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Rosemary Lloyd, Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xviii + 234 pp. \$27.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-521-53782-7.

Review by Timothy Raser, University of Georgia.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Charles Baudelaire's poetry was appreciated only by a few and his reputation, such as it was, was that of satanic destroyer of bourgeois values.[1] At that time, *the* French poet of the nineteenth century was Victor Hugo. Since then, appraisals have changed: Baudelaire is by far the best known of any French poet, and Hugo has now become a novelist, if not the composer of musical comedies.[2] The impact of such a dramatic change can hardly be overestimated, and it is thus with a sense of urgency that this reviewer anticipated the publication of the *Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire* edited by Rosemary Lloyd. The *Cambridge Companion* collection in literature now numbers some 144 volumes, but until now, French studies have been represented only by Flaubert, Proust, Saussure, The French Novel, and...Lacan. The *Companion to Baudelaire* is all the more welcome as, since 1980, interest in Walter Benjamin has mushroomed, and his great unfinished *Arcades Project* had much to do with the French poet.[3]

Rosemary Lloyd, Rudy Professor of French at Indiana University and the author of three studies of Baudelaire as well as of an edition of his letters,[4] has collected essays by herself and fifteen other eminent Baudelaireans for this volume which also includes a brief chronology, an appendix of titles of poems by Baudelaire, an index of names, and an index of titles. The *Companions* are commissioned to provide "lively, accessible introductions to major writers, artists, philosophers, topics and periods," and "are designed not only to offer a comprehensive overview of their chosen topic, but to display and provoke lively and controversial debate." It is no surprise then that the "life" of the poet should come to the forefront of many of these studies, and that textual analysis occupies a smaller space. The essays trace different aspects of the poet's career and employ different methods to arrive at their conclusions. They cover many of the chestnuts of Baudelaire criticism: his terrible life, the organization of his masterpiece *Les Fleurs du mal*, his politics, his relation to his historical moment, his prosody, his prose poems, his criticism of art, music, and literature, his translations, and translations of his works.

In spite of the need to cover a number of consecrated topics, the essays are often nothing short of brilliant: John E. Jackson's account of Baudelaire's life is a model of brevity, one whose concision springs from his apt choice of Evil as *the* single pole about which to make the events of the poet's life turn. Dolf Oehler's analysis of Baudelaire's politics—one rendered exceedingly difficult by the irony that suffuses all of the poet's pronouncements on political subjects and which has caused them frequently to be read at "a superficial level" (p. 17)—brings new insight to the pronouncements of a poet known as much for his early radicalism as for his late conservatism. By identifying the tone of Baudelaire's writings, Oehler manages to determine their intent, and this tone and this intent enable him to present a Baudelaire who is decidedly more political and more consistent than he has been for several generations. Barbara Wright takes up the subject of *Les Fleurs du Mal's* narrative, but even here, new insights are to be found: "Les Phares," for instance, does discuss painters and a sculptor, but it does not discuss poets or novelists, and the absence of the latter from among humanity's beacons is especially significant for a poet who writes so often of failure. Many readers know, of course, that Baudelaire dedicated his volume of poems to Gautier, and that he prided himself on the detail of his work: few, however, are aware of just how deep that detail is. Rachel Killick's discussion of his prosody uncovers strategies at the level of

phonemes and syllables that advance his poetic project, that is, that produce “freedom and surprise” (p. 65) even while negotiating the strictures of conventional versification.

Since Barbara Johnson’s deconstruction of Suzanne Bernard’s work on prose poetry in *Défigurations du langage poétique*, [5] studies of *Le Spleen de Paris* (the title posthumously attached to Baudelaire’s collection of prose poems) have interrogated the relation between the poems and the letter to his editor Arsène Houssaye in which the poet explains his project.[6] Sonya Stephens picks up this trail and investigates its implications in the three poems that share verse counterparts. Importantly, Stephens goes beyond Johnson by bringing in another claim voiced by the poet in his letter to Houssaye, i.e., that prose poetry is the poetry of the city and expresses experiences particular to that place. This greater contextualization was perhaps implied by Johnson, but is welcome here.

In addition to being a poet, Baudelaire was a translator, bringing De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* to French readers. E. S. Burt reads Baudelaire’s translation of De Quincey in the context of *Les Paradis artificiels*, the poet’s study of intoxicants. She shows how the subject matter becomes indistinguishable from literary language and, further, how this problem is compounded in the case of the translation of the *Confessions*. The possibility that literature and intoxicants produce similar effects, compromises, argues Burt, Baudelaire’s avowed purpose of warning against the perils of hashish and opium.

Baudelaire was also a critic, and Margaret Miner, J. A. Hiddleston, and the editor herself take on the works that fall respectively under the rubrics of music criticism, art criticism, and literary criticism. Baudelaire’s music criticism was confined to an essay on the 1860-61 performances of Wagner’s music in Paris; it remains, however, endlessly suggestive, and Miner argues that in dealing with Wagner’s operas, Baudelaire arrived at especially clear formulations of more general preoccupations: “these operas exteriorise and concretise a drama which never finishes playing itself out in the human psyche, where doubleness is at once inescapable and destabilising” (p. 154). Such a thesis, of course, requires a reconsideration of Baudelaire’s writings on the theater. Hiddleston, for his part, takes up the poet’s writings on the plastic arts, which occupy such a large part of his works, and concentrates on his critical assessment of works shown at yearly state Salons and other exhibitions. Hiddleston’s dominant concern here is whether Baudelaire’s judgment was correct and whether his sensibility coincided with that of the painter or sculptor. Lloyd assesses the evolution of Baudelaire’s criticism of contemporary authors, and detects in it fecund echoes of his poetic concerns.

That such essays fall into the pattern pre-ordained by the nature of a book intended to accompany a writer’s work should not be held against them: these essays are superb examples of the genre and fulfill a function both necessary and useful. They are, moreover, original works that offer novel and compelling arguments, a fact which is all the more remarkable because the fields in which they fall have been so well-worked.

In addition to these essays are three others that take up more unusual topics: Beryl Schlossman offers a study of “Baudelaire’s Place in Literary and Cultural History,” where one might expect a ranking with regard to other works in the canon. In fact, one finds a meditation on interdisciplinary studies (which are required by Baudelaire) and on modernity (which was formulated by the poet). Schlossman also contends that the misogyny so evident at the surface of some poems does not run deep, but actually veils a compassion for women unmatched in the poet’s consideration of men. The role of women in Baudelaire’s work is taken up in greater detail by Mary Ann Caws, who discusses the difficulties specific to a woman reading the poet’s works: to do so, she compares the readings of Edward Kaplan and Paul de Man to those of Barbara Johnson and herself, and teases out the gendered consequences of an interpersonal approach (vs. de Man and Kaplan’s impersonal approach). Clive Scott discusses the many translations of Baudelaire into English, a field which is “unimaginably frayed” and “irrecoverable” (p. 193). Instead of searching for a tone or a language equivalent to Baudelaire’s, whether from the

nineteenth century or the twenty-first, whether from England or elsewhere, Scott seeks instead the “writerly” among these translations.

The only misfortune of the essays mentioned so far is to fall into the company of the remaining ones, several of which promise to be downloaded for years to come. The first among those is Edward Kaplan’s essay bearing the oxymoronic title of “Baudelaire’s Ethics.” Picking up on a theme formulated by Yves Bonnefoy, Kaplan finds in the poet’s works a tension between compassion (Bonnefoy’s *charité*) and aestheticism. Kaplan sees this tension expressed via an “ethical irony” (p. 89) that permits the poem to say one thing and its opposite. On the surface, Baudelaire appears to negate morality: indeed, ever since Sartre’s 1949 essay on Baudelaire it has been asked [7] whether the word “ethics” can even be applied to the formulations of a man who articulated the self-defeating litanies of devil-worship, while generations of scholars have shown that it is all too easy to dismiss the moral import of Baudelaire’s works. Kaplan’s essay corrects this.

Ross Chambers’s “Baudelaire’s Paris” is another jewel: starting from Walter Benjamin’s understanding of the effect of population growth on the psyche of this urban poet, Chambers singles out the *échange de regards* as a privileged signifier of the sexuality of the great city, an erotic dimension characterized by the simultaneous familiarity and estrangement that makes the boulevards so fascinating. This sexuality governs the “intersections” (p. 105) of city life-intersections that in turn define the modernity of Baudelaire’s works.

The most surprising of these essays is Judith Volmer’s “Stroll and Preparation for Departure,” which compares the French poet’s experience of Paris to her own experience of...twenty-first-century Pittsburgh. It is a stretch to think of the banks of the Seine as comparable to the shores of the Monongahela, but once that is accepted, the poet’s work takes on an immediacy that is hard to deny. A single strapless shoe, an orange peel: the debris of an evening’s partying resonate for us just as the *chiffons* so prized by Baudelaire did for him. They tell stories of revelry and debauchery, like the stories that Baudelaire so often told.

This volume was in preparation at the time of the death of Claude Pichois, editor of the 1975-76 Pléiade edition of the Œuvres complètes. To close the volume, Lloyd uses a brief history by Pichois of the editions of Baudelaire. The essays selected by Lloyd guarantee that it will be many years indeed before this history of the poet’s editions will be complete.

LIST OF ESSAYS

John E. Jackson, “Charles Baudelaire, a Life in Writing”

Dolf Oehler, “Baudelaire’s Politics”

Barbara Wright, “Baudelaire’s Poetic Journey in *Les Fleurs du Mal*”

Rachel Killick, “Baudelaire’s Versification: Conservative or Radical?”

Sonya Stephens, “The Prose Poems”

Edward K. Kaplan, "Baudelairean Ethics"

Ross Chambers, "Baudelaire's Paris"

E. S. Burt, "Baudelaire and Intoxicants"

J. A. Hiddleston, "Art and Its Representation"

Margaret Miner, "Music and Theatre"

Rosemary Lloyd, "Baudelaire's Literary Criticism"

Beryl Schlossman, "Baudelaire's Place in Literary and Cultural History"

Mary Ann Caws, "A Woman Reading Baudelaire"

Clive Scott, "Translating Baudelaire"

Judith Vollmer, "The Stroll and Preparation for Departure."

Claude Pichois, "Afterword"

NOTES

[1] See, for example, Ferdinand Brunetière, who states "au contraire, depuis eux [Sully Prudhomme, François Coppée, Heredia], c'est à dire depuis une quinzaine d'années, son [i.e., Baudelaire's] influence n'a fait que croître; presque tous nos jeunes gens l'ont plus ou moins subie; et peu s'en est fallu que les suites n'en fussent désastreuses" (*L'Évolution de la poésie lyrique en France au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1894), vol. 2, p. 231). See also Gustave Lanson, who in the early years of the twentieth century wrote: "Il y a encore beaucoup de romantisme dans ce recueil [i.e., *Les Fleurs du mal*], et non du meilleur. Le goût du paradoxe, le désir d'ahurir le bourgeois, la volonté d'être et de paraître malsain, tout ce 'caïnisme' et ce 'satanisme,' et leurs accessoires, goules, vampires, cadavres, tombeaux, proviennent directement du bas-romantisme" Lanson and P. Tuffrau, *Manuel illustré d'histoire de la littérature française* (Paris: Hachette, 1953), p. 661).

[2] Pascale Devars, Edgar Petitier, Guy Rosa and Alain Vaillant, "Si Victor Hugo était compté: Essais de bibliométrie hugolienne comparée," in Pierre Georgel, ed., *La Gloire de Victor Hugo* (Paris: Éditions

de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1985), pp. 329-391.

[3] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2002). This project occupied Benjamin from 1927 until his death in 1940.

[4] Rosemary Lloyd, *Baudelaire et Hoffmann: Affinités et influences* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Lloyd, *Baudelaire's Literary Criticism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Lloyd, trans. and ed., *Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire: The Conquest of Solitude* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Lloyd, *Baudelaire's World* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[5] Barbara Johnson, *Défigurations du langage poétique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Nizet, 1959).

[6] See, for example, Jean-Christophe Bailly, "Prose and Prosody: Baudelaire and the Handling of Genres," in Patricia Ward, ed., *Baudelaire and the Poetics of Modernity* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), pp. 124-133, and Cheryl Krueger, "Telling Stories in Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris*," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 30: 3-4 (Spring-Summer 2002), pp. 281-299.

[7] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949). The first among the responses to Sartre's essay was George Bataille's essay on the poet later included in *La Littérature et le mal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

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