in mind when in his "La Chambre double" he says:

> Relativement au rêve pur, à l'impression non analysée, l'art défini, l'art positif est un bladphème. Ici, tout a la suffisante clarté et la délicieuse obscurité de l'harmonie (*Le Spleen de Paris* 33).

The coexistence of 'clarté and 'obscurité' perceived in harmony -- this is another hallmark of Baudelaire's art as it is particularly manifested in his prose poems. The simultaneous perception of opposites is both part of his worldview as well as his artistic technique. As Lemaitre says in his introduction to an edition of *petits Poèmes en prose* (*Le Spleen de Paris*):

> Seule la poésie peut effectuer la proximité de l'étrange, et réciproquement, l'étrangeté du quotidien. Or Baudelaire a besoin - esthéquement et nevreusement - de ress-entir dans une expérience unique la présence conjugée de l'intime et du lointain, il a besoin à la fois du merveilleux et du contact, et c'est bien pourquoi il est convaincu que la meilleure solitude s'obtient au sein même d'un *bain de multitude* (XVIII).

The dialectics of the closeness of the strange and the strangeness of the everyday affair, the simultaneous presence of the far and the near, is part of the Baudelairean "dialectics of subject and object, of a rhetoric of transformation by art which is based on a theory of universal analogies, correspondences and symbols" (Wellek IV, 437). Art works magic in uniting these two worlds. Here is what he says in "L'Art philosophique":

> Qu'est-ce que l'art pur suivant la conception moderne? C'est créer une magie suggestive contenant à la fois l'object et le sujet, le monde extérieur à l'artiste et l'artiste lui-même (*Oeuves complètes* 424).

By its suggestive magic, art abolishes the gulf between subject and object and, man and nature, creating a new artistic whole and a vision of that wholeness.

One of the devices Baudelaire very often uses in his prose poems to create a contrast with the cantatory evocative nature of poetry is the element of fiction. Anecdotic narrative and descriptive content are among the remarkable aspects of these works. On this basis, the similarity between prose poem and lyrical novel is striking; both are hybrid entities made up of varying amounts of poetry and fiction. Ralph Freedman's statement in his pioneering book, *The Lyrical Novel*, is equally true of prose poetry:

> The concept of the lyrical novel is a paradox. Novels are usually associated with story-telling .... Lyrical poetry, on the other hand, suggests the expression of feelings or themes in musical or pictorial patterns. Combining features of both, the lyrical novel shifts the reader's attention from men and events to a formal design. The usual scenery of fiction becomes a texture of imagery and characters appear as *personae* for the self (1).

The combination of the linear development of fiction with the horizontal, instantaneous action of the lyric, of the mundane cause and effect sequences of everyday life with the magical effect of the faraway and strange and the highlighting of the interaction between them -- this is how Baudelaire mixes the self with the subject, how he illuminates the natural darkness of things through the working of his imagination. It can , therefore, be said that prose poetry represents Baudelaire's attitude toward knowledge during the last decade of his life. One of the significant indications of his attitude towards this new development , as we will see below, is the fact that he rewrites some of the poems he had already published in *Les Fleurs du mal.*

The use of the devices of fiction in prose poetry work as a means to an end. As Chadwick says, the poet's aim is not to tell a story; he wants to "create an emotion or to convey an impression." He, therefore ,"accumulates outward symbols which constantly reiterate and reinforce the essential inner theme of the poem ... rather as a composer calls in the different instruments of an orchestra"(15). Baudelaire must have been aware of the theories formulated by German aestheticians and philosophers of the latter half of the novels. Novalis, for instance, in his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, cteated a hero who acts as the author's mouthpiece and who, through his passivity, allows the author to "draw his own self-portrait" in the process of "receiving experiences and remolding them as art" (Freedman 19-20). Herder's theory of organic form saw "literary signs" bound together through"energy linking subject and object, space and time, in imaginative apprehension" (Freedman, "Modern Poetics" 505). Baudelaire, also, through the fusion of opposites and the juxtaposition of discordant images and metaphors, tried to trigger a chain reaction which would bring about, in poetic terms, the union of self, object and an infinite aesthetic self.

A brief comparison of the two versions, one in verse and the other in the form of a prose poem, of "Le Crépusucule du soir" will show how Baudelaire has managed to incorporate so much more in the prose version. The former, first published in 1852, in comparison with the prose version (1857), sounds monotonous. This is due to the emphasis placed by the poet on one aspect, almost to the exclusion of others. It is, furthermore, immediately committed to this one-sided point of view. But the prose version from the very beginning is both evocative and provocative. A glance at the opening of each of the two poems would help:

> Voici le soir charmant, ami du criminel;
> Il vient comme un complice, à pas de loup; le ciel
> Se ferme lentement comme une grande alcôve,
> Et l'homme impatient se change en bête fauve.

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The coming of the night -- friend of the criminal -- is depicted with precision and effectiveness. The word 'voici', though with its implication of here-and-now involves the narrator too intimately in the unfolding drama; it, nonetheless, invests the poem with dramatic actuality from the very beginning. There is a wonderful progression of images through which a correspondence is established between the night and "l'homme impatient" who is transformed into a wild lbeast at the coming of the night. This triad of night, man and wild beast, intertwined through the images of the dark, then proliferates throughout the poem and covers the whole city.

The prose poem, on the other hand, can afford to be much more general and deceptively simplistic on the surface:

> Le jour tombe. Un grand apaisement se fait dans les pauvres esprits fatigués du labeur de la journée; et leurs pensées prennent maintenant les couleurs tendres et indécsises du crépuscule.

The day comes to an end and the work-wearied experience a measure of peaceful tranquility. But, at the same time, this initial stanza, with its almost factual, journalistic reportage, sets up a poetic *état d'âme* which, since it is much less resolved than the one in the verse version, leads to the creation of a feeling of expectancy , anticipation, even, maybe, anxiety. In this version the poet's double is much more active while, at the same time, poetic detachment is maintained more successfully; notice how impersonal is the way in which the general stage is being set by the narrator, what a world of difference between the almost non-committal 'le jour tombe' and the opening of the verse version discussed above. It is partly due to this detached atmosphere that drama between the subjective-objective self is more fully realized. The narrator's abode is placed so that it is equidistant from the top of the mountain, the abode of the forces of darkness, and the valley below, where the houses of the people are situated.

The juxtaposition of the images of light and darkness is by far more dramatically arranged and their fusion, therefore, is more successfully realized:

> Cette sinistre ululation nous arrive du noir hospice perché sur la montagne; et le soir, en fumant et en contemplant le repos de l'immense vallée, hérissée de maisons dont chaque fenêtre dit: "C'est ici la paix maintenant; "c'est ici la joie de la famille!" Je puis, quand le vent souffle de là-haut, bercer ma pensée étonnée à cette imitation des harmonies de l'enfer.

As in the opening stanza of the verse version we had a triad of night, man and wild beast, here we have the triad of mountain, night and valley. The mountain contains the house which is the source of the sinister howls, the night is dispassionately contemplating the valley and every window in the valley is innocently proclaiming that it is enjoying peace and the joy of family life! In the small space of five lines, Baudelaire has masterfully staged three almost independent scenes, 'almost' because of the night which is ironically 'fumant et contemplant' the seeming repose of the valley and its inhabitants, like the god in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* paring his fingernails. The seemingly passive atmosphere, though, is charged with pregnant meaning through the significant implications of such words and images as 'ululation,' 'perché,' 'repos,' 'hérissée,' and 'imitation des harmonies de l'enfer.'

The emphasis places in the prose poem on the twilight is also significant. In the verse version the word is not used even once. But, in the prose poem, it is employed very effectively as a zone in which the opposites such as darkness and light, natural and supernatural, dream and reality, overlap. This fusion of the opposites leads to a profound awareness which transcends all the individual participating elements, whereas, in the verse version, it only represents the boundary of the realm of darkness.

Another example of the use of this unitive element can be seen in "Les Bienfaits de la lune," where the moon, characterized as the "lumière vivante," possesses the sleeper and transfers to her the all-pervasiveness which is inherent in herself. The object, that is, the moon, is distilled a stage further

into the substanceless "lumière," but it is still called "vivante." The repetitions, with slight variation, which occur in the third and fourth stanzas, are typical of Baudelaire's practice. They further unify the discordant metaphoric objects and images in the poem -- the narrator, the sleeper and everything else which has been exposed, like the sleeper, to the light of the moon. Baudelaire has also uesd perfume in the same way, as it is insightfully discussed by Jean-Pierre Richard in the following passage:

> Que cet être se fasse encore plus élusif, tout en restant aussi délicieusement présent: et c'est sous les espèces d'un parfum qu'il nous apparaîtra. Si Baudelaire a tant aimé les parfums, c'est que l'objet se vaporise en eux avec une sorte de perfection. Point ici de dessous, de splendeurs, ni d'inconcevable mariage entre des contraires ennemis: l'object existe tout entier en chaque parcelle odorante, mais cette présence se saisit comme une absence. Le parfume est un frÔlement d'être. Comme l'écrit excellemment Sartre, c'est un "corps désincarné, vaporisé, resté certes tout entier en lui-même, mais devenu esprit volatil". Cette *volatilité*, ou, comme dit mieux Baudelaire, cette subtilitr, ce pouvoir que le parfum possède d'éparpiller sa substance en une infinité de molécules impalpables, font de lui un messager idéal parce qu'absolument insaisissable. "Ces parfums ont pour lui ce pouvoir particulier, tout en se donnant sans réserves, d'évoquer un au-delà inaccessible. Ils sont à la fois les corps et une négation des corps. Il y a en eux quelque chose d'insatisfait que se fond avec le désir qu'a Baudelaire d'être perpétuellement ailleurs." Ils n'existent même sans doute que pour signaler cet ailleurs: ce sont de pures allusions. Au même titre que tiédeurs, murmures ou lumières, mais avec plus de perfection, ils témoignent de la fécondité vaporosante de l'object (107).

Another effective use made by Baudelaire of the tools of narrative and description is that of "the divided point of view," "the poet and his mask ... dramatiz[ing] an internal conflict" (Freedman 32). A good example of the use of such a technique is "Le Mirroir" in which, on the surface, the narrator mocks and chides a man who looks in the mirror, although he would not like what he is going to see. The poem is replete with irony and sarcasm. And the sarcasm is extended beyond the figure on the prose poem's stage by a mocking reference to "les immortels principes de 89," i.e., the French Revolution and its subsequent developments. But, on a deeper level, the poet is talking to himself from the vantage point of his poetic detachment, wondering about the self's -- and, through the fusion of the figure with the narrator and the object (the mirror) -- the selves' insistence on looking at something which has always displeased him or them. Thus, the usual duality has achieved a third aspect on this level of meaning: the narrator, the mask and the self in the object-mirror. The last stanza of the prose poem emphasizes the helplessness involved in the act, because of its unreasonableness:

> Au nom du bon sens, j'avais sans doute raison; mais, au point de vue de la loi, il n'avait pas tort.

It is common sense to avoid pain and on this basis the narrator is right in admonishing the protagonist; legally, though, the latter has not committed any crime. But, none of these are really relevant, because, immediately prior to this stanza, the protagonist has said: " ... avec plaisir ou déplaisir, cela ne regarde que ma conscience." Thus, "Le Miroir" is also a good example of revealing the *etal* d ame through the distortion of the logical and coherent progression of the poem. The narrator's final stanza distorts the logic of, or its irrelevancy concerning, the preceding parts.

Poetic reality cannot be separated from its expression. Poetic language was freed from the limitations of classical and pseudo-classical rules so that the poet may be able to express what he felt needed expression. The techniques developed in the

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field of pose proetry, says Caws, made it "suitable to an extraordinary range of perception and expression, from the ambivalent (in content and in form) to the mimetic and the narrative (or even anecdotal) .... The prose poem aims at knowing or finding out something not accessible under the more restrictive convention of verse" (977-978). Technique and imagination are unified in a way that they are no longer distinguishable here is what Baudelaire has to say about technique and it is as classical and - ironically - as Romantic as one may wish:

> The better one's technique, the less should one make a virtue of it and display it, so that the imagination may be allowed to burn with its full brilliance. (*The Mirror of Art* 225).

And this more true of prose poetry than of any other poetic genre. That is probably why when most critics begin to write about its form, they end up discussing the imagination of the poet and vice versa, or why, as Guy Lavaud says, "le poème en prose ne se définit pas, il existe" (Bernard 1 l).

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