Baudelaire and Balzac: Echoes and Affinities[1]

Nicolae BABUTS[*]

1. Preliminary Considerations

The idea of a relation between two writers has been approached from at least three different points of view: One approach is to study them in a historical perspective, in which their philosophies or ideologies are highlighted, another one is designed to show similarity of style and suggest borrowings, and yet another one attempts to prove a theory with psychoanalytical overtones, such as Bloom's anxiety of influence. The present study follows a different path. I examine the relationship between Balzac and Baudelaire from a cognitive perspective, in which the historical dimension enters only as a secondary factor in the sense that chronologically Balzac came before Baudelaire. I argue for a kinship that is neither a matter of borrowing nor the result of an anxiety of influence. Rather, it is the consequence of a much broader reality: the manner in which any text is created and endowed with visionary power. At the near end of the mnemonic process, at the reading surface, we can apprehend the telltale signs, the evidence, in the form of echoes of previous texts that function as tributaries to the newly created text.

In the light of contemporary advances in the studies of memory (especially in the neurosciences) we are now in a better position to see the important role of memory in all creative acts. Although neuroscience research does not necessarily have a direct bearing on literary interpretation, it does illuminate and clarify certain aspects of mnemonic activity and confirm, for example, the distinction between voluntary/ involuntary memory that originated with Bergson and Proust[2]. Installing

---

[*] Syracuse University, USA.

[1] The translations of quotations from Baudelaire and Balzac are mine, with one important exception: James McGowan's translation of the two stanzas of "L'Homme et la mer".

[2] The crucial distinction, between conscious memorization, or voluntary memory, which is systematic and dependent on our will, and involuntary memory, which records events of our life and is spontaneous, has its sources in Bergson's *Matière et mémoire* (Bergson 1946: 86, 94) first published in 1896, and *A la recherché du temps perdu* (Proust 1954 III: 874–876), which Proust began writing in 1913. Although neuroscientists have come up with different distinctions, like explicit/ implicit, and episodic/ semantic memories, some of them retain the distinction voluntary/involuntary. Thus John Mace, while disagreeing with the Proustian version of involuntary memory, maintains that "involuntary memories are more likely to be evoked by abstract cues than they are [by] sensory/

memory at the center of reading and writing is not calculated to deny originality or original insights but to acknowledge that language, images, and ideas do not exist or function as pure or isolated entities, that language is wedded to vision, and that awareness of this union has far-reaching consequences for our understanding of the creative process[3].

Such a union is implicit in Proust's definition of style: "car le style pour l'écrivain, aussi bien que la couleur pour le peintre, est une question non de technique mais de vision" ['for style for a writer, as well as color for a painter, is a question not of technique but of vision'] (Proust 1954 III: 895). It is also suggested by Baudelaire in his emphasis on vision and feeling: "L'artiste, le vrai artiste, le vrai poète, ne doit peindre que selon qu'il voit et qu'il sent" ['The artist, the true artist, the true poet, must paint only in harmony with what he or she sees and feels'] (Baudelaire 1976d: 620).

As a mnemonic phenomenon, echoes play a fundamental role in the creation of texts. *They reveal influence not in the sense of borrowing but in the form of affinities between two writers*. What are echoes? To define them one has to consider what happens after reading. We read a novel or a poem and remember the subject and the outline of the story if there is one, and also many details, but we do not remember the exact words in each sentence. The fragmentation that occurs in memory after reading is equivalent to a cataclysmic breakup of the textual fabric. For the writer who is about to engage in a new enterprise of writing a new text, a new poem or novel, the surviving remnants of this breakup intervene as echoes. During the creative process they are retrieved, often by the involuntary memory, and employed to contribute to the new text. This process still has to be explored, but it appears that it is a two way affair: the remnants of previous reading are cues to invoke a new thought; and a new thought may serve as a cue to retrieve memories of reading. Like two sounds that come from afar, memories and thoughts meet, answer each other, modulate a mnemonic reality and create the new. As I shall argue, echoes are related to fragments of dynamic patterns that persist after reading and are then transformed to serve as constitutive elements in the newly conceived metaphoric field of a poem or a novel.

What are dynamic patterns? Theoretically every sentence (or sometimes a clause) represents a dynamic pattern. What makes a dynamic pattern a unit of meaning is the fact that within its organization as a sentence, it is inflected by an interaction of perceptual forces, by the movement it creates, by the perspective it offers. Because as a sentence, it manifests itself in the semantic, syntactic, acoustic,

---

perceptual or state cues" (Mace 2004: 898). Ultimately it may turn out, I believe, that the various classifications are simply indication of memory's different strategies.

[3] Some recent neuroscience research points to the inextricable links between language and extralinguistic material. Willems, Őzyürek, and Hagoort present ERP [event-related potentials] and fMRI [functional magnetic resonance imaging] evidence and write: "The left inferior frontal cortex plays an important role in integration and selection operations that combine linguistic and extralinguistic visual information into a coherent overall interpretation of an expression" (Willems, Őzyürek, Hagoort 2008: 1247). After testing speech recognition, Claudia Friedrich and Sonja Kotz conclude: "Using ERPs recorded during sentence fragment priming, we show that a form-based set of lexical tokens and a form-and-meaning-based set of lexical tokens are simultaneously made available to higher order processes of speech recognition" (Friedrich, Kotz 2007: 602–603).

dynamic and the metaphoric modes, it provides the optimum conditions for the union of perception and language. In contradistinction to schemas or categories, which are more abstract and prone to generalizations, the language-bound dynamic pattern has within its boundaries a minimum context and a specific identity[4].

Here is an example from Balzac quoted below in the original: "but Etienne and Gabrielle plunged together into the delights of this childlike hour…" (Balzac 1836: 736). Since the dynamics of immersion is at the center of the pattern, one can classify it and place it in the category of patterns of immersion. But the pattern itself is not a category. The plunging here is not any immersion; it does not say simply that time (hour) offers the possibility of immersion; it has a context: it is the plunging of two lovers in the delights of the hour. The difference is significant. Though it may have dynamic attributes, a category or a schema can be an idea, a semantic entity (for example, "the tiger is a wild animal") that can be applied to different contexts. A dynamic pattern, on the other hand, as a unit of meaning, possesses a minimum context, an identity, and a specific location in memory. More often than not, it is accessed by the involuntary memory[5].

In the cognitive view advocated here, the identity of dynamic patterns is non-negotiable. It is identity that enables memory to retrieve them. During the creative process they intervene and interact with emerging patterns in the author's memory, modulate them, and infuse them with new energy. Their contribution to the new metaphoric field that is being born in preparation for a new text emerges from this interaction. They are not simply incorporated into the new text in the manner of a quotation. What they contribute is their language, as well as dynamic, syntactic and semantic configurations, and some of their mnemonic energy, but within the new text they are no longer the same patterns. And that is not only because they come in fragments that have undergone important changes, but also because an overarching and overriding necessity that exacted these changes has them obey the laws of a new metaphoric field. The new field is not simply an idea but a world that begins with the enactment of its own constitution and specifies what is possible and appropriate under its laws. Under these circumstances, it makes very little sense to talk about borrowings or lack of originality. Often, there is no greater originality, no finer tonality, and no deeper vision than those a reader finds in a poem, or a novel, or any work that has been enriched by echoes from other texts. Such echoes are more than verbal traces or quotations from another text; they are also affinities with other

---

[4] I began to formulate a concept of dynamic patterns in 1977, with the study of structure in Baudelaire's images of immersion. The cognitive view I have developed over the years has its roots in literature, especially in the study of Baudelaire but it has benefited a great deal from new discoveries in the field of memory and the neurosciences. Its defining characteristic is the decision to install memory at the center of reading and writing. The value of the concept of dynamic patterns is only enhanced when one considers that Émile Benveniste in 1966 (Benveniste 1966: 130) and Paul Ricoeur in 1975 (Ricoeur 1975: 91) have affirmed unambiguously that the sentence is the unit of discourse. For a wider range of examples of dynamic patterns and for a discussion of their relations to echoes, see Babuts 2009: 1–45. For an example of a Balzac echo in Baudelaire's "Windows," see Babuts 2009: 11–13.

[5] Neuroscientists Hagar Gelbard-Sagiv *et al* speak of "internally generated neuronal correlate for the subjective experience of spontaneous emergence of human recollection" (Gelbard-Sagiv et alii 2008: 96).

writers, and they betray an underappreciated proposition, namely, that there is no greater originality than the originality emerging against the background of a tradition.

As I have said, there occurs a breakup of the textual fabric after reading and many patterns become so fragmented that they lose their identity and are no longer in play as patterns. In many cases their language may become tattered and they become clichés or even lose all effectiveness. I am thus not arguing that there are no such things as images or clichés characteristic of a period. But not all patterns are turned into clichés or fragmented beyond recognition. Those that are remembered preserve their specific context and their language displays a greater cohesion in defense of their identity. Consequently, if after reading, a pattern's lines of force, its language, and its identity are not completely destroyed by fragmentation, there is no reason why it cannot be recalled as an effective player in the creation of a new text.

Many scholars (among them Hollander, Ricks, Perri, Garner, Teskey, Prins, Ben-Porat, and Stein) have studied the occurrence of echoes and allusions and have shown their importance. John Hollander, in particular, stresses the fundamental character of the process when he observes:

> The way in which poets like Spencer, Jonson, Milton, and Marvell deal with prior texts seems a matter almost as important as the nature of poetic rhetoric (indeed, I shall suggest that it may be part of it) (Hollander 1981: 73).

Those who are concerned with language-bound resemblances are now using such terms as "allusion" or "echoes" or "phraseological adaptations" to describe the phenomenon. This new terminology circumscribes new concepts that should not be mistaken for the old ideas about "borrowings" and the implied lack of originality. Referring to claims by some critics[6] that "considerations of verbal echoes" are obsolete or irrelevant, Gregory Machacek writes:

> Despite such scorn from poststructuralist critics, for at least the last twenty years scholars of classical and modern literature have been struggling to develop a conceptual model and a critical vocabulary that will allow them more effectively to discuss the nature and workings of these brief phraseological adaptations (usually referred to as allusions or echoes ... (Machacek 2007: 523).

A study of echoes shows that they lead to a more subtle yet deeper kind of relationship. Why choose Baudelaire and Balzac? Certainly one could choose other authors and other texts, but one has to choose. The case of the two French authors is compelling in part because of the visionary quality of their work. Well-known Baudelairean scholars of the first half and the early part of the second half of the

---

[6] Machacek's reference is to Culler and Bloom. Culler speaks against source studies "of a traditional and positivistic kind" (Culler 1981: 109), but his position is flexible enough to accommodate the existence of echoes. In the 1990 study on intertextuality, he discusses the echo of the second quatrain of Baudelaire's "Correspondances" in a sentence of the poet's article "L'exposition universelle" and accepts its importance. Referring to de Man's comparison between "Obsession" and "Correspondances," he concludes that "Meaning … is not a property of an individual text but exists in the relation between texts, depending on contrasts and on echoes whose displaced repetitions offer material for interpretation" (Culler 1990: 134). Yet, this comparative method, which is certainly needed, could still preserve the identity of an individual text. Culler is skeptical about Bloom's own theory: "Is not Bloom's account of influence and misreading actually a theory of origins …?" (Culler 1981: 109).

twentieth century (Crépet, Blin, Michaud, Adam, Pommier, Prévost, Leakey and others) took for granted that one can discover connections between Baudelairean poems and texts the poet knew. At this stage of our studies, we can begin with two premises: The influences of Gautier, Balzac, Hoffmann, Hugo, Poe, Saint-Amant, and others on Baudelaire can hardly be doubted, and the presence of echoes that traverse the intertextual space to reverberate in the domain of *Les Fleurs du mal* cannot and does not diminish the extraordinary originality of the French poet.

The analysis that follows is also an illustration of the way texts are processed in memory and of the vital role that one's readings play in the creative process. Balzac's texts do not represent for Baudelaire a source or to use the expression of one reader, "the Ur-text." We cannot, and should not, assume that the poet's beginning, his first impulse to create a poem, came from reading Balzac's text, because that is precisely what we do not know. Echoes are a general phenomenon and represent elemental contributions to the creative process that intervene during what a contemporary poet, Amy Gerstler, calls the writer's "intake mode" (Gerstler 2006: 20). Often resemblances may be more or less fragmentary and may not be noticeable; but when the fragments retain enough indications of their previous identity, they can be noticed by readers[7].

2. Echoes and Affinities

Before beginning the analysis, I wish to emphasize that I do not speak about the way memories modulate Baudelaire's work, as they do in "Le Cygne" for example, but about the manner in which *the faculty of memory* processes texts, and acquires and prepares its materials for the act of creating something new. I look specifically, not at Balzac's influence in a global context of ideas, but at an affinity that surfaces at the level of dynamic patterns within the textual fabric.

Let us first look at the beginning of "L'Homme et la mer":

Homme libre, toujours tu chériras la mer!/ La mer est ton miroir; tu contemples ton âme/ Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame,/ Et ton esprit n'est pas un gouffre moins amer.// Tu te plais à plonger au sein de ton image;/ Tu l'embrasses des yeux et des bras, et ton cœur/ Se distrait quelquefois de sa propre rumeur/ Au bruit de cette plainte indomptable et sauvage (Adam 1961: 21–22).

Free man, you'll love the ocean endlessly!/ It is your mirror, you observe your soul/ In how its billows endlessly unroll–/ Your spirit's bitter depths are there to see.//

---

[7] This explains the fact many twentieth-century critics have again and again pointed out the important influence of Balzac. Régis Michaud for example, compares the first quatrain of Baudelaire's "Correspondances" and a passage from *Le Lys dans la vallé* (Michaud 1938: 257). Jean Prévost points out that "la doctrine des *Correspondances* vient de Balzac; qu'Hoffmann et Swedenborg ne feront que compléter Balzac… 'the doctrine of *Correspondances* comes from Balzac; that Hoffmann and Swedenborg will only complete Balzac' (Prévost 1964: 41). Closer to our purpose, Antoine Adam in his 1961 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* compares the beginning of "L'Homme et la mer" and Balzac's novel *L'Enfant maudit* and points out resemblances (Adam 1961: 291). In "Baudelaire et les anges de Swedenborg," I had an occasion to point out that Swedenborg's angels as they appear in Balzac's *Séraphita* might have suggested to Baudelaire to invoke them and say: "O vous! soyez témoins que j'ai fait mon devoir' 'O you! be witnesses that I accomplished my task' ("Projets d'un épilogue", *Oeuvres*, vol 1: 192).

You plunge in joy to your reflection's core,/ With eyes and heart seizing it all along;/ Your heart sometimes neglects its proper song/ Distracted by the ocean's savage roar (McGowan 1993: 33).

Baudelaire's "La mer est ton miroir" echoes Balzac's *L'Efant maudit*:

> ils [the two lovers] en sont au bonheur de contempler leur image dans le miroir d'une eau limpide; l'immensité leur suffit, ils admirent l'océan … [they have reached the happiness of contemplating their image in the mirror of a limpid water; immensity is all they need, they admire the ocean] (Balzac 1950a: 736).

Baudelaire's "tu contemples ton âme/ Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame" echoes the dynamic pattern in *L'Enfant maudit*. "La mer" becomes a metaphoric mirror and the verb "contempler" follows naturally from this metaphor. And because in Balzac what the two lovers contemplate is their own image, Baudelaire can now say that what man contemplates is his own soul. In doing so he is in harmony with an earlier dynamic pattern: At one point, l'enfant maudit (the child cursed by the father) observes: "L'Océan a donc passé dans mon âme!" ['So the Ocean has entered my soul'] (Balzac 1950a: 729); and "J'ai donc l'océan dans l'âme" ['So I have the ocean in my soul'] (Balzac 1836 XVI: 92). Both authors see a strong kinship between the ocean and the soul[8]. The pattern's dynamic relations fall into place along the axis of the verb "contempler": "contempler–l'image–dans la mer/miroir" becomes in the poem "contempler–l'âme–dans la mer/miroir.

Balzac writes about the two lovers: "ils devaient se rencontrer au bord de la mer qui leur offrait une image de l'immensité de leurs sentiments" 'they had to meet by the sea which offered them an image (a reflection) of the immensity of their feelings' (Balzac 1950a: 731). While Baudelaire associated "contempler" with "âme" and not with "image," as Balzac did, he comes back to the word "image" in the next stanza when he writes "Tu te plais à plonger au sein de ton image" 'you find pleasure in plunging to the bosom of your image.' From a cognitive perspective

---

[8] Indeed Jaques Crépet and Georges Blin remind us that the relation between man and the sea was "un thème particulièrement vivant à l'époque romantique" ['an especially popular theme during the Romantic period'] (Crépet, Blin 1942: 319). They cite Byron's images in which the ocean is called (in the French translation): "profond et sombre Océan" 'deep and dark Ocean,' "Glorieux miroir où la face du Tout-Puissant se réfléchit dans la tempête" 'Glorious mirror where the face of the Omnipotent is reflected in the storm' "Dès mon jeune âge, mes plaisirs étaient de me sentir sur ton sein bercé au movement de tes vagues" 'Since my childhood, my pleasures were to feel rocked at your bosom by the movement of your waves' (Childe Harold, ch. IV, cited by Crépet, Blin 1942: 319). As one can see, however, here the ocean reflects the face of God. It does not reflect the soul or the image of man. F. W. Leakey cites several lines from *Eleusis* of Laprade including this one: "L'esprit seul peut plonger plus loin que ta surface" ['The spirit alone can plunge below your surface'] (*Odes et poèmes*, 1843: 265–67; Leakey 1969: 106). There is definitely a resemblance here and it is very likely that Baudelaire read Laprade as well. Nevertheless Balzac's text is the more significant since it contains more than one dynamic pattern that suggests resemblances. The relation between man and the sea is indeed a cliché but within the core relation, each pattern contains more specific dynamic relations that endow it with an identity. Consequently to be significant, the resemblances have to go beyond the simple cliché and comprise these additional verbal and dynamic elements. My claim is not that there are no clichés or "a common heritage of available images" (as a reader suggested) but that there are texts that show a higher degree of kinship.

one recognizes here the dynamic pattern of immersion. It recalls Balzac's description of the two lovers: "mais Etienne et Gabrielle se plongèrent ensemble dans les délices de cette heure enfantine …" 'but Etienne and Gabrielle plunged together into the delights of this childlike hour …' (Balzac 1950a: 736). While both patterns are organized by the verb "plonger" ("plonger dans–les délices de cette heure" and "plonger–au sein de ton image"), they are also different: In *L'Enfant maudit*, one is immersing oneself in the medium of the delights of the moment, while in "L'Homme et la mer" the poet plunges within his image, which now becomes the medium of seduction. And indeed that is a big difference. But notice that while the delights of the hour disappeared, the tonality and energy of the Balzacian pattern reappear in the pleasure suggested by the expression "tu te plais à" 'you take pleasure in.' If memory plays tricks on us, this is one example.

Similar affinities can be detected in the second quatrain of "La Vie antérieure":

Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux,/ Mêlaient d'une façon solennelle et mystique/ Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique/Au couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux ['The waves, rolling the sky's images,/ Blended in a solemn and mystic fashion/ The all-powerful chords of their rich music/ With the colors of the sunset reflected by my eyes'] (Adam 1961: 20).

The following are some passages from *L'Enfant maudit*. Describing the old duke of Hérouville, Balzac writes: "Les reflets du couchant coloraient par une douce lueur rouge cette tête encore vigoureuse" ['The sunset glow colored with a soft red light his still vigorous head'] (Balzac 1950a: 705). And a page later he describes the squire, the priest and the physician, who were with the duke:

Fortement éclairés par un dernier rayon du soleil couchant [Balzac 1836 XVI : 14: par les riches couleurs du couchant], ces hommes silencieux composaient un tableau sublime de mélancolie et fertile en contrastes. Cette chambre sombre et solennelle … [Greatly brightened by a last ray of the sunset [by the rich colors of the sunset], these silent men formed a tableau exalted by melancholy and fertile in contrasts. This somber and solemn room …] (Balzac 1950a: 706).

We see in this rapprochement Balzac the romantic painter and Baudelaire the maker of dreams. We note the mnemonic process of reading and retaining dynamic patterns or rather fragments of dynamic patterns and words associated with them. Baudelaire combines fragments of Balzac's two patterns and creates one, in which "les reflets du couchant coloraient" and "les riches couleurs du couchant" (in the 1836 version that was most likely available to Baudelaire) become "couleurs du couchant refletés." While Balzac focuses on the action of sunset reflections on human beings, Baudelaire has his own eyes reflect the sunset. As Jean Prévost reminds us "il est lui-même le 'vivant pilier'" (Prévost 1964 : 63) the source of the mystic light. In Balzac the threshold of the visionary experience has been crossed and in Baudelaire we are at its center.

On the next page Balzac describes the child's voice:

La voix s'unissait aux bruissement de l'onde avec une si rare perfection qu'elle semblait sortir du sein des flots [The voice intermingled with the murmur of the surf with such rare perfection that it seemed to come from the depth of the waves] (Balzac 1950a: 707).

And when the father approached the child who was lying in the sun,

> le bruit de ses pas assourdi par le sable résonna faiblement en se mêlant à la voix des flots … [the sound of his steps muffled by the sand resonated lightly while mingling with the voice of the waves …] (Balzac 1950a: 707).

Finally in describing Gabrielle's voice, Balzac concludes: "il reconnut le bégaiement d'un coeur qui naissait à la poésie des accords" ['he recognized the fitful beating of a heart that awakened to the poetry of music'] (Balzac 1950a: 727). The first two dynamic patterns are organized around the verbs "s'unir" and "se mêler" and they provide the key word "mêlaient" for Baudelaire's longer dynamic pattern: "Les houles … mêlaient … Les tout-puissants accords … Aux couleurs du couchant…". Other words, like "solennelle" and "accords," also became adherent to the main structure, but their function changed. Thus from the description of a room, "solennelle" assumed the more important task of defining the union of the waves' music to the light of the sunset. Notice also that while in *L'Enfant maudit* the union is of sound to sound in "La Vie antérieure", Baudelaire true to his doctrine of "correspondances" creates a union between sound and color.

Echoes of *L'Enfant maudit* reverberate also in "Bénédiction". The count, being asked what he would do if the baby were born prematurely, declared bluntly: "Je tordrais fort proprement le col à la mère et à l'enfant" ['I would quickly wring the mother's and the child's necks'] (Balzac 1950a: 661). And because during the night the mother feared that indeed her husband would kill her, Balzac poses the question: "Cette terreur qui agitait l'arbre troublait-elle le fruit?" ['This terror that shook the tree did it also agitate the fruit?'] (Balzac 1950a: 661). In "Bénédiction" when the poet appears (is born) in this world, Baudelaire describes the poet's mother in these terms: "Sa mère épouvantée et pleine de blasphèmes" ['His mother frightened and uttering blasphemies'] (line 3). Her hatred makes her say: "Et je tordrai si bien cet arbre miserable,/ Qu'il ne pourra pousser ses boutons empestés!" ['And I will twist so well this wretched tree,/ That it will not be able to grow its stinking buds!'] (lines 15–16). The raison d'être of the metaphor of twisting the tree to kill it, the tree representing the child, is certainly surprising. But if one recalls Balzac's text, one can see that Baudelaire combines fragments from two dynamic patterns in *L'Enfant maudit*, the first containing the image of wringing the mother's and child's necks and the second having the metaphor that identifies the mother with a tree. Thus the metaphor of the child/ tree is no longer arbitrary or unjustified. What is characteristic here is that these verbal echoes are fragmentary and also that memory retrieves the tree metaphor even though it is not absolutely necessary to the basic intent of the dynamics of wringing someone's neck. This kind of retrieval militates in favor of the belief that, in this case at least, Baudelaire was unaware of the relation to Balzac.

Another instructive example is the echo of a portrait by Balzac of an extraordinary beauty, a 'foudroyante beauté," in *La Peau de Chagrin*. Balzac describes her as a

> monstre qui sait mordre et caresser, rire comme un démon, pleurer comme les anges… [a monster who knows how to bite and caress, laugh as a demon, weep as angels weep…] (Balzac 1950a: 66).

Baudelaire's "Hymne à la beauté" echoes this duality: "O Beauté! monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénu" ['O Beauty! monster, colossal, frightening, ingenuous!'] ("Hymne" line 22). The tonality of Baudelaire's poem echoes the energy and violence of Balzac's description. Balzac writes:

> Elle était comme la reine du plaisir… qui rit sur des cadavres, se moque des aïeux, dissous des perles et des trônes, transforme les jeunes gens en vieillards, et souvent les vieillards en jeunes gens… [She was like the queen of pleasure… who laughs (walking) on cadavers, couldn't care less about forefathers, dissolves pearls and breaks up thrones, makes young men old and old men young …] (Balzac 1950a: 66–67).

Baudelaire for his part takes up the dynamics of transformation in the following pattern: Beauty's kisses "font le héros lâche et l'enfant courageux" ['make a coward out of the hero and give courage to the child'] (line 8). Just as striking, the poet echoes the novelist's image of the beauty who laughs (walking) on cadavers: "Tu marches sur des morts, Beauté, dont tu te moques" ['O beauty, you walk on the dead and laugh at them'] (line 13).

What are the claims in the wake of these rapprochements? The preoccupation with sources and borrowings vitiated any attempt to understand what constitutes originality. We witness here the work of memory that combines fragments of patterns and words in a novel way to create something new, a completely new metaphoric field. Very few readers if any can retain verbatim all the exact sentences and words of a text they read. As a result, many sentences and patterns in the memory of the reader disintegrate and lose their identity, and the verbal remnants bear only traces of the tonality of the original dynamic patterns. I called this process a cataclysmic breakup of the textual fabric. Nevertheless, some sentences and patterns do retain their dynamics and bring with them the energy and the visionary power that informed them in the original text. Since it is universal, we have to assume that the process had to have occurred in the memory of Baudelaire as a reader of Balzac. In Baudelaire's poems, then, we can detect words and fragments of dynamic patterns from *L'Enfant maudit* and *La Peau de chagrin* in the guise of their distant echoes. One has to ask, which patterns are retained? On the one hand, one is likely to retain patterns that are more often encountered. These may indeed be depleted patterns, fragments that have become clichés. On the other hand, the memory of the reader, in this case Baudelaire's, will make choices. It will choose those that are in harmony with its own sensibility, its own search direction, and its own view of the world. And therein lies the affinity factor. The choices the reader makes, to remember and how to remember or not remember, betray his or her memory's response to the new encounters, the new horizon; they betray attraction and affinities. There will be those who continue to cling to the ideas that were so popular in the second half of the twentieth century, ideas that resemblances we now call echoes are clichés of the Romantic discourse. But clichés constitute less than half of the mnemonic activity involving language. If they were dominant, most, if not all, of our literature would be a colorless assemblage of clichés and commonplaces.

Moreover, the importance of echoes and affinities is revealed anew by the Proustian definition of style as vision. While philosophers deal in ideas and systems, dramatists, novelists, and poets offer their visions and interpretations of reality: a

mimetic transfiguration of the world. For them, memory inaugurates the organization and dynamics of the world outside by creating new metaphoric fields within. It is false to consider the stylistic dimension a surface dimension. In a work of literature, style, properly understood, goes deep at the very beginning of plots, characters, and ideas to modulate them and communicate to them color and passion.

Thus Balzac speaks of Étienne's "secret apprentissage de la douleur" ['a secret apprenticeship of sorrow'] (Balzac 1950a: 685), and the poet calls "la douleur" "la noblesse unique" ['the unique nobleness [of the spirit]'] ("Bénédiction": l. 65). Both refer to childhood, that of Étienne and that of the poet. Balzac writes about Étienne:

> Pour le mieux attacher à sa vie solitaire, un ange semblait lui révéler les abîmes du monde moral [In order to better attach him to his solitary life, an angel seemed to show him the depths of the moral world] (Balzac 1950a: 704).

Baudelaire for his part places the poet, "l'enfant déshérité" ['the disinherited child [poet]'] "sous la tutelle invisible d'un Ange" ['under the invisible tutelage of an Angel'] ("Bénédiction": l. 21). Balzac says about Beauvouloir, who plays a sympathetic role in the novel: "en comprenant le langage de ces fleurs" ['understanding the language of these flowers'] (Baudelaire 1950a: 720). Baudelaire ends "Élévation" with "et comprend sans effort/ Le langage des fleurs" ['and understands without effort /the language of flowers']. We recall at this point Pommier's explanation:

> C'est dans cette atmosphère verbale, fournie par un modèle élu, que prennent corps les compositions de Baudelaire [It is in this verbal atmosphere, provided by a chosen model, that Baudelaire's compositions take shape] (Pommier 1945 : 177).

We also have to speak of an attitude of empathy with the downtrodden. Balzac writes: "Les pauvres, les souffrants, les maltraités ont des joies ineffables" 'The poor, those who suffer, the ill-treated have ineffable joys' (Balzac 1950a: 732). And Baudelaire echoes the strong feeling and rhythm:

> Alors, les errantes, les déclassées, celles qui ont eu quelques amants, et qu'on appelle parfois des Anges … [Then, the wanderers, the lower class, those who had lovers, and who are sometimes called Angels …] (Baudelaire 1975a : 666).

Other verbal resemblances acquire significance in light of the kinship between the poet's and the novelist's visions of the world as they are modulated by the concept of correspondences. In *Louis Lambert*, Balzac begins his description of the protagonist's illness with this comparison: "Cette maladie, abîme tout aussi profond que le sommeil …" ['This illness, an abyss as deep as sleep …'] (Balzac 1950b: 441). Baudelaire for his part confesses:

> Au moral comme au physique, j'ai toujours eu la sensation du gouffre, non seulement du gouffre du sommeil, mais du gouffre de l'action, du rêve, du souvenir, du désir… du nombre, etc. [At the moral as well as the physical level, I have always experienced the sensation of the abyss, not only the abyss of sleep, but the abyss of

action, of dream, of remembrance, of desire… of number, etc.] (Baudelaire 1975b: 668)[9].

At first blush the link between sleep and abyss may appear as a simple commonplace. But the turn of the sentence is a telltale sign. It is almost as if Baudelaire were saying that he has had not only the sensation Balzac spoke of, but also additional ones, abyss of action, dream, etc. Elsewhere Balzac writes:

> Déjà plusieurs fois il avait trouvé de mystérieuses correspondances entre ses émotions et les mouvements de l'Océan [Already several times he had detected mysterious correspondences between his emotions and the movements of the Ocean] (Balzac 1950a: 698).

Baudelaire says,

> tout, forme, mouvement, nombre, couleur, parfum, dans le *spirituel* comme dans le *naturel*, est significatif, réciproque, converse, *correspondant* [all, form, movement, number, color, perfume, both at the *spiritual* and the *natural* level, is meaningful, reciprocal, converse, *corresponding*] (Baudelaire 1976c: 133).

Both Balzac and Baudelaire acquired the concept of correspondences from Swedenborg either directly or, as some think more likely, indirectly by way of intermediaries, such as Lavater[10]. Still, the fact that the doctrine of correspondences had reverberations in the literary circles of the time, and that other writers spoke about it, does not invalidate the affinities between Balzac and Baudelaire.

3. Two Passionate Visionaries

While resemblances at the level of Baudelaire's and Balzac's views of the world are an important factor in their relationship, the echoes of Balzac we have been citing transmit to Baudelaire's texts not meaning as such but energy, and dynamic and visionary qualities. How are then these qualities received? First, even before writing a poem, a poet may read a text and in the process of re-creating the textual patterns in his her own memory during the reading process, he or she invests them with the original dynamic relations. In this way, these patterns possess mnemonic energy and values, which can then be available for the creation of a new text, in this case a poem. Second, when readers approach this poem, they may have mnemonic potentials that contain dynamic patterns or fragments of dynamic patterns from the same text the poet read. In this way the poem's new patterns are for them already prefigured, foreknown, and anticipated. These readers would be ready to respond favorably to the new poem. There can be no misunderstanding: Memory is at the center of both writing and reading and the memories of both writer

---

[9] Speaking of "number," at the end of his novel, Balzac "transcribes" Louis Lambert's idea in the following terms: "*Tout ici-bas n'existe que par le Mouvement et par le Nombre*" ['Everything in this world exists only through Movement and through Number'] (Balzac 1950a: 453). And Baudelaire, in a curious echo, writes: "*Tout* est nombre. Le nombre est dans *tout*" ['All is number. The number is in all'] (Baudelaire 1975a: 649).

[10] In his edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, Antoine Adam mentions Madame de Staël, Esquiros, l'abbé Constant, and Hoffman (see Adam 1961: 271–272).

and reader are at work. We can speak of an intertextual region, where energy circulates, where exchanges of values are made and new metaphors are suggested or foreshadowed, provided we understand that all this happens in an individual mnemonic space and is then projected outward. Is a poet aware of the relationship between his or her work and these fragments harking back to an anterior text? That is a fascinating question, but at this stage of our knowledge we have no answer. We are dealing here with the individual involuntary memory (in the cognitive sense, but also in the Proustian sense) of writers. All we can say is that a reader or a critic who notices affinities may be able and willing to speak about relations and resemblances[11].

In the cognitive perspective, memory, the involuntary memory in particular, is at the center of the creative process. In Baudelairean theory what is at the center and what is the equivalent of memory is imagination. In "Salon de 1859" he writes:

> C'est l'imagination qui a enseigné à l'homme le sens moral de la couleur, du contour, du son et du parfum. Elle a créé, au commencement du monde, l'analogie et la métaphore. Elle décompose toute la création, et, avec les matériaux amassés et disposés suivant des règles dont on ne peut trouver l'origine que dans le plus profond de l'âme, elle crée un monde nouveau, elle produit la sensation du neuf [It is imagination that taught man the moral meaning of color, contour, sound, and perfume. It created, at the beginning of the world, the analogy and the metaphor. It decomposes all creation, and, with the materials amassed and arranged following rules whose origins one can find only in the depths of the soul, it creates a new world, it produces the sensation of the new] (Baudelaire 1976d: 621).

Building materials and verbal resources have been accumulated from life and from reading, reading Gautier, Hugo, Balzac, Hoffmann, Swedenborg, Poe, De Quincey, Saint-Amant, and many others, and these materials and part of their energy and tonality become available for a new organization of the mnemonic world. Once the composition of a poem or novel begins, the urgency of the new metaphoric field brings some of the acquired words and fragments of images into its gravitational range and weakens the links with their origins. The new metaphoric field develops a new coherence and confers on them, following rules that one can find only "dans le plus profond de l'âme," new valences and new values. Thus while in *L'Enfant maudit* and *La Peau de chagrin* the dynamic patterns we have cited have links to a well-defined story, a very specific context, and a powerful visionary tonality, Baudelaire's poems display a more condensed area of signification, dynamic patterns or images that are more stylized, and an equally determined visionary intent.

---

[11] A reader (who wishes to remain anonymous) ventures this idea about the effect of echoes: "I may read Baudelaire first, in which case it is when I read Balzac that I experience the power of the echo. And when I read Baudelaire, I may experience the same kind of involuntary memory trigger when a passage 'reminds' me of a passage... by authors Baudelaire could not have read – and who themselves may never have read Baudelaire. This is to say that for readers it is immaterial whether any 'historical' link exists between two texts – the memory is triggered regardless." Indeed that is true and it only indicates that affinities may exist between writers that have no historical connection. But the textual comparison in this article shows that the affinities between Baudelaire and Balzac, by their strength and tonality, represent more than a chance encounter.

One might be tempted to think that because of the different genres, the novelist and the poet would have no common ground, no occasion to meet. But their affinities are wide, far-flung, and deep. With the help of a language that is both cerebral and passionate, Balzac and Baudelaire fashion texts, in which elements of the natural world become infused with visionary power: The ocean becomes a mirror of the human soul; the reflected rays of the sun enhance the significance of objects and people; perceptual depth is obtained through the contribution of light, color, and sound. Their language has transfiguring virtues: The spectacle of a woman acquires mysterious gestures and compels the spectators to submit to her power; it is only one woman but she is transfigured and becomes the center of universal beauty. Above all visionary sights or events hovers the incontrovertible belief that reality is traversed by the rays of correspondences between the natural world we observe with our senses and the spiritual world we intuit in our experience. These correspondences may explain why Balzac and Baudelaire have a high regard for the moral dimension of life, and why they direct a sympathetic eye toward the less fortunate, the downtrodden: Balzac to have compassion for the mother and child in *L'Enfant maudit* and Baudelaire to extol wanderers like Jeanne and De Quincey's Ann in the haunting phrase, "Alors, les errantes, les déclassées …". One can call them traces, and more than traces, of Romanticism the two writers never wholly abandoned, even while going beyond, and leaving behind the movement's commonplaces for a more radical enterprise of discovery. What is important to see is that these characteristics, visionary depth and transfiguration of the real, modulate most of the two writers' works. I conclude with the firm belief that Baudelaire possessed in the highest degree the same gift he admired in Balzac, the capacity to be "visionnaire passionné" ['passionate visionary']¹².

Bibliography

Adam 1961: Antoine Adam, ed., *Les Fleurs du mal*, by Charles Baudelaire, Paris, Garnier Frères.

Babuts 1977: Nicolae Babuts, "Structure and Meaning in Baudelairian Images of Immersion", *Symposium* 31 (Fall 1977), pp. 185–195.

Babuts 1981: Nicolae Babuts, "Baudelaire et les anges de Swedenborg", *Romance Notes* 21.3 (Spring 1981), pp. 309–312.

Babuts 1997: Nicolae Babuts, *Baudelaire: At the Limits and Beyond,* Newark, University of Delaware Press.

Babuts 2009: Nicolae Babuts, *Memory, Metaphors and Meaning: Reading Literary Texts*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Transaction Press.

Balzac 1836: Honoré de Balzac, *L'Enfant maudit*, in *Études philosophiques*, tomes XV–XVI, Paris, Werdet.

Balzac 1950a: Honoré de Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin*, *L'Enfant maudit*, in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. 9, *Études philosophiques,* vol. 1, ed. Marcel Bouteron, Paris, Gallimard (Pléiade).

---

¹² Here are two examples of Baudelaire's admiration for Balzac: "J'ai maintes fois été étonné que la grande gloire de Balzac fût de passer pour un observateur; il m'avait toujours semblé que son principal mérite était d'être visionnaire, et visionnaire passionné" ['I have many times been surprised that Balzac's great glory was to be considered an observer; for it had always seemed to me that his main merit was to be a visionary, and a passionate visionary'] (Baudelaire 1976b: 2.120). Elsewhere he calls him "un créateur de méthode" ['a creator of a method'] (Baudelaire 1976a: 2.22).

Balzac 1950b: Honoré de Balzac, *Louis Lambert*, in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. 10, *Études philosophiques*, vol. 2, ed. Marcel Bouteron, Paris, Gallimard (Pléiade).

Baudelaire 1961: Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, ed. Antoine Adam, Paris, Garnier Frères.

Baudelaire 1975: Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Claude Pichois, Paris, Gallimard (Pléiade).

Baudelaire 1975a : Charles Baudelaire, "Fusées", in Baudelaire 1975 : 649–667.

Baudelaire 1975b : Charles Baudelaire, "Hygiène", in Baudelaire 1975 : 668–675.

Baudelaire 1976: Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Claude Pichois, Paris, Gallimard (Pléiade).

Baudelaire 1976a: Charles Baudelaire, "Les Contes de Champfleury", in Baudelaire 1976 : 21–23.

Baudelaire 1976b: Charles Baudelaire, "Théophile Gautier I", in Baudelaire 1976 : 103–128.

Baudelaire 1976c: Charles Baudelaire, "Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains" (Victor Hugo), in Baudelaire 1976: 129–141.

Baudelaire 1976d: Charles Baudelaire, "Salon de 1859", in Baudelaire 1976: 608–682.

Baudelaire 1993: Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Ben-Porat 1976: Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion", *A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature,* vol. 1, pp. 105–128.

Benveniste 1966: Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Paris, Gallimard.

Bergson 1946: Henri Bergson*, Matière et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.

Bloom 1975: Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Crépet, Blin 1942: Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin, eds. *Les Fleurs du mal*, by Baudelaire, Paris, José Corti.

Culler 1981: Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

Culler 1990: Jonathan Culler, "Intertextuality and Interpretation: Baudelaire's 'Correspondances'", in *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry*, ed. Christopher Prendergast, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 118–37.

Friedrich, Kotz 2007: Claudia K. Friedrich, Sonja A. Kotz, "Event-related Potential Evidence of Form and Meaning Coding during Online Speech Recognition", *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 19.4, pp. 594–604.

Garner 1990: Richard Garner, *From Homer to Tragedy: The Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry*, London: Routledge.

Gelbard-Sagiv et alii 2008: Hagar Gelbard-Sagiv, Roy Mukamel, Michal Harel, Rafael Malach, Itzhak Fried, "Internally Generated Reactivation of Single Neurons in Human Hippocampus During Free Recall", *Science*, 3 October 2008, vol. 322, no. 5898, pp. 96–101 (http://www.sciencemag.org).

Gerstler 2006: Amy Gerstler, "An Interview with Amy Gerstler", by Marjorie L. Manwaring, "Writer's Chronicle", 38 (March-April 2006), pp. 15–21.

Hollander 1981: John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Leakey 1969: F. W. Leakey, *Baudelaire and Nature*, Manchester, University of Manchester Press.

Mace 2004: John H. Mace, "Involuntary Autobiographical Memories are Highly Dependent on Abstract Cuing: The Proustian View is Incorrect", *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 18 (June 2004), pp. 893-899.

Machacek 2007: Gregory Machacek, "Allusion", *PMLA*, 122 (March 2007), pp. 522–36.

McGowan 1993: James McGowan, trans. *The Flowers of Evil*, by Charles Baudelaire, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Michaud 1938: Régis Michaud, "Baudelaire et Balzac", *Romanic Review*, 29 (Oct. 1938), pp. 251–61.

Perri 1978: Carmela Perri, "On Alluding", *Poetics* 7.3, pp. 289–307.

Pommier 1945: Jean Pommier, *Dans les chemins de Baudelaire*, Paris, José Corti.

Prévost 1964: Jean Prévost, *Baudelaire: Essai sur le création et l'inspiration poétiques,* Paris, Mercure de France (first appeared in 1953).

Prins 1957: A. A. Prins, "Unconscious 'Borrowing' and the Problem of Inspiration", *English Studies*, 38, pp. 64–71.

Proust 1954: Marcel Proust, *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, vol. I–III, eds. Pierre Clarac and André Ferré, Paris, Gallimard (Pléiade).

Ricks 2002: Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Ricoeur 1975: Paul Ricoeur, *La Métaphore vive*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil.

Stein 1988: Edwin Stein, *Wordsworth's Art of Allusion*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press.

Teskey 2006: Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

Willems, Őzyürek, Hagoort 2008: Roel M. Willems, Asli Őzyürek, Peter Hagoort, "Seeing and Hearing Meaning: ERP and fMRI Evidence of Word versus Picture Integration into a Sentence Context", *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 20.7, pp. 1235–1249.

Abstract

The article proposes to study echoes of Balzac's *L'Enfant maudit* and *La Peau de chagrin* that reverberate in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* at the stylistic or visionary level. In the cognitive view espoused here Baudelaire's dynamic patterns, word formulations and images, have reached their final status of a radically new creation, but at the same time they betray the existence of echoes harking back to the energy and tonality of a previous vision. These echoes represent affinities that surface at the level of verbal organization in Baudelaire's poems and reflect the novelist's and the poet's visionary kinship.