

The Influence of Baudelaire in France and England by G. Turquet-Milnes

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cela m'a fait un véritable plaisir de voir qu'un jeune anglais avait entrepris de son côté le travail quelque peu rebutant de faire cette édition d'un poème en v. français de 8234 vers. Les étudiants des universités anglaises qui choisissent les langues modernes comme sujet spécial se tournent presque tous vers les études littéraires qui ne demandent pas une préparation pour eux aussi ardue que celle des études linguistiques. Aussi faut-il tenir compte à Mr Bolderston de son bon vouloir. Si j'ai dû critiquer l'œuvre de début qui atteste du moins chez lui une louable ambition, j'espère que mes critiques ne feront que stimuler en lui le désir de vaincre.

PAUL BARBIER FILS.

LEEDS.

The Influence of Baudelaire in France and England. By G. TURQUET-MILNES. London: Constable and Co. 1913. 8vo. viii + 300 pp.

For the first time, in English, a book has been devoted to a serious study of Baudelaire and his influence. Mrs Turquet-Milnes is to be congratulated on a very careful and painstaking piece of work, which no student of nineteenth-century French literature can afford to neglect. The reserves we feel bound to make in praising her book must not be taken to imply any want of appreciation of what is, in many respects, a most noteworthy study of Baudelaire and of some of his contemporaries and successors. With the influence of Baudelaire on painting and music we do not propose to deal. A literary critic does not feel at home in discussing such topics, and we cannot help feeling that the book would have gained by concentration on Baudelaire himself and on those other writers who can, in any real sense, be considered Baudelairians.

It can scarcely be said that Mrs Turquet-Milnes has done complete justice to her subject. She has not altogether understood the apparently contradictory personality of Baudelaire. She demurs, and rightly, to the view that has long prevailed of Baudelaire as a decadent and a lover of evil, an exponent or apologist of sin. But she finds in him pursuit of sensation at any cost, and a sacrilegious pleasure in the pursuit of evil. Here we entirely disagree with her. Baudelaire had an intense and passionate horror of sin: but, though he fell continually into sin, love of sin found no place in his nature. His was a personality at once profoundly spiritual and overwhelmingly sensual, doomed by that clash of contradictories to sorrow, and, except by miracle, despair. Men have been, as he was, spiritualists, 'surcivilisés,' of exquisite refinement, quiveringly sensitive, and have yet been happy. Men have been simple pagans and yet found beauty in life. But Baudelaire was both at once, and for such a nature acute suffering is inevitable. His *Œuvres Posthumes*, especially *Mon cœur mis à nu*, and his other diaries, are probably the most terrible documents ever put upon paper, revealing as they do the gradual conquest of a great soul by despairing cynicism.

The Baudelairian legend may be set aside by the student of Baudelaire's life. His extravagances were merely the cynical armour of his sensitiveness: they were, we think, absolutely adventitious to his real nature. The two great influences of his life were Jeanne Duval and Madame Sabatier, his evil genius and his good angel. Jeanne Duval stands for all the shame and awfulness of sin. The poet, unable to tear himself away from her, came through her fatal and degrading attraction to despise all women, and to lose all faith in the highest aspirations of the soul. In her he found neither peace nor joy. No bond of sympathy existed between them except the most shameful. Mrs Turquet-Milnes' 'explanation of the attraction Jeanne Duval held for him' errs in too great delicacy. She is not a living woman used 'as a means of rehabilitating the attractions of the past.' With her Baudelaire found only 'the expense of spirit in a waste of shame.' But Madame Sabatier awoke in him all the dormant nobility of his being: his love for her was far removed from all degradation. She was for him

l'ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone.

She haunted him like a beautiful dream, like some spiritual presence ever with him, leading him from the slough of despair into paths of beauty, into the fields of peace. But he was haunted, too, by another vision—the vision of his past self. He feared to find in Madame Sabatier another Jeanne, but above all he feared himself: and so, though his love was returned, he made the supreme refusal, he rejected the hope and redemption which love alone could give him, and fell thenceforward through lower and ever lower depths of shame and despair, to a welcome death.

His soul was the soul of a god, but of a god possessed of a demon. Dragged incessantly towards the abyss, he fell times without number, but never without remembering whence he fell. We do not see him wallowing in forbidden delights. We see Lucifer as lightning fallen from heaven, bathed in the fire of Hell, racked with tortures too awful to be named.

Mrs Turquet-Milnes thinks differently; but to us it seems impossible to mistake the meaning of such lines as

Dans ton île, o Vénus! je n'ai trouvé debout
Qu'un gibet symbolique où pendait mon image.
O Seigneur, donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon cœur et mon corps sans dégoût.

Strength and courage to overcome his own self-loathing—that is indeed the great thing wanting in Baudelaire. The *Fleurs du Mal* are full of desperate loneliness, of unspeakable *ennui*.

His soul has never found satisfaction. In a barren, dreary solitude of contemplation he passes judgment on the body that has dragged him down, and the punishment falls speedily—the remorse that no wine nor drug can assuage, the heavy burden of despair that nothing can lift, an utter weariness of being that only one thing can cure.

There are two rays of hope in his darkness, love and death; and the first being quenched, he turns towards death as his only possible salvation.

C'est la gloire des Dieux, c'est le grenier mystique,
C'est la bourse du pauvre et sa patrie antique,
C'est le portique ouvert sur les cieux inconnus.

Thus Mrs Turquet-Milnes seems to us to have failed to appreciate (p. 17) the absolutely essential feature of Baudelaire's temperament. She considers him as a type rather than as an individual, and this, we should say, is the fundamental defect of the book.

Nor has she fully appreciated Baudelaire's attitude towards Art. She has not sufficiently distinguished Baudelaire's 'ideal beauty' as ultimately incarnated in Madame Sabatier from the dangerous seduction of a mere plasticism which so powerfully tempted him in Jeanne Duval. Where he seems to adhere to the orthodoxy of 'l'Art pour l'Art,' to be simply a disciple of Gautier, Jeanne Duval and all she stands for is the explanation. But Baudelaire struggled to free himself from her obsession, in Art as well as in Life. And in Art he succeeded, while in Life he failed. The higher Baudelaire found in Art his only consolation and hope. He attempted to gain in poetry that self-expression which in its fulness life had refused him. His verse is always sincere and passionate. Herein lies the explanation of his often seemingly self-contradictory attitude towards 'l'Art pour l'Art.' Art to him was absolute: an end in itself. Yet it was not the merely formal decoration that it was for Gautier. In Art Baudelaire sought rather an escape from the 'goût immodéré de la forme' than an exploitation of it.

His article on 'l'École païenne' is proof enough of this. To Baudelaire plasticity was too closely allied to sensuality to be anything but a curse. 'La plastique l'a empoisonné, et cependant il ne peut vivre que par ce poison.' There is nothing plastic about Baudelaire's verse: it is intense, passionate, even tortured, rising to infinite heights of aspiration, falling to infinite depths of despair. It is never without an intellectual substructure. 'Congédier la passion et la raison, c'est tuer la littérature.' Never does Baudelaire look at the world merely 'sous sa forme matérielle.' And yet he will not prostitute his Art to a purpose: Art is, it has and can have no purpose. In that sense must be interpreted his Art for Art's sake utterances. But Art will not be irresponsible dreaming or fresco or arabesque: Gautier's 'métaphores qui se suivent' are poles apart from the fiery intensity and passionate sincerity in self-analysis of Baudelaire.

The 'diabolism' so often noticeable in Baudelaire's conception of Beauty is due in part to the effort of the disappointed sensualist to 'commit the oldest sins a thousand different ways.' But it has also a nobler cause: the clash and strife of his two natures, and the opposed attraction of the two types of beauty that appealed to him, the plastic and the spiritual, and the despair and horror engendered by the hopelessness of his struggle to free himself from the lower obsession.

Pagans have worshipped plastic beauty without remorse: Baudelaire, the spiritualist, could not.

Apart from the form of his work, with which Mrs Turquet-Milnes hardly professes to deal, Baudelaire had in no real sense any predecessors. Gautier was a simple pagan. Aloysius Bertrand and Petrus Borel, on whom Mrs Turquet-Milnes has written illuminating and interesting essays, have no relation whatever to Baudelaire. The treatment of Baudelaire's posterity is, also, besides being very uneven, to a considerable extent beside the point. 'Baudelairism' has very little to do with Baudelaire. Mrs Turquet-Milnes' definition of 'Baudelairism' applies excellently to most of the so-called followers of Baudelaire, who made of themselves just what Baudelaire himself was not, lovers of sin. They had not, as Baudelaire had, that double nature which made him fear degradation even in the holiest relations of love. They had not that 'dégout d'aimer' which only such a nature as Baudelaire's can possibly know.

The most Baudelairian of the contemporaries of Baudelaire was certainly Barbey d'Aurévilly. He, like Baudelaire, is an intensely moral writer: perhaps (and we do not forget *Les Diaboliques*), with Baudelaire, the most intensely moral of all French writers: he has branded vice, which he loathed with all the Baudelairian loathing, as no other writer has ever branded it, as only Léon Bloy could have done, or Baudelaire himself. He himself was not a Baudelaire. But his characters are. The terrible Abbé de la Croix-Jugan of the *Ensorcelée* is a character that can never be forgotten. Mrs Turquet-Milnes, as might be expected, sees in Barbey 'a curious impiety' which made him write *Les Diaboliques*. Barbey was not impious here or anywhere. He is in the terrible stories of *Les Diaboliques* just as intensely Catholic and moral as in any other of his works. But he is a moralist for strong men and women who do not fear the truth. The brave he purges by terror: the weak he destroys. Léon Bloy, in his study of Barbey d'Aurévilly, calls the *Diaboliques* a 'document implacable qu'aucun moraliste n'avait apporté jusqu'ici, dans un ciboire de terreur d'une aussi paradoxale magnificence.' Mrs Turquet-Milnes is right in saying that 'at his greatest, he is as great as Balzac.' He was even greater.

Verlaine was not a Baudelairian either in the real sense or in any other. Tossed helplessly, without any serious struggle, between hysterical Catholicism and nameless orgies of vice, without any intellectual outlook or definite philosophy of life, he was in every way less than Baudelaire. His was not a great soul. He was simply a drunken profligate afflicted with unmanly spasms of remorse, who wrote a few beautiful and haunting lyrics amidst a mass of mediocre and even filthy scribbling. No high morality lights the awful darkness of some of his verse: his lapses are redeemed by no intense and passionate aspiration after purity.

The chapter of 'Living Poets' (IV, xi) is by far the weakest in the book. Mrs Turquet-Milnes should have made up her mind whether she meant to include them or not. Baudelaire and Barbey d'Aurévilly

are, in some ways, the most significant figures in the French literature of the nineteenth century. They are with the lesser men who gathered round them 'those who have expressed its temper' (p. 17) and made it different from any other century (that is, if we forget the whole scientific and materialist movement of the time). The writers of the last decade of the nineteenth century belong really to a new movement, one of faith and hope, which might take as its motto Vielé-Griffin's line:

Réjouis-toi et sache croire,
or his
Il n'y a pas de fatals désastres,
Toute la défaite est en toi!

The most essentially Baudelairian of contemporary poets—Henri de Régnier, whose *L'Homme et la Sirène*, e.g., is intensely Baudelairian in the true sense—is not even mentioned. Gilkin, the most conspicuous of contemporary dispensers of blasphemy—a Baudelairian in the other and bad sense—shares a similar fate.

We cannot devote much space to Part V, on the Baudelairian Spirit in England. To classify Mr George Moore as a Baudelairian, in spite of his real or affected love of Baudelaire, is to insult Baudelaire's sincerity and intensity. Mr Moore is certainly not 'Baudelairian in this sense that, though ceaselessly incredulous, he pretends to believe in this movement of Irish faith' (p. 257) or in the Protestantism to which he was converted. There can be no conflict in Mr Moore's nature. He is a maker of epigrams and sometimes of beautiful sentences, a devotee of 'l'Art pour l'Art' in its narrower sense. He is not a great tortured soul rent between Moloch and God. And when it comes to finding Baudelairism of any kind whatever in the mysticism of 'Æ.' (Mr George W. Russell) or in Synge, then it is time to protest. We doubt if 'Æ.' at least has ever read a word of Baudelaire or knows anything whatever about him. No two men could be further apart, in their lives or their work.

Swinburne no doubt admired Baudelaire. But he was a pagan. Nothing could be less Baudelairian, e.g., than the *Ave atque Vale* written in memory of Baudelaire and quoted by Mrs Turquet-Milnes. It would be difficult to misunderstand Baudelaire more completely. He sought no redemption from virtue, nor to him were the roses and raptures of vice other than charnel blossoms of Hell and the bark of Hell's hounds. He took the mingled metal of his soul, gold and bronze and dross, and found relief for his pain in beating it and working it into gorgeous filigree and arabesque, with here and there a terrific panel for the vestibules of Hell. But unlike Swinburne, at least the earlier and so-called Baudelairian Swinburne, he did not attempt to make vice or sin beautiful or attractive.

Mrs Turquet-Milnes is of course consistent, though wrong, in finding that 'Swinburne's idea of extracting "exceeding pleasure out of extreme pain..." is a Baudelairian one' (p. 225).

Wilde is certainly nearer Baudelaire, at least in his later work

where the soul of the poet cries from the depths of shame. But in so far as he was a Swinburnian and a pagan—and it seems that Wilde's spiritual nature only awoke after he had drained the cup of pleasure—he has no relation whatever to Baudelaire. It is quite un-Baudelairean to celebrate Swinburne as one who

Hath kissed the lips of Proserpine
And sung the Galilæan's requiem. (p. 239.)

Many a poet beside Baudelaire has distrusted the 'idea of progress' and has hated democracy (p. 240). We cannot follow Mrs Turquet-Milnes in finding in this 'aristocratic attitude' any proof of Baudelairean influence.

Before closing we must say a word as to Mrs Turquet-Milnes own style. Although we differ from her on some points, we have no small measure of admiration for her thought—but we have no word of praise for the prose in which she has clothed it. It jars upon the ear like a solo on the kettle-drum: it is as jog-trot as 'the butter-women's rank to market'—totally devoid of rhythm and harmony of phrase. The effect is a continual staccato which at times becomes nerve-racking. We think that Mrs Turquet-Milnes might considerably increase her popularity, without reducing the lucidity of her prose, if she would remember that the full-stop is not the only mark of punctuation in use in English.

The bibliography should have mentioned M. Cassagne's *La Théorie de L'Art pour l'Art*, indispensable to all students of the period; and M. T. de Visan's *L'Attitude du Lyrisme Contemporain*, if only to make it clear that despite a sonnet of which Mrs Turquet-Milnes makes too much (she is not alone in this), Baudelaire and the 'Symbolists' have very little, if anything, in common.

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DUBLIN.

Molière en Angleterre, 1660–1670. By J. E. GILLET. Paris: Champion. 1913. 8vo. 240 pp.

In a merry passage written in 1665, Sprat declared that the English 'have far exceeded' the French 'in the representation of the different humours. The truth is, the French have always seemed almost ashamed of the true comedy, making it not much more than the subject of their farces.' Sprat's contemporaries did not apparently share his opinion. In 1663 or 1664, Davenant borrowed the second act of *The Playhouse to be let* from *Sganarelle*; adaptations by various playwrights followed in quick succession, and, from 1663 to 1670, no less than eleven other plays were indebted to Molière's art. How Molière was first brought to the notice of the English public, what were Tartufe's and