The Dialectic Between the Styles:
Gautier’s Poem and Couture’s Painting

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Abstract

This paper is a comparative study of the style as a dialectic in two French artifacts in different media created in the nineteenth century. One is a literary work entitled *The Symphony in White Major*, 1849, a poem by Theophile Gautier; the other is a visual work entitled *The Romans of the Decadence*, 1847, a painting by Thomas Couture.

Both art works share the Romantic style, adopt some ancient Classical traditions, and include some Realistic presentations. My primary sources for this study are the art works themselves and poet-art critic of the same painting, Gautier. There is a style conversation between Gautier’s and Couture’s art works. Both artists learned from history and mythology reflecting their own perception.

The art works will be formally analyzed for their structures and contents to introduce the different styles. They are not only clear examples of the dialectic between the styles, but of the transformation of the visual, verbal, expressive, and poetic images.

Introduction:

In this paper I will demonstrate the dialectic between the styles in two French artifacts in different media created during the nineteenth century. The first is a literary work, *Symphony in White Major* (1849) a poem by Theophile Gautier, (fig. 1, 2). The second is a visual work, *The Romans of the Decadence* (1848), a painting by Thomas Couture (fig. 3).
In Hauser’s article “Style and Its Changes” (1972), he says that a style “is a dialectic between works in progress and works that already exist.” His statement of style is very similar to Wylie Sypher’s statement when he mentions that “a style has a dual nature; it takes its direction, form, or structure from many artists, . . . a style brings a community of problems, methods, and solutions” (1960, xix). The argument is that in one work of art there are many styles, old and new. There are similar stylistic traditions which connect both works, the painting and the poem. I will discuss and trace some of these styles.

Theophile Gautier:

He is a French poet, art critic, writer, and a chief editor of Revue de Paris. Gautier (1811-1872) is obsessed with the ideal woman and eternity influenced by Goethe (1787-1831), the German writer. Gautier writes some love poems to fair females; he talks about love, but it never sways or tosses him about the ocean of passion. Women appeal to him as partial incarnations of the divine principle, but they do not affect him as much as the beauty of a sculpted or a painted female. Gautier prefers the art form to the living form; from his point of view, the statue is more perfect. “He seeks preferably not a real woman but a spirit existing eternal in space and time” (Smith, 1977, 22).

As an art critic, Gautier is a public educator; he was engaged in “educating the public to an understanding and an appreciation of art” (De Sumichrast, 1903, 2). He always “presents his readers with objects-in-themselves, rather than with his own preconceptions, in terms of the feelings and associations they provoke in him” (Snell, 1982, 14).

Thomas Couture:

He is an academic painter (1815-1879) best known for his portraits and historical paintings. He developed his excellent skills under Gros and Delaroche. “An academic of stature, he combined soft 18th-century coloring and strict 19th-century classicism in his most important works” (Britanica.com). He is known by his tonal contrasts and considered to be the teacher of Manet. Couture encouraged a direct study of nature for landscape paintings.

A Discussion of the 19th Century Art Theories and Criticism:

In each period there is a general ideal translated by literary and visual means. In the mid-nineteenth century there were many different styles and stylizations. In France, there are two main currents appearing after the sixteenth century, the rational and the irrational. “The first is apt to be moralizing and didactic; the second is free of such ethical tendencies . . . The classical [style] provides an unshakable basis for the entire later development of French painting” (Friedlaender, 1977, 1). At the beginning of the eighteenth century, sentimentality was the creation for artistic judgment, but there was no desire to descend into the depth of emotion.
There is a big shift in understanding arts through history. A brief discussion of the history of art criticism which affects artists' productions and perceptions is essential. First, there is the ancient mimetic theory, which explains art as an imitation of aspects of the universe. Socrates puts emphasis on the arts of painting, poetry, music, dancing, and sculpture as imitations.

The philosopher in the Platonic dialogues characteristically operates with three categories . . . the eternal and unchanging ideas: reflecting this is the world of sense, natural or artificial; and in turn reflecting the second comprises such as shadows, images in water and mirrors, and the fine arts (Abrams, 1953, 8).

The focus of interest is shifted to the pragmatic theory in which a work of art is oriented to the audience. Accordingly, the function of the artist is to teach and delight, and the imitation is for 'what should be' not 'what is'. Another development helps to shift the focus to the artist as a creator, not as a craftsman. The Expressive theory, in which the work of art is "essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings" (Abrams, 1958, 22). The attributes and actions of the poet's mind become the main source of the subject matter. The last theory is the objective, which deals with the work of art itself. The art is analyzed "as self-sufficient entity constituted by its parts in their internal relations, and sets out to judge it solely by criteria intrinsic to its own mode of being" (Abrams, 1958, 26).

A change of style greatly involves a change of aesthetic theory, which provides an answer to the question: 'what is art?' "Aesthetic knowledge is a branch of philosophy and exists for the sake of knowledge, and not as a guide to practice . . . The aesthetic theorist . . . desires to understand the artists . . . in order to satisfy an intellectual interest of his own" (Bosanquet, 1902, xi). Some art historians and aestheticians put blocks between artistic expressions and treat the arts as closed forms; for example, this work is romantic and that is realistic, etc... Barzun argues that romanticism is realism in a way; the romanticists (1790-1850) were not searching for a dreamy world to escape in, but for a real world to live. They create art for all audience and all times. "The romanticists' realistic purpose [was] . . . their refusal to go on imitating forms whose contents had evaporated" (Barzun, 1975, 59). The exploration of reality was the fundamental intention of romantic art. "Developing from the culture of Enlightenment, it found expression in its early stages . . . The most typical element of the romantic sensibility lies in that "mystique of nature"" (Durbé, 1980, 558). For example, the romantics found that reality is subjective. Hazlitt defines romanticism as intensity of experience. Delacroix talks about romanticism as genuine feeling and the language of emotions. The critics' acceptance of emotion as art led the romantics to impressionism.
(Sypher, 1960, 65). There are two important aspects of romanticism, the naturalistic and the visionary, which “resulted in a kind of renovated classicism tinged by realism or an acute dissociation of sensibility” (Durbe, 1980, 559). Gautier agrees with Durbe’s statement: the romanticism as classicism, which is tinged by realism, but with association of sensibility. The Romantic artist is concerned with the work of art itself, but he ignores neither self-expression nor the audience.

The art of Gautier and Couture is a dialectic between the styles; a visual and verbal conversation is between Antiquity, Renaissance, Romanticism, and Realism. According to art history, Gautier is a romantic and a symbolist poet, but Couture is an academic painter. If Romanticism is considered to be a way of using words as instruments to express feeling (Sypher, 1960, 91); Couture then is a romantic painter because he uses history and mythology as instruments to express feelings too. He criticizes the present by recalling the past.

“Gautier stresses the pure formalism and play character of art . . . he desires to free it[art] from all ideas and all ideals, his supreme wish is to emancipate it from the dominion of the bourgeoise order of life (Hauser, 1960, 196). As a poet-art critic Gautier believes in the contrast between “man’s greatness and man’s wretchedness: man’s power and man’s misery” (Barzune, 1975, 16). This contrast helps him to create his own philosophy of art and his ideal. For him, “art exists neither to dogmatize, teach, nor to prove anything; its purpose is to give birth to the idea of the beautiful” (Gautier, 1901, 15).

Gautier’s Criticism of Couture’s Painting:

Theophile Gautier writes his art criticism with simultaneously literal and figurative meanings of words. In Salon de 1848, Gautier wrote his criticism of Thomas Couture’s The Romans of the Decadence in 1847 in twelve pages. This painting is considered to be a social criticism, a satire on the society of the July Monarchy in France. Couture conceives contemporary life in an allegorical form imbued with a strong ethical content. Gautier admires Couture’s cleverness of composition, its decorative balance, its clarity and its apparent ease. The greatest originality of the painting was felt to be in its colors. He also likes the beautiful silvery gray, “a pearly gray which drinks light and retains it” (Gautier, 1849, 65), and compared it favorably to the silvery quality of Veronese. The impact of the painting does not only depend on its technical quality or on the illusion, which is created, but of a true rebirth of history painting in the grand style. “Its timeless moralistic content was also perfectly attuned to the ethos of the time” (Gautier, 1849, 64). He expresses his admiration for the central female in the painting. He describes her as a personification of Rome. “The Messalina figure in Couture’s painting is transformed in Gautier’s account into fragment of sculpture from
the Parthenon, half-clothed in marble draperies fashioned by Phidias, with the bust of a statue, flesh of stone and a marmoreal brow” (Scott, 1988, 53).

Gautier is careful to underline the fact that the literary source for the painting is an ancient literary work, The Sixth satire. Against Woman by the Roman poet Juvenal (A.D. 60-135). The painter borrows Juvenal’s statement to criticize the contemporary high-class-French-society; here, the dialectic is not only in styles but also in contents. Couture quotes Juvenal while introducing his painting that “We [Romans] are suffering today from the fatal results of a long peace, more damaging than arms; luxury has rushed in upon and avenged the enslaved universe.” (Couture, Salon 1848).

Gautier says that the painting was “a visual attack against academism in modern times down to the present day. . . . The painting is characterized as a sermon against ‘selfishness and immorality’. . . not only to his [Couture’s] own people, but to all mankind in an enduring form” (Gautier, 1958, 16).

Gautier does not give a literal description; in fact, he uses the account of this painting “as a pretext for an exercise in figurative or poetic language, an exploration of linguistic ambiguity” (Scott, 1988, 52). Therefore, Gautier likes the juxtaposition of human figures in the painting; he transposes the quality of the marble statues to those of the living women.

**Couture’s Painting: The Romans of the Decadence:**

Couture depicts the concept of a classical ideal sensation of texture by his special unfinished technique, and of energy by the very dynamic motion which is applied in his painting. The union with one’s surroundings as a quality which appeared in Italian Renaissance paintings is shown in the positive relationship between his grounds: the foreground, middle, and background. “The artist creates the linear as conceptual and the painterly as sensuous in art” (Gautier, 1958, 8). The painting is very classically structured in a symmetrical balance and stereotype figures, who are fully proportioned. His linear style depends on lines, which are dissolved, and painterly depends on masses, which are moving and dominating the painting. His unfinished style does not concern details. There is one point-perspective in his painting; the vanishing point is centralized in a radial plan like Leonardo’s Last Supper. The colored marble floor in the foreground is one point for clarity in a Renaissance context. Couture uses Corinthian columns to connect the figures with the time period. It is a Dionysian or bacchanal celebration. It shows an absolute beauty in its pictorial and poetical elements. Couture shares Gautier the same perception of art, “Couture is seen by Gautier as a liberator who returns to painting for art’s and pleasure’s sake” (De Leiris, 1970, 16).

Couture uses the symmetry as a structure of his painting. There is an architectural background with the statues of Germanicus in the middle with
his famous pose, Brutus on the right and Cato (Cicero or Augustus) and Caesar on the left. Another intention of recalling the Ancient world is Juvenal himself sitting on a pedestal in a frontal pose. This is a classical tradition exactly similar to the artist who paints himself in his composition.

The structure in Couture’s painting is similar to Gautier’s poem. He uses erotic poses to put an emphasis on his idea. He inserts among the columns a sculpture gallery of many Roman ancestral figures. Like marble ghosts, they chillingly recall the moral probity of the Roman past. The two standing characters on the right foreground are not figures because they are not a part of this scene, but they are sadly watching this theatrical scene. They are identified as two Germanics from their drapery (Boime, 1969, 52). The central woman looks modest, mysterious, and sad. She is the connecting factor between the themes on her right and on her left. In the poem the central figure appears in quatrains seven; she sounds modest and majestic connecting movements before and after.

The orgy or decadence, the wages of sin is not new, but Couture’s contribution is the rising of the theme from genre to history painting. The painting is ushering in a revival of history painting in an original and modern idiom. Couture is seen as the leader of such a revival.

There is the infiltration of Venetian warmth and “sensuality of a Raphael’sque’s figures and structure” (Gautier, 1848, 16), almost evoking in itself the feeling that an orgiastic decadence has corrupted the noble Roman world. Couture’s brilliant color in freshness of touch was bound to seduce the public, the colored virtues of Veronese revived. Couture has his color theory: “true harmony comes from the accord of contraries; the colors have their own different sexes; we have males and females, . . . red is never truly happy or complete, unless it has near to it the color green . . . This is antithesis; an immutable law” (Boime quotes Couture, 1969, 49).

Couture uses the columns in the background as visual punctuation to separate the scenes and divide the space. Every statue is framed with two columns. The big group in the painting may be divided according to different moods. On the left, there is Juvenal sitting telling the story, which is in five movements. The first is a soft and gentle story-teller, the second is an erotic and violent struggle movement. In the center, there is the main figure lying down. The third is again a soft and gentle movement. The fourth is light passage, but the last one is melancholic with the two witnesses and the angry statues. There are two figures on the right and the other on the left, who look prostrate and inebriated.

Couture’s unfinished work is not unfinished, but he intends not to over-paint it, “You will find that the pleasantest parts have lost sentiment by having too much work put upon them . . . Beauty of outline, of masses, of color, require an incessant sacrifice of detail” (Landgren, 1970, 33). A more finished execution would lessen the execute spontaneously in the interest of
sincerity, to “give three minutes to looking at a thing, and one minute to painting it” (Boime quotes Couture, 1969, 47).

Gautier’s Poem: Symphony in White Major:

Gautier’s art is absolute and ends in itself; that is, the beauty which emanates from a work of art constitutes something divine. “The cult of beauty to which Gautier submitted his art was linked to the visible world rather than to the invisible one” (Denomme, 1970, 13). Gautier perceives art as pure intelligence that aims at truth, good taste to show us beauty, and a moral to teach duty. He believes that nothing is really beautiful except that which cannot be used for anything: “everything that is useful is ugly” (Gautier, 1855, 46). As a general rule, the moment when a thing becomes useful, it ceases to be beautiful. “It [a thing] becomes merged in positive life; it turns to prose from poetry; having been free, it becomes a slave, —that is art” (Gautier, 1858, 22).

Gautier holds a continual dialogue with himself in an attempt to reach a clear perception of ‘absolute beauty’. “Beauty is the splendor of truth . . . art elevates the human spirit in its very essence: reading verses, listening to the melody, looking at a picture or statue is a superior intellectual pleasure in itself, which releases you from the coarse reality” (Gautier, 1858, 6). One convenient way of expressing the concept of absolute beauty is “to identify it with God” (Tennant, 1975, 14). For Gautier, beauty comprises a duality of an eternal, immutable element and a transitory, relative one. In his poem, he is trying to describe his female by all languages, the visual, the audible, and very majestic verbal; see the next lines of Gautier’s poem:

What beaming virgin snow.
What pith a reed within.
What Host, what taper, did bestow.
The white of her matchless skin? (8)

Art is first and foremost an attempt to express the individual’s vision within an individual ideal, which is a part of the society’s ideal. Barzun makes a distinction between the individual ideal and society’s ideal.12 “The one thing that unifies men in a given age is not their individual philosophies but the dominant problem that philosophies are designed to solve” (Barzun, 1975, 14). Gautier dreams of alternative existence and an ideal universe; the real world is not for him a world of imminent future possibilities, but a static creation in its definitive form. His art is for art’s sake, without utilitarian or moral motive; it is the worship of pure beauty.

Gautier believes in art as a religion; he says that “We have no religion apart from that of art itself, and Venus pleases us as much as the Virgin . . . people are pagan or Catholic according to the talent of the sculptor” (Snell
quotes Gautier, 1982, 47). For Gautier, art itself is an experience. He is essentially a pragmatist, embracing one polemical line to support the argument of the moment, “only to reject it the next moment in favor of some new resonance” (Spencer, 1969, 44).

Poetry no longer makes claim to universality; the notion of the audience becomes largely irrelevant. For example, he asks questions about his female, uses many references to the classical mythology and repeats to clarify his images not only as a poet but also as an art-educator; read the following lines from Gautier’s poem:

Came she from Greenland fles
With Seraphita’s3 forth?
Is she Madonna of the snows?
A sphinx of the icy North. (16)

The modern approach in Gautier’s poem is the intimate visual relationship between words and space. He believes in the inseparability of form and idea, which is Platonic, “We could not understand body without soul, or soul without body . . . a beautiful is a beautiful idea . . . . from the form the idea is born” (Snell quotes Gautier, 1982, 40). Without form a poet is only a “poetaster”; but with forms he is a true singer (Gautier, 1902, 12). This gives over-importance to verses and forms. “To attempt to separate verse from poetry is a modern piece of folly that tends to nothing less than the destruction of art itself” (Gautier, 1902, 14). In the next example, he shows the inseparability between colors, words, and music instruments.

Or the organ’s ivory keys? (11, 1)
What pith a reed within. (8, 2)

Gautier’s vision is usually ordered by a desire to prettify, to idealize or to fantasize the whimsical personification by using plastic symbols or allegories which are far from ‘natural’. He uses, for example, ‘creamy, gems, alabaster’ to add more whiteness to his visual scene and to lift the image high above the real world:

Of creamy opal gems that hold (10, 3)
Of alabaster that repeats (14, 3)

The world which Gautier renders is ultimately one remote from observed reality, the methodized nature. Gautier is deeply imbued with the principles of romanticism, but his poetry has many classical elements. Classical composition in the visual arts as in verse “can be conceived as the reordering of already existing forms or phrases, requiring less pure invention than a capacity for intelligent assimilation of definitive idioms” (Snell, 1982, 16).
Gautier loves words for themselves for their look, their aroma, their color, their fantastic intimations. He is a modern poet in this sense and not a classical because the ancient poets discriminated between words and their associated words with people’s social classes. He has a glance for everything and a phrase for everything on the broad earth. His source of inspiration is always an object, which must have length, breadth, and color. Words are not mere aggregations of letters or syllables; they have a definite meaning attached to them. They are not simply a means, when assembled together to communicate ideas, “they have qualities and properties of their own . . . which gave them a value wholly apart from any usefulness they might possess as them, a value wholly apart from any usefulness they might possess as replacing the primitive language of signs” (Gautier, 1858, 8). His words, as a matter of fact, carry expressions and pictures; they are pictorial words. Gautier’s technique is

To paint the actual time of day and to use a palette provided with colors, which are necessary to render the hues of the hour. Copper reds, golden greens, turquoise tones are melting into sapphire, the hues that blaze, and melt into the final great conflagration, the strange, monstrous shaped clouds interpenetrated by the flash of light, that look like ruins of a mighty aerial Babel, are not poetic in themselves as rosy-fingered dawn? (Gautier, 1958, 39).

Poetry is a gift possessed by some people who have the power of expressing admirably and feelingly imparting the sense of color and melody, and communicating rhythmically with phrases. Poetry involves not necessarily ideas, but bringing out of the subject the fullest measure of form perfection. It is a divine tongue, but does not attain a moral end because that will lessen the poet’s poetic force, then the work becomes poor. “Poetry cannot assimilate itself to science or morals . . . itself, not truth, is its end” (Gautier, 1858, 42).

Verses and words as instruments with their infinite capabilities are important matters to Gautier. For example, he uses numerous white objects to describe his female in poetical and controlled images which show relationship between words and resources.

Displaying skin more gleaming white (2, 3).
Than the white of their down of snow (2, 4).
White as the moonbeam’s shivering ray (3, 3).
On glacier’s icy crest (3, 4).
On rich delight nacreous skin (4, 3).
And a wealth of whiteness fair (4, 4).
Her rounded breasts, pale globes (5, 1).
With her camellias and her robes (5, 3).
Of whiteness nebular (5, 4), etc.
Gautier is gifted with a vivid sense of color, an intense sense of form, and a delicate appreciation of sound. To Gautier all words are good, especially if they render his thoughts and carry his images. He wishes to attain accuracy in expression to produce the effect he seeks, not another or one which merely analogous to it. "His vocabulary is enriched with many terms drawn from the most varied sources. He is capable of rendering every shade of feeling, every gradation of hue and color, every sound of music and melody" (De Sumichrast, 1903, intro). Gautier states that

My share in that literary revolution was plainly indicated. I was the painter of the company. I hurried forth to conquer adjectives... I put upon the palette of style every hue of dawn and every tint of sunset; I have given you back red... I have written poems in white major (1858, 12).

*Symphony in White Major* is one of the *Enamels and Cameos* collection which was first published on July 17, 1852. It is one of Gautier’s most characteristic works; he says that

It indicates my intention to treat slight subjects within a restricted space, something with the brilliant colors of enamel upon a plate of gold or copper... Every poem was to be a medallion fit to be set in the cover of a casket, or a seal to be worn on the finger—something recalling the copies of antique medals one sees in the studios of painters or sculptors... I did not intend to deny myself the pleasure of carving on whitish or reddish layers of the gems a clean modern profile, or of dressing the hair of Parisian Greek women seen at a recent ball after the fashions of Syracusan medals (1958, 32).

The word medallion which Gautier uses implies the notion of selecting individual objects for transposition into pure aesthetic. The descriptive appearance of sameness is presented by the successive quatrains, hiding an extraordinary richness and diversity of inspiration and mood. *Enamels and Cameos* collection “reflects Gautier’s abandonment for all of the romantic ambition to create a kind of “total art”, one of vast and profound ideological and philosophical pretentious which forces the emotional participation of the reader” (De Sumichrast, 1903, 33).

Scott suggests a direct transformation of the visual image of the central female in Couture’s painting to Gautier’s poem, which he wrote one year later. “The poem becomes, in itself, an orgy of metaphorical transformation” (Scott, 1988, 54). His verse is neither sentimental, satirical, narrative, nor even lyrical; it is always pictorial full of images, colors, and sounds. When the motive is an idea, the image absorbs and swallows it, and the poem becomes a piece of visual art. Examples.

In such white wars supreme
She wins, and weft and flower
Leave their revenge's right, and seem
Yellowed with envy's hour. (6)
On the white of her shoulder bare.
Whose marble Paros lends.
As through the Polar twilight fair,
Invisible frost descends. (7)
The heroine herself is virtually absent in this poem. Gautier says:
Whose frozen secrets hide and blanch
In her white heart innermost? (17, 3-4)
What magic of what far name (18, 1)

"Yet in spite of decorative, ceremonious approach to love in the poem... the theme of desire is modulated in a variety of registers: provocative erotic, delicately sensual, wistfully retrospective" (Tennent, 1975, 61). For example, the fifth and sixth quatrains are erotic and violent, full of struggle and excitement.

Her rounded breasts, pale globes
Of snow, wage insolent war
With her camellias and her robes
Of whiteness nebular. (5)
In such white wars supreme
She wins, and weft flower
Leave their revenge's right, and seem
Yellowed with envy's hour. (6)

Individual metaphor transfers from the auditory to the visual or vice versa, the visual may evoke music, and both evoke nature. For example, Gautier gives the clouds a solid surface in this verse: On a glacier's icy crest. (3, 4)

Gautier' transformation technique is, "far from straightforward" (Snell, 1982, 23); the structure moves easily from the original setting through an elaborate series of variations in which melodic, painterly, and theatrical; all participate in whiteness. He repeats the same meaning with many examples in order to emphasize his image.
In the Northern tales of old, (1, 1)
Was she made of a milky drop (9, 1),
Of the marble still and cold, (10, 1),
Of the feathers of doves that slip (15, 1), etc.

Each strophe in Gautier’s poem asks whether the central woman is formed of one white substance or another. The poet begins with white snow maidens of Nordic legend. He moves to the south to find comparisons, first with camellias, then with marble and ivory. The constantly reiterated idea is that this woman is perfect but inhuman.

Sphinx buried by avalanche,
The glacier’s guardian ghost,
Whose frozen secrets hide and blanch
In her white heart innermost? (17)

In the final stanza, Gautier expresses his eternal debate between the real and unreal surfaces, the conflict between himself as a poet and as a man. In terms of style, this example shows the dialectic between the expressive theory and the objective one.

What magic of what far name
Shall this pale soul ignite?
Ah! who shall flush with rose’s flame
This cold, implacable white? (18)

The French poem is an example of Gautier’s marvelous command of language. He uses the octosyllabic verse—eight syllabled line—composing into the rigid and tight-knit structures. Gautier says that it is “a strongly restrictive form: in tone and ethos.... this form by no means is a new one, but renewed by rhythm, richness of the rhymes” (1903, 14).

De leur col blanc /cour bant /les lignes,
On voit dans les contes du Nord,
Sur le vieux Rhin, des femmes-cygnes
Nager en chantant pres du bord. (1)

This structure is peculiarly congenial to Gautier’s poetic character: its overall rigidity demands compression. It highlights individual components like the isolated word, image, rhyme which “tends to imprison rather than release the imagination” (Tennent, 1975, 34). Gautier uses punctuation for both visual and verbal functions, to paint a space and isolate his words to control
an image, and to prepare for another question. Each end-stopped line becomes a virtual entity.

*Sous la glace ou calme il repose.*

*Oh ! qui pourra fonder ce Coeur !*

*Oh ! qui pourra mettre un ton rose*

*Dans cette implacable blancheur!* (18)

Gautier’s chromatic scale starts with an orgy of color, then he increasingly refines color to purest intensity. “The symbolic use of muted tones suggests refinement, delicacy, intimacy, desirable ‘Rococo pink’ or semi-mystical ideal of purity” (Spencer, 1972, 40).

Particularly characteristic of Gautier are images of arrested movement, evoking life mysteriously poised between the two states, for example:

*Of the fountain drop in the chill air lost,*

*An Undine’s frozen tear?* (13, 3-4)

Gautier specifies his female in the poem beginning from quatrains seven:

*On the white of her shoulder bare,*

*Whose marble Paros lends,*

*As through the Palor twilight fair,*

*Invisible frost descend.* (7)

The seventh quatrain serves as an interlude or recurrence of the opening theme; it shows serenity and majesty. It is functioned as a bridge to connect the last two movements together (Mickel, 1971, 338-40).18

**Conclusion:**

There is a style conversation between Gautier’s and Couture’s art works. Both artists not only learned from history and mythology, but they also reflect their own perception of it, each by his medium.

A notion of modernity is already anticipated in the painting to differentiate the old Roman ‘statues’ as morality and the modern Romans ‘living’ as immorality. It is shown in the postures and gestures, nudity, wine, jewelers, and disrespect for the statues of philosophers and heroes.

Classical tradition is maintaining itself broadly and easily in the composition and execution of the painting. Within the idealized context, we find features belonging to the immediate world of the artist which strike a discordant note in the ensemble. For example, in the painting, the reclining figure in the center of the composition gazing wearily at the spectator is a
faithful portrait looking similar to the idealized female in the poem, who is ‘sitting’ in the seventh quatrains.

In this paper I first tried to discuss style as a dialectic. I selected both art works to show the real conversation between old and modern styles. My primary sources were the art works themselves and poet-art critic of the same painting, Gautier. The intimate relationship between poetry and painting is not a new phenomenon. The modernity in Horace’s famous formula is the romantic aspirations towards a new synthesis of the arts in order to have better understanding. Symphony in White Major and The Romans of the Decadence are not only clear examples of the dialectic between the styles, but of the transformation of the pictorial elements in verbal, expressive and poetic images.

جمالية الحوار بين أسلوبين فنيين:
قصيدة غوتيه ولوحة كوبيو

إيناس الخولي

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة العمقية لمفهوم الحوار والحل بين الأساليب الفنية في عملين فنيين مختلفين في القرن التاسع عشر فرنسا. العمل الأول هو السيميوفية البيضاء، قصيدة الشاعر تيوفيل غوتيه 1849 والعمل الثاني هو سقوط الرومان، لوحة للفنان توماس كوبيو 1847.

يمكن تصنيف كل العملين على أنهما رقمانيين. وكلاهما يتبنى التقاليد الكلاسيكية، وتظهر بهما عناصر واقعية. إن مصدر الأول للمعلومات في هذا البحث هو العملين الفنيين ذاتهما. ثم النقد الفني الذي كتبه الشاعر والنقاد الفني تيوفيل غوتيه للموضوع الموضوع الدراسة. يوجد حوار بين عملي غوتيه و كوبيو. لقد تألفت هذين الفنانين من التاريخ والفلسفة. وعمليهما الخاص على عملهما الفنيين.

سيتم تحليل العملين من حيث البناء والمضمون للتعبير عن الأساليب الفنية المتنوعة بهما. إن هذين العملين يمثلان مفهوم الجدل الحاد بين الأساليب الفنية القديمة والحديثة. ويقدمان مثلًا للتحول النسورات المصري، الفلسفية، التعبيرية، الشاعرية.
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* The paper was received on June 25, 1999 and Accepted for publication on Oct. 10, 2001.

**Primary Sources:**

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**Secondary Sources:**


Fig 1
Theophile Gautier, *Symphony in White, Major*, 1849
(The English Translation)

1 In the Northern tales of eul,
From the Rhine’s escarpments high
Swan-woman radiant were beheld,
Singing and floating by,

2 Or, leaving their plumage bright
On a bough that was bending low,
Displaying skin more gleaming white
Than the white of their down of snow.

3 At times one comes our way, ___
Of all she is paldest,
White as the moonbeam’s shivering ray
On a glacier’s icy crest.

4 Her boreal bloom doth win
Our eyes to feasting rare
On rich delight of nacreous skin,
And a wealth of whiteness fair.

5 Her rounded breasts, pale globes
Of snow, wage insolent war
With her camellias and her robes
Of whiteness nebular.

6 In such white wars supreme
She wins, and weft and flower
Leave their revenge’s right, and seem
Yellowed with envy’s hour.

7 On the white of her shoulder bare,
Whose marble Paros lends,
As through the Polar twilight fair,
Invisible frost descends

8 What beaming virgin snow,
What pith a reed within,
What Host, what taper, did bestow
The white of her matchless skin ?

9 Was she made of milky drop
On the blue of a winter heaven ?
The lily-blow on the stem’s green top ?
The foam of the sea at even?

Of the marble still and cold,
Wherein the great gods dwell?
Of creamy opal gems that hold
Faint fires of mystic spell?

Or the organ’s ivory keys?
Her winged fingers a’fyre
Like butterflies light over these,
With kisses pending soft.

Of the emine’s stainless fold,
Whose white, warm touches fall
On shivering shoulders and on bold,
Bright shields armorial?

Of the phantom flowers of frost
Enscrolled on the window clear?
Of the fountain drop in the chill air lost,
An Undine’s frozen tear?

Of May bent low with the sweets
Of her bountiful white-thorn bloom?
Of alabaster that repeats
The pallor of grief and gloom?

Of the feather of doves that slip
And snow on the gable steep?
Of slow stalactite’s tear-white drip
In cavernous places deep?

Came she from Greenland foes
With Seraphita forth?
Is she Madonna of the Snows?
A Sphinx of the icy North?

Sphinx buried by avalanche,
The glacier’s guardian ghost,
Whose frozen secrets hide and blanch
In her white heart innermost?

What magic of what far name
Shall this pale soul ignite?
Ah! who shall flush with rose’s flame
This cold, implacable white?
Fig 2
Theophil Gautier, *Symphonie en Blanc Majeur*, 1849
(The French Poem)

1 De leur col blanc courbant les lignes,
On voit dans les contes du Nord,
Sur le vieux Rhin, des femmes-cygnes
Nager en chantant près du bord.

2 Ou: suspendant à quelque branche
Le plumage qui les revêt,
Faire luire leur peau plus blanche
Que la neige de leur duvet.

3 De ces feuilles il en est une,
Qui chez nous descend quelquefois,
Blanche comme le clair de lune
Sur les glaciers dans les cieux froids :

4 Conviant la vue envieuse
De sa boreale fraîcheur
A des regais de chair nacree,
A des debauches de blancheur !

5 Son sein, neige moulée en globe,
Contre les camélias blancs
Et le blanc satin de sa robe
Soulevant des combats insolents.

6 Dans ces grandes batailles blanches,
Satins et leurs ont le dessous,
Et, sans demander leurs revanches,
Jaunissent comme des jaloux.

7 Sur les blancheurs de son epaule,
Paros' au grain éblouissant,
Comme dans une nuit du pole,
Un givre invisible descend.

8 De quel mica de neige verge,
De quelle moelle de Roseau,
De quelle hostie et de que l'cienge
A-t-on fait le blanc de sa peau ?

9 A-t-on pris la goutte lactee
Tachant l'æur du ciel d'hiver,
Le lis a la pulpe argentée,
La blanche ecume de la mer ;
Le marbre blanc, chair froide et pale,
Ou vivent les divinités ;
L’argent mat, la laiteuse opale
Qu’insent de vagues clartés ;

L’ivoire, ou ses mains ont des ailes,
Et, comme de papillons blancs,
Sur le pointe des notes frelès
Suspendent leurs baisers tremblants ;

L’harmine vierge de souillure,
Qui pour abriter leurs frissons,
Ouate de sa blanche fourrure
Les épaules et les blasons ;

Le vif-argent aux fleurs fantasques
Dont les vitraux sont fanamés ;
Les blanches dentelles des vasques,
Pleurs de l’ordine en l’air figés ;

L’aubepine de mai qui pilc
Sous les blancs frimas de ses fleurs :
L’albatre ou la melancolie
Arme à retrouver ses palours ;

Le duvet blanc de la colombe,
Neigeant sur les toits du manoir,
Et la stalactite qui tombe,
Larme blanche de l’âtre noir ?

Des Groenlands et des Norveges
Vient-elle avec Seraphita ?
Est-ce la Madone des neiges,
Un sphinx blanc que l’hiver sculpta ,

Sphinx enterré par l’avalanche,
Gardien des glaciers étoiles,
Et qui, sous sa poiltrine blanche,
Cache de blancs secrets geles ?

Sous la glace ou caime il repose,
Oh ! qui pourra fonder ce Coeur !
Oh ! qui pourra mettre un rose
Dans cette implacable blancheur !
Endnotes

1 - Gautier as a romantic states "let us love one another in Art as mystics love one another in God, and everything fade before this love" (Gautier, 1858, 4).

2 - There is always a conflict between Romantics and Academics. Academic is used in a sense of continuation to the Neo-Classicism which was the most acceptable at the time. See Friedlaender's introduction.

3 - Couture uses forms, which, according to Barzun, had evaporated, but their content and meaning are still alive. Ralf Humphries translated The Satires of Juvenal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958).

4 - See (Wofflin, 1950, 18-23).

5 - Boime quotes Couture that his "figures are dying from the excessive of meat and wine" (1969, 52).

6 - Gautier does not compare Couture's work to a certain one by Raphael. Perhaps there are some common structural elements in both Raphael's The School of Athens, 1508-12 and Couture's painting.

7 - This technical structure is used before by Raphael's cartoon: Healing of the Lame Man, 1515.

8 - The sitting woman in profile with a long nude back is very close to Ingres' La Grand Odalisque, 1814.
9. Perhaps Couture borrows the middle figure from neo-Classical paintings like Gavin Hamilton's *Brutus Swearing to Avenge Lucretia's Death*, 1763.

10. This is my interpretation when I try to analyze the structure of the painting, which is also similar to the poem's structure.

11. These two figures look like Gericault’s dead figure in *The Raft of Medusa* in 1818. The content is different, but the presentation is similar.

12. “In the romantic period . . . this problem was to create a new world on the ruins of the old” (Barzun, 1975, 14).

13. Seraphita is a mysterious hermaphrodite. It was represented in a novel by Honore de Balzac (1799-1850) as being divinely inspired.

14. Ancient poets believed that some words are ‘low’ and can not be used in poetry, but some are ‘high’ and therefore suitable for poetical purpose.

15. This statement clarifies that Gautier’s poetry is a mixture of pictorial, poetical images with truth ‘reality’, but it is not only the truth.

16. A nude woman is seen in Couture’s painting standing on the left, in the middle ground with an erotic gesture.

17. I’m using the English translation by F. C. De Sumichrast who translated most of Gautier’s literary works in 24 volumes (1901-1909).

18. Emanuel Mickel analyzes the overall structure of the poem in five movements, (1-3) as an opening theme. Its texture is soft, showing beauty and charming serene and regal atmosphere. The second movement (4-6) is erotic and violent, full of contrast and struggle. In the third movement (8-10) a religious theme is developed. A contrast between the warmth of the emotional ‘inner’ and her appearance (the central female) is a marble sculpture ‘outer’. In the fourth movement (11-15) there is an abrupt change of mood. It is lighter, more festive as an airy passage, which gives way to the concluding tone of melancholy. It is more romantic and joyous, reflecting the freshness of nature. A happy choice of the slow stalactite is a hidden emotion, which also tricks the eye by being soft and weak, but it is rocky and stony. The fifth movement is the conclusion. Gautier’s question is now about the nature of the lady, her origin, which he doubts. The only verse in the poem, which injects a feeling of softness, does not refer to the swan maiden, but to the poet’s wish ‘who shall flush with rose’s flame’.