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Beauty of the past and present!

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### Summary of Painter of Modern life

Charles Baudelaire begins his essay with a descriptive character formation of a self-taught artist he refers to as M.G., by drawing out the characteristics of the artist's nature and actions. These include: originality, modesty, a lack of need for approval, a desire to be anonymous, a lack of ulterior motives, and an obsession with a world of images. M.G. does not sign his pieces with his name. The author claims that the artist's nature is clearly readable in his works and even without the signature you can tell it was created by M.G. because "all his works are signed with his dazzling soul." M.G.'s knowledge of materials and capability of art making are referred to as being a gift. This leads to Baudelaire's distinction between what constitutes artist versus man of the world, because he calls M.G. a man of the world, rather than just an artist.

He defines artist(s) as a slave, "a specialist... skilled brutes, mere manual laborers, village pub-talkers with the minds of country bumpkins," discussing in narrow dialogs. The man of the world, on the other hand, is something higher, better, and more than the artist—"a man who understands the world and the mysterious and legitimate reasons behind all its customs." Baudelaire calls him a "spiritual citizen of the universe" and describes his immense yearning for knowledge and understanding. The author suggests that this initial attitude of yearning within an individual is what may lead to becoming a man of genius.

At first, the reader assumes M.G. is a specific person, but Baudelaire becomes more abstract in his character formation, which makes M.G. out to be more of an overall ideal—a way of being. The author vividly describes the mindset of a convalescent to highlight an attitude of curiosity inherent in M.G. He goes on to say that the experience of curiosity, interest, and passion, at these extremes, is relatable to being a child—one distracted by the wonder of every single element as being new and exciting. Basically, Baudelaire is depicting the idea of artist as super sensory sensitive. However, M.G. does not have the mentality of a child. He is a hybrid of childlike naivety mixed with a mature sensibility, making him man of a genius.

So far, M.G. holds an elitist position as man of the world, but Baudelaire also notes the downside to this position concerning the artist's capacity of feeling. Just as M.G. can be taken to ecstasy through observation, he can also feel the worst of all pains. Baudelaire's example is a quote by M.G. himself: "any man who is not weighed down with a sorrow so searching as to touch all his faculties, and who is bored in the midst of the crowd, is a fool! A fool! and I despise him!" Here, the author uses the theme of melancholia belonging to the genius; his gift is both a positive and negative bestowment received by Fate.

Baudelaire closes by maintaining the myth and the need of the artist in culture. He describes the magical creation process as an activity that produces objects inevitably carrying the essence and soul of their creator. He celebrates a mature naivety towards the present, and condemns borrowing too much from the past. Baudelaire is proposing an idea of man and a way of reacting to the world that will eventually lead to some progression—a man forever in search of modernity.

### Summary



5. In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire advocates that beauty is composed of two opposing yet complementary elements: one constant and the second circumstantial. Together, they allow us to experience beauty. This duality in art, explains Baudelaire, is a direct consequence of the duality in man. Also, he proposes, throughout history we may see the very detailed continuous and even harmonic evolution of our judgment of Beauty.

6. Throughout the essay, Baudelaire develops a captivating thought into a fascinating question: are the canons of beauty that man upholds of his conscious creation, or do they spring from and reflect the link between the dual elements in man? In his words, "The perpetual correlation between what is called the soul and what is called the body is a quite satisfactory explanation of how what is material or emanates from the spiritual reflects and will always reflect the spiritual force it derives from"<sup>1</sup>. This question is important because if our standards of beauty derive exclusively from the spiritual or eternal element, development cannot take place; hence, what Baudelaire calls the circumstantial element, must play a very important role in the growth of art and our perception of beauty.

7. Is this circumstantial element in art a direct consequent of the permutation of existing canons and standards of prior periods, perhaps combined with thoughts that are awakened by events that time presents? Is the particular course of this evolution necessitated by the preceding conditions? Is this circumstantial element in art conceived freely by the human mind, or is it a manifestation of a circumstance of the human mind?

8. Baudelaire proposes in the opening of the essay that "The idea of beauty that man creates for himself affects his whole attire; [...] Man comes in the end to look like his ideal image of himself"<sup>2</sup>.

9. If man creates for himself an idea of beauty, then the composing elements of this idea must first be of his appeal. Knowledge can bring us to appreciate things differently and cause our perception of beauty to develop and blossom. Incidentally, we become acquainted with the different ideas (sometimes thoughts that are awakened by objects of our appreciation) from which we capture the principle that they appeal to, to array our own aesthetic canon, which we can later apply to ourselves and in our creations.

10. The aesthetic properties of an object are the tangible expression of the essential characteristics that distinguish the object as such; then our appreciation of certain physical qualities—such as beauty, for instance—are the recognition, through sensory perception, of the symbols that stand and respond to our signification of truth. Therefore, a way to approach truth is through beauty: by understanding what we consider beautiful and why, we can know the self that appreciates this beauty. —"For the perfect dandy, these things [clothes and material elegance] are no more than the symbol of the aristocratic superiority of his mind"<sup>3</sup>.

We can draw from the above that when the principles that we have chosen are confronted with their perceptible parallel, "which we may like to call, successively one and the and the same time, contemporaneity, fashion, morality, passion."<sup>4</sup>, without which the first element would be indigestible, there we find beauty.

3 In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Charles Baudelaire suggests the artist immerse him or herself into the flux of the present in order to best represent the qualities of the

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modern age, Baudelaire writes: "The pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present is due not only to the beauty with which it can be invested, but also to its essential quality of being present" (Baudelaire 793). For Baudelaire, the essential quality of being present is best seen in the activities of the flâneur, an idle walker and passionate observer of the complexities of the modern age. It is the flâneur, a person completely immersed in the crowd, who can best represent the intricacies of the age. Although written nearly a century and a half ago, Baudelaire's theory of the flâneur and the modern artist is still relevant today, and can be seen most notably in urban photography and film. Below I will discuss Baudelaire's theory of the artist and the flâneur in his discussion of Edgar Allan Poe and Constantin Guys—who Baudelaire refers to as Monsieur G.—as well as how it applies to the urban narrative film, as best seen in the work of Martin Scorsese.

Poets have no other quality but to cultivate the element of beauty. And in love with distinction have above all things. They are not so furnished, they have a crude representation of not so being astonished. They also suffer as well. They are incredible have quality of oppression. Contact element of triviality. It is last spark of heroism. He has an insurmountable determination, un moved. Not beauty belongs beauty has to be achieved. Not pressed in nature → voice if has own self interest. Beauty has to be created.



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 → there is no singular vision of beauty it has dual nature, it has two characteristics. One is eternal and relative (circumstantial) (evolving)  
 (fixed) → beauty has body & soul  
 (spiritual) → body & soul  
 inevitable variable. eternal.

→ misguided artists, think beauty has to be same. i.e 1st one, eternal.

→ Art & beauty is not limited to major artist - can minor also contribute.

→ past important but we cannot ignore beauty of present lesser poets. with mind of past.

→ The circumstantial elements are the smearing, icing on divine cake. Together they allow us to experience beauty.

→ Beauty to develop a thought into fascinating perception. circumstantial elements plays importance on... (fashion rel, variable). the also gives an eternal beauty idea.

→ Beauty = "a promise of happiness and nothing else"

→ The artist, man of the world, man of the crowd and child → The water doesn't need to sign but his work signs.

→ Curiosity is main spring of genius of the artist, it motivates him.

→ A child is innocent, absorbs form & color, highest degree of feeling, sees everything, has highest level of feeling attached, absorbs form & color, adult has sound nerves, he has weaker nerves. Child is beauty drunk.

→ Beauty - 2 elements: ① constant ② circumstantial.

→ why? due to human nature. why? due to human nature, we would be misfit in society.

→ if our gods would be of part, we would be missing the icing of the divine cake, could not be digestible without the icing of the circumstantial elements.

→ genius → childhood genius, but still at the center, he is very absorbed. child & artist may not see him. He is very absorbed.

→ sees everyone but none sees him. He is very absorbed. → world is like a mirror to him and looks for modernity.

→ Modernity. He sits in the crowd and looks for modernity. → circumstantial is half of the part (modernity), other part is eternal.

→ Beauty is balance/harmony (modern will become thru artifice) → outside of an old age woman by the state of body with no laws governing him

→ reproduction of soul & body. → their happiness. → reproduction of soul & body. → their happiness. → reproduction of soul & body. → their happiness.