

Baudelaire's Influence on the Modernist Poetry of T.S. Eliot

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Abstract

This study explores the transformation of Paris and its effect on the new movement Symbolism which influences American modernism. This movement is explained through the works of Charles Baudelaire who has an enormous impact on T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. Since symbolism was the only movement that modernist writers of America found close to their era. They could not break off; on the contrary they took some essential parts of it which was a main source of inspiration. Therefore, as a symbolist poet, Charles Baudelaire influenced T.S. Eliot and like Baudelaire T.S. Eliot focused on the brokenness and falseness of modern experience and he found symbolism close to his era, therefore he took some essential parts as an inspiration. For this reason, the influence of symbolism on Modernist literature cannot be ignored.

Keywords: *Modernism, Symbolism, Brokenness, Falseness, Modern Experience, Modernist Literature, Transformation*

Özet

Bu çalışma, Paris'in dönüşümünü ve Amerikan Modernizmine tesir eden Sembolizmin bu dönüşüm üzerindeki etkisini inceler. Bu akım T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats ve Ezra Pound gibi yazarlar üzerinde etkili olan Charles Baudelaire'in eserleri ile açıklanmıştır. Amerikan yazarlar sembolizmi kendi çağlarına yakın buldukları için, sembolizmden bağlarını koparamamışlardır, tam tersine sembolizmi ilham kaynağı olarak almışlardır. Bu sebepten dolayı Charles Baudelaire'in T.S. Eliot üzerinde olan etkisi büyüktür ve T.S. Eliot da Baudelaire gibi modern hayatın getirmiş olduğu parçalanmışlık ve sahteliğe odaklanmıştır. Sembolizmi ise kendi dönemine daha yakın gördüğü için temel kısımlarını almıştır.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: *Modernizm, Sembolizm, Parçalanmışlık, Sahtelik, Modern Deneyim, Modernist Edebiyat, Dönüşüm*

Rosner refers to Balzac's *Old Goriot*: "An old man sits for a portrait. He is an aristocrat wearing fine fabric. Upon closer inspection, however, the viewer sees that his jacket is worn, his body soft and his face cracked. This is a portrait of an old man clinging to better times. This belongs to the Honoré de Balzac's Image of Old Goriot, the protagonist of his 1835 novel" (78).

This portrait embodies the transformation of Paris that took place in the nineteenth century. In other words, the city was modernized but people were not capable of enduring this sudden modernization. You can wear a suit with good fabric, but if you don't internalize your outer appearance, it has no meaning as in Balzac Image of Old Goriot, you can find yourself in a suit that doesn't reflect your inner self. Without a detailed knowledge of Paris and its dwellers, it is difficult to understand their inner world.

This paper will explore the transformation of Paris and Symbolism. Moreover, the influence of symbolism on American modernism will be mentioned. As a symbolist poet, Charles Baudelaire's influence on T.S. Eliot will be explained with specific works of art that T.S. Eliot wrote. Charles Baudelaire influenced modernist writers like T.S. Elliot, W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound.

In Paris, there became a transformation from old to new: the capital city was renovated and this transformation caused changes in the city's social character, class structure, and its relationship to nature. Moreover, some cultural consequences were inevitable in the face of these changes. It was not easy for people to endure such a radical change, because of anxieties about materialism, commercialism, and modernity.

Writers depicted the changes in the city from start to finish, which caused the advent of a new movement in art ranging from sculpture to literature, which is called Symbolism. The birth of French Symbolism goes back to

the 1880s when it flourished as a literary phenomenon. The first application of the term came with the advent of one French poet's Symbolist Manifesto (1886) published in Le Figaro newspaper as Neginsky states in his book:

Enemy of teaching, of declamation, of false sensitivity objective description, Symbolic poetry seeks to clothe the Idea in a perceptible form that nevertheless will not be the ultimate goal in itself, but, which, even as it serves to express the Idea, remains subject to it. The Idea, for its part, must not allow itself to be deprived of the sumptuous robes of external analogies; for the essential character of symbolic art is never to reach the Idea itself. Accordingly, in this art, the depictions of nature, the actions of human beings, all the concrete phenomena would not manifest themselves; these are but appearances perceptible to the senses destined to represent their esoteric affinities with primordial ideas. (557)

Moréas claims in Symbolist Manifesto that in this art there is no need to make out the tangible phenomena; the actual thing which should be taken into consideration is abstract perception. You do not need to explain the Idea, there is no need to be clear, but you can be understood through being perceptible to the senses. Although the term Symbolism was first exercised by Jean Moréas in 1886, the stylistic, thematic, and philosophic assumptions of this poetic movement were employed earlier in the works of Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stéphane Mallarmé. Generally speaking, special characteristics of this concern are driven with temporal sensations rather than explicit statements and descriptions. There is a desire to figure out the existence of temporary being but this desire is blended with mystic and hidden essences of life.

As stated above, Baudelaire (1821-1867) was one of the symbolists of that era and he used poetry to inject value back into capitalist society. Charles Baudelaire was a French poet, translator, novella and short fiction writer, and dramatist. Baudelaire's poems concentrate on themes of death, sex, and decay. He is regarded as one of the world's greatest lyric poets and the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal* [Flowers of Evil] (1857), which brought him permanent fame along with scandal, and persecution, and censorship.

In Benjamin's writing on Baudelaire, "we find powerful identification of the poet: with his social isolation, with relative failure of his work, and in particular with the fathomless melancholy that suffuses every page" (3). According to Benjamin, Baudelaire is a highly esteemed poet since his works claim a "particular historical responsibility" (3). Baudelaire does not break the chains of history; on the contrary, he perceives the past as a basic guide directing him toward his specific way.

The transformation of Paris in the nineteenth century was one of the basic motifs shaping his idea of a work of art. The nineteenth century experienced huge urban expansion: Paris grew to an incredible scale that resulted in new modes of experience. Since he was a poet with a sensitive disposition, he could not hold himself back from writing: he felt the need to write. In his masterpiece *Les Fleurs du Mal* he mostly focuses on the brokenness and falseness of modern experience.

Actually, he was affected by modern life: he claims that in the modern city we become a *flâneur* or stroller. In fact, this was an entirely new urban figure, related with Baudelaire's work which is marked by the decay of art's aura, and above all he is for Benjamin, the epitome of his era. He made Paris a subject of lyrical poetry for the first time.

Do you remember a picture (for indeed it is a picture!) written by the most powerful pen of this age and entitled "The Man of the Crowd?" Sitting in a café, and looking through the shop window, a convalescent is enjoying the sight of the passing crowd, and identifying himself in thought with all the thoughts that are moving around him. He has only recently come back from the shades of death and breathes in with delight all the spores and odors of life; as he has been on the point of forgetting everything, he remembers and passionately wants to remember everything. In the end he rushes into the crowd in search of a man unknown to him whose face, which he had caught sight of, had in a flash fascinated him. Curiosity had become a compelling, irresistible passion. (Baudelaire 4)

The painter of modern life is left alone against the shocks of modern life. In a way he is a modern individual who has been deprived of the possessions and security of bourgeois life. In the first phase, his intention is to enjoy the passing crowd and to isolate himself from people. However, this was easy in the face of crowd. If you want to be a permanent audience, the best step is to look at life rather than rushing into it.

As stated before, Charles Baudelaire was an influential French Symbolist and his works had an incredible effect on writers not only in France but also throughout Europe along with America. Poets like W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), and Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) were all greatly affected by Symbolism. The works of Translation of French poets were translated to English during the 1890s.

In Bradbury's article, "Modernism in the American Grain," T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, John Gould Fletcher, and Conrad Aiken all accepted the influence of Arthur Symon's book, *The Symbolist Movement and Literature* (1899)" (254). Ezra Pound and his friends wanted to revitalize American poetry, but they had no native source to consult. For this reason, they started to produce works of art mostly based on symbolism. Therefore, symbolism gained admittance into American literature thanks to these poets. Marshall states;

As a school of literature, symbolism refers to the three phases of a vital part of the development of literary modernism: first to an artistic movement in France and Belgium during the last decade and a half of the nineteenth century; then, retrospectively and most importantly, to its immediate sources in French Poetry beginning in the 1850s; and finally to the influence that both of these had on European and American literatures throughout the first half of the twentieth century. (155)

Symbolism was the only movement that modernist writers of America found close to their era. They could not break off; on the contrary they took some essential parts of it which was a main source of inspiration.

In the 1920s, after First World War I people felt alone and isolated because of the essential technological changes in architecture, transportation, and engineering. Moreover, cities grew at an unprecedented rate and gave rise to huge urban expansion. For this reason people felt alienated, fragmented, and lost in their world's immense ocean. America became an urban and industrial society. All of those reasons motivated writers. That's why the group of writers named the Lost Generation is synonymous with Modernism.

To summarize, the influence of symbolism on Modernist literature cannot be ignored. In progressive phases of my study, I will analyze the topic, delving into symbolism in the work of Charles Baudelaire and its effect on the poetry of T.S. Eliot. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri. He was mostly influenced by Ezra Pound, who was his major guide in the grain of modernism.

In London, he came under the influence of his contemporary Ezra Pound. He directed himself in the path of modernism, and he was a modernist critic who was under the influence of Hulme and Worringer as well as Pound. Among all the modernist poets, Ezra Pound was the leading poet for him since Ezra Pound assisted him in the publication of his masterpieces in a number of magazines. His first poetry collection was *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Thanks to this work of arts he became a central figure in twentieth century, and did not lose his influence. He always emphasized the importance of language. According to him, Eliot's main goal was to extend language through poetry:

To preserve, and second to extend and improve. In expressing what other people feel he is also changing the feeling by making it more conscious; he is making people more aware of what they feel already and therefore teaching them something about themselves.... I will be equally true that quality of our poetry is dependent upon the way in which people use their language: for a poet must take as his material his own as it is actually spoken around him. If it is deteriorating, he must take the best of it. (11)

Just given, Eliot's understanding of poetry was "Art is for art's sake." In other words, he did not write to be understood, he took advantage of the text to realize his own purpose, which is to extend language. He disposed, the social function of poetry. In this way, the French Symbolists influenced him. "He noticed his own voice through his confrontation with Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. Schneider stated the kind of poetry that I needed, to teach me the use of my own voice, did not exist in English at all; it was only to be found in French" (11).

Eliot was keen on French poetry. He wanted to establish a corresponding image of poetry encountered in the works of arts of his French counterparts such as Baudelaire:

For it would be fine and a new thing if he could create in his own language something approximating to the blend of the familiar and the strange which Baudelaire offers to an English reader not fully bilingual. (Schneider 8)

Eliot was so influenced by French Poetry that he aimed to produce works of art familiar to French Poetry but in his own language. He stated "I am an English poet of American origin in whose formation the influence of Baudelaire and of the poets who derived from Baudelaire has been dominant" (8) Eliot stated in "Tradition and Individual Talent" that historical sense is important. He thinks that tradition can be acquired by great struggle and it involves the historical sense (37).

The Waste Land is one of the significant poems of the twentieth century. Actually, it contains psychological and cultural turbulences that showed up after First World War, because of the loss of cultural and moral identity. In other words, he describes the post-war sense of loneliness, distrust, futility, uselessness, and thirst for living..

T.S. Eliot was under the influence of Symbolist poetry, especially Baudelaire, who "felt with special and unique intensity the torturing impact of a great modern city upon individuals" (Al-Bashir and Muhammed 14). For this reason, it is inevitable to encounter the footsteps of Baudelaire in the works of art belonging to T.S. Eliot. Specifically, Baudelaire illustrated

the “sickness and agony of the human heart and soul “ (Al-Bashir and Muhammed 14) that has been in evidence in every age and country. T.S. Eliot pictures. “ the unreal city” in *The Wasteland*.

From Baudelaire I learnt the poetical possibilities of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of juxtaposition of the matter of-fact and the fantastic and the source of new poetry might be found in what had been regarded as the impossible, the sterile, the intractable, unpoetic. (Al-Bashir and Muhammed 15)

Eliot wanted to depict despicable aspects of city life that became an unbelievable burden on the dwellers' shoulders. During the post-war period, people were experiencing its isolating and torturing effects. Therefore, Eliot mingled the sordid aspects of metropolitan life with a new poetic style. Chinitz states; “*The Wasteland*, a poem published some thirty years before and still spoke for “the time” depended on a sense that one inhabited an elastic historical period that had began before the First World War and stretched out into some indefinite future” (324).

The poem mainly focuses on the problems experienced in that period and emphasizes its outcomes that will be crucial in the future. In other words, *The Waste Land* takes historical problems into consideration. T.S. Eliot represents the decline of Western civilization and the living presence of the past; speaks for a civilization in crisis.

What was the motive that pushed Eliot to write such a poem? Eliot felt the crisis during the First World , so it pushed him to utter his own disturbances caused by the Great War, which left so many people alienated, desolate, and disappointed.

“Bin gar keine Russin, stammaus Litauen, echt deutsch.”

The translation of those lines, “I am not Russian at all; I am Lithuanian, authentic German” refer to the enmity between societies caused by European nationalism. Therefore, there is an emphasis on the Great War.

The poem is comprised of five parts: a Burial of the Dead, a Game of Chess, a Fire Sermon, a Death by Water, “What the Thunder Said” I will focus on the first part of the poem. In this part, the speaker talks about the old days, childhood memories of a woman named Marie, followed by the portrayal of trees. This part focuses on the sordid aspects of modern life via some figurative language attributed to the land itself:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow

Out of this stony rubbish?
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.

In those lines, Eliot directs our attention to the image of , barren land that has no sign of vitality, like people who have no life because of modern attitude. In fact, in this barren land we come across elements of nature, but they do not provide any safety to us. People become stuck in deep disappointment; therefore, they experience harsh alienation and their visions and dreams become a heap of images. At this point, did Baudelaire effect Eliot?

Baudelaire took advantage of the deserted and abandoned streets in order to illustrate the fragmented and shattered lives of people caused by modernism. The final stanza of this section confirms my assertion since it starts with the image of “unreal city.” The speaker talks about “brown fogs” and crossing London Bridge.

To conclude, Charles Baudelaire influenced Modernist poets of America. American poets started to produce works of art like Baudelaire, mostly based on symbolism, which influenced American modernism. Like Baudelaire, T.S. Eliot focused on the brokenness and falseness of modern experience and he found symbolism close to his era; therefore, he could not break off; on the contrary, he took some essential parts as a main source of inspiration.

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