

BAUDELAIRE AND THE RIVAL OF NATURE:
THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ART AND NATURE IN FRENCH LANDSCAPE PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

The rise of landscape painting as a dominant genre in nineteenth century France was closely tied to the ongoing debate between Art and Nature. This conflict permeates the writings of poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire. While Baudelaire scholarship has maintained the idea of the poet as a strict anti-naturalist and proponent of the artificial, this paper offers a revision of Baudelaire's relation to nature through a close reading across his critical and poetic texts. The Salon reviews of 1845, 1846 and 1859, as well as Baudelaire's *Journaux Intimes*, *Les Paradis Artificiels* and two poems that deal directly with the subject of landscape, are examined. The aim of this essay is to provoke new insights into the poet's complex attitudes toward nature and the art of landscape painting in France during the middle years of the nineteenth century.

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All references to *Œuvres Complètes* are cited from Marcel Ruff's edition contained in one volume.

Baudelaire, Charles. *Œuvres Complètes*. Préface, présentation et notes de Marcel A. Ruff. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968.

INTRODUCTION

The history and rise of landscape painting in nineteenth century France may be viewed in terms of the growing debate between “Nature” and “Art.”¹ The gradual shift at the beginning of the century from historical landscape containing mythological or religious themes to pure landscape as subject by the 1830's epitomizes the conflict between nature and art. This battle is a recurring theme in the writings of poet and critic Charles Baudelaire, whose vision of the artist contains two extremes – one in which the artist dominates nature, the other in which the artist is dominated by nature. The emphasis on Baudelaire the anti-naturalist and proponent of the artificial within scholarship discounts the complexity of Baudelaire's relationship to various aspects of nature throughout his poetry, prose, and critical writings. While the urban landscape unequivocally dominates Baudelaire's oeuvre, I argue that multiple landscapes exist within his writings based on the natural world: most notably, the seascape, the sunset, and even the snowscape. My aim is to disabuse the reader of the claim that Baudelaire “sees nothing commendable in the painting of landscapes”² and to show that he in fact uses landscape painting as a concrete example with which to formulate his theory of Imagination. Additionally, the

¹ While the duality between nature and art is in no way novel to the subject of painting, this dialogue is confined to the subject of landscape painting in nineteenth century France, a genre that by its choice of landscape as subject is, aside from the human figure, the closest to nature. See Michele Hanoosh, “Painting as Translation in Baudelaire's Criticism.” (*Forum for Modern Language Studies*, January 1986, Vol. 22, 20): “Baudelaire berates landscapists, who among painters are by their genre closest to nature.”

² Anita Brookner, *The Genius of the Future: Studies in French Art Criticism*. (London, New York: Phaidon, 1971) 66.

technique of *plein air* landscape painting with its rapid notation, expressive brushstroke, and temporal dimension, influenced his choice of Constantin Guys for *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*.³

I am in agreement with Felix Leakey who argued in his thorough and detailed work *Baudelaire and Nature* (1969) that Baudelaire's hostility to nature was an extremely stylized and self-conscious creation which evolved throughout his lifetime.⁴ For Baudelaire, who grew up and spent almost his entire adult life in Paris, except for most notably, a summer in Neuilly near the Bois de Boulogne at the age of six, a ten month voyage by sea to India in 1841, and visits to his mother's house in the port town of Honfleur in 1859, the country side may have seemed not only alien and remote to his urban sensibilities, but filled with unknown terrors and power. His rejection of nature that was cultivated over a number of years was not only an ideological one born out of theory, but a real life fear of the unknown other – i.e. the natural world, with which he had had little or no contact as an urban resident. Fragments or slices of nature viewed from the city dweller's perspective are what primarily attracted him and which he allegorized in his poetry: sunsets, clouds, and the change of seasons.

The conflict between the artist's imagination and nature was perceived by Baudelaire to be an act of submission or an engaged battle. While most scholarship emphasizes Baudelaire's contempt for landscape painting, I contend that within his Salon reviews Baudelaire does not exhibit such an absolute disdain for the genre: his issues are not with landscape itself, but with how landscape painting is conceived in relation to nature, imagination, composition, and facture. The artist must shape and recompose nature with the use of divine imagination, or else be

³ James Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 189-192.

⁴ F. W. Leakey, *Baudelaire and Nature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969).

overpowered, as in the example he makes of painter Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres whom he described as one of nature's casualties in *Exposition Universelle of 1855*.⁵

This essay also takes into account the relationship between woman and nature, and of Baudelaire's difficult relationship with his mother, related specifically to that of the imaginary landscape and the painted face of a woman. The correlation between the face of a woman and a landscape painting share two opposing functions for Baudelaire: one pertaining to the intellect and the other to emotion. His requirement for artifice applies to the intellectual while his requirement for the presence of melancholy in both a woman's face and a landscape painting pertain to the emotional. This conveyance of emotion, in allowing oneself to be moved, hence submissive, is as essential as is the need to dominate nature through artifice. The difficulty in Baudelaire's relationship to nature and landscape painting arises from these apparently irreconcilable differences. This split between emotion and intellect mirrors Baudelaire's dominant/submissive relationship to Nature (i.e. woman and landscape).

Baudelaire's famous open letter to Fernand Desnoyers, written at the end of 1853 and published in May 1855 in the collective volume *Fontainebleau* on the occasion of a request for some nature poems, demonstrates the poet's distaste for the verdant world of vegetable matter and all things that grow and flower. Here Baudelaire defined his dual concept of nature, at once flourishing and abundant and concomitantly hard, cruel and indifferent.

My dear Desnoyers,

You ask me for some lines for your little book of poetry on Nature, is that so? About the woods, the great oaks, the verdure, the insects – about the sun no doubt? But you know perfectly well that I am incapable of being moved by plants, and that my spirit rebels against this peculiar new religion which to my mind will always have something inexpressibly

⁵ “Ce n'est pas M. Ingres qui a cherché la nature, mais la nature qui a violé le peintre, et que cette haute et puissante dame l'a dompté par son ascendant irrésistible.” OC, 366.

shocking about it for every spiritual being. I will never believe that the soul of god inhabits plants, and even if it did live there, I would not worry much about it. I would consider my own soul worth far more than the soul of sanctified vegetables. I have always thought that there was in Nature, flourishing and rejuvenating, something impudent and distressing.⁶

Baudelaire was not the lone voice of anti-naturalism during the middle of the nineteenth century, and his commitment to it wavers in his journals and letters. Jean Paul Sartre maintained in his 1946 Existential study of the poet that Baudelaire was part of a current of anti-naturalism at mid-century that placed itself in opposition to the popular cult of nature which was gaining ground.⁷ This wave of anti-naturalism is directly related to the rise of naturalist landscape painting executed by Barbizon artists, or what Baudelaire referred to as the “positivist” strain in painting in 1859. For, Baudelaire the progressive landscape lacked the essential requirements for him in painting – that of subject matter and human presence. Yet the praise that he reserves in the *Salon* of 1859 for Eugène Boudin’s “subjectless” pastel seascapes and Eugène Lavielle’s rustic winter snowscape attests to this lack of adherence to a strict anti-nature, anti-landscape aesthetic.

Critical to Baudelaire’s aesthetic of landscape painting and nature is an understanding of the impact of the eighteenth century on his sensibilities.⁸ He declared as much in his notes for future projects in which he claimed, “I am an old man: in my tastes in costumes, fashions,

⁶ Mon cher Desnoyers, Vous me demandez des vers pour votre petit volume, des vers sur la *Nature*, n’est-pas? Sur les bois, les grands chênes, la verdure, les insectes, - sur le soleil, sans doute? Mais vous savez bien que je suis incapable de m’attendrir sur les végétaux, et que mon âme est rebelle à cette singulière religion nouvelle, qui aura toujours, ce me semble, pour tout être *spirituel*, je ne sais quoi de *shocking*. Je ne croirai jamais que *l’âme des dieux habite dans les plantes*, et quand même elle y habiterait, je m’en soucierais médiocrement, et considérerais la mienne comme d’un bien plus haut que celle des légumes sanctifiés. J’ai même toujours pensé que qu’il y avait dans la *Nature*, florissante et rajeunie, quelques chose d’affligeant. In *Correspondance*, edited by Claude Pichois,(Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1973) Volume One, 248. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947) 119. Both Sartre and Felix Leakey emphasize Baudelaire’s ambiguous concept of nature, revealed especially in light of his letters.

⁸ Nicole Ward Jouve, *Baudelaire: A Fire to Conquer Darkness* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980) 13-14. See also Wolfgang Drost, *Salon de 1859: texte de la Revue Française par Charles Baudelaire; établi avec un relevé de variantes, un commentaire et une étude par Wolfgang Drost avec la collaboration de Ulrike Riechers* (Paris: H. Champion, 2006)126-128.

furniture, women.”⁹ While he disliked the didacticism of the *paysage historique* (historical landscape) which ascribed to nature a morality, Baudelaire’s opinions regarding landscape painting were aligned with the conservative and hierarchical tradition of the academy, in regard especially to the issue of finish or *fini*. Art historian Wolfgang Drost has emphasized the anti-modern quality of Baudelaire’s critique on *paysage* and his nostalgia for the Romantic landscape of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.¹⁰ For Baudelaire, contemporary landscape painters lacked imagination and their paintings lacked finish. At the same time Baudelaire preferred the landscapes of fantasy created by proto-Romantic artists like Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721).¹¹ When Baudelaire composed his review for the 1859 Salon, the Goncourt Brothers had published the first of three volumes entitled *L’Art du XVIII siècle*, which helped to revive the taste for French Rococo art, endowing it with a quality of Romanticism.¹² Included in the volumes were monographs of Watteau, François Boucher (1703-1770), and Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806). Within this context of a new evaluation of eighteenth century painting, Baudelaire’s concept of nature had its roots in the pre-Romantic and Romantic period, where ruined abbeys, overgrown gardens, and ivy covered towers dotted the landscape and where nature was allegorized.¹³ At the same time, his idea of nature was in strict defiance to that of the eighteenth century’s Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), whose benign view of nature and rejection of original sin were anathema to Baudelaire from the 1840’s onward. His chapter entitled *Éloge du Maquillage* in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* is most often cited to demonstrate

⁹ “Je suis un vieux : mes goûts en costumes, modes, meubles, femmes.” *Projets et notes diverses*, OC, 707.

¹⁰ Drost, 685.

¹¹ Baudelaire included Watteau in his poem “Beacons” as part of a group of painters who were a source of inspiration for the poet, attesting to Baudelaire’s devotion to the cult of images. In Chapter One of the *Salon of 1859*, he referred to Watteau as the “historien des belles fêtes d’après –midi dans les grands parcs italiens.” (historian of charming *fête champêtres* in great Italian parks.) OC, 392.

¹² See Brookner, 121-144; also Drost, 126. The earliest essay on Watteau by the Goncourt Brothers was published in *L’Artiste* in 1856.

¹³ Jouve, 13-14.

his repudiation of nature, his identification of nature with original sin, an aesthetic of the artificial, and the corrective role of art by use of the example of a woman's face. It is a critique on eighteenth century aesthetic and specifically the writings of Rousseau, which, according to Baudelaire, caused a misunderstanding of nature's intentions.¹⁴

Literary historian Nicole Ward Jouve maintains that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries “meet in his blood.”¹⁵ Baudelaire's father François was born in 1759 and spent the majority of his life in the eighteenth century until his death in 1827. He was a priest and a tutor who moved in affluent and educated circles until the period of the French Revolution. At the time of the revolution he left the church and married an artist who died prematurely in 1814 and left him widowed with a son. An amateur artist himself as well as a collector, he painted throughout his entire adult life and for a time sold his work to support himself after the revolution. He married Caroline Defayis in 1819, and at the time of his second son Charles's birth in 1821, he declared his profession as painter on the baptismal act.¹⁶ Théophile Gautier, in his biography of Baudelaire, described the poet as having inherited his father's epicurean tastes and eighteenth century refined manners.¹⁷ His love of the visual arts was passed onto Charles who spent his earliest years surrounded by his father's collection of eighteenth century prints and statues that populated the rooms of the Paris apartment in which the family lived. Joanna Richardson, in her 1994 biography of Baudelaire, reconstructed the décor and furniture arrangement of the apartment based on inventory that had been taken after François Baudelaire's

¹⁴ “C'est cette infaillible nature qui a créé le parricide et l'anthropophagie, et mille autres abominations que la pudeur et la délicatesse nous empêchent de nommer.” OC, 561-62. See *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Edited and translated by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964) 31-32.

¹⁵ Jouve, 13-14.

¹⁶ Sima Godfrey, “‘Ce père nourricier’: Revisiting Baudelaire's Family Romance” (*Nineteenth Century French Studies*, Fall/Winter 2009, Vol. 31, Number 1 & 2) 41.

¹⁷ Théophile Gautier, *Charles Baudelaire: His Life*. Translated into English by Guy Thorne (New York: Bretano's, 1915) 12.

death. Walls were covered in eighteenth century etchings, gouaches, and pastels, and plaster statues and busts of mythological and classical figures were placed throughout the apartment.¹⁸ Such alabaster figures and powder-colored pastels would later surface in Baudelaire's poetry. After François Baudelaire's death in 1827, he is overshadowed in Baudelaire bibliography by Charles's notoriously difficult relationship with his step-father Général Jacques Aupick. However, his real father's absence had a deep impact on Baudelaire, who carried his portrait and drawings with him from one living quarter to the next, and mythologized his father as a man who gave up God for Art.¹⁹

Baudelaire's mother, henceforth referred to as Mme Caroline Aupick, was an orphan who had had the fortune of being adopted by a wealthy family, through whom she eventually met and married François Baudelaire. She has been described as a hypersensitive and nervous individual who suffered from a melancholic disposition.²⁰ She had little interest in the arts and took refuge in religion. Her relatively quick remarriage after the death of François Baudelaire to Général Jacques Aupick is viewed in particularly crushing terms for Charles and is often cited as the source of his rejection of nature. As historian Anita Brookner argued, Baudelaire viewed his mother's hasty remarriage as a weakness or a submission to what he viewed as a woman's "base animal nature." He had imagined the period of brief isolation with his mother as idyllic, which was shattered by her marriage to the general, comparable to the sin of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Anything that was unadorned was "dangerously close to original sin."²¹

¹⁸ Joanna Richardson, *Baudelaire* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1994) 9.

¹⁹ For the impact of Baudelaire's father, in addition to Sima Godfrey, see: Rosemary Lloyd, *Baudelaire's World* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002) 43-45; Richard Burton, *Baudelaire in 1859: A Study in the Sources of Poetic Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 46-52.

²⁰ Richardson, 7-10.

²¹ Brookner, 66; Sartre 17-20.

A shift in his relationship to nature and landscape painting is most evident around 1859, the year of his reconciliation with his mother after the death of his stepfather in 1857 and his stay at her seaside house in Honfleur on the coast of Normandy, which historians G. Jean- Aubry and Richard Burton characterized as a particularly fecund year in Baudelaire's creative output.²² Burton contends that Baudelaire's rediscovery of the natural world via his intermittent respites in Honfleur contributed to a significant output of work for the first time in years, as Paris had not been conducive to the steady writing of poetry. In Paris, Baudelaire was continually distracted by debt collectors, frequent changes of residence, and a tumultuous relationship with his mistress Jeanne Duval. During this year in Honfleur, he composed the *Salon* of 1859, several poems for the second edition of *Fleurs du mal*, and completed *Un Mangeur d'Opium*, in addition to gathering information for *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*. Baudelaire's writing at this time contains remote and ephemeral references to nature – clouds, sky, sea, and sunsets – vistas that were offered from the position of the house in Honfleur and more specifically from the room that Baudelaire occupied with its window that looked out onto the Seine estuary. These ethereal aspects of nature relate directly to Baudelaire's description of “the muslins, the gauzes, the vast iridescent clouds of stuff” in which a woman envelops herself in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*.²³ G. Jean-Aubry wrote that “la maison jou-jou,” Baudelaire's nickname for his mother's house, was buried in greenery.²⁴ The combination of green vegetation, sea, and sky, in conjunction with his close proximity to his mother for the first time in years, would have an influence on his relationship with the feminine and with nature.

²² Richard Burton, *Baudelaire in 1859: A Study in the Sources of Poetic Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); G. Jean-Aubry, *Eugène Boudin*. Translated by Caroline Tisdall (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1968) 30.

²³ “Les mousselines, les gazes, les vastes et chatoyantes noyées d'étoffes...” OC, 561.

²⁴ G. Jean-Aubry, *Baudelaire et Honfleur* (Paris, Maison du Livre. 1917) 15. “La petite ville était enfouie dans le verdure.”

Chapter One provides a brief background on the history of French landscape painting, from the eighteenth century Rococo and Neoclassical landscapes to the rise of Naturalism and the *plein air* paintings of Barbizon painters in the nineteenth century. Chapter Two addresses Baudelaire's art criticism on *paysage* in the *Salons* of 1845, 1846 and 1859. His hierarchical thinking concerning subject matter and finish, voiced in the *Salon* of 1859 in reference to the work of Charles-François Daubigny, aligns him with other more traditional critics of the genre, despite his animosity for the Neoclassical *paysage historique*. The landscape painters whom Baudelaire likes, such as Jean-Baptiste Corot, Théodore Rousseau, Eugène Lavielle, and Eugène Boudin all have in common the evocation of mood, emotion, atmosphere, and a sense of space and light. Chapter Three is devoted to Baudelaire's poetry, specifically “Le Confiteor de l'Artiste” from *Les Petits Poèmes en Prose*, with references to *Fusées* from his *Journaux Intimes* and to *Les Paradis Artificiels*. Each of these prose poems includes references to sea, clouds, and sky. “Le Confiteor de l'Artiste” is interpreted as relating specifically to the composition of a seascape painting, while “Paysage” from *Les Fleurs du Mal* is related to the poetic imagination and to the artificial pastoral espoused in the *Salon* of 1846.

By looking closely at his critical writings on landscape painting in conjunction with a prose poem from *Les Petites Poèmes en Prose* and a poem from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, my aim is to place Baudelaire within the context of landscape painting at mid-century and to reassess his views on specific landscape painters. I use the word “battle” to describe the combative relationship between art and nature in the work of this urban poet who characterized nature as an “enchantress without pity, ever-victorious rival” and the study of nature and beauty as “a duel in

which the artist shrieks with terror before being overcome.”²⁵ While Baudelaire viewed the rise of Realism in landscape painting as a sign of the defeat of art by nature, he himself was not immune to being moved by a beautiful landscape. In a letter written to his mother after his final break-up with Jeanne Duval in 1856, he wrote that he longed for the company of Jeanne when he saw “a beautiful landscape or anything pleasant.”²⁶

²⁵ “enchanteresse sans pitié, rivale toujours victorieuse” and “un duel où l’artiste crie de frayeur avant d’être vaincu.” OC, 149.

²⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondance*. Ed. Claude Pichois with Jean Ziegler, 2 vols. Paris : Gallimard, 1973, vol. 1, 356. “un beau paysage, n’importe quoi d’agréable.”

CHAPTER 1 ORIGINS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY FRENCH LANDSCAPE PAINTING

The nineteenth century is often referred to as the century of landscape painting. Various factors contributed to the rise in popularity of the genre in France: the emergence of historical landscape painting in the eighteenth century, the dissolution of the Academy's hierarchy, the influence of the English landscape and Dutch baroque landscape painting, rural depopulation and urbanization, industrialization, and the rise of nationalism. By providing a brief overview of the history of landscape painting, my aim is to situate Baudelaire within the context of the rise and significance of *paysage*.

The origins of nineteenth century French landscape painting may be traced back to the seventeenth century, when the Academy's strict hierarchy was firmly established and artists were instructed on what and how to paint. Of the numerous theoretical and critical writings concerning the art of landscape painting in the early eighteenth century, the most influential of these is Roger de Piles's *Cours de Peinture par principes*, published in 1708 just before his death.²⁷ His presence is relevant here to the issue of nature and art that would continue to unfold in nineteenth century France, as well as his influence on Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, whose treatise *Eléments de perspective pratique à l'usage des artistes* published less than a century later, is considered a reiteration of many of the principles set forth by De Piles.²⁸ Although there is no indication that Baudelaire was at all familiar with De Piles's work, they share some striking affinities, especially in their preference for color over line, their predisposition to the atmospheric effects of the sky and clouds, and the role of the sublime and imagination in

²⁷ Roger de Piles (1635-1709) was a painter, etcher, art critic and collector. He was responsible for the ascendance of Peter Paul Rubens over Nicolas Poussin in the early eighteenth century, favoring color over line.

²⁸ For a brief analysis on landscape theory in the eighteenth century, see Marianne Roland-Michel. "Landscape Painting in the Eighteenth Century: Theory, Training, and its Place in Academic Doctrine," in *Claude to Corot: The Development of Landscape Painting in France* (New York: Colnaghi, 1990) 99-109.

landscape painting.²⁹ Similar to Baudelaire's *Salon* of 1846, in which nature is the measure for artistic creation, De Piles maintained that the landscape painter's work is ultimately "derived from nature and perfected by art."³⁰ Unlike Baudelaire, however, art and nature are not seen in antithetical terms but are in fact compatible. De Piles created three categories of landscape painting that would later be used by Valenciennes: the heroic, the rural, and the pastoral. Of the three, De Piles maintained that the heroic style was enriched by the artist's imagination, thus creating "an agreeable illusion, a sort of enchantment" in contrast to the rural style which "abandoned itself to the caprices of nature rather than cultivated: we see nature simple, without ornament, and without artifice."³¹ In his work entitled *The Art of Painting*, De Piles placed the landscape artist in a divine role, establishing and elevating the status of the *paysagiste*: "If painting be a sort of creation, tis more sensibly so in landscape than in any other kind of pictures. We see there Nature rising out of her chaos."³² Without the artist to order and compose nature, nature remains unkempt. The landscape painter's engagement with nature, as it was conceived of in the early eighteenth century, endowed him with a kind of mastery over the natural world.

During the eighteenth century landscape painting emerged as a major genre despite the Academy's restrictive program. The most common function of *paysage* was a decorative one in which the landscape served as a scenic backdrop to figures who took part in mythological or historical events. As the century progressed, landscape gradually emerged as a dominant element in painting composition. The human figure became more and more diminutive in scale, revealing

²⁹ While not within the scope of this paper, what is especially striking is the large amount of text that de Piles devoted to the subject of sky, clouds, and sunsets, especially in their transformative effect upon the color and shapes of the landscape.

³⁰ Roger de Piles, *The Principles of Painting* (London, M.DCC.XLIII. [1743]. [Eighteenth Century Collections Online](#). Gale. Temple University Libraries. 2 August. 2011) 124.

³¹ *Ibid*, 124-25

³² Roger de Piles, 32 *The Art of Painting, with the lives and characters of above 300 of the most eminent painters* (London, MDCCXLIV. [1744]. [Eighteenth Century Collections Online](#). Gale. Temple University Libraries. 2 August 2011) 32.

a greater interest in the landscape as a thematic source. Two dominant strains are well known and established: the decorative landscapes of the Rococo and the idealized landscapes epitomized by Neoclassicism in the 1770's and 1780's. While these two strains are an oversimplification of styles, each addressed in its own way the dualism between nature and art, in addition to the role of the artist in the transcription of the natural world. Additionally, a realist tendency in landscape occurred at mid-century that was influenced by the Dutch baroque landscape and which forms a direct line to the Barbizon painters of the nineteenth century.³³ Thus the debate between artifice, idealization, and realism, as well as the actual function of landscape, was already occurring in eighteenth century landscape painting.

The *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, founded in 1648, established a strict hierarchy of painting subjects. Artists worked within a rigid system that dictated both subject and style of painting. Historical and mythological genres ranked the highest, followed by portrait, genre, landscape and still life. By academic standards, landscape ranked among the lowest as it was thought to require little imagination, skill, or knowledge on the part of the artist who merely imitated what was before him or her in nature.³⁴ History painting was regarded as the most significant genre, one in which the human image played the dominant role and was considered “the only genre to transcend the mere imitation of external nature.”³⁵ However, many history painters practiced landscape painting alongside other genres, as it was the least burdened by tradition and offered the most freedom for experimentation and expression, factors that would contribute to the rise of landscape painting in the following century. While the Academy offered

³³ Philip Conisbee, *Painting in Eighteenth Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981) 191-193.

³⁴ Baudelaire would have the same argument in his review of the *Salon of 1859*, accusing landscapists of laziness and of lacking in imagination.

³⁵ Ian Lochhead, *The Spectator and the Landscape in the Art Criticism of Diderot and his Contemporaries* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982) 23.

little if any support for the genre, patronage for the landscapist was provided by private collectors who, as the century progressed, preferred landscape painting mostly as decorative panels for interiors, to the historical paintings advocated by the Academy at the time.³⁶

The deliberate artifice of the Rococo represents the dominant aesthetic of landscape during the first three quarters of the eighteenth century. This style was extremely popular and the demand for such artificial pastorals continued alongside other stylistic strains within the genre. However, such “artificial pastorals” contained elements of firsthand observation. The close observation of nature within preparatory studies may be found in the work of artists from the early part of the century such as Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721). Watteau, whose paintings are renowned for their artifice, made carefully observed drawings from nature that were later incorporated into his studio paintings.³⁷ This combination of observation and artifice would also inform the work in the later part of the century by Rococo painters such as François Boucher (1703 -1770) and Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806).

The alternative to the “decorative” style of the Rococo was the landscape painting of Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789) whose paintings were extremely popular with both critics and the public. Vernet became famous for his large-scale port and shipwreck scenes, based on observation and imagination, in which miniscule human figures are overwhelmed by the natural elements.³⁸ The presence of artists like Vernet and Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) at the Paris Salon helped to elevate the status of the *paysage historique*. By the late eighteenth century, the sublime in nature had become a dominant theme in landscape, offering a vision in which the spectator was overwhelmed by the power and enormity of the natural world, in contrast to the

³⁶ Conisbee, 184.

³⁷ Conisbee, 176.

³⁸ Conisbee, 179-184.

Rococo fantasies where figures appeared blissfully unaware of the oversized aspects of nature that were painted in soft pastel colors with a light facture. The depiction of dramatic natural phenomena such as towering waterfalls, cliffs, mountains or majestic views coincided with the shrinking of figures. The omnipotence of nature and the smallness of the human before the elements became the subject of the painting. Artists such as Oudry argued that the Academy was not the place for an aspiring landscapist; instead he advised landscape artists to work directly from nature, as well as to copy seventeenth century Dutch and Flemish artists who painted simple scenes of nature.³⁹

The French Revolution commonly marks an end to the Rococo. However, even before the revolution, Rococo's picturesque view of nature was replaced with landscapes based on the seventeenth century precedent of Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and Claude Lorrain (1621-1682). The classically oriented *paysage historique* derived from Poussin an architectural conception of nature in which landscape was composed of divided foreground, middle ground and background. Yet a growing number of *paysage historiques* began to emphasize the landscape background and specific elements such as trees and moonlit skies as a means to correspond with the feelings of the represented figures. The leading proponent of the Neoclassical school was Pierre Henri de Valenciennes (1750-1819), who as an instructor of perspective and landscape painting at the *École des Beaux-Art* in the late 1880s, combined deeply entrenched academic studio practice with innovative techniques, specifically the making of outdoor studies or *études*.

Valenciennes's writings helped to legitimize the practice of landscape painting and were influential in raising the status of *paysage* and the establishment of the *Prix de Rome* for

³⁹ Lisa Simpson, *From Arcadia to Barbizon: a journey in French landscape painting* (Memphis: Tenn.: Dixon Gallery and Gardens, 1987) 9.

historical landscape in 1817, which gave students the opportunity to study abroad in Italy. His treatise on perspective and landscape, *Eléments de perspective pratique à l'usage des artistes*, published in 1800 and posthumously in 1820, emphasized landscape painting and the practice of working outdoors before the motif. The *étude* was already an essential component in the creation of studio pictures within academic practice; however, its use was primarily personal and not intended for exhibition. Valenciennes attached great importance to the *plein air étude* executed in oil rather than the traditional pencil or charcoal drawing. This leap from drawing materials to painting materials for outdoor sketching was instrumental in the transformation of *plein air* painting, which would become common practice for Barbizon painters culminating in the work of the Impressionist painters. He did however stress that *études* were meant only for personal use within the context of the studio. At the time of the first publication of Valenciennes's book in 1800, the number of pure landscape artists whose work was exhibited at the Salons during the period continued to increase. By the time of its second publication in 1820, sketches began to be exhibited in the Salon with more frequency under the specific category of *étude*, designating them first and foremost as unfinished paintings that captured the skill and manual dexterity of the artist.⁴⁰

The role of imagination in landscape, critical for Valenciennes, is pronounced in these writings, especially regarding the work of the historical landscapists. Relevant to the debate between art and nature, Valenciennes concerned himself with imagination and aligned it with creative genius: "There are two ways to envisage Nature: the first allows us to see Nature as it is, the second to see Nature as it could be, and as it would be represented as a fertile imagination

⁴⁰ Robert Rosenblum, "Painting Under Napoleon," in *French Painting 1774 -1830* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1975) 161.

represents it to a man of genius.”⁴¹ Like de Piles before him, he was partial to painters Nicolas Poussin, Annibale Carracci (1560-1609) and Titian (1477-1576), regarding specifically their use of color and imagination. Their paintings represented nature “adorned with the treasures of imagination that only genius can conceive of and represent.”⁴²

Not only was the presence of imagination a requirement for a successful landscape painting, but the conveyance of emotion to the spectator was of equal importance. Valenciennes appreciated the work of Claude Lorrain, especially of his rendering of atmospheric air and mist, “that vagueness and indecision which gives nature its charm and which are so difficult to render.”⁴³ Yet because he believed that Claude’s paintings failed to move the spectator’s soul or imagination, his paintings were best suited for a domestic setting. He posed the question for both Claude and Gaspard Poussin (1613-1675, brother-in-law of Nicolas Poussin), asking “have they moved the imagination? Have they been able to make the soul appreciate any feeling other than admiration?”⁴⁴ During the mid-nineteenth century, Baudelaire was concerned also with effect of the landscape on the spectator’s imagination and soul, and saw this as the primary failure in contemporary landscape painting.

Valenciennes created a classification of landscape painting based on De Piles categorization of 1708: *paysage historique*, *paysage pastoral*, and *études*. For Valenciennes, the *paysage historique* represented the highest form of landscape painting with its idealized view of nature based on Poussin. He maintained that the *paysage historique* was more difficult to master

⁴¹ Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, “Advice to a Student on Painting, Particularly on Landscape” from *Éléments de perspective pratique* (Joshua C. Taylor, *Nineteenth Century Theories of Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987) 250.

⁴² Ibid, 248.

⁴³ Ibid, 248. Interesting to note in relation to Baudelaire, who was also taken with atmosphere and mists in both painting and poetry.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 248.

than other genres due to all the knowledge that was required in both history and natural sciences.⁴⁵ The *paysage pastoral*, considered an inferior style of landscape painting, was devoid of literary subject matter and offered idealized views whose intent was to be charming and naïve rather than didactic. It is noteworthy that Valenciennes not only cited the classics as a source of inspiration, but also emphasized nature itself.⁴⁶ He recommended painting the same motif at different times of day in order to observe how shapes are changed by light effects, even to the point of being unrecognizable. This is a procedure that the Impressionists later employed repeatedly in their cycles of painting, such as Claude Monet's series of Rouen cathedral.

Valenciennes's student Achille Michallon, who would later instruct Jean-Baptist Camille Corot, was awarded the first Prix de Rome for *histoire paysage* in 1817. Michallon was one of the earliest painters to go to the Forest of Fontainebleau and set up his easel and canvas *avant le motif*.⁴⁷ Following this line from Valenciennes to Michallon, the *plein-air* sketch is a direct descendent of Academic practice and was not an invention of Barbizon painters in the forest of Fontainebleau. As art historian Albert Boime has argued, the Academy's issue with landscape painting was not subject matter, but execution. Artists began to abandon the rules of the classical landscape composition and focused instead on the natural landscape or site before them; their paintings began to assume an unfinished appearance characterized by loose brushwork. This sketch/finish conflict that dominated landscape painting by mid-nineteenth century was taken up by critics including Charles Baudelaire, who addressed the debate in the work of Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot in 1845 and later in 1859 in the paintings of Charles-Francois Daubigny (1817-1878).

⁴⁵ Valenciennes, 251.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 250-253.

⁴⁷ Drost, 116.

The generation of landscapists who worked in Italy in the early part of the nineteenth century practiced the *plein air* method advocated by Valenciennes. Early in his career, Corot had embraced the concepts of Valenciennes handed down through Michallon and became the link between the Neoclassical and Barbizon artists.⁴⁸ Like many aspiring landscapists, he travelled to Italy in 1825 and made oil sketches outdoors in front of the motif. He continued to practice *plein air* painting when he returned to France in 1828 and began travelling throughout France where he, like Michallon before him, was particularly drawn to the area of the Forest of Fontainebleau. The paintings he composed there of scenes of the French countryside would have a strong impact on artists who, seeking a return to nature, converged on the village of Barbizon in Fontainebleau in the 1830's and 1840's. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Corot became the most popular landscape painter in France, standing for both tradition and transformation. His paintings were considered "meditations on nature rather than accurate representations."⁴⁹

Romanticism arrived late to France and did not have the effect on landscape painting as it did in England and Germany. However the presence of the English Romantic landscape was influential in the painting technique and practice of landscape painting in France. The contact between English and French artists after 1815 became a major influence on the style of the French landscape. With the 1815 lifting of the travel ban, a flood of English artists came to Paris and the surrounding countryside to paint.⁵⁰ John Constable, one of the major artists of the English naturalistic tradition, significantly influenced the landscape tradition in his country and in France. Prints of English artists's sketches of the French countryside illustrated popular travel

⁴⁸ Simpson, 17.

⁴⁹ Michael Clarke. *Corot and the Art of Landscape* (New York: Cross River Press, 1991) 80.

⁵⁰ Robert Herbert, *Barbizon Revisited: essay and catalogue* (New York: Clarke and Way, 1964) 16.

books.⁵¹ The influence of Constable and the English school reached beyond artists such as Eugène Delacroix to Barbizon painters such as Théodore Rousseau (1812-1867) and Jules Dupré (1811- 1889).

John Constable's entry of *The Haywain*(1821), with its lack of compositional structure and idealization, created a sensation during its exhibition at the Paris Salon of 1824. Eugène Delacroix, whose *Massacre at Chios* (1824) was exhibited that year, was impacted by Constable's innovative technique of broken color, visible brushwork and use of various hues of color to create a luminosity and depth.⁵² Constable's representation of nature, especially in his handling of paint, caused Delacroix to reconsider how he himself painted his background landscapes. After viewing *The Haywain*, Delacroix refigured the landscape background in his *Massacre at Chios*. Art historian René Huyghe's 1963 description of Constable's influence on Delacroix emphasizes the depiction of limitless space and the "dream quality" that Delacroix discovered in Constable's brushstroke and flicks of white paint.⁵³ Huyghe described the transformation of Delacroix's landscapes, after viewing Constable, as becoming "sheets of light and shade", "bands of sea", land that "floats and rolls like clouds" and "space without limit or center." Delacroix's employment of wide bands and strips of paint to delineate the immensity of space and sky placed his figures in a limitless, unstructured space. The dreamlike quality and atmosphere in the landscapes of Delacroix must have appealed to Baudelaire's sense of the infinite and corresponded to his prose poems of sea, sky and clouds. Huyghe's description of Delacroix's limitless space as "the poetry of a distant horizon" could just as well be applied to Baudelaire whose dreams of distant horizons are an integral part of his prose poems. This

⁵¹ Clarke,17. Such English annuals Baudelaire referred to in his review of the *Salon of 1846* next to the "landscapes of fantasy" of Rembrandt, Rubens, and Watteau.

⁵² Simpson, 17.

⁵³ René Huyghe, *Delacroix* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1963) 127 – 130.

painterly dissolution of nature may be found in the famous quote of Baudelaire's on imagination from the Queen of Faculties in the *Salon* of 1859: "It decomposes all creation."⁵⁴

The Revolution of 1848 constitutes a major dividing line that marks the end of Romanticism and the rise of Naturalism among progressive artists and critics.⁵⁵ Romanticism was still evident but was on the decline. This deterioration of Romanticism concomitant with the ascension of Naturalism and Realism became the target of Baudelaire's diatribe against landscape painting in the *Salons* of 1846 and 1859. The predominance of Realism in painting, a term that Baudelaire maintained was not properly defined, signaled a defeat not only of the Romantic landscape but of art by nature. By mid-century the idealized Italianate landscapes of Valenciennes were displaced by the *paysage rustique* of the Barbizon painters. In the 1820's and 1830's, many artists, the majority of them Parisian inhabitants, abandoned Paris and relocated to the small village of Barbizon, located south-west of the city. Influenced by the Dutch Baroque painters of the seventeenth century, artists sought freedom and personal expression in landscape painting that, as the least encumbered by the tradition of the Academy, was to become the most revolutionary. Among avant-garde artists landscape ceased to be mere backdrop or stage set for the human figure - it was now the subject itself. While subject matter in the early decades of the nineteenth century had been crucial to the work of the historical landscapist, by the 1830's such requirements were no longer mandatory for the progressive *paysagiste*, whose subject became the landscape itself.⁵⁶

The flight from the city to the countryside took the Romantic view of nature to its extreme: a return to nature for truth and restoration as a reaction against modern industrialization

⁵⁴ "Elle décompose toute la création." OC, 397.

⁵⁵ Herbert, 37.

⁵⁶ John House, "Framing France" in *Landscapes of France: Impressionism and its Rivals* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1995) 20-21.

and urbanization. These artists appropriated Jean Jacques Rousseau's benign and benevolent view of nature and man in nature: take the man out of society and his true, good nature will reappear. Yet many of these artists still remained connected in some way or other to the city. For example, Théodore Rousseau maintained his studio located in central Paris, which was conveniently located near his art dealer.⁵⁷

The dichotomy between city/country had reached its peak by the 1840's. Historian Nicholas Green refers to the "metropolitan colonization of Barbizon,"⁵⁸ perhaps best summarized by Baudelaire in 1861 from his journal notes for *Mon Coeur Mis à Nu*: "Man loves man so much that when he flees the city, it is in search of the crowd, in other words to recreate the city in the country."⁵⁹ This could be a description for the movement of landscape painters and city dwellers who fled Paris to Barbizon at mid-century in search of painting subject and an experience of "nature." The city/country split so dominant at the time was instrumental in the rise and appreciation of landscape painting. By mid-century, with the increase of urban life, industrialization, and rural depopulation, the invention of the steam train, as well as a new sense of nationalism, the French landscape provided a picturesque view of nature that appealed to the urban audience. The image of the rural landscape as a refuge from the modern city was a central issue to both the real experience of nature and the experience of viewing a landscape painting. The restorative aspects of nature were emphasized, and the growing popularity and entries into the Salon attest to the demand for landscape painting at this time. Landscape was seen in opposition to modern urban life as well as a refuge from the crowd.⁶⁰ Writer and critic Maxime

⁵⁷ Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990) 118.

⁵⁸ Green, 118.

⁵⁹ "L'Homme aime tant l'homme que quand il fuit la ville, c'est encore pour chercher la foule, c'est à dire pour refaire la ville à la campagne." OC, 634.

⁶⁰ House, 12.

du Camp (1822-1894), a landscape enthusiast who claimed to prefer trees to men, insisted in his review of the *Salon* of 1861 that in order for nature to be experienced fully, the human figure must be eradicated from landscape painting. Du Camp argued that the presence of the human figure ruined the spectator's direct communion with nature, breaking the spell of restorative nature.⁶¹

A major feature of progressive landscape painting at this time was the sketch/finish conflict. As art historian Robert Herbert maintained, Barbizon painting narrowed the gap between the sketch and the finished studio painting.⁶² The popularity of the Barbizon school coincided with Naturalism and Realism in painting. For Baudelaire the unfinished sketch exemplified a kind of submission to nature that he detested, implying not only a lack of imagination but subservience to the subject. The landscapist Charles-François Daubigny (1870-1878) was a target for much of the criticism at this time, including Baudelaire's, whose adherence to the Neoclassical requirement of finish dominated his aesthetic of landscape painting. Théophile Gautier also took issue with the *étude* and saw it as a dangerous trend in painting. For Baudelaire in the 1840's and 1850's, Realism, perhaps even more than Naturalism, signaled a defeat of the imaginative landscape. The idea of landscape painting as an imaginative genre had been a unifying current in French painting from Poussin and Claude in the seventeenth century through Watteau and Fragonard in the eighteenth. This decline of imagination in landscape was a critical element in Baudelaire's review of the *Salon* of 1846 and fourteen years later in the *Salon* of 1859.

⁶¹ Maxime du Camp, *Le Salon de 1861* (Paris : A. Bourdilliat, 1861)145-46 "Ce que l'on aime dans les forêts, dans les prairies, sur le bord de la mer, c'est la solitude absolue que nous permet d'être en communion directe avec la nature (...) qu'un paysan ou qu'un matelot apparaisse, le charme est rompu, et l'on est ressaisi par l'humanité qu'on avait voulu fuir."

⁶² Herbert, 15.

CHAPTER 2 SALONS AND THE CONDITION OF BEAUTY IN LANDSCAPE

A close reading, particularly of Baudelaire's art criticism in the *Salons* of 1846 and 1859, reveals the ambiguities, inconsistencies, and contradictions in his ideas regarding nature and landscape painting at the Paris Salon. Despite his declarations, Baudelaire lacked a truly decisive anti-naturalist theory – with the exception of the frequently cited letter to Fernand Desnoyers and the chapter on makeup from *Le Peintre de La Vie Moderne*. Both nature and landscape painting were critical in defining his concept of imagination. The 1845 and 1846 Salons are introductions to Baudelaire's theory of landscape that he would develop fully by 1859. Specifically, in the *Salon* of 1846, his critique on landscape painting is a principle source for his aesthetic of imagination which informs aspects of the poetry of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Les Petits Poemes en Prose: Paris Spleen*. Despite many of his Sadean proclamations about nature, his dependence on nature is evident throughout the 1846 Salon where it is considered the ultimate criterion for both art critic and artist.

When Baudelaire wrote his first Salon review in 1845, landscape painting was becoming one of the most important genres in nineteenth century French art. Over one third of the paintings exhibited at the annual Salon dealt with landscape, although critics debated its actual importance and significance.⁶³ In the *Salon* of 1845 Baudelaire exhibited vestiges of a Romantic concept of nature and offered a somewhat neutral critique on landscape painting. His brief section on landscape is devoted primarily to Jean-Baptiste Corot whose reputation at this time was not yet generally recognized or definitively established.⁶⁴ Viewed as a bridge between the

⁶³ Drost, 116-117.

⁶⁴ Drost, 640.

classical and the Romantic, Corot's paintings would have appealed to Baudelaire as they functioned as both evocation and artifice. His work ranged from artificial pastorals, such as souvenirs of Italy, through less formal images of specific locales in France to small studies executed in front of the subject. The word "souvenir" is often a part of his titles and may have derived from Valenciennes's writings; the very notion of a memory, which plays a critical role for Baudelaire in artistic creation, would have also been compelling for Baudelaire in his critique of Corot. He placed him at the head of the modern school of landscape painting and praised the color and melancholy of his paintings. He noted what he viewed as Corot's sincere love of nature that was balanced with as much intelligence as love.⁶⁵ Baudelaire stressed the necessity of regarding nature with equal parts love and intelligence, emotion and intellect. He also addressed the sketch/finish conflict pertaining to Corot, defending him, as he did Eugène Delacroix, and delineated the difference between a finished work and a completed work.

In his passage on Corot, Baudelaire introduced Théodore Rousseau as Corot's only rival in landscape, both in his *naïveté* and originality, laying the foundation for a Corot/Rousseau dichotomy that he would expand upon in the following year's Salon. For Baudelaire, Rousseau represented the synthesis of Naturalism and Romanticism as his paintings depicted forces of light, winds, and storms. His poetic and dramatic scenes of nature had been consistently rejected by the Salon jury from 1836 on, beginning with *La Descent des vaches dans le Jura* (1834) with its Romantic overtones of Byron and Dante. Rousseau's reputation as an outsider, that earned him the title of "*le grand refusé*" for being rejected so many times from the Salon, and which he

⁶⁵ "évidemment cet artiste aime sincèrement la nature, et sait la regarder avec autant d'intelligence que l'amour." OC, 218.

cultivated as much himself, would have appealed to Baudelaire, whose characterization of Delacroix as a misunderstood genius followed a similar vein.⁶⁶

The *Salon* of 1845 is also marked by an acknowledgement of Romanticism's passing. The landscape painter Paul Huet (1803-1869) had dominated landscape up to 1833 until the arrival of Rousseau on the scene. Huet had remained a Romantic while the Barbizon artists moved toward a greater naturalism. Baudelaire observed that Huet was making changes to his style which he found noteworthy enough to mention. He was dismayed by the alterations that Huet was now making to his paintings and wrote in regard to his painting *Un vieux château sur des rochers* (1845), "Is it by chance that M. Huet would like to modify his manner? It was already excellent."⁶⁷ Baudelaire viewed this decline in Romanticism, a word that by this time was being used pejoratively, as a decline in imagination.

The following year's *Salon* of 1846 contains two significant positions: the beginnings of Baudelaire's distaste for contemporary landscape painting and his use of landscape painting to illustrate his theory of imagination. Throughout the review, Baudelaire's main preoccupation with painting as he envisioned it is the quality of *naïveté* and Romanticism. For him, Romanticism is modern art. Therefore the contemporary landscape painting must contain an element of Romanticism. The absence of Romanticism in landscape painting would have ensured that he viewed it as anti-modern, despite its waning popularity in public taste. He placed Delacroix at the head of the modern school of painting for his poetic imagination, his Romanticism, and his color, and wrote that his chief preoccupation was movement, color and

⁶⁶ John Sillevius, "The Barbizon School," in *The Barbizon School* (The Hague, Netherlands: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1985) 41; Green, 117-118.

⁶⁷ "Est-ce que par hasard M. Paul Huet voudrait modifier sa manière ? –Elle était pourtant excellente." OC, 219.

atmosphere. Delacroix abandoned line to seek “the eternal vibrations of nature” in color.⁶⁸ Through him, Baudelaire introduced the concept of nature as a dictionary, which is essentially the basis for the entire essay. Nature is the criterion by which all work is judged, for both art critic and artist.⁶⁹ There are artists, such as the American painter George Catlin (1796-1872) who painted the tattoos of Indians in accordance with the harmonious systems of nature.⁷⁰ Landscape painters, such as Nicolas Louis Cabat (1812 -1893) whose work was once brilliant and naïve, was admonished for having abandoned nature.⁷¹ His writings contain numerous positive references to nature that meanwhile contradict his rejection of nature. In one instance, he even goes so far as to advise a painter, in a moment of exasperation, to “Look at nature, sir.”⁷²

Baudelaire believed that once nature is understood it can be abandoned because the artist “presents *another* nature, analogous to the mind and temperament of the artist.”⁷³ The artist’s goal of creative output is to endow his painting with his own nature, temperament, emotion, and to convey this to the spectator. Baudelaire believed that nature, an overpowering and ascendant force, must be struggled with and subdued in order for the artist to express his own temperament. Even if nature demands otherwise, the artist must remain true to his own nature and principles.⁷⁴ Imagination is the tool with which to transform, translate, and subdue nature. His critique of the naturalist landscape is that many of the artists copy rather than compose from nature. These landscapists do not infuse their temperament or personality in the

⁶⁸ “les palpitations éternelles de la nature.” OC, 235.

⁶⁹ “Désormais muni d’un criterium certain, criterium tiré de la nature, le critique doit accomplir son devoir avec passion.” OC, 229.

⁷⁰ “tous leurs tatouages et coloriage étaient faits selon les gammes naturelles et harmoniques.” OC,240.

⁷¹ “Il a véritablement tort de ne plus se fier à la nature, comme jadis.” Cabat was one of the early *plein-air* painters who worked at Fontainebleau and was strongly influenced by the seventeenth century Dutch landscape. Around 1840, he abandoned the style of his early works and adopted a more conventional style that won him accolades with the Academy. OC,255.

⁷² “Regarder la nature, monsieur.” OC, 247.

⁷³ “il peut négliger la nature ; il en représente une autre, analogue à l’esprit et au tempérament de l’auteur.” OC, 235.

⁷⁴ “Si la nature le veut, l’artiste idéaliste, qui veut être fidèle ses principes, n’y doit pas consentir.” OC, 253.

landscape. Baudelaire was interested in the unique vision of the individual artist - the imaginative (*l'imaginatif*) who says "I want to illuminate things with my mind and project the reflection onto other minds."⁷⁵

Baudelaire traced the modern school of landscape painting's "luster" back to the school of Romanticism. It was the romantic study of nature that had endowed the contemporary school of landscape with its best qualities.⁷⁶ Anything good or valuable in contemporary landscape was the result of Romanticism. Baudelaire's predilection for the romantic landscape is evident in his praise of the early works of the Romantic painter Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803-1860) whose "meticulous taste for nature", especially in the effects of light, made Baudelaire consider him a great landscape painter.⁷⁷ He included him in his chapter "On some Colorists" due to his radiant color, but was little interested in his work exhibited at that year's Salon. His early paintings, he wrote, were full of poetry, reverie, atmospheric effects, shadow and light that affected the spectator's soul. Baudelaire appreciated his close study of nature and his ability to transform the external world. Light and atmosphere, two of Baudelaire's criteria for a successful landscape, played a significant part in his paintings. What is most compelling in his writing on Decamps is his attention to the synthesis of figure and landscape. Baudelaire, who maintained that great artists understood that landscape was a painting's accessory, admired Decamps's compositions for their unity of figure to landscape.⁷⁸ This is a direct contradiction to Baudelaire's observations on Delacroix's paintings at the Palais Bourbon, in which he extolled the genius of Delacroix for having known that landscape remain an accessory.

⁷⁵ "Je veux illuminer les choses avec mon esprit et en projeter le reflet sur les autres esprits." OC 400.

⁷⁶ OC 254.

⁷⁷ "le goût minutieux de la nature, étudiée surtout dans ses effets lumineux, l'avait toujours sauvé et maintenu dans une région supérieure." OC,241.

⁷⁸ "M. Decamps était paysagiste aussi, et paysagiste du plus grand mérite ; ses paysages et ses figures ne faisaient qu'un et se servaient réciproquement. Les uns n'avaient pas plus d'importance que les autres, et rien chez lui n'était accessoire." OC, 242.

In the chapter devoted to landscape from the *Salon* of 1846, Baudelaire classified landscape artists as landscape colorists, landscape draughtsmen, naturalists who idealize, historical landscapists, and imaginative landscapists. The last of these – the imaginative landscape painting – is the most significant for Baudelaire as it served as a model for the uses of imagination as well as relating directly to that of a woman’s face. Baudelaire extolled the virtues of these landscapes of fantasy in which artistic amendment is critical. Examples of the imaginative landscapes can be found in the paintings of Watteau, in stage scenes at the Opéra, and in printed English annuals. He preferred certain artists who created these “marvelous” landscapes which date back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Rembrandt van Rijn, Peter Paul Rubens, and Watteau. The fantasy landscape is “the expression of man’s dreaming or the egoism of man substituted for nature” which represents man’s natural – Baudelaire’s word - need for the marvelous.⁷⁹ Baudelaire essentially declared his love for decorative painting and the artificial pastorals of the eighteenth century.⁸⁰ Wolfgang Drost maintains that Baudelaire’s attraction to such theatrical depictions of nature is the expression of anti-naturalism in Baudelaire and at the same time corresponds to the Baudelairean need to dream.⁸¹

These imaginative landscapes were the antithesis of the historical landscape that Baudelaire was pleased to see in decline. His primary grievance with the *paysage historique* was

⁷⁹ “l’expression de la rêverie humaine, l’égoïsme humaine substitué à la nature.” OC, 254.

⁸⁰ Such an example of Baudelaire’s love of theatrical *mise en scène* and landscape as décor appears in a passage from *Paradis Artificiels*. The passage contains a first person account of the drug induced visions of a woman staying in a château decorated in the eighteenth century rococo style. After ingesting hashish, the woman undergoes visions of fantastic landscapes and wildlife from the interior of her boudoir. The walls are covered with long mirrors separated by panels of painted landscapes. Under the affect of hashish the painted landscapes begin to expand before her into limitless perspectives: “c’étaient des rivières limpides et des paysages verdoyant se mirant dans des eaux tranquilles.” Such landscapes correspond to Baudelaire’s description in the *Salon of 1846* of “jardins fabuleux, horizons immenses, cours d’eau plus limpides qu’il n’est naturel, et coulant en dépit des lois de la topographie, rochers gigantesque construits dans les proportions idéales, brunes flottantes comme un rêve.” Like Baudelaire, she is attracted by the magic of “jardins fabuleux, horizons immenses.” Layer upon layer of artifice is contained within the passage: the painted landscape as viewed through the eyes of an intoxicated mind may be read as a metaphor of the poetic or artistic process.

⁸¹ Drost, 126 -127

its didacticism which he identified as “morality applied to nature.”⁸² It contained neither the imagination of the fantasy landscape nor the servitude of the Naturalist *paysage*. Baudelaire outlined in greater depth his views on nature, distinct from the more amiable tone of 1845. For him, “Nature” operated outside the realm of human ethics or morality; any ethics that nature seemed to have was the result of a human construct or projection.⁸³ Hence he liked artists and art works that “lied,” things like stage sets and dioramas appealed to him because he found that in their deception they were closer to the truth. In a preceding chapter in the *Salon* of 1846, “De l’Idéal et du Modèle,” Baudelaire defined the relationship between the artist and nature: “Drawing is a struggle between nature and the artist, in which the artist will triumph more easily as he has a better understanding of the intentions of nature.”⁸⁴ The artist battles against nature and triumphs because of a knowledge of the intentions of nature which operate beyond the human realm. The artist is able to defeat nature only by use of memory and imagination, and must be an interpreter rather than a copyist. As I demonstrate in the next chapter, this struggle between nature and imagination was dramatically illustrated in his prose poem *Le Confiteur de l’artiste*, in which the artist is depicted in the throes of a psychological and emotional battle with a vision of nature before him.

Baudelaire’s brevity on the subject of Corot in 1846 is striking when compared to the *Salon* of 1845. He devoted just a few short sentences to the artist in which he praised him for his lack of pedantry along with his simplicity of color. This may be due to the fact the Corot had entered only one painting into the Salon, *Vue Prise dans la Forêt de Fontainebleau*, but may have been a result of his enthusiasm for Théodore Rousseau. In 1846, he set up two opposing

⁸² “c’est la morale appliqué à la nature.” He would have the same issue with François Millet’s peasant paintings in the *Salon of 1859*. OC, 254.

⁸³ “La nature n’a d’autre morale que le fait, parce qu’elle est la morale elle-même.” OC, 254.

⁸⁴ “Le dessin est une lutte entre la nature et l’artiste, où l’artiste triomphera d’autant plus facilement qu’il comprendra mieux les intentions de la nature.” OC, 245.

styles – the Romantic and the Neoclassical landscape. The Romantic was influenced by the seventeenth century Dutch landscapists who devoted themselves exclusively to the study of nature. The Neoclassic landscape, Baudelaire wrote, was concerned with style and architecture in nature. He approved of artists such as Corot, Antoine Hérault, and Louis Lottier, whose paintings evoked mood, light, and atmosphere. However, it was Rousseau, one of Baudelaire’s idealizing naturalists, who fulfilled “the conditions of the beautiful in landscape.”⁸⁵ Rousseau presented Baudelaire with the same difficulty of interpretation as Delacroix.⁸⁶ He shared Delacroix’s sense of melancholy and infused his own temperament and emotion into the painting.

Melancholy, one of Baudelaire’s favorite attribute in art, is the outstanding feature of the work of Rousseau. As the 1840’s progressed, Rousseau began to paint much more barren and lonely landscapes. Just as the poetry of Baudelaire is replete with images of twilight, dusk, bluish light, and setting suns, Rousseau also loved to depict the time of day that signifies not only endings but the transformation of landscape through diminishing light. Baudelaire remarked on Rousseau’s predilection for “nature’s bluish moments, twilights, sunsets sodden with rain, massive shades circled by the winds, great plays of light and shadow.”⁸⁷ He especially loved the sky and clouds in Rousseau’s paintings, the same features that would later appear in his *Spleen* poems *L’Étrangère* and *La Soupe et Les Nuages* and which he discovered in the sky and cloudscapes of Eugène Boudin in 1859.⁸⁸ Rousseau’s canvases may have struck a chord at this time for Baudelaire, who mourned the passing of Romanticism and who by 1859 was critical of

⁸⁵ “les conditions du beau dans le paysage.” OC, 256.

⁸⁶ “Il est aussi difficile de faire comprendre avec des mots le talent de M. Rousseau que celui de Delacroix, avec lequel il a, du reste, quelques rapports.” OC, 256.

⁸⁷ “Il aime les natures bleuâtres, les crépuscules, les couchers de soleil singulier et trempés d’eau, les gros ombrages où circulent les brises, les grands jeux d’ombres et de lumière.” OC, 256.

⁸⁸ “Ses ciels sont incomparables pour leur mollesse floconneuse.” Ibid.

the lack of imagination and feeling. The rise of naturalism was a sign of defeat at the hands of nature. The artists no longer feels, no longer translates his feeling before nature, he now just copies it.

What then are exactly the conditions of beauty in landscape? Baudelaire's *Journaux Intimes*, composed between 1851 and 1862, include a section entitled *Fusées* (1851) that explains these conditions of beauty in regard to a woman's face.⁸⁹ I substitute these requirements of beauty in the face of a woman for "the face of nature" in landscape painting. He wrote that "a beautiful and tempting face, I mean the face of a woman, is a face that simultaneously makes one dream of voluptuousness and of sadness, in a confused manner; one that conveys an element of melancholy."⁹⁰ Baudelaire's requisite for beauty is that it contain an element of sadness and melancholy. He was especially fond of Delacroix's women, noting that they were not the fashionable pretty types, but ones he described as being "sick" and illuminated by an interior beauty.⁹¹

In respect to landscape painting, the same holds true for Rousseau (and, in 1859, Eugène Lavielle), whose rendering of light and most importantly sunset is a recurring motif in Baudelaire in its evocation of melancholy and the end of things. Rousseau, like Delacroix, infused his soul, hence his emotion, into the painting. He wrote that "his painting breathes a great sigh of melancholy."⁹² He does not transcribe what is in front of him, but translates his feelings

⁸⁹ This description is markedly different from the one Baudelaire elaborates upon in his chapter on women's beauty and makeup in the *Le Peintre de la Vie Modern*, which Sartre employs for his explanation of Baudelaire's aesthetic of the artificial.

⁹⁰ "Une tête séduisante et belle, une tête d'une femme, veux-je dire, c'est une tête qui fait rêver à la fois, - mais d'une manière confuse, -de volupté et de tristesse; qui comporte une idée de mélancolie." OC, 626. The presence of sadness in a woman's face may be connected to his relationship to his mother. Baudelaire supposedly had a passion for making his mother cry when he was a young man, for "seeing her in tears." See Richardson, .44.

⁹¹ OC, 238.

⁹² "Sa peinture respire une grande mélancolie." OC, 256

while viewing nature.⁹³ Baudelaire perceived in Rousseau's landscapes aspects of Rubens and Rembrandt, those artists included under the designated *paysage imaginaire* category that Baudelaire extolled. Finally, his paintings are likened to English painting.⁹⁴ He compared Rousseau to northern landscape painters whom he connected to Romanticism in painting, and urged the reader, in place of the painter, to imagine oneself having a *profound love of nature*, dominating and ordering it.⁹⁵ Nature may be loved as long as it is amended through artistic imagination.

In the *Salon* of 1846, Baudelaire viewed the sunset as a particular moment when nature itself takes part in her own artistic amendment, like a woman who applies makeup for embellishment. Nature at dusk was especially appealing for Baudelaire – it indicated an obscure and diffuse lighting that metamorphosed a landscape into something fantastic. Sunsets were not solely about endings in a Romantic sense; they were also about the transformation of material objects through light and the dissolution of nature. Sunrise and sunset altered the landscape as in the *Salon* of 1846 when morning twilight adds an element of fantasy and enchantment to a previously bland landscape. Here nature is viewed almost as a mistress, as seen in the passage where he referred to “the sort of twilight in which a still sleeping Nature has a wan and raw appearance and in which the countryside reveals itself in a fantastic and striking guise.”⁹⁶ Characteristics of twilight – ambiguity, obscurity, and a diffused illumination – serve to

⁹³ Michele Hanoosh, “Painting as Translation in Baudelaire’s Art Criticism” 1986, 29. “not nature itself, but rather the artist’s interpretation.”

⁹⁴ Noteworthy in consideration of the influence of the English landscape, as in Constable on Delacroix.

⁹⁵ “Qu’on se rappelle quelques paysages de Rubens et de Rembrandt, qu’on y mêle quelques souvenirs de peinture anglaise, qu’on suppose, dominant et *réglant* tout cela, un amour profond et sérieux de la nature, on pourra peut-être se faire une idée de la magie de ses tableaux.” OC, 256.

⁹⁶ “ce crépuscule où la nature mal éveillé nous apparaît blafarde et crue, où la campagne se révèle sous un aspect fantastique et saisissant.” OC, 246. Translation by Jonathon Mayne. *Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and other exhibitions reviewed by Charles Baudelaire*. (London: Phaidon; Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1965) 84.

embellish nature. The transformative effect of light, sunsets in particular, relates to makeup on a woman's face. Later in his life, the sunset would be recalled not only for its evocative power in the Romantic sense, but for its erotic power connected to the body of a woman. In his *Journaux Intimes* he wrote of his desire to kiss a woman's leg, positioned precisely so that the glow of the setting sun would outline its contours.⁹⁷

Salon of 1859

The *Salon* of 1859 was composed during Baudelaire's stay at his mother's house in Honfleur on the coast of Normandy. In the summer of 1859 he had made a trip from Honfleur to Paris and made a very brief visit to the Salon. According to a letter to he wrote to his friend the photographer Nadar, Baudelaire based his writings on a short perusal through the galleries and the *livret*, and he composed the review in a period of ten days.⁹⁸ The *Salon* of 1859 has been referred to as Baudelaire's anti-realism manifesto; it is a critique of both Neoclassicism and Realism.⁹⁹ It is important to point out that he was critical of the diminishing role of imagination in landscape but not landscape painting itself. He found fault with the artist, who was a mere copyist and who mistook an *étude* for a painting. He appreciated artists who remained constant in their nature and temperament, essentially those artists whom he believed remained faithful to Romanticism, such as Eugène Delacroix and Paul Huet (1803-1869). What began as critique in 1845 and 1846 turned into a diatribe against the technique and vision of the modern landscapists, but not landscape itself. In many ways, Baudelaire was a traditionalist regarding landscape

⁹⁷ "Tantôt il lui demandait la permission de lui baiser la jambe, et il profitait de la circonstance pour baiser cette belle jambe dans telle position qu'elle dessinât nettement son contour sur le soleil couchant." OC, 627.

⁹⁸ *Corr. I*, 578.

⁹⁹ Drost, 81.

painting and aligned himself with academic principles concerning hierarchy of genres and the issue of finish. Yet he was also aware of nature's role in artistic creation— he had been critical in 1846 of the “chic” in painting which he defined as an abandonment of both nature and the model.

Prior to his chapter devoted to landscape, Baudelaire wrote about the landscapes of François Germain Léopold Tabar (1818-1869), a student of Paul Delaroche and painter of military exploits. One of these military pictures in particular, Tabar's *Guerre de Crimie, Forrageurs* (1859) struck Baudelaire with its pastoral evocation in the midst of a military campaign. He referred to it as an “idyll shot through by war”¹⁰⁰ and paid particular attention to the details of the background landscape. What stood out for Baudelaire was the expansive grassland, “and what a beautiful grassland, gently rolling in lines which follow the movement of the hills!” He paid close attention to what is considered one of his great aversions – verdant nature or “the freshness of growing things.”¹⁰¹ And he was drawn to the poetic quality with which the artist endowed “both nature and man.”¹⁰² He also liked the landscape of Louis Godefroy Jadin (1805-1882) whose view of Rome he praised for its poetry, its melancholy, and its impression of evening “shot with bands of scarlet.”¹⁰³

In the opening passages of the *Salon* of 1859, Baudelaire introduced his theory on the uses of imagination, in its power to dissolve and decompose matter. He envisioned the external world (returning to the notion of nature as a dictionary from 1846) as “the whole visible universe is but a storehouse of images...it is a sort of pasture which the imagination must digest and

¹⁰⁰ “c'est une idylle traversée par la guerre.” OC, 407.

¹⁰¹ “la fraîcheur végétale.” Ibid.

¹⁰² “tout y est poétique, la nature et l'homme.” Ibid.

¹⁰³ “traversé de bandes pourprées.” OC, 416.

transform.”¹⁰⁴ There were two distinct camps in painting: the realists and the *imaginatifs*. In Chapter Four, he explicitly stated that landscape appeared to offer enormous opportunities to those whose minds were lazy and who merely imitated what was in front of them.¹⁰⁵ This critique is based upon the academic tradition of artists who painted motifs directly after nature and used them for the composition of their paintings. In regard to the issue of *fini* in landscape painting, with the exception of Corot, he was in accord with the teachings and aesthetics of the academy. What displeased Baudelaire was not landscape but landscape without subject and without imagination. While he rejected too much detail, he sounded quite similar to the academicians of the earlier part of the century who complained about a lack of finish and the practice of exhibiting studies as finished paintings. Baudelaire expanded on his Rousseau/Corot rivalry. Corot was now viewed as the antithesis of Rousseau. While he continued to praise them, he became most critical of their composition: Rousseau, while he was still capable of dazzling the spectator, suffered from a blind love of nature and mistook a simple study for a composition. He now found his paintings exhausting.

While he was critical of Rousseau’s composition of a cottage with a flowery thatch, he extolled the virtues of Corot’s student Eugène Lavielle’s simple landscape also of a thatched cottage in the woods. Baudelaire admired the view offered by Lavielle of a winter landscape that included a snowed in cottage beside a lane that disappeared into the woods, with a setting sun peeking in between the trees. While woods and cottages in a rural setting are not associated with Baudelaire’s aesthetic, the depiction of winter with its evocation of the “sad season” appealed to

¹⁰⁴ “Tout l’univers visible n’est qu’un magasin d’images...c’est une espèce de pâture que l’imagination doit digérer et transformer.” OC, 399.

¹⁰⁵ OC, 400.

him.¹⁰⁶ The depiction of a winter day coming to an end appealed to his sense of reflection and memory, as well as the transformative power of light. Here, melancholy is connected to the weather. Philosopher Gaston Bachelard used Baudelaire's writing on Lavielle's painting in his *Poetics of Space* to illustrate the poet's relationship to winter and snow in particular.¹⁰⁷ Bachelard interpreted winter as conducive for Baudelaire to the poetic process as it signals a time for hibernation and a shutting out of the external world. The so called "sad season" painting by Lavielle attracted Baudelaire not only because of its rarity among landscape painters but because of what it evokes – a retreat, forced by the weather, to an interior state. This evocation of the "sad season" will be looked at later in the poem *Paysage*, as winter in fact acts as the catalyst for creative production; the poet shuts himself in behind closed doors and shutters in order to compose his pastoral poems.

With his defense of fini/non-fini in Corot's landscapes in the *Salon* of 1845, Baudelaire's comments on Corot's paintings attest to his involvement with the sketch/finish conflict that was especially tied to landscape painting. In 1859 he took particular aim at Charles-François Daubigny for mistaking a sketch for a finished picture. But before this attack, he complimented Daubigny on the "grace and freshness" and poetry of his landscapes, and how they convey the original feeling of the artist to "the spectator's soul."¹⁰⁸ But, he wrote, this quality of feeling was obtained at the expense of finish and perfection of detail.¹⁰⁹ The lack of finish in Daubigny was in fact one of the most frequent points of contention in the reception of his work. For Daubigny, the sketch-like technique made the canvas more like studies done before the motif, thus closer to

¹⁰⁶ When Baudelaire was six, after his father's death, he and his mother spent the summer in a small house in the sleepy village of Neuilly, near the Bois du Boulogne. At the time, before the Haussmanization of Paris, the Bois de Boulogne was a forest. See the poem "Je n'en ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville."

¹⁰⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* 38-41.

¹⁰⁸ OC, 415.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

nature, as the artist himself had experienced it. To the landscape painters of Daubigny's generation, finish meant distance from the original contact with nature.¹¹⁰ In 1859, Baudelaire stressed that *études* were mistaken for finished work. Sketch-like facture indicated a kind of slavishness and a proximity to nature that Baudelaire found distasteful. While some artists passed his critique, especially Delacroix (whose loose facture contemporary critics characterized as the result of painting with a *balai ivre* or drunken broom), the landscapist ran the risk of being penetrated by nature, of allowing oneself to be a passive receptor, of not making continual adjustments or "falsifications." For Baudelaire, such proximity to nature presented a mortal danger to the artist; a distance must always be retained.¹¹¹ The loose facture may have been associated in his mind with too close a contact with nature by the artist.

The sketch-finish conflict never resolved itself in Baudelaire, whose writings contain multiple inconsistencies and contradictions. Yet the rapidity of execution in Eugène Boudin's sketches in the 1859 Salon, which will be addressed in the following chapter, received incomparable praise for several reasons. They represented the intangible and distant aspects of nature that in 1859 attracted Baudelaire: the sky, clouds, sea and the moon. They were produced in Honfleur, near to his mother's home. Last of all, they illustrate Baudelaire's dual concept of beauty – that of the eternal and the fugitive – that he was beginning to formulate in 1859 for *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*. Baudelaire extolled the virtue of these sketches by Boudin because Boudin himself remained aware that these were studies that would later be transformed in the studio into a finished painting. Yet it is worth speculating, as Leakey and Burton have done, just how significant these sketches were in his choice of Constantin Guys as the painter of modern

¹¹⁰ Michael Andrew Marlais, *Valenciennes, Daubigny, and the Origins of French Landscape Painting* (South Hadley, Mass: Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 2004) 47.

¹¹¹ "La première affaire d'un artiste est de substituer l'homme à la nature et de protester contre elle." OC, 251.

life. Based on his lengthy and poetic evocation of the work, Baudelaire experienced these sketches as he would a finished painting by Corot – in fact he was both emotionally and imaginatively moved – comparing them to an opium dream. Here the sketchy facture did not present an obstacle for Baudelaire in regard to a landscape painting; its main subject was the remote aspect of nature while at the same time indicating a dissolution of nature by imagination. As in the poem “Correspondances,” Boudin had translated his own experience before nature, not nature itself, and infused these abstracted sketches with his soul. Boudin’s loose facture, like Delacroix’s, impart mood, emotion, soul into the painted image.

CHAPTER THREE BAUDELAIRE AS *PAYSAGISTE*

For nature to be transcended, Baudelaire believed that the artist must enter into a struggle with the external world of nature or be subjected to “a bizarre operation that consists in killing, in themselves, the thinking and feeling man.”¹¹² Yet while Baudelaire professed to hate nature for its “insolence,” for having an ethics all its own and for creating nothing complete, he still loved it for its beauty.¹¹³ While nature as pure subject rarely if ever appears in his poetry, as it does with the Romantic poets, many times it becomes instrumental in triggering other senses and memories. His manifesto poem “Correspondances” describes nature as a series of symbols, in which sights and sounds trigger other sensations and memories. Noteworthy, however, are two poems – one prose and one lyric - that correspond to his art criticism and may be read from the point of view specifically of a landscape painter. The prose poem “Le Confiteur de l’artiste” from *Les Petits Poèmes en Prose* and the lyric poem “Paysage” from *Les Fleurs du Mal* demonstrate Baudelaire’s aesthetic of landscape and his concept of Imagination. Additionally, each poem was composed or rewritten in the early 1860’s after his stay at his mother’s house in Honfleur.

Baudelaire’s experience of nature was a combination of terror and attraction, dramatized most forcefully in the prose poem “Le Confiteur de l’artiste.”¹¹⁴ First published in August 1862 in *La Presse* and later included in the collection of prose poems known as *Les Petits Poèmes en Prose: Spleen de Paris*, this poem is perhaps the only example in Baudelaire’s

¹¹² “une opération bizarre qui consiste à tuer en eux l’homme pensant et sentant.” OC, 415, *Salon of 1859*.

¹¹³ The word “insolence” is taken from the poem “A Celle qui est trop gaie” in which the narrator punishes a flower for nature’s fecundity.

¹¹⁴ In a letter to Arsène Houssaye, his friend and potential publisher of *Les Petits Poèmes en Prose*, Baudelaire explained his concept of the body of work as having neither head nor tail, beginning or end. Baudelaire’s prose poems were a radical break from verse poetry; here the poet identified compositions without meter or rhyme as a form of poetry. See OC, 146.

poetry where nature figures as a direct theme rather than as simply a source for analogies.¹¹⁵ It is representative of the relationship between nature and beauty, nature and the female, as well as the duel between the artist and nature. While this poem was composed after 1859, its salient features seem to have been inspired by a combination of sources from that time: the position of Baudelaire's mother's house with its view of the Seine estuary that opened onto the sea, his viewing of Eugène Boudin's pastel sky and seascapes, and the proximity to his mother for the first time in years.

Apart from a few short visits to Paris, Baudelaire spent most of 1859 in Honfleur and had not seen the sea in over fifteen years. By all accounts he had not been near a body of water during the period between the aborted sea voyage of 1841-42 until his first visits to his mother's house in Honfleur in 1858.¹¹⁶ The effect of seeing the ocean for the first time in years must have been profound. In a letter written to his friend and publisher Auguste Poulet-Malassis in November of 1858, he wrote that his mother's house was "perched above the sea, and even the garden looks like a miniature stage set. Everything is calculated to amaze the eyes, and that is what I need here."¹¹⁷ In *Les Fleurs du Mal*, first published in 1857, memories of the sea from his 1841 trip were a source of inspiration for several of his poems. Now in Honfleur in 1859, Baudelaire was able to view the sea from his bedroom window and from his mother's garden and revisit some of those earlier themes during a later phase in life.

¹¹⁵ "Le Confiteur de l'artiste", OC, 149. Deconstructionist readings of this poem and other poems that comprise *Les Petits Poèmes en Prose* question the narrative voice and Baudelaire's intention behind his employment of the first person *je*. However, I connect the voice in the prose poems with those found in the Salon writings, *Les Artificiels Paradis* and *Journaux Intimes*. It is my view that the authorial voice found in the *Spleen de Paris* and lyric poetry is closely tied to Baudelaire's individual history rather than a disguised attempt at 'tricking' the reader. See for example Maria C. Scott, *Baudelaire's Le Spleen de Paris: Shifting Perspectives* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

¹¹⁶ Joanna Richardson, *Baudelaire* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1994) 368.

¹¹⁷ "Je suis allé voir le local. Il est perché au-dessus de la mer, et le jardin lui-même est un petit décor. Tout cela est fait pour l'étonnement des yeux. C'est ce qu'il me faut." Corr. I, 521.

Unlike the poem “Man and the Sea” from *Les Fleurs du mal* in which water is viewed as both combatant and brother to man, as man’s equal, water here is regarded as an omnipotent “Mother Nature” or oceanic mother, an overpowering, inundating force.

In “Le Confiteor de l’artiste” (henceforth “Le Confiteor”), Baudelaire paints a word-picture of his preferred kind of landscape, that of the seascape, which in the *Salon* of 1859 he described as a “most poetic genre.”¹¹⁸ The poem is not only interesting because the narrator assumes the role of a landscape painter, but also for its insight into Baudelaire’s perspective on the doctrine of original sin in connection with nature. In the poem, Nature is imagined as both virgin and temptress. The identification of nature with purity rather than original sin is uncharacteristic of Baudelaire. Instead, the artist’s taint of original sin, determined by a corporeal, earthly existence, is inadequate when confronted with the chasteness of the sea and the sky. If “a fine picture is nature reflected by an artist” as Baudelaire claimed in the *Salon* of 1846, the poem describes an instance where the artist’s ability to reflect or translate nature is deadened once he succumbs to nature’s charm.¹¹⁹

The poem is set in Baudelaire’s favorite season of autumn and at the end of a day, just before the sun is about to descend. It opens with a vision of the poet facing the immensity of sea and sky, and who, lulled by the sights and sounds, allows himself to be penetrated by nature and in the process experiences a loss of self.¹²⁰ The poet/landscape painter willingly surrenders to a beautiful spectacle, a kind of forbidden landscape, which may explain the religious title of the poem as an admission of guilt or sin on the part of the artist. The opening images are ones of

¹¹⁸ “un genre pourtant si poétique.” OC, 417.

¹¹⁹ “un beau tableau étant la nature réfléchie par un artiste” OC, 229.

¹²⁰ For an interpretation on sexual penetration in this poem see Russell King, “Sexual (In?)difference: Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris*” in *Reconceptions: Reading Modern French Poetry*, ed. R. King and B. McGuirk (Nottingham, 1996) 8-20.

penetration that eventually transform into submission, in which the artists allows the female force of nature to dominate him:

How penetrating the late afternoons of autumn! Ah! Penetrating to the verge of pain, for there are certain delicious sensations whose vagueness do not exclude intensity; and there is no sharper point than that of Infinity.

What delight to drown one's regard in the immensity of the sky and sea! Solitude, silence, incomparable chastity of the blue! a little sail shivering on the horizon, and who by its littleness and loneliness imitates my irremediable existence, monotonous melody of the sea's swell, all these things think through me, or I think through them (for in the grandeur of reverie the ego is quickly lost!); they think, I say, but musically and picturesquely, without quibblings, without syllogisms, without deductions.

However, these thoughts, that come from me or rush out from other things, soon become too intense. Energy in voluptuousness creates an uneasiness and a positive suffering. My nerves are strung to such a pitch that they no longer give anything but piercing and painful vibrations.

And now the depth of the sky dismays me; its clarity exasperates me. The insensibility of the sea, the immutability of the spectacle revolt me...Ah! Must one eternally suffer, or eternally flee beauty? Nature, pitiless enchanteresse, ever victorious rival, let me be! Stop tempting my desires and my pride! The study of beauty is a duel in which the artist shrieks in terror before being vanquished.

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'infinie.

Grand délice que celui de noyer son regard dans l'immensité du ciel et de la mer ! Solitude, silence, incomparable chasteté de l'azur ! une petite voile frissonnante à l'horizon, et qui par sa petitesse et son isolement imite mon irrémédiable existence, mélodie monotone de la houle, toutes ces choses pensent par moi, ou je pense par elles (car dans la grandeur de la rêverie, le *moi* se perd vite !); elles pensent, dis-je, mais musicalement et pittoresquement, sans arguties, sans syllogismes, sans déductions.

Toutefois, ces pensées, qu'elles sortent de moi ou s'élancent des choses, deviennent bientôt trop intenses. L'énergie dans la volupté crée un malaise et une souffrance positive. Mes nerfs trop tendus ne donnent plus que des vibrations criardes et douloureuses.

Et maintenant la profondeur du ciel me consterne; sa limpidité m'exaspère. L'insensibilité de la mer, l'immutabilité du spectacle me révoltent...Ah ! faut-il éternellement

souffrir, ou fuir éternellement le beau ? Nature, enchanteresse sans pitié, rivale toujours victorieuse, laisse-moi ! Cesse de tenter mes désirs et mon orgueil ! L'étude du beau est un duel où l'artiste crie de frayeur avant d'être vaincu.¹²¹

The act of looking becomes one in which the artist's eyes "drown" in the spectacle of nature. The overall effect is one of submission and intoxication on the part of the artist who immerses himself in the visual experience. Baudelaire described this sensation of what he often referred to as *volupté* and visual immersion before an actual painting in the *Salon* of 1859. In regard to Delacroix's *Ovid in exile among the Scythians* (1859), a painting in which landscape is notably as important as the figures, he wrote of its effects upon the beholder, of how "the mind sinks into it with a slow appreciative rapture, as it would sink into the heavens, or into the sea's horizon."¹²² Viewing a painting and beholding a landscape are intertwined in their evocation of *volupté*.

Baudelaire viewed the world of vegetable matter in connection with sin, vice, and evil. The messy sludge of nature is replaced in this poem with the purity of sea and sky and its evocation of the eternal and the infinite. It begins as a kind of celestial vision with the "chastity" of the blue as its defining characteristic. Notions of the infinite are tied in with Baudelaire's Romanticism. Baudelaire the Romantic, who sought the sublime in landscape painting, defined Romanticism in part as "aspiration towards the infinite" in the *Salon* of 1846.¹²³ This aspiration towards the infinite was to become the central theme of his essay on hashish composed in 1851, with its opening chapter entitled "A Taste for the Infinite" (Le

¹²¹ OC, 149.

¹²² "L'esprit s'y enfonce avec une lente et gourmande volupté, comme dans le ciel, dans l'horizon de la mer." OC, 403. Translation by Jonathon Mayne. *Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and other exhibitions reviewed by Charles Baudelaire*. (London: Phaidon; Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1965).

¹²³ "Qui dit romantisme dit art moderne, - c'est-à-dire intimité, spiritualité, couleur, aspiration vers l'infini, exprimées par tous les moyens que contiennent les arts." OC, 230.

Gout de l'Infini) – which, for Baudelaire, is the basis for the majority of man's excesses as well as the source for artistic creation. The artist of "Le Confiteor" is driven by this same longing. Chastity, purity, and clarity are found in that bodiless and amorphous world of water, light, and air, which, as the poem progresses, comes to disgust the artist because they remind him of his own material being and his connection to original sin. He cannot tolerate what he views as the purity of the sea and sky which remind him of his "irremediable" existence, that incurable, sin stained catholic guilt of which he wrote of in the poem "L'Irréparable."

Baudelaire's notion of correspondences, in which nature is viewed as a system of signs and colors, where sounds and scents mix, is described in "Le Confiteor" as the dissolution of self: "all these things think through me or I through them (for in the grandeur of reverie the ego is quickly lost!) They think musically and picturesquely." Here he connects, by way of a landscape, poetry, painting, and music. By referring to music and the picturesque, the experience of viewing an actual landscape is connected to the act of looking at a painting or listening to music. This experience as it relates to painting was accorded to many of Delacroix's works, as with the previously mentioned example of *Ovid in exile among the Scythians*. In *Les Paradis Artificiels*, Baudelaire described in similar terms how music enters physically into the listener, and in turn the listener loses a sense of self: "It enters bodily into you, and you become dissolved in it."¹²⁴ In "Le Confiteor" it is nature, specifically water and sky, that overpowers and enters into the poet/painter. This is the "lazy artist" par excellence, whom Baudelaire described in the *Salon* of 1859 as the modern landscape painter. This same individual is found in *Les*

¹²⁴ "elle s'incorpore à vous, et vous vous fondez en elle." OC, 580.

Paradis Artificiels who, as a lover of music, submits to being moved by a shapeless, timeless force.¹²⁵

The act of viewing the sea and sky catapults the poet/painter into a state of reverie, heightening his senses to such an extreme that he can no longer withstand looking at it. The sensual pleasure of looking at a beautiful landscape causes actual pain and suffering for the narrator. *Volupté* or sensual pleasure, even rapture, is a critical element in Baudelaire's conception of pleasure, guilt, and sin. The narrator indulges himself in an unrestrained pleasure of the senses – visual, auditory, and physical, suffering because he is not only constrained by his lack of Imagination before the open landscape but by his lack of purity. As a landscape painter, he is unable to capture or translate what is before him because he has allowed himself to be enchanted, thus immobilized, by the spectacle. He begins to be overwhelmed physically by the experience – “my nerves are strung to such a pitch that they no can longer give out anything but shrill and painful vibrations.” Nature dominates and overpowers the artist's senses.

In the final paragraph, nature transforms from the pure, chaste virgin into the temptress – “she” becomes the “pitiless enchantress, ever victorious rival” – with whom he pleads to stop *tempting* him. (Italics mine) As the poem draws to a close, nature and beauty are regarded as interchangeable; the word beauty is in fact substituted for nature. Here is proof of the artist having found beauty in nature. The last sentence is a submission of defeat and acknowledgement of the superiority of nature: “The study of beauty is a duel in which the

¹²⁵ “La musique, autre langue chère aux parasseux ou aux esprits profonds qui cherchent la délasserment dans la variété du travail, vous parle de vous-même et vous raconte le poème de votre vie.” OC, 580.

artist shrieks with terror before being overcome.”¹²⁶ Nature defeats both art and the artist. The ecstasy procured by finding beauty in nature is the same as that described in *Les Paradis Artificiels*, in which the artist allows himself to be dissolved by something *outside* of himself, distinguished by a longing for the infinite. The confession or admission of sin by the artist is not only a result of his submission to nature’s beauty, but also because he has *enjoyed* it as a sensual experience, as a “delicious sensation.”

In the *Salon* of 1859, Baudelaire declared that “imagination avoids landscape.”¹²⁷ “Le Confitteor” is an example of this failure of imagination; the artist’s encounter with the natural landscape renders his imagination powerless. The mind sinks into a state of reverie akin to intoxication. Sartre remarked on Baudelaire’s revulsion of abandoning himself to anything that was not an artificial construct.¹²⁸ Yet Baudelaire stated in the *Salon* of 1859 that landscape painters (essentially *plein air* painters), absorbed in note taking, were unable to abandon themselves to the “prodigious reveries contained in nature’s spectacles.”¹²⁹ In this poem, the potency of nature is contrasted with the inability of human imagination to transcend the landscape. Looking at the beauty of nature in its raw state becomes a luxurious experience that renders the artist impotent, and speaks of Baudelaire’s conflict with the natural world. Baudelaire evokes something akin to the ecstasy of St. Theresa; the artist’s experience of shrill and painful vibrations (the experience is described with words such as *douleur*, *malaise*,

¹²⁶ Translation by Louise Varèse, *Paris Spleen* (New York, N.Y. : New Directions, 1970) 3. I have chosen to use Louise Varèse’s translation for this last line as it surpasses any translation I could make of this sentence, and I believe it is the best translation by far that captures what Baudelaire aimed to express. This last sentence has always appeared, for me, as a fragment that Baudelaire borrowed from his other writings and attached to the end of the piece with which to anchor it and give a sense of *fini*. With its declarative tone and use of the third person, it could easily have been pulled from one of his critical works such as Chapter Seven (De l’Idéal et du Modèle) from the *Salon of 1846*.

¹²⁷ “Oui, l’imagination fuit le paysage.” OC, 417.

¹²⁸ “Baudelaire déteste l’abandon. De l’aube au soir, il ne connaît pas une seconde de laisser-aller.” Sartre, 127.

¹²⁹ “aux prodigieuses rêveries contenus dans les spectacles de la nature présente.” OC, 417, *Salon of 1859*. For Baudelaire, the work of the imagination, for the *paysagiste*, occurs within the studio, not outdoors.

souffrance) in which both pain and pleasure, achieved through a visual and auditory experience and imported into the body, overwhelm the artist. This same spiritual quest for transcendence that results in defeat is an echo of his poem “The Laments of an Icarus” from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, in which the poet likens himself to the mythical character of Icarus, whose rejection of earthly pleasures and search for an end of the infinite leads to his downfall. His preference to clutch at clouds rather than the body of woman speaks of his desire to live in the world of imagination (clouds) while rejecting nature (body of a woman).¹³⁰

The sea is a recurrent element in Baudelaire’s writings. His reference to the ocean in *Mon Coeur Mis à Nu* from 1862 resembles “Le Confiteor” when he wrote of the effect of viewing the sea: “Why is the spectacle of the sea so infinitely and eternally attractive? Because the sea simultaneously offers the idea of immensity and of movement.”¹³¹ The notion of the sea or a body of water as temptress and intoxicant corresponds to his section of “L’Homme Dieu” in *Les Paradis Artificiels*, which may be interpreted as an allegory of the creation of art. He cautioned the reader of the dangers of viewing or being near water in a state of actual intoxication or for anyone with an artistic mind. The artist/hashish taker must exercise vigilance when near a body of water in his dreamlike, hypnotic state, or risk being overwhelmed by the sea element or spirit known as the Undine. Nature is conceived of as a female force capable of conquering a vulnerable, content, perhaps even “less fertile” mind.¹³² Replacing the state of intoxication with that of artistic meditation, it may be read as a warning of being seduced by nature’s beauty in its raw, unembellished state. It also corresponds to the

¹³⁰ “Les amants des prostituées/ Sont heureux, dispos et repus/ Quant à moi, mes bras sont rompus/ Pour avoir étreint des nuées”

¹³¹ “Pourquoi le spectacle de la mer est-il si infiniment et si éternellement agréable? Parce que la mer offre à la fois l’idée de l’immensité et du mouvement.” OC, 636.

¹³² Baudelaire referred to the use of stimulants as particularly attractive to “less fertile minds.” This lack of a fertile imagination he also ascribed to the landscape painter in 1859.

blind love of nature that he accused landscape painters of in the *Salon* of 1859. The emphasis on the voluptuous (*volupté*) and sensual pleasure of viewing a body of water corresponds to that described in “Le Confiteor.” The mental intoxication of the artist and the drug taker are interchangeable and subjected to the enchanting power of the female water spirit.

From *On Wine and Hashish*, 1851:

I have suggested that, for those who are artistically inclined, water takes on a disturbing charm when illuminated by hashish. Waterfalls, babbling jets of water, harmonious cascades, and the blue expanses of sea will sing, flow, and sleep in the innermost depths of your mind. It would be, perhaps, less than wise to permit a man in such a condition to linger on the banks of some still pool; like the fisherman in the ballad, he might allow himself to be carried off by the Undine.¹³³

Baudelaire later revised this same idea in the final chapter of *Les Paradis Artificiels* published first in 1858 in the *Revue contemporaine*:

To this essentially hedonistic and sensuous phase belongs, too, the love of clear waters, running or still, that grows so astonishingly amidst the mental intoxication to which some artists are subject(...) Fleeting eddies, the frolics of water, harmonious cascades, the sea’s blue immensity, all these surge by you, singing and sleeping, with an inexpressible charm. The water gleams like a very enchantress - so that, although I do not greatly believe in the furious fancies of hashish, I should not assert that the contemplation of a limpid gulf was without danger for a soul in love with crystalline space; or that the ancient fable of Undine might not become for the devotee a tragic reality.¹³⁴

¹³³ “J’ai remarqué que l’eau prenait un charme effrayant pour tous les esprits un peu artistes illuminés par le haschisch. Les eaux courantes, les jets d’eau, les cascades harmonieuses, l’immensité bleue de la mer, roulent, dormant, chantent au fond de votre esprit. Il ne serait peut-être pas bon de laisser un homme en cet état au bord d’une l’eau limpide; comme le pêcheur de la ballade, il se laisserait peut-être entraîner par l’Ondine.” OC, 310.

¹³⁴ “C’est aussi à cette phase essentiellement voluptueuse et sensuelle qu’il faut rapporter l’amour des eaux limpides, courantes ou stagnantes, qui se développe si étonnamment dans l’ivresse cérébrale de quelques artistes. Les miroirs deviennent un prétexte à cette rêverie qui ressemble à une soif spirituelle, conjointe à la soif physique qui dessèche le gosier, et dont j’ai parlé précédemment; les eaux fuyantes, les *jeux* d’eau, les cascades harmonieuses, l’immensité bleue de la mer, roulent, chantent, dorment avec un charme inexprimable. L’eau s’étale comme une véritable enchanteresse, et, bien que je ne croie pas beaucoup aux folies furieuses causes par le haschisch, je n’affirmerais pas que la contemplation d’un gouffre limpide fût tout à fait sans danger pour un esprit amoureux de l’espace et du cristal, et que la vieille fable de l’Ondine ne pût devenir pour l’enthousiaste une tragique

Baudelaire and Eugène Boudin

Baudelaire employed this language of intoxication in reference to Eugène Boudin's pastel studies of the sea and sky in 1859, comparing them to a "heady drink or the eloquence of opium."¹³⁵ The *Salon* of 1859 includes a full paragraph devoted to Boudin's improvised pastels that captured "the extraordinary magic of air and water."¹³⁶ The apparent similarities between Boudin's pastels and Baudelaire's prose poem may have been a result of their brief meeting in Honfleur; however, much of it remains speculation. Most scholarship notes that "Le Confiteur de l'artiste", along with "L'Étranger" and "La Soupe and Les Nuages" from *Les Petits Poemes en prose* resemble the pastel sea and skylines by Boudin that Baudelaire had the opportunity to view in the painter's studio while in Honfleur.¹³⁷

In 1859 Boudin had rented a house near to Mme Aupick's which also had a similar view onto the Seine estuary. Boudin, a native of Honfleur, had been preoccupied throughout his paintings with transcribing the sea and in capturing the fleeting effects of light and the shifting shape and movement of clouds. He was influenced by seventeenth century Dutch landscapes in which the sky was the most significant element of the composition with its

réalité." OC, 580. Translation by Peter Quenell. *The Essence of Laughter and Other Essays, Journals, and Letters*. Edited and introduced by Peter Quenell. (New York, N.Y. : Meridian Books, 1956) 96.

¹³⁵ "une boisson capiteuse ou comme l'éloquence de l'opium." OC, 417.

¹³⁶ "les prodigieuses magies de l'air et de l'eau." Ibid, 417

¹³⁷ See G. Jean-Aubry, *Baudelaire et Honfleur*. Paris, Maison du Livre. 1917; Jean-Aubry, *Eugène Boudin*. Translated from the French by Caroline Tisdall. Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1968; Richard Burton, *Baudelaire in 1859. A Study in the Sources of Poetic Creativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

allusion to the sublime. The implication of the sublime or an “aspiration towards the infinite” may have been the feature that attracted Baudelaire foremost to Boudin’s pastel sketches.

These small “atmospheric” studies that Baudelaire viewed consist of cloudy blue and white skies, of moonlit skies and stormy seas over the estuary, of the moon rising and peeking through thick horizontal black bands. The lack of detail and the extraction of an overall impression coincide with Baudelaire’s aesthetic that the “the sublime ought to avoid details.”¹³⁸ The studies are devoid of any human presence except for the occasional boat drifting in the estuary. Their subject is transience and flux, in which the artist tried to capture unstable phenomena such as clouds, sunsets, and moonrises. They are in essence subjectless paintings, abstract collections of lines and shapes that capture the fleeting and ephemeral quality of the sky, and appear to go against all of the artistic tenets Baudelaire required for a successful landscape – that of subject, human presence, and *fini*.

The “eternal and the fugitive” element of these small pastels must have reflected for Baudelaire his dual definition of Beauty, as he was collecting information and thinking about his work for *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* which he would compose at the end of 1859. There is no evidence that the relationship between the two artists continued beyond these few meetings in Honfleur; how many ideas and intimate thoughts were exchanged is purely speculative. Neither poet nor painter mentions each other in any subsequent writing. However, in a journal entry from May 1859, Boudin described the struggle he had with capturing the formless and remotest aspects of nature, and how he was “tortured” by its beauty, strangely prefiguring the theme of “Le Confiteor de l’artiste.”

¹³⁸ OC, 245.

Nature is so beautiful that when I am not tortured by poverty I am tortured by her splendor. How fortunate we are to be able to see and admire the glories of the sky and earth; if only I could be content just to admire them! But there is always the torment of struggling to reproduce them, the impossibility of creating anything within the narrow limits of painting.¹³⁹

Boudin appears to be struggling with not only imagination and desire in this passage but also with the constraints of the artist's material, in this case, oil paint. For the studies, however, Boudin employed pastel which by its nature is a very delicate substance, mirroring the ephemeral and fugitive quality of the clouds, the effects of light, and changing colors. G. Jean-Aubry noted in his biography on Boudin that upon his viewing of the sketches in the Musée d'Honfleur, he was struck by how much they had dissipated over the years as a result of pastel.¹⁴⁰ The chalkiness of the pastel also conveyed and captured what Baudelaire might have referred to as the palpitations of the atmosphere. These atmospheric vibrations were what Baudelaire described in "Le Confiteor" as penetrating the artist and are the same "throbbings of nature" that Delacroix conveyed through color.¹⁴¹

Boudin, in Baudelairean terms of translating nature, had succeeded in capturing its effects and essence without losing his self or personal vision; he had in effect conquered nature by imposing what Baudelaire referred to as the artist's "interior eye" onto the landscape. He imbued the image with his own emotion, with a moody atmospheric, and with his soul. They recall Delacroix's use of wide bands and strips of color to delineate the immensity of the sky and a limitless, unstructured space. A sense of foreboding and mystery distinguish some of the darker pastels as well as a latent Romanticism associated with sunsets and the rising of the moon. In others, visions of clouds appear as celestial evocations and

¹³⁹ Quoted in G. Jean-Aubry, *Eugène Boudin*, Translated by Caroline Tisdall (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1968) 24.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 152.

¹⁴¹ "les coloristes, qui veulent imiter les palpitations éternelles de la nature." OC, 235.

indicators of dreams. Even as Baudelaire made it a point in the *Salon* of 1859 to remark that Boudin understood above all that these were sketches to be employed for later use in the studio, where all the work of the imagination occurs, Baudelaire did devote a significant amount of space to them in contrast to the dearth of descriptions given to finished paintings. His passage evokes an architecture of clouds which Baudelaire imagined as a series of heavenly projections and infernal cavities:

In the end, all these clouds, with their fantastic and luminous forms; these ferments of gloom; these immensities of green and pink, suspended and added upon one another; these gaping furnaces; these firmaments of black or purple satin, crumpled, rolled or torn; these horizons in mourning, or streaming with molten metal – in short all these depths and all these splendors rose to my brain like a heady drink or like the eloquence of opium. It is rather as odd thing, but never once, while examining these liquid or aerial enchantments, did I think to complain of the absence of man.¹⁴²

Baudelaire was not troubled by the absence of man in Boudin's pastels because Boudin's presence, his own nature and subjectivity, were evident throughout the pastels. Human presence is implied by the act of translating nature by the artist. For Baudelaire, if a landscape is to be beautiful, in this case a skyscape, "it is not so of itself, but through me, through my own grace and favor, through the idea or the feeling which I attach to it."¹⁴³ Boudin had translated nature through the process of selection and imagination. His pastel studies of clouds conceive of nature as a place of pure dreaming.

¹⁴² "A la fin tous ces nuages aux formes fantastiques et lumineuses, ces ténèbres chaotiques, ces immensités vertes et roses, suspendues et ajoutées les unes aux autres, ces fournaises béantes, ces firmaments de satin noir ou violet, fripé, roulé ou déchiré, ces horizons en deuil ou ruisselants de métal fondu, toutes ces profondeurs, toutes ces splendeurs, me montèrent au cerveau comme une boisson capiteuse ou comme l'éloquence de l'opium." OC, 416. Translation by Jonathon Mayne. *Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and other exhibitions reviewed by Charles Baudelaire..* (London: Phaidon; Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1965) 200.

¹⁴³ "Si tel assemblage d'arbres, de montagnes, d'eaux et de maisons, que nous appelons un paysage, est beau, ce n'est pas par lui-même, mais par moi, par ma grâce propre, par l'idée ou le sentiment que j'y attaché." While Baudelaire was referring specifically to the art of criticism, it can be applied to artistic creation. OC, 414, *Salon de 1859*.

This artistic dissolution of nature, the attempt to capture such amorphous and ephemeral things as sunsets, clouds, and atmosphere had appealed to Baudelaire in his writing on Delacroix's background landscape paintings at the library of the Palais de Luxembourg in 1846. He paid particular attention to Delacroix's clouds painted on the ceiling of the Luxembourg library, referring to him as "Delacroix - the landscape painter!" The romantic landscape that "completes" the subject of *Romeo and Juliet* was "enveloped in the purplish mists of dawn."¹⁴⁴ Delacroix's skies and clouds, are "spun and drawn out in different directions, like a piece of gauze."¹⁴⁵ Again, Baudelaire reminds the reader of the relationship in his mind between the fabric associated with women's clothing and clouds.

If earth and vegetation at times created an aversion in Baudelaire, and reminded him of his earthly, dis-eased material existence, the world of sky and clouds, both significant elements of nature, were critical in their relationship to notions of reverie and escape. Their immaterial aspect appealed to Baudelaire, as the "muslins, gauzes, and clouds of stuff" that surrounded a woman. For Boudin, the subject of clouds offered inexhaustible variety, prefiguring the horizontal parade of individuals that Baudelaire would write about in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* which Constantin Guys would capture in his sketches on the Parisian streets.

Imagination and the Landscape of Fantasy

While "Le Confiteur de l'artiste" is about the act of looking at a landscape, "Paysage," the opening poem of the "Parisian Tableaux" section in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, is about the creation

¹⁴⁴ "Les vapeurs violacées du crépuscule enveloppent cette scène et le paysage romantique qui le complète." OC, 238.

¹⁴⁵ "Quant au ciel, il est bleu et blanc, chose étonnant chez Delacroix ; les nuages, délayés et tirés en sens divers comme une gaze qui se déchire, sont d'une grande légèreté ; et cette voûte d'azur, profonde et lumineuse, fuit à une prodigieuse hauteur." OC, 237.

of a landscape. It connects directly to Baudelaire's art criticism, specifically to the *Salon* of 1846 and the *Salon* of 1859, and to his concept of poetic imagination. The idea of the idyll and of the voyage, recurring motifs in Baudelaire's poetry, is central to the poem. The reader is given a view onto the city of Paris through the window of a mansard apartment where the poet sits dreaming at his desk. While seemingly a poem of the city, due to its inclusion in the "Tableaux Parisiens" section and its apparent connection to the townscape etchings of Charles Méryon (1821-1868), "Paysage" is a poem of imagination, recalling the landscape of fantasy which Baudelaire extolled in the 1846 Salon. The imagined landscape in "Paysage" may also be read as a longing in Baudelaire to return to the idyll of his childhood that related to that brief period after his father's death when he lived alone with his mother in Neuilly. Additionally and closer in time, it may have been connected to his mother's garden in Honfleur which he imagined in specifically artificial terms, comparing it to a theatrical stage set as he did in his 1858 letter to Poulet-Malassis.

The date of its exact composition is unknown; however Felix Leakey dated it to the late 1840's. Significantly, Baudelaire altered the poem in 1861 from the 1857 version.¹⁴⁶ The 1861 revision and its inclusion in the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* may have been a result of the nearness in time to his stay in Honfleur and his altered relationship to nature – he had considered Honfleur as kind of refuge, specifically a refuge from Paris – the same kind of idyllic setting that the poet of "Paysage" is seeking. Distinct from the theme of disillusionment with the pastoral as in the poem "Voyage to Cythera," "Paysage" distinctly remains a positive landscape, an attempt to perhaps recapture childhood memories. Baudelaire's predilection for the "sad

¹⁴⁶ Leakey, 164; see also Arden Reed, *Romantic Weather: The climates of Coleridge and Baudelaire*. (Hanover: Published for Brown University Press by University Press of New England, 1983) 236.

season” of winter is also recalled. Like Eugène Lavielle’s winterscape from the Paris *Salon* of 1859, winter and snow are envisioned as conducive to the creation of poetry and to dreaming, and turn the poet from a wordsmith into a landscape painter.

I want, to compose my eclogues chastely,
to sleep close to the sky, like the astrologers
And, next to the bell towers, listening and dreaming
to their solemn hymns carried by the wind.
Chin resting on both hands, high up in my mansard,
I will see the workshops that sing and chatter;
The pipes, the bell towers, these masts of the city,
And the vast skies that make us dream of eternity.

It is sweet, through the mists, to watch the birth
Of the star in the azur sky, the lamp at the window,
The rivers of coal-smoke rising up toward the firmament,
And the moon pouring out her pale charms.
I will watch springtimes, summers, autumns,
And when winter arrives with its monotonous snows,
I will close the curtains and shutters everywhere
to build in the dark my faerie palaces.
Then I will dream of bluish horizons,
of gardens, of jets of water weeping into alabaster,
of kisses, of birds singing morning and night,
and of everything childlike in the Idyll.
Riot, storming vainly at my glass,
Does not make me raise my head from my desk;
For I will be plunged in this volupté
Of evoking Spring with my will,
Of tearing a sun from my heart, and making
Of my burning thoughts a warm atmosphere.

Je veux, pour composer chastement mes églogues,
Coucher auprès du ciel, comme les astrologues,
Et, voisin des clochers, écouter en rêvant
Leurs hymnes solennels emportés par le vent.
Les deux mains au menton, du haut du ma mansarde,
Je verrai l’atelier qui chante et qui bavarde ;
Les tuyaux, les clochers, ces mâts de la cité,
Et les grands ciels qui font rêver d’éternité.

Il est doux, à travers les brumes, de voir naître

L'étoile dans l'azur, la lampe à la fenêtre,
 Les fleuves de charbon monter au firmament
 Et la lune verser son pâle enchantement.
 Je verrai les printemps, les étés, les automnes ;
 Et quand viendra l'hiver aux neiges monotones,
 Je fermerai partout portières et volets
 Pour bâtir dans la nuit mes féeriques palais.
 Alors je rêverai des horizons bleuâtres,
 Des jardins, des jets d'eau pleurant dans les albâtres,
 Des baisers, des oiseaux chantent soir et matin,
 Et tout ce que l'Idylle a de plus enfantin.
 L'Émeute, tempêtant vainement à ma vitre,
 Ne fera pas lever mon front de mon pupitre ;
 Car je serai plongé dans cette volupté
 D'évoquer le Printemps avec mon volonté,
 De tirer un soleil de mon cœur, et de faire
 De mes pensers brûlants une tiède atmosphère.¹⁴⁷

The poet's view of the external world moves to an internal vision produced by his imagination. Rather than illustrating the battle between art and nature, it is a poem about the sovereignty of imagination, where "the most curious events and revolutions take place beneath the firmament of the skull, in the close and mysterious laboratory of the brain."¹⁴⁸ This firmament of the skull becomes the firmament of the heavens in "Paysage" beneath which the poet invents his ideal landscape. Nature is recalled through memory and then subordinated to imagination in order to create an atmospheric landscape in which the artist seeks refuge. It is related to anti-naturalism in Baudelaire, where, in order for a landscape to be found interesting it must be unnaturally exaggerated, or populated with ruins and statues as from an eighteenth century landscape.

The first part of the poem is comprised of a vision of the sky and the townscape of Paris. The second half ends with an imaginary spring time *paysage* that has the quality of a Rubens,

¹⁴⁷ OC, 95.

¹⁴⁸ "les révolutions et les événements les plus curieux se passent sous le ciel du crâne, dans la laboratoire étroit et mystérieux du cerveau." OC, 233, *Salon of 1846*.

Watteau, or Fragonard. The poet abandons the Parisian townscape, converting it into the artificial pastoral that he espoused in the 1846 Salon. It is ultimately an anti-urban poem, where the artist shuts out the sights and sounds of the city for a vision of spring, specifically in relation to those “landscapes of fantasy.” This is the same idyllic vision that a woman experiences, also in the confines of a single room, under the effects of hashish in *Les Paradis Artificiels*. Glimpses of nature viewed through the city dweller’s perspective – the sky, the moon, the change of seasons, stars in the heaven - illustrate the town inhabitant’s conception of nature. What he sees through his window of the townscape acts as a kind of reverse “Correspondances” comprised of man-made elements that trigger within the poet visions of the natural world. He creates his own personal version of nature based on eighteenth century paintings, the most artificial and supernatural of landscapes.

The poem opens with an image of the poet high up in his garret, looking out of his window as daylight fades and night arrives, a crepuscular hour in which he dreams of writing an eclogue, a pastoral or idyllic poem, “close to the vast skies that bring thoughts of eternity.”¹⁴⁹ The sky plays a prominent role as a source for imagination and its evocation of the infinite. He describes, in the future verb tense, his ideal conditions for writing a pastoral. As he looks through the single window of the mansard, winds and mist pass before him as day fades to night. These mists and fogs, like clouds, trigger the poet to dream, and cover the townscape in a hazy atmosphere. He watches the city and the change of three seasons until the arrival of winter, which sets in motion his creative dreaming. This first section of the poem presents a series of contrasts between the city and nature: black coal smoke rising heavenward opposes the pale moon sending its light downward; the star in the sky lights up in contrast to the lamp lighting up

¹⁴⁹ “les grands ciels qui font rêver d’éternité.” OC, 95.

in a distant window. The opening lines introduce the townscape of Paris from an elevated position, so that the poet is closest to the sky. From this elevated position, he watches the atmospheric changes brought on by the passing of seasons, until finally winter, with its monotonous snows, activates within him the necessary isolation to create the imaginary landscape or artificial pastoral. In the second half, an imaginary landscape is constructed before the reader's eyes, moving from imaginative mists that cover Paris to a landscape of fantasy. Gautier described the poetic process and the presence of mists, as seen through a single window, in his biography of Baudelaire: "In his verses he was frequently led from the mist and mud of Paris to the countries of light, azure and perfume. Between the lines of the most somber of his poems, a window is opened through which can be seen, instead of black chimneys and smoky roofs, the blue Indian seas..."¹⁵⁰

Distinct from "Le Confiteor", in which both Art and Imagination are defeated by Nature, Imagination conjures up a childlike idyll composed of a palace, gardens, blue horizons, alabaster fountains, for an escape from the city, recalling Rubens' "gardens of oblivion" in the poem "Beacons." The chiming of bells are replaced with the singing of birds morning and night. This is the Romantic landscape that he longed for, and by its description it evokes a kind of Rococo garden scene. Imagination conjures a landscape as an escape from the city, an "anywhere out of the world."¹⁵¹ Through the mists the city transforms into an ocean, likening the steeples and towers to masts of ships.¹⁵² Like the "atmospheric studies" of Boudin, atmosphere in this poem becomes a primary significance, ending with the poet/painter having created a "warm atmosphere" through his will. Imagination and nature

¹⁵⁰ Gautier, 16.

¹⁵¹ See "Any Where Out of the World" (N'importe où hors du monde) from *Les Petits Poèmes en Prose*.

¹⁵² For a brilliant interpretation of the city turned into a seascape, see Arden Reed, *Romantic Weather: The Climates of Coleridge and Baudelaire* (Hanover: Published for Brown University Press by University Press of New England, 1983) 231-252.

are not seen in antithetical terms. As in the *Salon* of 1846, the reader is introduced to the “fabulous gardens, immense horizons, naturally limpid streams, mists that float like dreams...”¹⁵³

“Paysage” is what Baudelaire might have referred to as a poem of the Northern hemisphere, where Romanticism was born. In chapter two on Romanticism and color in the *Salon* of 1846, he wrote that “dreams and fairytales are born in the mist” and that the northern half of France is “plunged in a fog.”¹⁵⁴ The poem “Paysage” describes this - the poet, in his “studio” gazes through his window onto the mists and fogs of Paris, and is spurred into reverie – and what he creates is significantly a nonurban landscape. Atmosphere in painting was highly touted by Baudelaire throughout his writing; he commented most often on the atmospheric renderings in not only landscape painting but in portraiture. In the *Salon* of 1846 on the subject of portraiture he wrote that “the artist has to be able to immerse a head in the soft haze of a warm atmosphere.”¹⁵⁵ Imaginative mists and fogs are like a shroud for him, creating a warm atmosphere that surrounds an object or a place, both transforming and mystifying it. In “Paysage,” Paris sinks into a mist and disappears beneath it.

Not only is “Paysage” a poem of the North in its description of a characteristically Northern city, but the location of the poet is vertically northern, in a heightened position to the city below him. It describes the restlessness not only of the poet but of the townscape surrounding him, of the “workshops that sing and chatter.” In the 1846 Salon Baudelaire distinguished works of art created in the south “where nature is so beautiful and bright” while

¹⁵³ OC, 254.

¹⁵⁴ OC, 230.

¹⁵⁵ “Il faut savoir baigner une tête dans les molles vapeurs d’une chaude atmosphère.” OC, 248.

“the North, suffering and restless, seeks comfort in Imagination.”¹⁵⁶ The south is the art of the open air in which the artist, confronted with a bright and beautiful nature, does not need to invent. The North, by contrast of its deficiencies, has fostered imagination. For Baudelaire, the best invention, the most poetic of imaginings takes place indoors, as it does for the poet of “Paysage.” The garret apartment therefore becomes a substitute for the artist’s studio, corresponding to “the profound dreams of the studio and of imagination’s gaze drowned in grey horizons” that he wrote about in 1846.¹⁵⁷ The poet becomes a landscape painter. The connection between painting and poetry was made in the *Salon* of 1859, when Baudelaire referred to Victor Hugo as “the king of landscape painters” in French poetry.¹⁵⁸

Volupté is central to the experience of the artistic dream and imagination. While the artist’s experience of *volupté* in “Le Confiteor” arose out of a visual and bodily experience, the *volupté* in “Paysage” occurs as a result of imagination, thought, and will. In contrast to the artist of “Le Confiteor” who passively drowns his regard into the *volupté* of the natural spectacle, the poet/painter here is active in the creation of the landscape: he “plunges” himself in this *volupté*, in the sensual pleasure of imagining. He will “evoke springtime” with his will, creating a “warm atmosphere.” It is “the vision produced by intense meditation, or, with minds less fertile, from artificial stimulants.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ “la nature y est si belle et si claire...le Nord souffrant et inquiet se console avec l’imagination.” OC, 230.

¹⁵⁷ “les rêves profonds de l’atelier et les regards de la fantaisie noyés dans les horizons gris.” Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ “la magnifique imagination qui coule dans les dessins de Victor Hugo, comme le mystère dans le ciel. Je parle de ses dessins à l’encre de Chine, car il est trop évident qu’en poésie notre poète est le roi des paysagistes.” OC, 418.

¹⁵⁹ “la vision produite par une intense méditation, ou, dans le cerveaux moins fertiles, par un excitant artificiel.” OC, 404.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

While the tension between Imagination and Nature is central to Baudelaire's writing, and most apparent in his critique on landscape painting that he developed against the Naturalist and Realist landscape, Baudelaire did not maintain a secure and definitive rejection of nature throughout his life. The complex debate about the role of the artist in the transcription of nature occurred throughout the eighteenth century and continued well into the nineteenth through the genre of *paysage*. Baudelaire was part of this debate, and like De Piles and Valenciennes before him, he emphasized the role of imagination in landscape painting. Much of the anti-naturalism that has persisted in Baudelaire scholarship has been a result of the nineteenth century, specifically Gautier's biography on Baudelaire which emphasized his rejection of the natural and his love of the artificial.

While by no means exhaustive, I have endeavored to bring something new to such work and discovered something in the process: that for Baudelaire, elements of nature were viewed sometimes as intoxicating forces as described in *Les Paradis Artificiels*. Nature, as much as poetic imagination, anchors the *Salon* of 1846. It is for the art critic and artist the ultimate criterion from which to work. A total disregard of nature and the model results in what Baudelaire called the "chic" in painting. To reduce Baudelaire's philosophy as strictly against nature is to base one's opinion on a few select fragments or passages that have been passed down throughout years of scholarship and biography.

Both of the poems discussed represent two polarities of Baudelaire's aesthetic of landscape – one in which a failure of Imagination produces an intoxicated state of *volupté* from which the artist wakes and finds himself powerless ("Le Confiteur de l'artiste"), and the other in

which Imagination seeks out a nature of its own construct, the *paysage de fantaisie*, as a refuge from the city (“Paysage”). Each poem is constructed around the idea of *volupté* as it is experienced through landscape painting and nature: the artist seeks out sensual pleasure in both the real and imagined landscape. And each poem has its own form of mental intoxication as a metaphor for the creative process: one in which the artist looks outside of himself for a paradise in nature and fails, the other in which the artist creates a paradise based on nature that is transfigured by imagination. Within this, nature is closely tied to the feminine and the erotic.

I have relied on the works of such scholars as Felix W. Leakey and Richard Burton who presented complex and nuanced pictures of Baudelaire’s idea of nature. Two years after the publication of Leakey’s *Baudelaire and Nature* (1969), Anita Brookner published her brilliantly written and insightful piece on Baudelaire that was included as a chapter in *The Genius of the Future* (1971). Within the essay, she ignored, however inadvertently, much of Leakey’s arguments, and read Baudelaire’s life and work from the “sentiment of the artificial” and the perspective of Freudian interpretation. While I am indebted to many of her ideas, she overlooked the significance of Baudelaire’s father on the poet’s taste and aesthetic, and cast him in the role of a shadowy distant figure. She also had, like Gautier had done in 1862 in his article on Baudelaire, reduced the poet’s work to a “sentiment of the artificial.” I have also been reliant on Jean-Paul Sartre’s idiosyncratic study of the poet. However lacking in scholarly research and heavy on Existential philosophy, he acknowledged Baudelaire’s ambivalent feelings towards nature as both a profound attraction and terror. My revised vision of Baudelaire’s relation to nature relies on reading across his critical and poetic texts and aims to provoke new insights into the poet’s complex attitudes toward nature and the art of landscape painting in France during the middle years of the nineteenth century.

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