# Ficino's Lyre in Baudelaire's Paris[1]

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## L'art par excellence

In 1877, Walter Pater could state with confidence that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."[2] The ethereal modes by which music communicated with listeners made it the envy of poets, painters, and sculptors, whose art works seemed so deadened by their media. As Pater said, "art is always striving… to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material."[3] Music achieved this independence, shirking off the words that anchored poetry and prose in the intellect and the paint and clay that grounded the plastic arts in the material world in order to communicate in a language that circumvented these limits, a language that Hegel called the "language of the soul."

Because music could transcend the representative modes of sculpture, painting, prose, and poetry, it could take as its subject matters that were too vast to be represented and too vague to be comprehended by the intellect. Indeed, the infinite was one of the subjects regularly attributed to "absolute" music, for example, a subject that supposed an unending longing for contact with a tran-

1 Very much like Cousin's own work, this essay combines an eclectic set of long-standing scholarly interests. It initially took shape as the introduction to a study of Mallarmé that, trimmed of this pre-history, appears in the collection *Meetings with Mallarmé in Contemporary French Culture*, ed. Michael Temple, Exeter, 1998, pp. 160-79, under the title "On the Side of Poetry and Chaos: Mallarmean *Hasard* and Twentieth-Century Music." There I thanked Carlo Caballero for pointing me toward Cousin and here I must thank him again, for this essay is even more indebted to his generosity and his research on Cousin, forthcoming as an article entitled "Mallarmé and the Idea of Pure Music." My thoughts on Renaissance neo-Platonism both here and elsewhere would not have been possible without the pioneering studies of Ficino by D. P. Walker and, more recently, Gary Tomlinson (*Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others*, Chicago and London, 1993). And finally, my fascination with the idea of "poetic music" and with Pater owes much to the work of Carl Dahlhaus, especially his *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989. I am grateful to the conference participants for their good comments and to Carlo Caballero, Michael Long, Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, and Philippe Vendrix for reading earlier versions of this paper.

2 Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, 4th ed., London and New York, 1888, p. 140.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

— *La Renaissance et sa musique au XIXe siècle*, éd. Philippe Vendrix, CESR, Tours, 2004, pp. 203-220 —

scendent realm.[4] What is more, the indeterminate character of musical language – the way its signs locked into a referential system surpassing the rationality governing ordinary language – allowed music to transport listeners beyond the reach of words to the spaces of the infinite. Thus music could do more than simply address the infinite: music could provide a fleeting experience of it. Victor Cousin, the principal protagonist of my essay, suggested as much as early as 1818 in a series of public lectures at the École Normale when he praised music in the following way:

> C'est l'art sans contredit le plus pénétrant, le plus profond, le plus intime… Il vous ravit jusqu'au ciel, il vous emporte dans les espaces de l'infini, il vous plonge dans d'ineffables rêveries… Sous ce rapport, la musique est un art sans rival.[5]
> [It is incontrovertibly the most penetrating, the most profound, the most intimate art… It transports you to the heavens, it carries you into the spaces of the infinite, it plunges you into ineffable reveries… In this respect, music is an art without rival.]

Scholars of the Renaissance will hear familiar claims echoing in Cousin's *laus musicae*. In the scholastic tradition, music had always crowned the seven liberal arts, and in the *studia humanitatis*, too, music was a principal mode through which humanists attempted to recover Classical artistry and its moral properties. Plato supposed that the spiritual flight to divine knowledge took place when the soul moved in harmony with universal concords, and, at least in the Renaissance, moral philosophers working in the tradition of Plato believed that the mechanical pulsations of music were the surest means by which to set the soul in motion.

The idea that music could control the passions became a platitude in the sixteenth century – "music hath charms to calm the savage breast" – and the notion enjoyed a healthy life throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and into the nineteenth. But what distinguishes the sixteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas about the power of music from those of the intervening time and, indeed, what makes music central to Renaissance and Romantic aesthetics, relates to music's preeminence among the arts in both of those aesthetic systems and, more particularly, to the way poets and philosophers construed the relationship between poetry and music. In the Renaissance, humanists strove to perfect the beautiful and morally uplifting quality of art works by recuperating the modes of Classical art. In France, the Académie de Poésie et de Musique and the poets of the Pléiade placed the imitation of ancient lyric poetry and song at the center of a project to elevate French language and society. Generally speaking, it was poets and not musicians who promoted these cultural projects,

4 Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music, op. cit.*, pp. 88-96, 142-52.

5 Victor Cousin, *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, Paris, 1846, vol. 2, pp. 196-97.

but this is hardly important since little separated the modes of lyric and song. Lyric poetry, by definition, was poetry to be sung, and music – named for the muses – invested lyric poetry with its power. That lyric and song are virtually synonymous within neo-Platonic poetics is a premise central to my essay, which explores the Renaissance and its music in the nineteenth century within the broad contexts of lyric and moral philosophy rather than the more limited context framed by musical settings of lyric poetry.

By reason of its proximity to music, lyric poetry reigned supreme alongside music during the Renaissance. Horace, Anacreon, Amphion, Orpheus, and even Apollo bore the lyre as a device, a lyre that shed a guiding light for Renaissance poets and, in France, for the neo-Platonic poets of the Pléiade. As we know, neo-Platonism fell into disrepute in the seventeenth century when Cartesian philosophy rationalized aesthetics, grounding them in thought rather than in the motions of the soul.[6] Lyric, too, fell from grace, and poets like Racine, Corneille, Molière, and Quinault distinguished themselves by writing for the theater, not by writing lyric poetry. Only in the nineteenth century did lyric again become a principal mode for poets and musicians, and it did so at a time characterized at least partly by a revival of neo-Platonism and the recrowning of music with her old Renaissance laurels. Indeed, the famous line I use to introduce this paper comes from Pater's book on the Renaissance, a book that helped define the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century rebirth of Classical aesthetics for nineteenth-century readers.[7]

Sixty years before Pater penned those famous words, Cousin was lecturing at the École Normale on Plato and Renaissance mysticism to an avid public, and reminding listeners that poetry and song had once capped Mount Parnassus. Cousin's philosophies are the point of departure for my essay, which proposes some preliminary explanations of the parallels between Renaissance and Romantic ideals of music and poetry that arose from the common ground of neo-Platonism. Certainly the older Romantic poets knew Cousin well: Sainte-Beuve counted him as a close friend, while Balzac, Stendhal, and Lamartine all attended his lectures at the Sorbonne. His lectures proved so popular that they were printed in newspapers, posted at street corners, translated, and distributed as far abroad as Moscow.[8] François Fétis embraced Cousin's aesthetics and modeled his history of music on Cousin's *Histoire de la philosophie*, a fact that, while incidental,

6 On this transition, see Timothy J. Reiss, *Knowledge, Discovery and Imagination in Early Modern Europe: The Rise of Aesthetic Rationalism*, Cambridge, 1997.

7 Cousin also implicitly puts hearing on top (over sight) but reason above sensibility, *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 375; vol. 2, pp. 190, 193.

8 See D. G. Charlton, "Victor Cousin and the French Romantics," *French Studies*, 17 (1963) pp. 311-23.

is suggestive of Cousin's importance to a central figure in nineteenth-century music history and criticism.[9] In short, I argue that the intellectual environment created by Cousin's lectures and publications made an understanding of Renaissance neo-Platonism available to a broad public. The audience for Cousin's thought eventually came to include Baudelaire, and in closing I will suggest that Baudelaire's reaction to Cousin and his readings of sixteenth-century neo-Platonic poetry may have helped codify the musical poetics of symbolism.

## Cousin and Plato

Cousin was more of a lecturer on philosophy than a philosopher himself, and what he did contribute to the philosophical canon, as he himself freely admitted, was not systematic philosophy, but an eclectic reading of many past philosophers. He believed that every philosophical system contained a portion of the truth, and that the truths of all philosophical systems could be combined to produce a single whole truth. In this way, Cousin based his philosophy of eclecticism on method rather than on systematic coherence, and a principle of liberal selection guided him in his attempts to unite all of the truthful elements of past philosophical systems into a comprehensive whole.[10] Unfortunately, Cousin's method rendered his philosophy derivative and rife with contradictions, two features that explain in part why his works are rarely read any longer. But all was not in vain. The positive contribution of eclecticism, at least to Cousin's own age, was its resurrection of historical philosophies, for past philosophies furnished the material from which Cousin assembled his work. Plato, Aristotle, Ficino, Ramus, Paracelsus, Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, Kant, and many more were reviewed, categorized, and critiqued in Cousin's courses. His method instigated what became France's first comprehensive history of philosophy, a history that would remain unchallenged until well into the twentieth century.

Cousin's lectures were published in a dizzying array of editions, but foremost among them is the *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, which was based on the lectures given between 1815 and 1821.[11] Cousin had been thrust into a lectureship

9 On Fétis and Cousin see Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France:* La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, *1834-80*, Cambridge, 1995, esp. pp. 33-45.

10 Cousin, *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, *op. cit.*, vol 2, pp. 1-18. This method (eclecticism) exposed him to severe critique. See Jules Simon, *Victor Cousin*, 3rd edition, Paris, 1891, pp. 65-9. But it may also be that the inner reversals of eclecticism proved to be politically expedient in an age marked by governmental upheaval. As the *ancien régime* that had traditionally been a touchstone for systematic philosophy in earlier centuries was finally coming apart, so too systematic philosophy seems to have been rendered untenable. The inner contradictions riddling Cousin's work were perhaps its saving grace in such a politically volitile era.

11 Cousin's fullest survey of Renaissance philosophy was first delivered in lectures between 1828 and 1830 and is published under the slightly different title, *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie*, 3 vols., Paris, 1845. I use a later edition entitled *Histoire générale de la philosophie*, Paris, 1864.

in philosophy at age 23, just after having completed studies in Greek. Without a philosophy of his own to expound and with no training in the matter, he began – in a fairly unprecedented fashion – to describe the philosophies of others. The *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, first published in 1837 by the École Normale, then again in 1845 by Didier, became *the* fundamental text for French students of philosophy. But it was not just a five-volume history of philosophy, for Cousin dedicated the second volume to his own aesthetic theories, a volume he titled *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien*. This is where we find his most original work, which explains why it was so quickly liberated from the *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne* to become a self-standing book. Didier published *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien* as a single volume in 1853, a publication which ran to an astounding 18 editions by 1873 and continued to 30 editions by 1917. In *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien*, Cousin's method bears a fairly coherent philosophy concerning the connectedness of truth, artistic beauty, and morality – that is, on the true, the beautiful, and the good. In this sense, then, it synthesizes his readings in Classical and early modern moral philosophy with a special emphasis on aesthetics. Along with Kant and Hegel, Plato is an important source for *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien*, in which Platonic idealism constitutes a fundamental point of departure for Cousin's musical aesthetics.[12]

Cousin had a long-standing interest in Plato. He had studied Greek in college, and when he was dismissed from his lectureship between 1820 and 1828 owing to political problems in France, he set about translating the whole of Plato, a project that he always considered to be his chief work, and rightly so, for his became the standard French translations of Plato.[13] Another early interest of Cousin's was music. One of his disciples relates that Cousin dreamt of being a musician while at college and penned a libretto entitled *Les trois flacons* that he planned to have set by Fromental Halévy.[14] (The project never progressed.) Ironically, only in 1919 when Satie set Cousin's translations of the Platonic dialogues as *Socrate: Drame symphonique en trois parties avec voix* would Cousin's words ring to music. In the end, whether the story about Cousin's musical aspirations is true is less important than the way its telling depicts Cousin as sympathetic to music from the start, a sympathy that would have made Plato's philosophies even more appealing.

The cornerstone of Cousin's aesthetics comes straight from Plato: the arts can educate society through beauty, since beauty is essentially moral.[15] Beauty

12 For an excellent overview of Cousin's debts to Kant, Hegel, Plato, and others, see Frederic Will, *Flumen Historicum: Victor Cousin's Aesthetic and Its Sources*, Chapel Hill, 1965. I found this book to be invaluable. It clarified the continuities and disjunctions between the aesthetic theories of Cousin and Plato and confirmed what had been mere intuitions on my part.

13 Simon, *Victor Cousin, op. cit.*, p. 21.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

15 My summary here of Will's analysis is, of necessity, brief and selective. For his full explanation, see *Idem, Flumen Historium, op. cit.*, pp. 14-27.

creates measure and proportion in the soul that lead to goodness. The experience of beauty draws the soul up and into a perfectly proportioned original state where it experiences grace and virtue. Seeking after its original state of perfect unity, the soul inclines toward the spiritual as if by nature. Thus, the soul's affinity for beauty, particularly the supreme beauty or what Plato calls the Idea of Beauty, is simply the soul's attraction or love for its most perfect spiritual double. The harmonic resonance between the soul and beauty thus explains both the soul's affinity for beauty and its love of goodness, for love is nothing other than the motion that beauty excites in the heart, the primary organ of the passions. In Cousin's vocabulary, the perfect spiritual double desired by the soul is infinity, and so he concludes "c'est [l'infini] que nous aimons en aimant la vérité, la beauté, la vertu… Le coeur est insatiable parce qu'il aspire à l'infini. Ce sentiment, ce besoin de l'infini est au fond des grandes passions et des plus légers désirs."[16] *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien* explores how truth, beauty, and morality operate on the intellect, heart, and soul.

Plato says in the *Republic* that music is the most edifying of the arts because it nourishes a simple and beautiful rhythm in the soul.[17] Music penetrates to the inwardmost portions of the soul, seizing it with rhythm and harmony and imparting grace to the listener. Music, moreover, is the best means of moral education because it is the least representative of the arts: the plastic arts distract the soul with superfluous aesthetic pleasures, but music is pure motion that speaks directly to the soul and aligns it with the motion of the universe. Celestial harmonies are, in turn, perceived through a kind of moral reason arising from the passions.[18] Cousin recalls this moral understanding of music from the *Timæus* and the *Republic* when he says:

> Il y a physiquement et moralement entre un son et l'âme un rapport merveilleux. Il semble que l'âme est un écho où le son prend une puissance nouvelle. On raconte de la musique ancienne des choses extraordinaires qu'il n'est pas difficile d'admettre en voyant les effets de notre musique sur nous-mêmes qui ne sommes pas aussi sensible au beau que les anciens. Et il ne faut pas croire que la grandeur des effets suppose ici des moyens très compliqués. Non, moins la musique fait de bruit, plus elle touche. Donnez quelques notes à Pergolèse, donnez-lui surtout quelques voix pures et suaves, et il vous ravit jusqu'au ciel… [19]

16 "It is [the infinite] that we love in loving truth, beauty, and virtue… The heart is insatiable because it aspires to the infinite. This sentiment, this need of the infinite, is at the bottom of the greatest passions and the lightest desires." Cousin, *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne, op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 98.

17 Plato, *Republic*, 401 D; *Laws*, 812; *Timæus*, 47; also see Will, *Flumen Historicum, op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

18 Cousin, *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne, op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 97-103.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 196-7.

[There is, physically and morally, a marvellous connection between sound and the soul. It seems that the soul is an echo where sound takes on a new power. One says extraordinary things about ancient music that are not difficult to accept when we see the effects of our music on ourselves, who are not as sensitive to the beautiful as the ancients. And it is not necessary to believe that the greatness of the effects implies very complicated methods. No, the less music makes noise, the more it touches. Give some notes to Pergolesi, above all give him some pure and smooth voices, and he will ravish you to the heavens.]

Here Cousin pursues the same specter of ancient music that vexed Renaissance neo-Platonists, who wished to revive a music for which they had no material record. At the end of this passage, Cousin substitutes Pergolesi for ancient music, making Pergolesi stand for the simple sort of music condoned by Plato. Cousin's writing evinces more than a passing similarity to an argument made by the great neo-Platonic philosopher of the Pléiade, Pontus de Tyard, who had made the following remarks in his *Solitaire second* (1555):

[…] la Musique figurée le plus souvent ne rapporte aux oreilles autre chose qu'un grand bruit, duquel vous ne sentez aucune vive efficace. Mais la simple et unique voix, coulée doucement… vous ravit la part qu'elle veut.[20]
[… figured Music [polyphony] most often brings to the ears only a great noise from which you feel no lively effect. But the simple and single voice, flowing sweetly… ravishes you as it will.]

That old Renaissance debate over the virtues of polyphony and monody seems to itch below the surface of Cousin's text as he, like Tyard, attempts to give a contemporary example of simple music that can bring about a Platonic *ravissement*.

One problem with Cousin's Platonism is that he misunderstands (or deliberately misrepresents) the role of art in Platonic philosophy.[21] Plato envisions a spiritual ladder occupied by particular beauties that draw the spirit up to them. The Idea of Beauty stands at the top, but it is not separate. It is a supreme beauty that can be perceived through the love of lesser beauties, which means that the whole system is situated within the realm of the sensible. Cousin broke the bonds linking music, beauty, and morality in Plato's system by separating the material elements of a beautiful object from its spiritual components. Under the influence of neo-Classical art theory, Cousin thus transformed Plato's Idea of Beauty into "le beau idéal," an ideal beauty that was a spiritual refraction of the lesser beauties perceptible through the senses.[22] For Cousin, the path from the perception

20 Pontus de Tyard, *Solitaire second*, ed. Cathy M. Yandell, Geneva, 1980, p. 214.

21 Will offers a rich explanation of the reasons for this "error" in Cousin's Platonism, which results from the influence of Plotinus, Quatremère de Quincy, Shaftesbury, and others. See *Idem, Flumen Historicum, op. cit.*, pp. 23-53.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

of a beautiful object to the understanding of ideal beauty could never be direct, and the jump from the material to the spiritual plane required the mediation of reason in order to abstract ideal beauty from real beauties. This kind of reason was sooner a faculty of the imagination than of the intellect, per se, but it was still reason, not sense. Over and over again, Cousin insists that "le vrai, le beau, et le bien" exist beyond the reach of the senses. Sense experience alone can never produce spiritual enlightenment, which is why music, the art that appeals least to the intellect, cannot, in Cousin's estimation, reign supreme.

No art could contest music's potential to stir the passions, yet Cousin, who formulated his philosophies in the early nineteenth century under the sway of Kant, did not place music on top in his artistic hierarchy. He believed that music's circumvention of the intellect diminished it, as we see in the following passage, the continuation of the passage cited in my introduction:

> Sous ce rapport, la musique est un art sans rival: elle n'est pourtant pas le premier des arts. La musique paie la rançon du pouvoir immense qui lui a été donné; elle éveille plus que tout autre art le sentiment de l'infini, parce qu'elle est vague, obscure, indéterminée dans ses effets… Sa puissance directe et naturelle n'est ni sur l'imagination représentative ni sur l'intelligence; elle est sur le coeur.[23]
> [In this respect, music is an art without rival: it is nevertheless not the first of the arts. Music pays the ransom of the immense power which has been given it; it awakens more than any other art the feeling of the infinite because it is vague, obscure, undetermined in its effects… Its direct and natural power is neither over the representative imagination nor over intelligence; it is over the heart.]

According to Cousin, the unmediated quality of music prevented it from engaging the spirit. It could produce a feeling of the sublime and carry the listener off to infinite realms, but it could not speak to the rational part of the soul. Obscure and indeterminate, the magic language-beyond-language by which music spoke to the heart evaded reason. This led Cousin to praise poetry as a superior art, since its combination of musical modes and words engaged the intellect as well:

> La parole humaine, idéalisée par la poésie, a la profondeur et l'éclat de la note musicale; et elle est lumineuse autant que pathétique; elle parle à l'esprit comme au coeur; elle est en cela inimitable et inaccessible qu'elle réunit en elle tous les extrêmes et tous les contraires, dans une harmonie qui redouble leur effet réciproque.[24]
> [Human speech, idealized by poetry, has the depth and brilliance of the musical note; and it is lucid as well as moving; it speaks to the spirit as to the heart; it is in this inimitable and inaccessible in that it gathers together in itself all the extremes and all the opposites in a harmony that redoubles their reciprocal effect.]

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23 Cousin, *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne, op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 197-98.

24 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 203.

Here Cousin argues that poetry reworks speech into a musical language that speaks to both the intellect and the irrational passions of the heart. The amplification of speech in music lends the "charm of measure" to ordinary words, and through this amplification poetry hovers midway between speech and music. It is at once material and immaterial, precise and indeterminate, and more effective than pure music. As much as Cousin wanted to believe in Plato's harmonic universe and the musical gyrations of the world soul, he ultimately assimilated Plato to his own post-Cartesian world where reason mediated sensual experience. This is why he declared poetry, which was both musical and rational, "l'art par excellence."

## Cousin and neo-Platonism

According to Cousin, the misconception that transcendent ideas could be experienced directly via the senses was the fundamental error of mysticism, a branch of neo-Platonism first developed by Alexandrian philosophers and perpetuated by the Florentine Academy of Marsilio Ficino.[25] Judging from Cousin's library, he had a thorough knowledge of Renaissance neo-Platonism. He avidly collected sixteenth-century printed books and owned three copies of Cornelius Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*, the complete works of Pico della Mirandola, three copies of Francesco Giorgio's *De harmonia mundi* (one a French translation by Guy Le Fevre de La Boderie that included Pico's *Heptaplus* as well), two early French translations of Ficino's *De vita libri tres*, a translation of Ficino's *Symposium* commentary, and an Italian translation of Ficino's letters, not to mention a score of sixteenth-century treatises on astrology and magic such as Jean Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers* and Benito Pereyra's *De magia*.[26] I single out Ficino in my title primarily because later Renaissance neo-Platonists so regularly referred to his *De vita*, either explicitly or implicitly, and because Cousin owned so many French translations of Ficino. It is not at all clear whether Cousin read Latin with comfort – indeed, it was Cousin who insisted that philosophy be taught in French – and so Ficino holds a special place not just in his teachings but in his library as well.[27]

Just because Cousin read Ficino does not mean, however, that he approved of Ficino's neo-Platonism. Mysticism is the object of a long invective in *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien*. The demonology, trance, and ecstasy by which mystics achieved divine illumination struck Cousin as thoroughly irrational, in the sense that they

25 Mysticism is discussed in *Histoire générale de la philosophie, op. cit.*, pp. 259-66, 291-302; *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne, op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 375-9, vol. 2, pp. 94-120.

26 See Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, *Catalogue des ouvrages du XVIe siècle*, 2 vols., Paris, 1978. Cousin's library included over 1200 sixteenth-century prints that he donated to the University of Paris at the end of his life.

27 Simon, *Victor Cousin, op. cit.*, p. 114.

did not engage the faculties of reason.[28] Because mysticism focused on the heart alone and neglected the intellect, Cousin even construed it as morally dangerous. He explained that the heart, like reason, longs for the infinite, but that the heart can be misled: the heart can mistake a simulacrum of true beauty for the real thing, and this image of beauty will excite the heart without satisfying it.[29] Cousin concluded that taken alone, the heart's love is ignorant. While mystics asserted that one could know the infinite through the motions of the passions, Cousin derided the idea as insane, since, as Descartes had proved, knowledge of God is gained through reason. Mysticism

> […] est l'entier et aveugle abandon de soi-même, de sa volonté, de tout son être dans une contemplation vide de pensée, dans une prière sans parole et presque sans conscience.[30]
>
> [… is the total and blind abandon of the self, of its will, of all its being in a contemplation that is empty of thought, in a prayer without words and almost without conscience.]

Cousin particularly criticized mystics for their theory of ecstasy, which posited a direct communion of the soul with God. How could ecstasy, which denied all of the higher faculties – conscience, memory, reflection, and "la parole humaine" – produce divine knowledge? "L'extase, loin d'élever l'homme jusqu'à Dieu, l'abaisse au-dessous de l'homme; car elle abolit en lui la pensée."[31] Here we discover why music, the language of the heart and the fundament of Ficinian magic, must rank below poetry in Cousin's artistic hierarchy and why the interrogation of reason's function in divine knowledge employs so much of the same vocabulary that Cousin enlists elsewhere to explain the difference between poetry and music. Music simulates an unmediated knowledge of truth that can only finally be attained by reason. Music may engage the senses and may, through its moral beauty, awaken a sense of grandeur that could compel the imagination toward an understanding of the sublime, but in the end, neither ecstasy nor music is sufficient.[32] Only poetry can "express thought in its most sublime flight, in its most refined abstraction."[33]

Whether he was aware of it or not, Cousin's polemic against mysticism and ecstasy reproduced a coherent account of neo-Platonic mysticism that could

28 On the practices of Renaissance mystics see Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic, op. cit*. What I relate here is Cousin's characterization of Renaissance mysticism, which is inaccurate in the way it stresses the irrationality of mysticism but quite important for the same reason.

29 *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne, op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 101-2.

30 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 104. Mysticism confounds reason and sentiment. Sentiment is the harmonious and lively rapport between reason and sensibility, whereas the "mysticism of sentiment" suppresses reason (vol. 2, pp. 104-105).

31 "Ecstacy, far from elevating man to God, lowers him below man, for it destroys thought in man…" *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 114.

32 On the sublime see *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 141-42.

33 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 201-202.

be used to argue for music's supremacy among the arts. The synergy between music and the heartbeat of the world-soul explained music's power to awaken the feeling of the infinite, and as vagueness, ineffability, and mystery became virtues in Romantic art, music came to have a central role in the experience of the sublime. Its magic circumvention of the intellect, far from holding it ransom, made artists treasure it. As Pater said, "art is always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception… it is the art of music which most completely realises this artistic ideal."[34]

## Music and Letters

Cousin disseminated his theories at precisely the time Charles Baudelaire (1821-1868) came of age as a poet, and *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien* was widely read in France by the time of Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) and Paul Verlaine (1844-1896). Scholars usually point to Wagner as a principal source of symbolist aesthetics, citing Baudelaire's 1861 review of *Tannhäuser* and Mallarmé's 1885 *rêverie* in the *Revue wagnérienne*. Yet Baudelaire's theory of correspondence, upon which symbolism was founded, is not wholly indebted to German Romantics. Since many of the same aesthetic ideas were available in Cousin well before the *wagnérisme* of 1860-1880, it is not fair to assert, as Bojan Bujíc does in his *Music in European Thought, 1851-1912* that in France "there existed no bond between philosophy and the art of romanticism such as existed in Germany."[35] Nor is it fair to say that the French regarded "aesthetics as a self-contained discipline, closely related to history and sociology and completely divorced from metaphysics."[36] Cousin is no Hegel, to be sure, but his aesthetics is thoroughly philosophical and metaphysical.

Baudelaire was keenly aware of the way Cousin harnessed beauty to truth and goodness, making poetry a servant of moral instruction. In a poetic world that had taken up Gautier's cry of art for art's sake, Baudelaire condemned Cousin's *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien* for mixing three such different ends, arguing that beauty alone is the proper aim of poetry: "la morale cherche le bien, la science, le vrai, la poésie et quelquefois le roman, ne cherchent que le beau."[37] Indeed, the title of *Les fleurs du mal* is all the more pointed in this regard, since it inverts the goal of a

34 Pater, *The Renaissance, op. cit.*, p. 144.

35 Bujíc, ed., *Music in European Thought, 1851-1912*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 179. Bujíc seems completely unaware of Cousin's work, even though one of the Wagnerians he includes in his collection, Théodore de Wyzéwa, edited a volume of Cousin's writings in 1898 (*Pages choisies de Victor Cousin, publiée avec un notice sur Cousin par Téodor de Wyzéwa*, Paris, 1898).

36 Bujíc, ed, *Music in European Thought, op. cit.*, p. 179.

37 "The moral seeks the good, science the true, poetry and sometimes novels only seek the beautiful." Cited in Rosemary Lloyd, *Baudelaire's Literary Criticism*, Cambridge, 1981, p. 126. I paraphrase Lloyd's remarks here. Some scholars would attribute an "art pour l'art" philosophy to Cousin well before Gautier. See Charlton, "Victor Cousin and the French Romantics," *op. cit.*, p. 318.

moralizing poetics – *le bien* – and replaces it with its antithesis, *le mal*. "Spleen et Idéal," the first section of *Les fleurs*, reproduces this dichotomy. While Cousin's Platonism supposes a useful kind of poetry that addresses the sublime, Baudelaire, in contrast, traces his descent into a Dantean *enfer* where his œuvre blossoms forth from the materiality of life and its baseness or *mal*. It is not that Baudelaire's poetry points any less firmly toward an Idea of Beauty, but rather that he wishes "d'extraire la beauté du Mal."[38] Baudelaire writes from the abyss. Abandoning the *champs fleuries* of earlier poets, this self-proclaimed "chantre des voluptés folles du vin et de l'opium," takes Paris at her most vulgar as his muse.[39]

The public received *Les fleurs du mal* with mixed emotion, and when it came time to issue a second edition in 1861, Baudelaire attempted to compose a preface to respond to critics and, as he said, to explain the difference between *le Bien* and *le Beau*, and how *la Beauté* can be found in *le Mal*.

> J'avais primitivement l'intention de répondre à de nombreuses critiques et, en même temps, d'expliquer quelques questions très simples, totalement obscurcies par la lumière moderne: qu'est-ce que la Poësie? quel est son but? de la distinction du Bien d'avec le Beau; de la Beauté dans le Mal; que le rythme et la rime répondent dans l'homme aux immortels besoins de monotonie…[40]
> [I originally intended to respond to numerous criticisms and, at the same time, to explain several very simple questions, totally obscured by the modern light: what is Poetry? what is its purpose? of the distinction between the Good and the Beautiful, of the Beauty in the Bad, that rhythm and rhyme respond in man to the immortal needs of monotony…]

The language of *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien*, replete with capitals, generates Baudelaire's projected preface, organizing the subjects he proposes to address. But Cousin's book, already in its eighth edition, must have seemed a daunting opponent. In the end, Baudelaire discarded all attempts to compose a preface challenging Cousin, and perhaps with good reason, for his poems stake their claims within Cousin's dialectic of the true, the beautiful, and the good. *Les fleurs du mal* does not reject Cousin as much as it retunes his values to the magical strains of the Ficinian lyre, a lyre revived *grace à* Cousin himself.

*Du vrai, du beau, et du bien* was not the only possible source of Baudelaire's Platonism: Cousin's translations of Plato, the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), and Renaissance poetry have all been suggested by Baudelaire scholars as intellectual background for the poet's idealism.[41] Whether Cousin's

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38 Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal, édition de 1861*, ed. Claude Pichois, Paris, 1972, p. 229.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

41 See, among others, Marc Eigeldinger, *Le platonisme de Baudelaire*, Paris, 1951, Freeman G. Henry, *Le message humaniste des* Fleurs du mal*: Essai sur la création onomastico-thématique chez Baudelaire*, Paris, 1984, pp. 142-50, and Elliott Forsyth, "Baudelaire and the Petrarchan Tradition," *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 16 (1979), pp. 187-97.

attack on Renaissance neo-Platonism piqued Baudelaire's curiosity cannot be verified, but we do know that the verse of France's preeminent neo-Platonic poet, Pierre de Ronsard, captured Baudelaire's imagination. Baudelaire owned an early seventeenth-century edition of Ronsard, and modern editions of Ronsard by Sainte-Beuve and Blanchemain began to appear in 1828, generating considerable interest in the brightest star of the Pléiade.[42]

A friend of the young Baudelaire recalls him, "finding his way between Villon and Ronsard, crazy for old sonnets and young paintings, refined, paradoxical, bohemian, and dandy."[43] Petrarchistic sonnets like Ronsard's clearly inspire the shape and content of *Les fleurs du mal*, from its cyclic structure and verse forms to the way images of the mistress's eyes overwhelm the text.[44] But Baudelaire found even more in Ronsard. Ronsard's taste for Ovidian metamorphosis as a lesson in spiritual transformation breathes a sexuality into his texts that both establishes and denies their subservience to Petrarchan dicta.[45] Ronsard's verse cultivates sexual desire as a positive force, digging down into the darkest portion of the soul and harnessing its most animalistic passions in the service of a spiritual transport that is continually initiated in the lower stratum in a way that deliberately confounds physical ravishment with the soul's flight to higher knowledge. And true to Plato, this ravishing of the soul from the body is activated by or likened to music in Ronsard's verse. Song and soul loss are inseparable, as we see in sonnet 38 from *Les Amours*:

> Doulx est son ris, & sa voix qui me poulse
> L'ame du corps, pour errer lentement,
> Devant son chant marié gentement
> Avec mes vers animez de son poulce. (ll. 5-8)[46]
>
> [Her laugh is sweet, and her voice pushes / my soul from my body to flee slowly / before her song beautifully tuned / to my verses and brought to life with her plucking.[47]]

Or sonnet 164, to cite but two examples:

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42 See Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, *Baudelaire*, Paris, 1987, p. 200. Early editions of Ronsard include *Poésie française au seizième siècle*, ed. Charles-Auguste Sainte-Beuve, Paris, 1828; *Œuvres choisies de Pierre de Ronsard*, ed. Paul L. Jacob, Paris, 1841; and the first modern edition of Ronsard's complete works, *Œuvres complètes* ed. Prosper Blanchemain, Paris, 1857-66.

43 "C'est dans ce cadre étrange et sur ce fond bariolé que je retrouve l'image la plus nette de Baudelaire que j'ai le mieux connu à vingt ans, cherchant sa voie entre Villon et Ronsard, fou de vieux sonnets et de jeunes peintures, raffiné, paradoxal, bohème et dandy," Charles C[ousin], *Voyage dans un grenier*, Paris, 1878, pp. 10-11.

44 Baudelaire mentions Rémy Belleau and Ronsard in *Fleurs*, 88, ed. Pichois, *op. cit.*, p. 117. Also see Forsyth, "Baudelaire and the Petrarchan Tradition," *op. cit.*

45 On Petrarch and Ovid, see Robert M. Durling, ed. and trans., *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, Cambridge, Mass., 1976, pp. 26-33.

46 Pierre de Ronsard, *Les Amours de Pierre de Ronsard*, ed. Henri and Catherine Weber, Paris, 1963, p. 25.

47 The image here is of a lute-playing lady singing Ronsard's verse.

Depuis cinq ans dedans ce beau verger,
Je voys balant avecque faulx danger,
Soubz la chanson d'Allegez moy Madame:
Le tabourin se nommoit fol plaisir,
La fluste erreur, le rebec vain desir,
Et les cinq pas la perte de mon ame. (ll. 9-14)[48]

[For five years in that beautiful orchard, / I went dancing with False Danger, / To the tune of "Allegez moy Madame:" / The drum called it wild pleasure, / The flute error, the rebec vain desire, / And the five steps the loss of my soul.]

For Ronsard, the poetic furor transmitted through lyric links sex, the soul, and the spiritual world in chain of corresponding orders. Certainly the darker side of Renaissance mysticism appealed to Baudelaire – note the demonic singing muse of "Tout entière" (*Fleurs*, 41), or compare his "Le chat" to that of Ronsard (*Fleurs*, 51; Ronsard, *Premier Livre des poèmes*) – but the way he took up the subject of ravishing lyric in *Les fleurs du mal* is, in my estimation, far less significant than the way he adopted the system of correspondences supporting it.

In both Ronsard and Baudelaire, the universal soul enmeshes the world – *le bien avec le mal* – in a symphony of likenesses that plays itself out in transformations of the kind we find in Ronsard's sonnet 137 and Baudelaire's "Correspondances." Ronsard's sonnet features anthropomorphism, a mapping of the body onto the world that reveals the similitudes between the micro- and macrocosm. With lengthy praise of her individual body parts, Ronsard dismembers his mistress until only her disembodied voice is left to waft like perfume from the beautiful garden of her mouth across a mutable landscape:

Ce doulx parler qui les mourantz esveille,
Ce chant qui tient mes soucis enchantez,
Et ces deux cieulx sur deux astres antez,
De ma Deesse annoncent la merveille.
Du beau jardin de son printemps riant,
Naist un parfum, qui mesme l'orient
Embasmeroit de ses doulces alienes.
Et de là sort le charme d'une voix,
Qui touts raviz fait sauteler les boys,
Planer les montz, & montaigner les plaines. (ll. 5-14)[49]

[This sweet voice which quickens the dead, / This song which holds my thoughts enchanted, / And these two heavens planted above two stars / Announce the splendor of

48 *Ibid.*, p. 105. On this chanson – set by Guillaume Boni – see my "An Erotic Metaphysics of Hearing in Early Modern France," *The Musical Quarterly*, 82 (1998), pp. 678-91.

49 Ronsard, *Les Amours*, ed. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

my Goddess. / From the beautiful garden of her laughing springtime / Arises a fragrance with which even the Orient / Would perfume her sweet aliens. / And from there comes the charm of a voice / Which ravishes everything, makes the woods jump, / Levels the mountains, and raises the plains.]

In the quatrains, Ronsard catalogs his mistress's features – her laughter, breasts, teeth, lips, speech, singing, eyes, and eyebrows – in an exhaustive series of parallel constructions that seems to culminate in her arrival in the eighth line of the poem as these beauties "announce" her splendor. Yet the heavy description really atomizes the mistress – beauty by beauty – and severs the poem from its now shattered object.[50] Language is unleashed from its referent, sublimating sexual desire into a lyric utterance capable of carrying the listener/poet off to vast spaces where mountains erupt and crumble to music.

Not only does "Correspondances" rework the theme of incantatory song and even describe singing with the synaesthetic simile of oriental perfumes,[51] the chains of semantic correspondences it posits recall the same magical understanding of the world formulated by Renaissance neo-Platonists.[52]

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.
Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.
Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
– Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,
Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.[53]

[Nature is a temple where living pillars / Sometimes unleash confused words; / Man traverses it through forests of symbols / That observe him with knowing glances. / Like long echoes that mingle far away / In a shadowy and profound unity, / Vast as the night

50 On this rhetorical process, see Nancy J. Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elisabeth Abel, Chicago and London, 1982, pp. 95-109.

51 Baudelaire explores the same matrix of topics (oriental perfumes, singing, and the soul) in "Parfum exotique," *Fleurs*, ed. Pichois, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-4.

52 My reading of this poem has benefitted greatly from that of Katherine Bergeron in her important study of Baudelaire and Debussy, "The Echo, the Cry, the Death of Lovers," *19th-Centuty Music*, 18 (1944), pp. 136-51. See especially her evaluation of the semantic mobility of the text, pp. 137-9.

53 Baudelaire, *Fleurs*, ed. Pichois, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

> and as the light, / Perfumes, colors, and sounds answer each other. / There are perfumes as fresh as children's flesh, / Sweet as oboes, green as meadows, / And others corrupt, rich, and triumphant, / Having the expansion of infinite things, / Such as amber, musk, benzoin, and incense, / Which sing of the transports of the spirit and the senses.[54]]

Here the Petrarchan mistress of Ronsard's poem, who was distilled by and into poetry itself, is entirely absent from the poem. Baudelaire replaces the Petrarchan object of desire with transubstantiation itself, dispensing with the conceit of penning poetry to a distant beloved and jumping straight to the ultimate subject of neo-Platonic verse: spiritual transport. The opening of Baudelaire's lyric sequence enacts a communion ("Bénédiction," "Élévation," "Correspondances") in which "Correspondances" shows how the flesh can be transformed into spirit. *Les fleurs du mal* thus opens with a gesture replacing Catholic morality with a neo-Platonic idea of Beauty that is accessed through the senses and activated by the poetry itself, not by the beloved. And, cut loose from the mistress – their standard referent – the correspondences described by Ronsard become the very stuff of Baudelaire's verse as perfumes, colors, and sounds respond to one another directly, and amber, musk, and incense sing the transports of the spirit all on their own. Ronsard needs to ventriloquize the voice of his mistress in order to show how music activates desire and propels the soul on its flight from the body, whereas Baudelaire takes his own poetic voice to be sufficiently musical to ravish his readers. Despite these differences, however, both poets put forth not just a musical poetics appropriate to the emphasis on lyric in each of their oeuvres, but a musical metaphysics right in line with neo-Platonic thought.

Musical discussions of "Correspondances" usually arise in conjunction with discussions of Wagner and *wagnérisme*. After all, Baudelaire quoted "Correspondances" in his essay "Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris," using the poem to show how musical meaning could be translated into words.[55] But here we should recall that music and poetry are only media and that the object of Baudelaire's translation was not to make music comprehensible in poetic terms, but to revisit the musical experience of *Tannhäuser* in his essay. Sounding music was not requisite for the ecstasy so often associated with music by Romantics. Baudelaire said as much in his letter to Wagner when he described hearing *Tannhäuser* for the first time:

> D'abord il m'a semblé que je connaissais cette musique, et plus tard en y réfléchissant, j'ai compris d'où venait ce mirage; il me semblait que cette musique était la mienne, et je la reconnaissais comme tout homme reconnaît les choses qu'il est destiné à aimer.[56]

54 With a few alterations, I rely on the translation of Bergeron, "The Echo, the Cry, the Death of the Lovers," *op. cit.*, pp. 137-9.

55 Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, Paris, 1976, vol. 2, p. 784.

> [At first it seemed to me that I knew this music, and later, upon reflection, I understood where this mirage came from; it seemed to me that this music was my own, and I recognized it in the way that every man recognizes the things that he is destined to love.]

Baudelaire heard his own music in *Tannhäuser*, recognizing it as *le Beau*, that Idea of Beauty that attracts the soul. Well aware of how presumptuous this must have sounded, he went on to tell Wagner that "pour tout autre que pour un homme d'esprit, cette phrase serait immensément ridicule, surtout écrit par quelqu'un qui, comme moi, *ne sait pas la musique*…."[57] In other words, Baudelaire did not know music *per se*, but he trusted Wagner, a fellow "homme d'esprit," to understand that the music being discussed was far more than the audible strains of *Tannhäuser*.[58] "Music" was the artistic condition to which poetry aspired, a transport to infinite spaces, the password to an occult web of correspondences that might be illuminated by the poet, a fire sublimating mortal flesh, a drug of mystics, sensual, irrational, voluptuous. "La musique souvent me prend," Baudelaire wrote in 1857, "je sens vibrer en moi toutes les passions…."[59] Baudelaire knew Music before he heard Wagner. For Music was lyric, a new French lyric revived at least in part from a Renaissance past during which *le Bien* of the spirit world could still be reached through *le Beau* and *le Mal* of Music's play on the senses.

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56 Baudelaire, *Correspondance*, ed. Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, Paris, 1973, vol. 1, pp. 672-3.

57 *Ibid.*, "For anyone other than a man of spirit, this phrase will seem terribly ridiculous, particularly written by one such as myself who *does not know music*…."

58 Stéphane Mallarmé, too, rethought Wagnerian music-drama in terms of a poetic transposition, turning it into a "solitary silent concert… given by the act of reading." See Mallarmé, "Richard Wagner, rêverie d'un poète français" in *Igitur, Divagations, Un coup de dés*, ed. Yves Bonnefoy, Paris, 1976, p. 169, trans. in Bujíc, ed., *Music in European Thought, op. cit.*, p. 243, and my "On the Side of Poetry and Chaos," *op. cit.*

59 "Music often takes me… I feel all the passions vibrate in me….", Baudelaire, "La musique," *Fleurs*, ed. Claude Pichois, *op. cit.*, p. 100.