

Poetics and Visual Culture

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Edouard Manet's Pastel of Cabaner as a Synesthete

Edouard Manet's 1880 portrait of Ernest Cabaner, little discussed in the vast literature on the artist, was drawn at the very time of a dramatic rise in publications on synaesthesia. Undoubtedly well aware of Cabaner's experiments on colored hearing, Manet provides a visual testament to his friend as a chromoesthete. Synesthetes were labeled in the medical and cultural literature of the time as diseased and degenerate, or as gifted with possessing a higher form of human vision. Manet's deft handling of the pastel medium, with its indeterminacies and modernist freedom of handling, allows a reading of Cabaner as both. Poets such as Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and Charles Cros recorded their vivid impressions of Cabaner; the novelists Jean Richepin, Félicien Champsaur, Catulle Mendès, Paul Alexis, and Léon Bloy cast him as a character in their novels; George Moore and Gustave Kahn wrote eloquently about him, while Émile Zola pleaded Cabaner's cause in brochure for a benefit exhibition held shortly before his death. Manet praised Cabaner's well-known song *Le Pâté* as being as beautiful as the canvas of a primitive, employing a telling metaphor wherein he unites song with visual art. In his pastel, Manet arranged his unblended strokes - which, like musical notes, have no specific meaning until they take their place in a composition where their contiguity with other related elements charges them with expressivity - into a pictorial form whose gestural strokes signify touch and time by means of color. Thus, Manet visually invokes the relational play between signifiers and metaphors, paralleling Cabaner's *Sonnet à sept nombres* through its capricious intermingling of chromatic vowels with elements from nature. Cabaner's poem engaged in semiotic uncertainty by its arbitrary linkage of sounds, feelings, and colors that ultimately resist any totalizing effort of clear meaning or logic of experience, earning him the reputation of a crazed eccentric because of his theories of freedom from conventional way of executing music. Manet took similar modernist liberties in his pastel, providing a moment of uniquely heightened synesthetic perception for the observer.

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Delacroix's *Faust* and Hugo's Grottesque

Between 1825 and 1827 Eugène Delacroix created 17 lithographs based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust I*. These heavily Gothicized images with their often contorted figures and emphasis on the supernatural stand out as unique within Delacroix's *oeuvre*. Previous scholarship generally discusses Delacroix's *Faust* lithographs with regard to the artistic and theatrical precedents that inspired them, namely the engravings of Moritz von Retzsch and Peter von Cornelius and a stage version of the story that Delacroix saw in London in 1825.

I however plan to look at these lithographs in relation to the artistic milieu in which Delacroix created them. The late 1820s constitute the period during which Delacroix most closely aligned himself with the other members of the Romantic movement. It is also the period

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during which he suddenly stopped keeping a journal. When Delacroix's journal resumes in 1847, we find ourselves confronted with a proponent of Classicism who disparages the works of the French Romantic writers, namely Victor Hugo. However some 20 years earlier, the two Romantic giants were quite friendly.

The year before the publication of Delacroix's *Faust* lithographs Hugo published his preface to *Cromwell*, viewed by many as the manifesto of the Romantic movement. In it Hugo touts the value of the grotesque in art as the necessary counterpart to the sublime. He further credits the Middle Ages and specifically northern Europe with the cultivation of the grotesque. I argue that Delacroix lithographs of *Faust* represent a response to the ideas surely espoused by Hugo during the meetings of Romantic minds that took place in the late 1820s. An ink drawing presented to Hugo by Delacroix, in which the writer appears with Faust and Mephistopheles serves to corroborate the notion that the two discussed *Faust* specifically. Furthermore Henri Beraldi, writing in 1886 viewed Delacroix's *Faust* lithographs as the visual equivalent to Hugo's preface to *Cromwell*, and upon their publication, critics dubbed Delacroix the leader of the "school of the ugly."

While the German engravings and the English theater surely had some bearing on Delacroix's *Faust* lithographs, I believe his immersion in the Romantic circle of the 1820s, within which Goethe served as a popular topic of discussion, led to their undertaking. By discussing Delacroix's lithographs in the context of Hugo's monumental preface, I hope to shed light on Delacroix's reasons for creating them as well as their unique stylization.

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Whistler and Gauguin: Orientalist Fantasies and Baudelairean *Voyage*

East and West collide in *Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony*, a painting that occupied James McNeill Whistler intermittently between 1864-1870, an extended gestation that belies its importance to the artist's emerging aesthetic. In many ways, *The Balcony* encapsulates the central tenets of Whistler's theory whose mainstay was Baudelairean *Voyage* and *Correspondances*, while also delineating the meaning of his obsessive *japonisme*. In the image, languid, kimono-clad women listen to music amid japoneseque ceramics, lacquer ware, and fans. Their space is bounded by a horizontal railing and a cropped border of meandering blossoms. In the distance stand the belching smokestacks and factories of Battersea Reach that dominate the south shore of the Thames River. In this surprising juxtaposition, Whistler not only pits divergent spatial realms of foreground balcony and background riverbank but distinguishes conflicting mental spaces as well. Through color as well as placement, the gritty reality of the industrialized city is ameliorated and quite secondary to the promise of flight insinuated by faraway lands whose exotic beauty can arouse the senses and stimulate imaginative *Voyage*. This painting asserts Whistler's growing conviction of the supremacy of Art as an antidote to Nature, a visual affirmation of the role of artifice to touch the Ideal. The women seem somnolent, enveloped in a lethargy sustained by the thick air and heavily fragrant atmosphere that surrounds them. Like a vaguely remembered dream, the disjunction between the foreground apparition and the background "reality" exacerbates the sense that the vision on the balcony represents the vestiges of some lost Golden Age, retrievable only through Art. Whistler equates the dreamlike arrangement of languishing females, itself a fusion of Kionaga's geisha imagery and the Algerian

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harems of Delacroix, with artifice and the power of art to improve upon mere appearance and compensate for the vagaries of Nature. The image is in a long line of Orientalist fantasies that fuelled the escapist tendencies of Western painters.

The Balcony won a gold medal at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle and would surely have caught the attention of Paul Gauguin, who has left a written record of his intense response to the dioramas of Tahiti found at the fair. Similarly, *The Balcony* would have resonated with his longing for *Voyage* which took a decidedly literal turn in 1891, the year of his first Tahitian sojourn. Immersed in the Parisian avant-garde during the 1870s and 1880s, Gauguin's knowledge of Whistler's aesthetic theories and unconventional paintings cannot be doubted. Theodore Duret's articles informed French artists of Whistler's activities as well as the travesty of the Whistler-Ruskin trial. Stéphane Mallarmé translated Whistler's "Ten O'Clock" lecture into French, and both Whistler and Gauguin attended Mallarmé's *martis*. Moreover, Gauguin's mentor Camille Pissarro's high regard for Whistler's work has been recorded in several letters. This paper explores the debt Gauguin's paintings of exotic, Tahitian women owe not only to Whistler's aesthetic theory but also to his well-known series of "Women in White."

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Cycle, cercle et œil L'identité chez/de Redon

Cet essai étudiera le motif du cercle sous tous ses aspects, tel qu'il est représenté dans les *Noirs*, en se basant sur la théorie des correspondances de Baudelaire, point de départ de l'identité symboliste. L'œil rond, ouvert, observateur omniscient, qu'il soit seul ou multiple gouverne, revient sans cesse sous diverses formes. Le cycle, qu'il représente celui de la vie à la mort ou qu'il fasse montre d'une évolution darwinienne inversée, tient lui aussi une place de choix dans l'univers de Redon.

Grâce aux essais de Deleuze et de Derrida pour n'en citer que deux, sera également mise en lumière la place du monstre et de la monstruosité dans la peinture de Redon, telle qu'ils sont liés au cercle et au cycle, en ceci--entre autres--qu'ils aident à la création, ou recreation, artistique et esthétique d'une identité individuelle (Redon) et universelle, paradoxalement double : symboliste et décadente, et en même temps ni l'une ni l'autre.

Peut-on ainsi véritablement placer Redon dans un groupe, lui donner une identité, tout comme ce fut la difficulté devant les poètes dits « maudits », tels Rimbaud ou Ducasse, avant lui ? Doit-on, d'ailleurs, chercher à faire entrer l'artiste dans un groupe fermé ? C'est une des questions auxquelles cet essai tentera de répondre.