

desire that depends the length of life of a toy. I do not find it in me to blame this infantile mania; it is a first metaphysical tendency. When this desire has implanted itself in the child's cerebral marrow, it fills his fingers and nails with an extraordinary agility and strength. The child twists and turns his toy, scratches it, shakes it, bumps it against the walls, throws it on the ground. From time to time he makes it re-start its mechanical motions, sometimes in the opposite direction. Its marvellous life comes to a stop. The child, like the people besieging the Tuileries, makes a supreme effort; at last he opens it up, he is the stronger. But *where is the soul?* This is the beginning of melancholy and gloom.

There are others who immediately break the toy which has hardly been put in their hands, hardly examined; so far as these are concerned I must admit that I do not understand the mysterious motive which causes their action. Are they in a superstitious passion against these tiny objects which imitate humanity, or are they perhaps forcing them to undergo a kind of Masonic initiation before introducing them into nursery life? — *Puzzling question!*⁴

Philosophic Art

What is pure art according to the modern idea? It is the creation of an evocative magic, containing at once the object and the subject, the world external to the artist and the artist himself.

What is Philosophical Art according to the ideas of Chenavard and the German school? It is a plastic art which sets itself up in place of books, by which I mean as a rival to the printing-press in the teaching of history, morals and philosophy:

In fact there have been periods of history in which the role of the plastic arts was to paint the historical archives of a people and its religious beliefs.

But for several centuries now the history of art has been marked by an ever-increasing division of powers, some subjects becoming the special preserve of painting, others of music and others of literature.

Is it by some fatal consequence of decadence that today each art should evince a desire to trespass on the next, so that we have the spectacle of musical scales being introduced into painting, colour into sculpture, plastic devices into literature, and, by other artists — those indeed with whom we are specially concerned today — a sort of encyclopedic philosophy into plastic art itself?

Every good piece of sculpture, painting or music evokes the sentiments and the dreams which it sets out to evoke.

Thus Philosophic Art is a return towards the picture-making proper to the childhood of the nations, and if it remained strictly faithful to itself, it would feel it its duty to juxtapose as many successive images as are contained in whatever sentence that it might wish to express.

Even so we may reserve the right to doubt whether the hieroglyphic was clearer than the printed sentence.

We thus propose to study Philosophic Art as a kind of monstrous growth in which certain fine talents have chosen to display themselves.

It should be noted moreover that in order to justify its existence, Philosophic Art presupposes an absurdity — I mean the public intelligence in matters of the fine arts.

The more Art strives to be philosophically clear, the more it will degrade itself and revert towards the primitive hieroglyph; on the other hand, the more it divorces itself from the Didactic, the more it will soar aloft into the realms of Beauty pure and disinterested.

As we all know, and as it would be only too easy to guess if we did not, Germany is the country which has sunk deepest into the error of Philosophic Art.

In our examination we shall pass over such well-known examples as Overbeck,¹ who studies the beauty of the past only the better to teach religion, or Cornelius² and Kaulbach, who do the same thing in order to teach history and philosophy; let us note moreover that even when he had to deal with a purely picturesque subject, that of a Madhouse (see Pl. 52), Kaulbach was unable to resist treating it 'categorically' – in an Aristotelian manner, one might almost say – so eternal is the antinomy of the pure poetic mind and the didactic.

Instead, as our first specimen of Philosophic Art, we shall concern ourselves today with a German artist who is much less well-known, but who, in our opinion, was infinitely more gifted from the point of view of pure art; I refer to M. Alfred Rethel,³ who died insane a short time ago, after having decorated a chapel on the banks of the Rhine,⁴ and who is unknown in Paris save for eight wood-cuts, of which the last two figured at the Exposition Universelle.

The first of his 'poems' – an expression that we are obliged to use in speaking of a school which puts the plastic arts on the same footing as the printed word – dates from 1848 and is entitled *The Dance of Death in 1848* (see Pl. 53).

It is a reactionary poem whose subject is the usurpation of all powers and the fascination exercised upon the people by the fatal goddess of Death.

A detailed description of each of the six plates which go to make up the poem, with an exact translation of the legends in verse which accompany them. – An analysis of M. Rethel's artistic merit – the original element in his work (the genius of epic allegory in the German manner), and the element of plagiarism (imitations of various old masters, Dürer, Holbein, and some not so old); and of the moral value of the poem, its Satanic,

Byronic quality, and the feeling of desolation which characterizes it. What seems to me to be truly original about this poem is the fact that it appeared at a moment when practically the whole of European humanity had rushed headlong, with eyes open, into the follies of revolution.

Two prints which together form an antithesis. One, *The First Onslaught of Cholera upon Paris, at the Bal de l'Opéra* (see Pl. 54). The bodies of masqueraders stretched out stiff upon the ground, a puerette with her toes hideously sticking up in the air and her mask slipping off; musicians making their escape with their instruments tucked under their arms; an allegorical impassive scourge-bearer seated on a bench, and the generally sinister character of the whole composition. The second contrasts with it and represents a type of 'good death' (see Pl. 55). A virtuous and peaceable man is taken unawares in his sleep; he is depicted in a lofty place, a place which has doubtless been his home for many a long year; it is a room in a bell-tower, commanding a view of the fields and a distant horizon – a place made for peace of mind; the old fellow sleeps in a roughly-made chair, while Death is playing a magical air on his violin.⁵ A great sun, bisected by the line of the horizon, shoots on high its geometric rays. – *A fine day is drawing to its close.*

A little bird, perched on the window-sill, is looking into the room; has it come to listen to Death's violin, or is it an allegory of the soul preparing to make its flight?

In interpreting the productions of Philosophic Art, a great attention to detail must be brought to bear; here everything – place, decor, furnishings, accessories (see Hogarth, for example) – everything is allegory, allusion, hieroglyph, rebus.

M. Michelet has attempted a minute analysis of Dürer's *Melancholia*;⁶ his interpretation is questionable, however, particularly with reference to the syringe.

Furthermore even at their moment of creation in the mind of the Philosophic artist, these accessories are characterized by a poetic, vague and ambiguous quality rather than by one which is literal and precise, and often it is the translator who invents their *intentions*.

Philosophic Art is not so alien to the French mentality as one might think. France has a weakness for myths, morals and

rebuses; or to put it better, being a country of reasoners, she has a weakness for mental effort.

The Romantic School has been particularly distinguished for its reaction against these rationalistic tendencies and its establishment of the glory of pure art; and certain tendencies – notably those of M. Chenavard, the rehabilitation of hieroglyphic art – are themselves a reaction against the school of art for art's sake.

Can it be that there are philosophic climates, as there are climates of love? Venice practised the love of art for art's sake; Lyons is a philosophic city. Lyons has her own philosophy, her own school of poetry, her own school of painting, and finally her own school of philosophic painting.

She is a strange city of bigotry and commerce, both Catholic and Protestant, full of fog and smoke, a city in which ideas sort themselves out with difficulty. Everything that comes from Lyons is meticulous, slowly thought out and timid; the Abbé Noireau, Laprade, Souлары, Chenavard, Janmot. You might suppose that everyone there was suffering from an intellectual cold in the nose. Even in Souлары I detect that categorizing habit of mind which is so conspicuous in the works of Chenavard and which betrays itself also in the songs of Pierre Dupont.⁷

Chenavard's⁸ brain is itself not unlike the city of Lyons; it is foggy and sooty and bristles with spikes, like that city of blast-furnaces and spires. It is a brain in which things do not mirror themselves clearly; we see them only reflected through an atmosphere of fumes.

Chenavard is not a painter; he despises what we understand by painting. It would be unjust, however, to apply to him the fable of the fox and the grapes; for I think that even if Chenavard could paint with as much dexterity as anyone you care to mention, he would remain no less contemptuous of the sauces and spices of art.

Let it be said at once that Chenavard has an enormous superiority over all other artists; for if he is not sufficiently animal, they are far too lacking in spirituality.

Chenavard knows how to read and to reason, and has thereby made himself the friend of all who love reasoning; he is a remarkable scholar, and is experienced in the art of meditation.

A passion for libraries has been with him from his earliest

years; accustomed while quite young to attach an idea to every plastic form, he has never rummaged in a portfolio of engravings or wandered round a picture-gallery without regarding them as storehouses of general human thought. Deeply interested in religions and gifted with an encyclopedic mind, he was naturally bound to end up by conceiving an impartially syncretic system.

Although heavy and difficult to manoeuvre, his mind has its charm which he knows how to put to good use, and if he has waited long before playing his part, rest assured that in spite of his apparent simplicity of nature, his ambitions have never been small.

(Chenavard's first pictures: *M. de Dreux-Brézé and Mirabeau – The Convention Voting the Death of Louis XVI*. Chenavard chose an excellent moment to show off his system of historical philosophy, expressed by means of the pencil.)

At this point we propose to divide our work into two parts, in the first of which we shall analyse the intrinsic merit of an artist gifted with an astonishing compositional skill, which is much greater than one would suspect if one took too seriously the scorn which he professes for the resources of his art – his skill at drawing women; in the second we shall examine that merit which I call 'extrinsic' – in other words, his philosophic system.

(M. Ledru-Rollin⁹ – a general confusion of mind and a lively public preoccupation with the philosophy of history.)

Humanity is analogous to Man himself.

It has its ages, and its pleasures, its labours and its ideas which are analogous to its ages.

(An analysis of Chenavard's emblematic calendar (see p. 210). – That certain arts belong to certain ages of humanity, just as certain passions belong to certain ages of man.)

The age of man himself can be divided into *childhood*, corresponding to the historical period from Adam until Babel; into *manhood*, corresponding to the period from Babel until Christ, who will be considered as representing the zenith of human life; into *middle age*, which corresponds to the period from Christ until Napoleon; and finally into *old age*, corresponding to the period which we are about to enter and whose beginning is marked by the supremacy of America and of industry.

The total age of humanity will be eight thousand four hundred years.

the limits set by providence; nevertheless it is man's privilege to be always capable of developing great talents within a false genre or while violating the natural constitution of art.

Although I regard Philosophic Artists as heretics, I have often come to admire their efforts by an effect of my own reason.

What seems to me finally to establish their heretical character is their inconsequence for they draw very well and very inventively, and if they were logical when they came to put into practice an art which they put on the same footing as any other means of instruction, they ought to have the courage of their own convictions and revert to all the innumerable and barbaric conventions of hieratic art.

I Didactic Painting: Notes on Chenavard's Utopia

There are two men in Chenavard, the *utopian* and the *artist*. He wishes to be praised for his utopias, and is sometimes an artist *in spite of* his utopias.

The birthplace of Painting was the Temple. Its roots are in Religion. The modern Temple and the modern Religion are the Revolution. Thus let us create the *Temple of the Revolution* and the painting of the Revolution. In other words, the modern Pantheon will contain the *History of Humanity*.

Pan must kill God. Pan is the people.

An aesthetic which is chimerical, in other words *a posteriori*, individual and artificial, substituted for the involuntary, spontaneous, fatal and vital aesthetic of the people.

Thus Wagner refashions Greek Tragedy, which was created spontaneously by Greece.

The Revolution is not a religion, since it has neither prophets, saints nor miracles, and its very aim is to deny all that.

If there is something good in Chenavard's thesis, it is simply a contempt for the trivial and a conviction that great painting is founded on great ideas.

A great degree of naiveté also, as with all utopians. He supposes that all men have an equal love of *justice* (holiness) and an equal humility. Honest man, excellent man!

Proud solitary, stranger to life!

II

Chenavard is a caricature of ancient wisdom traced by modern fantasy. Painters who think.

III Men of Lyons

ARTISTS Chenavard, Janmot, Révoil, Bonnefonds, Orsel, Perrin, Compte-Calix, Flandrin, Saint-Jean, Jacquand, Boissieu.

LITERATI Laprade, Ballanche (for the smoke), A. Pommier, Souлары, Blanc Saint-Bonnet, Noiroт, Pierre Dupont, De Gérando, J.-B. Say, Terrasson.

11 One such painting, by Leandro Bassano, is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, and it is possible that Baudelaire may have seen a print of it. Even so, the name of Bassano seems an odd one in the present context.

12 The Café Greco, in the Via Condotti, Rome, had been a favourite resort of artists and writers since the latter part of the eighteenth century.

13 Peter Brueghel, the Elder.

14 Peter Brueghel, the Younger.

15 Baudelaire may be thinking of such doctors as Briquer de Boismont and J. J. Moreau (de Tours), whose *Des Hallucinations* and *Du Hachisch et de l'aliénation mentale* (respectively) had been published in 1845.

16 Baudelaire must have known Brueghel almost entirely through engravings.

Chapter 9 A Philosophy of Toys

1 She was in fact the mother of Ernest Panckoucke, bookseller and translator, the 'present Panckoucke', and wife of Charles Panckoucke (by this time dead), the well-known translator of Tacitus. She held a literary salon at her house in the rue des Poitevins, and died in 1861.

2 This and the following paragraph were later (1862) used, with minor alterations, to form the prose-poem *Le Joujou du Pauvre*.

3 Baudelaire's description is a little hard to follow, but he is evidently describing a development of the Fantoscope, one of the earliest optical toys, an example of which, dating from c.1833 and 'invented by Professor Plateau', is in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The difference is that in the Fantoscope there is only one card, containing both slots and figures. The user rotates the card, looking (from the back) through the coalescing slots at the mirrored reflection of the figures. The Museum's example includes dancing frogs, tortoises and a violoncellist. It is not to be confused with the later Zoetrope, or Wheel of Life.

4 These words first appeared in the 1855 version of the article. They are of course taken from Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial* ('What Song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, though puzzling Questions, are not beyond all conjecture'). Baudelaire seems, however, to have known it not from the original source but (as Miss Gilman points out, pp. 75-6) from the epigraph to *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, where the whole sentence is used by Poe. It is significant that Baudelaire's translation of this story first appeared in instalments in February and March 1855, the year of the addition of these words to the text of the present article.

Chapter 10 Philosophic Art

1 Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869), leader of the 'Nazarenes'; from 1810 he worked in Rome.

2 Peter Cornelius (1783-1867), chiefly noted for his revival of fresco; from 1824 he was director of the Munich Academy.

3 At one time Baudelaire considered asking Rethel to execute illustrations for the *Fleurs du mal*. He was somewhat improbably known as 'le Delacroix allemand'.

4 In fact, the Town Hall at Aachen.

5 In fact Death is tolling the bell; in the first plate however Death is playing the violin, using two bones; Baudelaire was evidently writing from memory.

6 In his *Histoire de France au seizième siècle*, 1855, pp. 86-90.

7 Baudelaire wrote an enthusiastic, if critical, article about Dupont; see *L'Art romantique*.

8 For the most complete account of this artist, see Joseph C. Sloane, *P. M. J. Chenavard, Artist of 1848* (University of North Carolina Press, 1962). Baudelaire and he had several friends in common, including Delacroix; see pp. 64-5.

9 Minister of the Interior in the Government of 1848.

10 The subject of a series of pictures by Janmot exhibited in Paris in 1854; the catalogue was accompanied by a verse commentary by the artist himself. (Note by the 1868 editors.) The series, correctly entitled 'Le Poème de l'Âme', is now in the possession of the Faculté des Lettres, Lyons. A catalogue, including four plates and a valuable introduction by René Jullian, was published by the Lyons Museum in 1950.