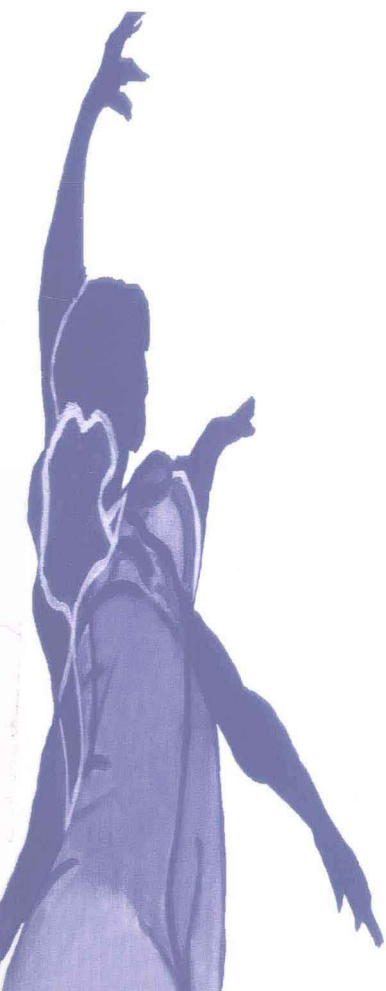


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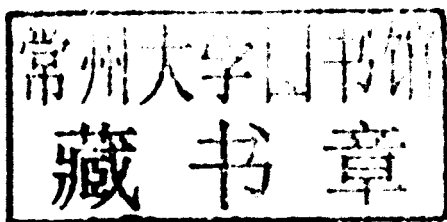


Peter Lang

Ann Kennedy Smith

Painted Poetry

Colour in Baudelaire's Art Criticism



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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*For Sam, Rory and Eve,
with all my love*

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Abbreviations

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| <i>OCI</i> and <i>OCII</i> | Baudelaire, Charles, <i>Oeuvres complètes</i> , texte établi, présenté et annoté par Claude Pichois, two volumes (Paris: Gallimard, 1975, 1976) |
| <i>Corr. I</i> and <i>II</i> | Baudelaire, Charles, <i>Correspondance</i> , texte établi, présenté et annoté par Claude Pichois avec la collaboration de Jean Ziegler, two volumes (Paris: Gallimard, 1973) |
| <i>CJL</i> | <i>Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs</i> |
| <i>EPI</i> | <i>Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages (1852)</i> |
| <i>EP₂</i> | <i>Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses œuvres (1856)</i> |
| <i>EU₅₅</i> | <i>L'Exposition universelle (1855)</i> |
| <i>F</i> | <i>Fusées</i> |
| <i>FM</i> | <i>Les Fleurs du Mal</i> |
| <i>MBN</i> | <i>Le Musée du Bazar Bonne-Nouvelle</i> |
| <i>OVD</i> | <i>L'Œuvre et la vie de Delacroix</i> |
| <i>PA</i> | <i>Peintres et aquafortistes</i> |
| <i>PH</i> | <i>Le Poème du hachisch</i> |
| <i>PV</i> | <i>Le Peintre de la vie moderne</i> |
| <i>QCF</i> | <i>Quelques caractéristes français</i> |
| <i>RQC</i> | <i>Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains</i> |
| <i>RW</i> | <i>Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris</i> |
| <i>SP</i> | <i>Le Spleen de Paris</i> |
| <i>S₄₅</i> | <i>Le Salon de 1845</i> |
| <i>S₄₆</i> | <i>Le Salon de 1846</i> |
| <i>S₅₉</i> | <i>Le Salon de 1859</i> |
| <i>VH</i> | <i>Du vin et du hachisch</i> |

I have used the word 'Salon' to refer to the annual exhibitions of art, and *Salon* in italics to refer to the written reviews of the exhibitions.

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Introduction

Although Baudelaire's essays on art and artists are not exactly numerous – just four Salon and exhibition reviews, two essays on artists, one essay on laughter and a handful of short articles on caricaturists and etchers, they contain so many complex ideas that, as J.A. Hiddleston points out in *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (1999), a fully comprehensive study of the art criticism would be 'a vast and highly complex undertaking'.¹ On the other hand, restricting the focus of this book to Baudelaire's approach to colour in art might not seem vast or complex enough. Why only colour, when Baudelaire's writings are characterized by their diversity, shifts in emphasis, impassioned enthusiasms and fervent hatreds? Why colour in particular, when he writes so eloquently on sculpture, caricature, etching and photography as well as painting? And how seriously can we take his remarks on such an intrinsic part of art anyway, when he himself admits his susceptibility to an alluring subject matter, constantly reveals his literary and poetic allegiances, and is at different stages preoccupied by wider concepts of modernity, beauty and the creative imagination?

Some of the varied themes and influences in Baudelaire's art criticism that have been explored in recent years include parallels with Chevreul by Bernard Howells and Jennifer Phillips, Michèle Hannoosh on the essays on etching and caricature and Timothy Raser on the use of narrative and citation in the *Salon de 1859*.² Emily Salines and Sonya Stephens both

¹ *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

² Bernard Howells, *Baudelaire: Individualism, Dandyism and the Philosophy of History* (Oxford: Legenda, 1996), Jennifer Phillips, 'Relative Color: Baudelaire, Chevreul, and the Reconsideration of Critical Methodology', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 33/3–4 (Spring–Summer 2005), pp. 342–357, Michèle Hannoosh, 'Etching and Modern Art: Baudelaire's *Peintres et aquafortistes*', *French Studies* (January 1989), pp. 47–60 and *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), Timothy Raser, *The Simplest*

have written informatively on, respectively, the metaphor of translation and the importance of the sketch in Baudelaire's aesthetic, and the works of Rosemary Lloyd have contributed to many of these debates.³ André Ferran's *L'Esthétique de Baudelaire* (1933), Margaret Gilman's *Baudelaire the Critic* (1943) and Lucie Horner's *Baudelaire critique de Delacroix* (1956) are still indispensable guides to the criticism as a whole, as are the extensive writings of Claude Pichois, Felix Leakey, David Kelley, Armand Moss and Gita May.⁴ Almost all of these writers allude to Baudelaire's interest in colour, and indeed it would be difficult to write about Baudelaire's art criticism and *not* mention his interest in colour. His lifelong admiration for Delacroix and undisguised preference for the colourist approach to painting is a consistent theme, infiltrating even his articles on lithography and caricature as well as the essays on literature, poetry and music. This is not to say that the question of colour itself in Baudelaire's art criticism has been given the attention due to it. Perhaps because it is so apparent, most critics mention it almost in passing, some even suggesting that his preference for expressive colour might have adversely affected his judgement of Ingres and other artists. The question remains as to how seriously we can take the approach of a poet such as Baudelaire to such a painterly matter in any case, and I hope this book will provide some answers to this.

To understand Baudelaire's approach to the subject of colour better, and explore its connections with his poetry and his other critical articles, it is worth considering colour's place in the wider history of aesthetic writings preceding the nineteenth century. It might appear strange to separate

of Signs: Victor Hugo and the Language of Images in France: 1850–1950 (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 123–150.

- 3 Emily Salines, *Alchemy and Amalgam: Translation in the Works of Charles Baudelaire* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004) and Sonya Stephens, 'Painting in the Studio: Artful Unfinishedness?' in Stephens (ed.), *Esquisses/Ébauches: Projects and Pre-Texts in Nineteenth-Century French Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 42–55. Rosemary Lloyd's works include *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire* edited by Rosemary Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and *Charles Baudelaire* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008).

- 4 See bibliography for a full list of works by these authors.

one element of painting from the rest, but this was common practice in much of the critical discourse on art in France for many years. In Chapter 1, 'Colour Blindness: Perceptions of Colour before Baudelaire', I consider some of the statements made about the part that colour should play in art, from the establishment of the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* in the seventeenth century with its theoretical treatises on art, through the lofty arguments about *ut pictura poesis* in the eighteenth century up until the *Salon* reviews of Baudelaire's time. I trace some of the reasons why, even by the mid-nineteenth century, the element of colour still possessed a low status in the eyes of many. The *Académie's* purpose, to promote the arts of painting and sculpture to the same status as that of literature, placed an early theoretical emphasis on the narrative function of painting, and this, along with the lengthy process of acquiring the desired level of skill in draughtsmanship, meant that colour was frequently assigned a decorative or symbolic role. Roger de Piles's arguments for a more serious consideration of colour contributed to the shift in the political balance of power within the Academy, although the writings of Winckelmann, in whose concept of Beauty colour had little part to play, were arguably more influential in the neo-classical tradition by the end of the eighteenth century. However, by this time a new form of writing on art had emerged which was markedly different from the academic treatises that had gone before, and this took the form of reviews of art exhibited in the increasingly popular biannual Salons. Diderot's essays giving his personal views on the art on display meant that a new literary genre, the *Salon*, was born, and although his understanding of colour and championing of Chardin went some way to redress the balance in favour of colour techniques, traditional views on colour were still prevalent by the nineteenth century. *Salon* writers tended to range themselves on one side or the other, depending on whether they took the *coloriste*- or *dessinateur*-based approach. Thoré and Gautier were just two of the unlikely allies in this dispute; for different reasons, both argued for the particular power of colour and suggested that colour technique was based on a complex set of skills that had barely been acknowledged up until then. Their views and those of other contemporary critics are examined more closely in the first chapter.

Baudelaire's first *Salon* review appeared in 1845, and was far from achieving the success that he had hoped for. This may have encouraged him to try a new, bolder approach the following year, when he moved away from being a conventional *salonnier* to making serious statements about modern art, Romanticism and why Delacroix was the nineteenth century's greatest artist. One of the most remarkable features of Baudelaire's *Salon de 1846* is the groundbreaking chapter on colour early in the essay which sets out the reasons why colour must be taken seriously as an essential component of modern art. In Chapter 2, 'Colour Vision: The Science of Seeing' I consider this in the light of new scientific theories of colour at the time. Did Chevreul's chemistry-based research on complementary colours have as much influence on him as his personal contact with Delacroix and Deroy? I consider the evidence, and ask whether even in the 1840s Baudelaire was less interested in exploring systems of colour tones than in identifying how certain colour combinations provided a stimulus to his own imagination. In any case, by emphasizing the complexity of the principles that govern the harmony of colour, Baudelaire showed how this part of painting should be given the intellectual respectability long associated with draughtsmanship. His insistence that a harmonious colour was an essential requirement of a painting was closely connected to his conviction that the modern painting should express the artist's temperament in a way that unites all of painting's components.

The need for harmony is also central to Chapter 3, 'Colour and Line: Resolving the Conflict?' which considers how the tensions between colour and line developed for Baudelaire from the early *Salons*, when he praised Ingres as a genius along with Delacroix and Daumier, to the searing indictment of a 'line-based' art in the essay *Exposition universelle* (1855) and after. This marks a shift in emphasis in Baudelaire's approach to art from an apparent willingness to embrace different styles of art in his early essays to insisting that only a method and approach to art that was based on the colourist approach was acceptable, though colour itself did not have to be present. One reason that I suggest for this change of heart is that unless Baudelaire tackled directly the inherent flaws of the line-based approach, with its frequent assumption that colour had to be controlled and subordinated to a linear structure, he could not assert colour's position at

the heart of artistic creation. So in his early *Salons* Baudelaire was able to admire Ingres' style of painting because of his skills in drawing and ability to capture physiognomy, and overlook an approach to colour that was far from the Delacroix-influenced aesthetic. By 1855, however, Baudelaire had come to believe that only the line that works harmoniously with colour, such as Delacroix's, or is based on what he perceives to be colourist principles, as in the art of Daumier and, later, Guys, can be accepted. In the 1850s Daumier's lithographs provided a bridge across what were for Baudelaire widening differences between colour- and line-based approaches to art, because he insisted that the lithographs evoked *ideas* of colour and therefore appealed directly to the imagination. At a time when he begins to turn away from French art in favour of poetry and Wagner's music, he discovers Guys, and with him re-discovers his pleasure in art. For Baudelaire, Guys was not only the accurate painter of modern life but also the master of the sketch, and his method of creating *ébauches parfaites* gives Baudelaire a new understanding how line and colour can be equally expressive.

Chapter 4, 'Colour Symbolism: Art, Poetry and Music', considers in more detail Baudelaire's approach to colour's expressive powers and how this develops through his criticism and poetry. Despite an early fascination with Fourierism, Baudelaire rejected a systematic approach to colour symbolism in favour of a strongly individual response to particular colours and combinations of colour. His assertion that colour is a particularly expressive form of communication, capable of 'thinking for itself' and directly affecting the spectator by means that are not always understandable, is central to the articles written about the *Exposition universelle* (1855). I consider whether there is a connection between the colours he found particularly affecting in art and his poetry, and if Baudelaire was suggesting a particular affinity with colour and music. In his article on Wagner, Baudelaire considers the ability of music to translate ideas and, simultaneously, other arts, and treats it and Hugo's poetry as imaginative forms of painting at a time when he has begun to lose hope in Salon art.

Colour's ability to *suggest* establishes it within a network of connections which include music, poetry and literature, and Chapter 5, 'Colour and Imagination: Translating the Dream' considers what links Baudelaire's concept of the creative imagination in the *Salon de 1859* with his concept

of colour. The imaginative involvement on the part of the spectator was an element that became increasingly important to Baudelaire in his later criticism, and this is reflected in the 1859 *Salon* for which he drew a form of inspiration from the absence of imagination in French art, and by extension, its cultural life. By 1859 Baudelaire's growing confidence as a poet, despite or even because of the banning of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, leads him to seek what he considered to be poetry in the other arts, and the idea of translation is central to this in his later critical writings on art, literature and music. He employs the term both in the sense of art's imaginative ability, translating the imagination, and how readily it seems to evoke the properties of another art. The ideal translator is also the poet/critic who brings about another essential act of translation by possessing both the most receptive nature and the most expressive form of language.

This book explores how Baudelaire's writings on colour reflect and inform many of his critical preoccupations throughout his life, from the painting of Delacroix to the music of Wagner. The wish to connect the art criticism and the poetry has resulted in an emphasis on the subjects of the works of art that Baudelaire discusses, and much has been written on his *transposition d'art* poetry, but this tends to overlook Baudelaire's own emphasis on the medium of painting itself. Why did he, as a poet and writer, place such value on this quintessentially non-verbal artistic language, perhaps the most difficult area of painting to describe and express adequately in words? The subject of colour presented Baudelaire with a set of unique challenges that would spur him on to greater heights of creative expression in the critical form, and his interest in what he saw as the colourist approach to art led him to find connections in the arts that went beyond the particular medium and played a vital role in his conception of a distinctly modern art.

CHAPTER I

Colour Blindness: Perceptions of Colour before Baudelaire

Glorifier le culte des images (ma grande, mon unique, ma primitive passion) (*Mon cœur mis à nu*, I, 701)

[...] car, très jeunes, mes yeux remplis d'images peintes ou gravées n'avaient jamais pu se rassasier, et je crois que les mondes pourraient finir, *impavidum ferient*, avant que je devienne iconoclaste. (*Salon de 1859*, II, 624)

Beginnings

With an artist for a father and living in an apartment full of paintings and engravings, art certainly formed a large part of Baudelaire's world during his earliest years. In later life he would mock his father's limited artistic abilities, but he always respected François Baudelaire's taste and love of art and it is significant that in the final *Salon* that Baudelaire wrote, when he feels so disaffected with modern French artists and the popular tastes of the day, that he acknowledges the debt he owes for his love of art to this early pre-verbal influence of images all around him. Baudelaire's first recorded *writings* on art, on the other hand, show his debt to a poet as much as to a painter. While still a schoolboy in 1838, Baudelaire was taken on a school trip to Versailles, and afterwards wrote to his stepfather about his delight in the art that he had seen. One exciting moment was seeing for the first time several works by Delacroix, an artist Baudelaire had recently read about in newspaper reviews of the 1838 *Salon* exhibition. At Versailles he admires most of the paintings on display, including works by Vernet and Scheffer,

artists who had long enjoyed official approval and no doubt would have appealed to his stepfather too; Baudelaire himself later would come to despise their popular historical style. But the painting that struck him most was Delacroix's *Bataille de Taillebourg*, a dramatic scene which, as Baudelaire wrote, eclipsed all the other historical paintings on display. As he explained to General Aupick, his immediate love of Delacroix might have been due to the enthusiasm of one particular *Salon* reviewer for the painting:

Je ne sais si j'ai raison, puisque je ne sais rien en fait de peinture, mais il m'a semblé que les bons tableaux se comptaient; je dis peut-être une bêtise, mais à la réserve de quelques tableaux de Horace Vernet, de deux ou trois tableaux de Scheffer, et de la *Bataille de Taillebourg* de Delacroix je n'ai gardé souvenir de rien [...] je parle peut-être à tort et à travers; mais je ne rends compte que de mes impressions: peut-être est-ce là le fruit des lectures de la *Presse* qui porte aux nues Delacroix?¹

The reviewer was none other than Théophile Gautier, the influential poet and art critic to whom the *Fleurs du Mal* would be dedicated almost twenty years later, and who championed Delacroix throughout his life. In the *Salon* article on Delacroix that appeared in *La Presse* on 23 March 1838 Gautier did not limit himself to the paintings on display alone, including the *Bataille de Taillebourg*, but also wrote about the *Mort de Sardanapale*, the *Massacres de Scio* and the *Femmes d'Alger* so that the review took the form of a retrospective overview of the artist's achievements. So it is all the more significant that even before Baudelaire had seen any painting by Delacroix he had 'seen' many of his works through the words of a poet. Gautier's descriptions are certainly stirring stuff. The evocation of Delacroix's *Medée Furieuse*, for instance, must have struck the young Baudelaire's imagination strongly: 'le contraste du vermillon insouciant qui s'épanouit sur les joues rebondies et satinées des pauvres victimes, avec la verdâtre et criminelle pâleur de leur mère forcenée, est de la plus grande poésie.'² In a few dense lines Gautier

- 1 *Correspondance*, texte établi, présenté et annoté par Claude Pichois avec la collaboration de Jean Ziegler, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1973); 17 juillet 1838, pp. 57–59. Further references to this work will be included in the text.
- 2 Gautier, *Salon de 1838*, *La Presse*, 2, 16, 22, 23, 26, 31 mars, 13 avril, 1er mai 1838; 22 mars.

has evoked the drama, beauty and violence of Delacroix's colour, linking its expressive power to the subject of the painting, and likened the effect to that of great poetry. It is notable that it is the contrast of red and green that for Gautier embodies the particular drama of this painting, as it will in many different forms for Baudelaire throughout his life.

Was it an impulse towards his own future *métier* that led Baudelaire to connect the insights of the poet-critic Gautier with his own first impressions of Delacroix? As Claude Pichois notes, 'l'art était pour lui un destin'³ and so, of course, was poetry; the ability to write sensitively and expressively about art is closely linked to Baudelaire's poetic use of language. Before seeing the art of his own day, the young Baudelaire had encountered it through words, and rightly sensed that the writers he most admired were also attuned to the painters he would admire as soon as he got the chance. He probably also knew that Delacroix was an artist who provoked strong reactions in almost everyone who saw his work. Could that be why he writes of Delacroix to General Aupick? Yet his wish to explain the power of Delacroix's art even to those who might be least receptive never leaves him, and even when Delacroix is widely praised, as in 1855, Baudelaire insists on pointing out that the radical nature of his art has still not been properly understood. From the beginning, Baudelaire's wish was to use his words to make others *see* what was uniquely expressive about Delacroix's colour and the role it played in his art as a whole. When, at the age of twenty-four, Baudelaire embarked on his career as an art critic he would soon realize, if he had not already done so already, that most people did not share his enthusiasm for and understanding of this essential medium of painting. Centuries of looking at art in certain ways had influenced how colour was perceived and in this chapter I will look at the history of writing about colour and consider why it was often considered as a poor relation in art as a whole.

3 Claude Pichois, *Notices, notes et variants* in Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, texte établi, présenté et annoté par Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 1252. Further references to this work will be included in the text.

The Establishment of the Academy and the Beginnings of Art Criticism

In 1648 the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* came into being, the successful result of several years of petitioning of the young Louis XIV by a group of court painters led by Charles LeBrun. This new Royal Academy of art had a twofold aim: to enable royally favoured artists to be free of the restrictive guild system, or *Maîtrise*, and to establish painting as the sister art of literature, for which the *Académie Française* had been established thirteen years earlier. After 1661 the influential minister Colbert formed a string of Academies so that all of the arts would come under royal control, reflecting the centralizing power of the young Louis XIV and providing a higher social status for ambitious artists. In practice, the power of the Academy was such that what was considered to be art's emancipation from the institutionalism of the guild soon became another form of imprisonment: that of strict doctrine and an inflexible hierarchy within art itself. As the art historian Nikolaus Pevsner puts it: 'while apparently combating the medieval conception of the guild, a system was substituted which left less of the really decisive freedom to the painter and sculptor than he had enjoyed under the rule of the guild, and infinitely less than had been his under the privileges of the previous French kings.'⁴ This shift in status was to have a momentous effect on painting. Artists were now expected to conform to the precepts laid down by the Academicians or risk losing

- 4 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), p. 83. Pevsner provides one of the clearest expositions of the establishment and early years of the *Académie*; see also André Fontaine, *Les Doctrines d'Art en France; Peintres, Amateurs, Critiques de Poussin à Diderot* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1909), Anthony Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France 1500–1700* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 192–222 and Annie Becq's extensive work *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne 1680–1814*, 2 vols (Pisa: Pacini, 1984). Richard Wrigley's *The Origins of French Art Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) also offers a very informative history of the period.