

HELEN ABBOTT



PARISIAN INTERSECTIONS

Baudelaire's Legacy to Composers



PETER LANG
CLASSICS

The period from the 1850s to the 1890s in Paris marked a key turning point for poets and composers, as they grappled with the new ways in which poetry and music could intersect. Under the particular conditions of the time and place, both art forms underwent significant developments which challenged the status of each form. In both creative and critical work from this era, poets and composers offered tantalising but problematic insights into 'musical' poetry and 'poetic' music.

The central issue examined in this book is that of what happens to poetry when it encounters music, especially as song. The author places Baudelaire's famous sonnet 'La Mort des amants' at the heart of the analysis, tracing its transposition into song by a succession of both amateur and professional composers, examining works by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Serpette, Rollinat, Debussy and Charpentier, as well as an extraordinary parodic song version by Valade and Verlaine.

A companion website offers recordings of each of the songs analysed in this book.

Helen Abbott is currently Professor of Modern Languages at the University of Birmingham. She specialises in relationships between poetry and music in nineteenth-century France and has published widely on Baudelaire, Debussy, Mallarmé and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. She also promotes performance of French *mélodie* through regular collaboration with professional pianists and singers.

ISBN 978-1-80374-010-2



9 781803 740102

www.peterlang.com

Parisian Intersections

Helen Abbott

Parisian Intersections

Baudelaire's Legacy to Composers



PETER LANG
CLASSICS

Lausanne • Berlin • Bruxelles • Chennai • New York • Oxford

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.

The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023904937

ISBN 978-1-80374-010-2 (print)

ISBN 978-1-80374-011-9 (ePDF)

ISBN 978-1-80374-012-6 (ePUB)

© 2023 Peter Lang Group AG

Published by Peter Lang Ltd, Oxford, United Kingdom

info@peterlang.com - www.peterlang.com

First published in 2012 by the same author in the series *Romanticism and after in France*, Vol. 22 (ISBN 978-3-0343-0805-2).

All rights reserved.

All parts of this publication are protected by copyright.

Any utilisation outside the strict limits of the copyright law, without the permission of the publisher, is forbidden and liable to prosecution.

This applies in particular to reproductions, translations, microfilming, and storage and processing in electronic retrieval systems.

Contents

List of Tables	vii
Music Recordings	ix
List of Abbreviations	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii
CHAPTER 1	
Parisian Intersections	I
CHAPTER 2	
Liebestod	19
CHAPTER 3	
Musical Theories	43
CHAPTER 4	
Song	65
CHAPTER 5	
Parody	133
CHAPTER 6	
Legacy	157

Appendices	171
Bibliography	203
Index	213

List of Tables

Table 1	Nineteenth-century settings of 'La Mort des amants'	71
Table 2	Vocabulary of 'La Mort des cochons'	144

Music Recordings

Recordings of the songs analysed in this book are available on the companion website: <https://soundcloud.com/parisian-intersections/sets/parisian-intersections/s-tau07>

Mary Bevan (soprano)
Helen Abbott (cello)
Sholto Kynoch (piano)

Recorded at the Jacqueline Du Pré music building, St Hilda's College, Oxford, 21 March 2011. Recording engineer Jules Millard.
© Helen Abbott 2011

Track listing:

1. Villiers/Sivry, *La Mort des amants*
2. Villiers/Holmès, *La Mort des amants*
3. Villiers/Georges, *La Mort des amants*
4. Villiers/Gautier, *La Mort des amants*
5. Serpette, *La Mort des amants*
6. Rollinat, *La Mort des amants*
7. Debussy, *La Mort des amants*
8. Charpentier, *La Mort des amants*
9. Villiers/Sivry, *La Mort des cochons*

Abbreviations

The editions of Baudelaire's and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's work referred to throughout are the Pléiade editions (see bibliography for full details), and will be signalled by the following abbreviations:

B. *OC* Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*

B. *Corr* Baudelaire, *Correspondance*

VIA. *OC* Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Œuvres complètes*

VIA. *Corr* Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Correspondance*

Acknowledgements

Helen Abbott is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Each year the AHRC provides funding from the Government to support research and postgraduate study in the arts and humanities. Only applications of the highest quality are funded and the range of research supported by this investment of public funds not only provides social and cultural benefits but also contributes to the economic success of the UK. For further information on the AHRC, please go to: www.ahrc.ac.uk



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

This research was also made possible thanks to a Visiting Fellowship at the Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of London, 2010–2011. For further information on the IGRS, please go to: www.sas.igrs.ac.uk

With thanks to Francis Bevan, Mary Bevan, Sholto Kynoch, Robin Holloway, Edmond Lemaître, François Le Roux, Dominic and Felix McGonigal, Jules Millard and Thomas Schmidt-Beste for their assistance with all the musical aspects of this book. I am grateful also for the support and assistance of Anne and Steve Abbott, Chantal and Jean-François Chaumont, Sven Greitschus, Carol Tully and Tim Unwin. Finally, particular thanks go to Denis Saint-Amand, for pointing me in the direction of ‘La Mort des cochons’ which served as the impetus for writing this book in the first place.

Parisian Intersections

What happens to poetry when it encounters music? This is the central question of this book, and one which has preoccupied poets, musicians, critics and philosophers throughout the ages. As poet and critic Yves Bonnefoy has identified, the mid-to-late nineteenth century in France is ‘un des moments les plus remarquables de l’alliance de la poésie et de la musique [...] où plus que jamais musiciens et poètes s’intéressent les uns aux autres.’¹ This is the time of Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) and Richard Wagner (1813–1883), two seminal figures whose developments in the domains of poetry and music continue to have profound resonances today. Critical studies of the relationship between Baudelaire and Wagner to date have focused on concepts such as ‘writing on music’ (Margaret Miner), ‘writing about music’ (Mary Breatnach), ‘the idea of music’ (Joseph Acquisto), or ‘music writing literature’ (Peter Dayan), for example.² However, these stud-

- 1 Yves Bonnefoy, *L’Alliance de la poésie et de la musique* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2007), pp. 58–59.
- 2 Critical studies on the relationships between Baudelaire and Wagner have flourished in the last twenty years in particular, from Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s *Musica ficta* (*Figures de Wagner*) (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1991), and Margaret Miner’s *Resonant Gaps between Baudelaire and Wagner* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), through to Mary Breatnach’s ‘Writing About Music: Baudelaire and *Tannhäuser* in Paris’, in Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf (eds), *Word and Music Studies: Essays on the Song Cycle and on Defining the Field*, *Word and Music Studies* 3 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 49–64, Eric Touya de Marenne’s *Musique et poétique à l’âge du symbolisme: Variations sur Wagner: Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Claudel, Valéry* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005), Joseph Acquisto’s study on the persistence of the lyric in Baudelaire’s writing on Wagner in *French Symbolist Poetry and the Idea of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), Peter Dayan’s analysis of the untranslatability of

ies rarely explore in depth how the presence of a whole range of writers and composers in Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century had such a defining influence on the development of the relationship between poetry and music. This book seeks to fill that gap by ‘joining the dots’ of how different poets and composers working in Paris in the 1840s–1890s were developing a new stance towards poetic and musical composition, publication and performance. It draws together both major and more peripheral figures of the era who were all based in Paris, including (in alphabetical order): Charles Baudelaire, Hector Berlioz, Ernest Cabaner, Emmanuel Chabrier, Gustave Charpentier, Ernest Chausson, François Coppée, Charles Cros, Claude Debussy, Pierre Dupont, Alexandre Georges, Judith Gautier, Théophile Gautier, Augusta Holmès, Catulle Mendès, Maurice Rollinat, Gaston Serpette, Charles de Sivry, Léon Valade, Paul Verlaine, Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam and Richard Wagner. The names in this list, topped and tailed by Baudelaire and Wagner, include both renowned and lesser-known poets and composers. In fact, a number of them can be classified as *both* poets and composers, such as Claude Debussy (who composed his own prose poetry for his *Proses lyriques*), Pierre Dupont (who devised music for his own verse), Maurice Rollinat (who composed music both for his own verse and for Baudelaire’s) and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam (a poet, playwright, and short-story writer who, as an amateur musician, was also one of the first to set Baudelaire’s poetry to music).³ This frequent bridging of genre boundaries by poets and composers themselves was possible because they all moved in very close circles, frequenting many of the same Parisian cafés and salons such as the *Brasserie des Martyrs* which opened in the 1850s, the salon hosted by Nina de Villard in the 1860s, the *Cercle zutique* at the *Hôtel des Étrangers* in the early 1870s, or the cabaret venue

Wagner’s music for Baudelaire in *Music Writing Literature, from Sand via Debussy to Derrida* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), and Alain Badiou’s *Five Lessons on Wagner* (London: Verso, 2010).

- 3 At the time, Debussy’s *Proses lyriques* texts were admired by contemporaries (and published separately from the music), but Debussy scholars tend to be more disparaging of these texts today. See for example David Code, *Debussy* (London: Reaktion, 2010), pp. 53–54.

Le Chat noir in the 1880s. Against this backdrop of names and places, it is Baudelaire's name that repeatedly emerges as a pivotal point of contact, giving rise to a very particular set of Parisian intersections that this book seeks to address, taking into account the fact that 'poetry [...] reflects a deep response to the historical moment of its production'.⁴ Baudelaire's position in this historical moment is significant as his writings about music in the 1860s signal:

Baudelaire's decision to write about music heralds the renewal of an ancient musico-poetic polemic on the one hand and, on the other, the emergence in France of a highly influential and creative interest in the art of music that had burgeoned among writers and philosophers earlier in the century.⁵

Baudelaire's central role in mid-nineteenth-century Parisian intersections between poets and composers and their poetry and music is, then, both backward- and forward-looking, and he is acutely aware of his place in the historical development in word/music relations.

By acknowledging that Baudelaire's poetry reveals an engagement with the problematic status of the literary text, especially in relation to music (and not just Wagner's music), this book offers detailed analyses of what happens when there is a mismatch between the aesthetic expectations pertaining to a poetic text and those of a musical text, re-evaluating the place and status of popular poetry and popular song in relation to high art compositions.⁶ In so doing, the aesthetic uncertainties are mapped against the important political upheavals of the nineteenth century in France, which carried very significant consequences for the capital city and the artists who lived and worked there. The link between a popular

4 Joseph Acquisto and Adrianna M. Paliyenko, 'Preface: The Cultural Currency of Nineteenth-Century French Poetry', *Romance Studies*, 26:3 (2008), 195–197 (p. 195).

5 Breatnach, 'Writing about music: Baudelaire and *Tannhäuser* in Paris', p. 60.

6 It is worth recalling Walter Benjamin's analysis of *Les Fleurs du Mal*: 'Baudelaire wrote a book which from the very beginning had little prospect of becoming an immediate popular success.' Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1983), p. 109.

aesthetic and political engagement is most prevalent in songs that were being composed in the aftermath of political events, especially around the start of the Second Empire (1852–1870), leading into the first decades of the Third Republic (1871–1940).

As Alain Vaillant has noted, ‘Il n’est pas [...] insignifiant que le premier texte publié de Baudelaire fût une chanson.’⁷ The *chanson* of which he speaks is entitled ‘Un Soutien du valet de trèfle’ and comprises seven stanzas of satirical lyrics with a refrain-variante, co-authored by Baudelaire and Gustave Le Vavas seur and published in *Le Corsaire* 1 February 1841 (Baudelaire was just 19 years old).⁸ The two poets base their lyrics on the air *Il était un roi d’Yvetot*, and satirise the playwright Jacques Ancelot’s candidature for the *Académie française*.⁹ Significantly, it marks a certain rebellion against both the literary establishment and political authority which is typical of the poets of this era.¹⁰ This kind of collaboration on satirical song lyrics based on popular song tunes, especially those which are politically allegorical, was standard practice during this era in Paris, but it has gone largely ignored in the critical scholarship.¹¹ As Vaillant goes on to point out, ‘on commence seulement aujourd’hui à prendre mesure de tout

7 Alain Vaillant (ed.), *Baudelaire journaliste* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), p. 37.

8 Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975–1976), I, pp. 213–214. Further references will be designated by the abbreviation B. OC. in the text.

9 Pierre-Jean de Béranger composed the original political song in 1813 with anti-Bonapartist lyrics. See Appendix A for the song score.

10 Victor Hugo’s ‘L’Absent’, written in 1851 in the wake of Hugo’s exile from France as a result of his distaste for Napoléon III, was tellingly set to music by Gabriel Fauré in the year of Napoléon III’s downfall (1870). Similarly, writing of Rimbaud’s engagement with authority at the end of the Second Empire, Seth Whidden notes that ‘L’autorité de l’écrivain suivant souvent de près celle de l’autorité politique, l’échec du Second Empire signale un refus du pouvoir autoritaire, politique ou poétique.’ Seth Whidden, ‘Avec les Zutistes, de très sérieuses *Conneries*’, *Le Magazine Littéraire* 489 (2009), 68–69 (p. 68).

11 Marie-Véronique Gauthier’s *Chanson, sociabilité et grivoiserie au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1992) is a notable exception.

ce que les meilleurs poètes du XIXe siècle (Hugo, Musset, Nerval, Banville, Verlaine, Rimbaud...) doivent à cette forme d'expression artistique.¹² Baudelaire's pivotal place in this relationship between popular song lyrics and high art poetry, coming not by chance at an important moment in French political history needs careful re-evaluation.

In the closing months of the Second Republic, and on the day of his thirtieth birthday, 9 April 1851, Baudelaire published eleven sonnets in the Parisian periodical *Le Messager de l'Assemblée* under the collective title *Les Limbes*.¹³ The liminal title suggests a marginal status for these poems, confirmed by the evocative titles of each of the sonnets:

1. 'Le Spleen' ('*Pluvieuse irrité...*')
 2. 'Le Mauvais Moine'
 3. 'L'Idéal'
 4. 'Le Spleen' [= 'Le Mort joyeux']
 5. 'Les Chats'
 6. 'La Mort des artistes'
 7. 'La Mort des amants'
 8. 'Le Tonneau de la haine'
 9. 'La Béatrix' [= 'De profundis clamavi']
 10. 'Le Spleen' [= 'La Cloche fêlée']
 11. 'Les Hiboux'

12 Vaillant, *Baudelaire journaliste*, p. 37.

13 Baudelaire was instrumental in the revival of sonnet form. The fourteen lines of sonnet form are typically divided into two quatrains and two tercets. These will be referred to as Q1, Q2, T1 and T2 throughout this study. For more on the development of sonnet form in the nineteenth century in France, see David Scott, *Sonnet Theory and Practice in Nineteenth-century France: Sonnets on the Sonnet*, Occasional Papers in Modern Languages, 12 (Hull: University of Hull Publications, 1977). For technical analysis of Baudelaire's use of sonnet form, see Benoît de Cornulier, 'Pour l'analyse du sonnet dans *Les Fleurs du Mal*', in Steve Murphy (ed.), *Lectures des Fleurs du Mal* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002), pp. 197–236.

All are texts which were later incorporated into the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) with minor modifications, including to some of the titles (the revised titles are indicated above in square brackets). Nine of the eleven sonnets were placed in the 'Spleen et Idéal' section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, whereas two – 'La Mort des artistes' and 'La Mort des amants' – formed part of a triptych of poems which closed the 1857 collection under the section title 'La Mort'. Whilst these 'death' sonnets clearly signal an aesthetic relationship with death through their titles, in fact all eleven *Limbes* sonnets thematise death, and in so doing, also tease out a very particular aesthetic stance that is significant for understanding poetry's place and status during this era in France in particular in the context of political change. As Vaillant points out:

C'est [...] la première fois que Baudelaire publie des vers dans un journal politique sérieux [...]. Après l'illusion de la révolution et la déception des journées de juin 1848 et avec la menace grandissante du coup d'État, il se représente désormais comme un fantôme échappé du royaume des morts, un mort-vivant enfermé dans son ennui et sa haine du monde.¹⁴

This idea of a trapped, exiled or misunderstood poet is fuelled by the way in which the sonnets frequently refer to the notion of the poet's creative impotence, and his position on the lowest rung, whether in the gutter ('L'ombre d'un vieux poète erre dans la gouttière', 'Le Spleen' ('*Pluviôse, irrité...*', v. 7),¹⁵ in a self-dug grave ('Je veux creuser moi-même une fosse profonde', 'Le Spleen' [= 'Le Mort joyeux', v. 2), or in a melancholy abyss ('Du fond du gouffre obscur où mon cœur est tombé', 'La Béatrix' [= 'De profundis clamavi', v. 2). The poetic voice of these poems demonstrates, therefore, key moments of weakness. This is acknowledged self-consciously in 'Le Spleen' [= 'La Cloche fêlée', where the poet writes of his 'âme fêlée' (v. 9) whose 'voix affaiblie' (v. 11) mirrors that of a 'blessé qu'on oublie' / [...] sous un grand tas de morts / Et qui meurt, sans bouger, dans d'immenses efforts.' (vv. 12–14). This image of the wounded poet whose own death is

14 Vaillant, *Baudelaire Journaliste*, p. 94.

15 In later versions of this poem, the word 'l'ombre' is replaced with 'l'âme'.

caused by the weight of dead bodies signals an awareness of a particular poetic mortality already expressed in 'Le Spleen' ('*Pluviôse irrité...*') where the personified figure of 'Pluviôse' 'verse // la mortalité' (vv. 2–4). More specifically, it is the poet's voice that suffers in the face of its mortality. In 'Le Spleen' ('*Pluviôse irrité...*'), the poet takes on 'la triste voix d'un fantôme frileux' (v. 8), where in 'Le Spleen' [= 'La Cloche fêlée'], his 'voix affaiblie / Ressemble aux hurlements d'un blessé qu'on oublie' (vv. 11–12).¹⁶ Whether ghostly or mortally wounded, the poet's voice struggles to find the strength to express itself. This is not simply a position of false humility adopted by a poet deploying the classic technique of *captatio benevolentiae*, but the stance of a poet who is preoccupied with what his poetic voice is able to achieve in the face of both political and aesthetic adversity. At times it falters with weak (or merely 'sufficient') rhymes, such as the 'légères / jardinières' rhyme of 'La Mort des amants' (vv. 1–3) or the 'rangés / jais' rhyme of 'Les Hiboux' (vv. 2–3), or the questionable ABAB rhyme pattern of the quatrains in 'Le Spleen' [= 'Le Mort joyeux'] in which the A rhyme tries to match the '-ots' / '-os' rhyme of Q1 with the '-eaux' rhyme of Q2.¹⁷ The poet's voice also loses its persuasive force in 'Le Spleen' [= 'Le Mort joyeux'], as Claude Pichois notes, since the logic falters. In T1, Baudelaire deploys the term 'vers' in the plural, exploiting the ambiguity created by homophony which means the word can be read either as the worms who will devour the poet's corpse, or as the verse that will eat away at the poet. Yet it is difficult to grasp how the 'vers' who are first of all 'sans oreille' (singular) and 'sans yeux' (plural), can then, in the next line, apparently see perfectly clearly: 'Voyez venir à vous un mort libre et joyeux' (v. 11). The sonnet then closes with the idea of the poet dying in the company of other dead bodies: 'ce vieux corps [...] mort parmi les morts.' (v. 14) – an image which is reiterated, as already explored above, in 'Le Spleen' [= 'La

16 In later versions the 'hurlements' become, more specifically, a death-rattle: 'sa voix affaiblie / Semble le râle épais d'un blessé qu'on oublie'.

17 In later versions of these poems, Baudelaire reinforces the rhymes to make them either rich or *léonine*. For more detail, see David Evans, *Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 71.

Cloche fêlée’]. The poet’s presence amongst the dead is, however, carefully negotiated. He carves out a place for himself against the backdrop of other artists attempting to idealise death. In ‘L’Idéal’, he specifically distinguishes his own creative work from that of the illustrator Paul Gavarni who – although he selects deathly figures as the subjects of his images – fails to capture the intensity of the kind of death that Baudelaire yearns for in his poetry. He writes in Q₂ that:

Je laisse à Gavarni, le chantre des chloroses,
 Son troupeau gazouillant de beautés d’hôpital,
 Car je ne peux trouver parmi ces pâles roses
 Une fleur qui ressemble à mon rouge idéal. (‘L’Idéal’, vv. 5–8)

For Baudelaire, poetic death requires ‘immenses efforts’ (‘Le Spleen’ [= ‘La Cloche fêlée’], v. 14) on the part of the poet. In order to create a poem (so often designated by the term ‘fleur’ in Baudelaire’s poetry, as is signalled by his ultimate decision to name his verse collection *Les Fleurs du Mal*), the poet must work himself to death – whether through the ‘mille ans de sueurs et d’efforts’ of ‘Le Tonneau de la haine’ (v. 6) or ‘Le travail de mes mains’ of ‘Le Mauvais Moine’ (v. 14). As Baudelaire most clearly expresses in ‘La Mort des artistes’, in order for an artist to have any hope of attaining an aesthetic ideal (whether sculpture or poetry – although the two art forms are metaphorically linked), ‘Il faut user son corps en d’étranges travaux’ (v. 5). He goes on to express how:

Il en est qui jamais n’ont connu leur idole,
 Et ces sculpteurs maudits et marqués d’un affront,
 Qui vont se déchirant la poitrine et le front,

 N’ont plus qu’un seul espoir, qui souvent les console,
 C’est que la Mort, planant comme un soleil nouveau,
 Fera s’épanouir les fleurs de leur cerveau! (‘La Mort des artistes’, vv. 9–14)

This notion that the artist must work so hard that he risks his own death, with no guarantee that aesthetic beauty will emerge, sets up a particularly Baudelairean aesthetics of death that reveals the true extent of the poet’s task.