

## Collective creativity

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## ARTICLES – FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE

# Collective Creativity: Negotiating Canonicity Through Adaptations of Baudelaire

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Baudelaire was ‘canonised’ in the *Pléiade* editions published by Gallimard in 1931. This important step in the reception history of a major nineteenth-century French poet was part of an ongoing process of interaction with Baudelaire’s work. As this article contends, musical adaptations play a significant part in Baudelaire’s global reception history, from the 1860s onwards. The article argues that as the adaptive process moves beyond the ‘one author, one adapter’ model, into a more collective creative process, it both alters the poetry for good and contributes directly to the ongoing canonisation of the poet’s work. The interplay of different artists using combinations of media formats (word, music, and moving image), crossing into different languages and updating for contemporary audiences, brings about collective responses which radically nuance understanding of (male) authorial privilege. A detailed analysis of two songs with moving image created by the Chicago-based theatre collective Theater Obleck in their seven-year-long *Baudelaire in a Box* project (2010–17) reveals the importance of gendered individuation in collective works, and how this operates to break down the dominant position of the male author. The article concludes with a critique of how live music performance genres have typically masked the diverse makeup of a collective creative process (which individuates) in favour of an overarching collaborative vision (which generalises). It contends that the reuse of an established literary source continues to complicate the non-hierarchical vision of a collective creative response, giving rise to a genius paradox. On the one hand, the ‘ethic of rarity’ (Heinich 1996: 11) dictates that the modern artist is hailed as a unique figure. On the other, the collective inputs that have shaped the work remain an essential part of the creative process. Casting light on collective musical adaptations of Baudelaire thus invites a reconsideration of the value premiums we place on canonical works and their authors.

Authors enter or leave the canon, depending on the vicissitudes of taste. Yet there are some authors whose place in the canon is firmly established. In the modern French context, an author is deemed to have entered the literary canon once they have secured a place in the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* collection (Compagnon 1995: 1,188). The *Pléiade* editions began in 1931 with the publication of the complete works of Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) (Pichois 2006: 214). Baudelaire’s place in the literary canon was not, however, a given. This article sets

out to explore how engagement with Baudelaire's work beyond the literary domain contributed to his status as a canonical literary figure, and how that status continues to be enhanced today. It suggests that the repeated take-up of Baudelaire's work by others – at different points in time, through other media formats, and beyond the borders of France – is one of the key markers of aesthetic value that led to, and continues to fuel, the status of Baudelaire's poetry as canonical.

The cultural products of the French nineteenth century have long inspired reinventions across time, media, and nation (Griffiths 2013: 1–3). Victor Hugo's novels have been reimaged as musical theatre and film. Émile Zola's novels have been recast as serialised radio dramas. In the case of Charles Baudelaire, both his verse and his prose poems have been redesigned as songs over 1,700 times.<sup>1</sup> The use of an established literary source to create a new work shines light on a creative process that is often more complicated than a one-to-one relationship between author and adapter (Brackett 1999: 127). This article will examine how collective creativity underpins the adaptive process. It begins by charting the uneven landscape of literary celebrity in the French nineteenth century, and how the vacillation between individual artists and collective endeavour affected an author such as Baudelaire. This leads, in turn, to a consideration of how composers/songwriters have responded to Baudelaire over the course of a 150-year period. The analysis will pay close attention to how the relationship between author and adapter incorporates more collective interactions, which cast light on the role of gendered individuation (Chatterjee 2015: 17). A detailed analysis of two songs produced during a large-scale collective multimedia reworking of all of Baudelaire's verse poetry then follows, using the example of *Baudelaire in a Box* developed by theatre collective Theater Oobleck. It suggests that Theater Oobleck's intervention, which spans 165 song settings of 130 Baudelaire poems, is invested in collectively lifting the lid on Baudelaire's poetry through the transient form of song combined with moving image. Acknowledging that 'the complexities of the new media also mean that adaptation [...] is a collective process' (Hutcheon 2006: 80), the article concludes with a series of reflections on how collective creativity can be understood as a set of interventions that bridge time, media, and languages by shining a brighter light on the diverse individuals involved.

### **Constructing literary celebrity in nineteenth-century France: Baudelaire and the canon**

A writer's rise to prominence in nineteenth-century France was not straightforward. An emerging literary marketplace, fuelled by improved literacy rates and the development of the serialised novel, formed 'a battleground of cultural and economic value' (O'Neil-Henry 2017: 2). The competition for readers' attention meant that authors needed to work collectively with others to garner critical acclaim:

l'écrivain, au vu de l'avènement du marché libre des valeurs littéraires et du monde concurrentiel auquel il doit faire face est contraint d'entretenir et de développer des contacts avec ses pairs, mais aussi avec le personnel qui peut assurer la mise en circulation de ses écrits (des médiateurs qui vont du directeur de journal à l'éditeur, en passant par l'imprimeur), voire avec des artistes issus d'univers voisins et avec des individus susceptibles de parler de lui. (Dessy, Fäcker, Saint-Amand 2017: 1).

(The writer, given the advent of the free market of literary value and of the competitive marketplace they would have to face, was obliged to nurture and develop contacts

<sup>1</sup> For musical responses to Baudelaire, see the *Baudelaire Song Project* [www.baudelaire song.org](http://www.baudelaire song.org). This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/M008940].

with their peers, and also with the professionals who could ensure the entry into circulation of their writings (intermediaries including the journal director and editor, as well as the printer), and indeed with artists from related spheres and with people who might be likely talk about them).<sup>2</sup>

Collective efforts to promote a writer's work sit uneasily with the ideology of literary value, however. As the path to literary acclaim became ever more performative, it also revealed itself to be unreliable. Baudelaire's literary criticism provides useful insight into the precarious nature of the mid-nineteenth-century literary world, showing us 'reputations being made or unmade' (Lloyd 2006: 174). Baudelaire writes, for example, of how Pierre Dupont 'a été une grande gloire' (was a huge celebrity) in the wake of the 1848 revolutions, but how, by 1861 the poet-chansonnier 'est négligé plus qu'il ne convient' (is more overlooked than he ought to be) (1975–6: 169; vol. 2). In his commentary on Victor Hugo, meanwhile, Baudelaire reflects with some suspicion on the extent of Hugo's literary celebrity. In claiming that Hugo's genius is 'vraiment prodigieux' (truly prodigious), he draws attention to the overblown techniques used by the author: 'L'excessif, l'immense, sont le domaine naturel de Victor Hugo' (The excessive, the immense, are the natural domain of Victor Hugo) (1975–6: 137; vol. 2). In this view, Hugo's celebrity seems to emerge from a deliberate strategy of self-aggrandisement on the author's part. As Anthony Glinoeer has noted, Romantic authors such as Hugo or Vigny were deeply concerned with 'constructing the myth of their original singularity' (Glinoeer 2009: 37). Indeed, it seems that persistently talking about one's own literary greatness can serve to lodge that claim in perpetuity, as Bradley Stephens has argued: 'There can be no denying that posterity was at the forefront of Hugo's mind [...] or that such a desire has encouraged his categorization as a "great" writer' (2016: 233). Yet, as Baudelaire recognises, the label of greatness can also be attributed prematurely. In the case of Théodore de Banville, a coterie of professional taste-makers sought to promote the idea of the poet as youthful prodigy:

Théodore de Banville fut célèbre tout jeune. [...] Dans ce temps-là le *tout Paris* se composait de cette élite d'hommes chargés de façonner l'opinion des autres [...]. Ceux-là saluèrent naturellement l'auteur des *Cariatides* comme un homme qui avait une longue carrière à fournir. (Baudelaire 1975–6: 162; vol. 2)

(Théodore de Banville became famous very young. [...] At that time, Parisian society was made up of an elite group of men tasked with shaping the opinions of others [...]. They naturally hailed the author of the *Cariatides* as a man who was set to have a long career.)

Baudelaire's critique is not levelled at these critics' overall judgement of Banville, but rather at how the ebullient literary marketplace was prompting collective opinion-makers to make a judgement so early on in a career.

These examples foreground 'the tendency to personalize artistic greatness' during this era (Heinich 1996: 63). Baudelaire's commentaries on his contemporaries demonstrate that he was fully aware of how implicated he was in this process of shaping collective taste. His contributions to the prevailing tendency to talk of individual celebrity, genius, and greatness, also recognise how unpredictable such labels may prove to be. The effects of the 1857 trial on Baudelaire's career have been well documented (Pichois 1987, Hannoosh 2011). It was one of the vicissitudes of the French Second Empire that his first and only collection of verse poetry should be subjected to censorship. Despite the efforts of authors supporting each other in

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<sup>2</sup> All translations my own, unless otherwise stated.

a competitive and crowded literary marketplace, in the case of a poet such as Baudelaire, it was far from certain that his works would secure the kind of posterity that Hugo seemed sure to be able to achieve with his. Indeed, despite a supposedly collegial peer network of poets contributing to the 'self-regulation of the poetic landscape' and 'participating in a collaborative canonisation process' (Evans 2015: 208), Baudelaire's place in the canon was not secured until well into the twentieth century (Labbé 2018: 1, Pichois 2006: 214).

### Composers/Songwriters respond to Baudelaire

Baudelaire's entry into the literary canon seems belated, at some seventy years after the publication of *Les Fleurs du mal*. This 'official' recognition coincided with the publication of the first *Pléiade* volume in 1931 (Pichois 2006: 214), his inclusion on the French university syllabus around 1930 (Labbé 2018: 1), and his representation in school poetry anthologies from the 1930s onwards (Labbé 2014: 566). However, in the years preceding this moment of literary prestige, his poetry had continued to circulate, albeit with mixed reception. His early reception swung between staunch 'antibaudoirisme' rejecting his moral depravity, and favourable critical opinion praising his aesthetic innovation (Labbé 2014: 11). Editions of his work continued to be printed, including Eugène Crépet's important *Œuvres posthumes* published just twenty years after the poet's death (Baudelaire: 1887). This book received a polarising reception, with some critics praising Baudelaire's literary prowess, and others slating it for its dubious ethics (Guyaux 2007: 687–92). While it is clear that critics struggled to reach agreement on Baudelaire, already his poetry was being adapted into musical works and circulating in these new adaptations amongst different musical and artistic circles, including salons and cabarets. The impetus that drives a composer to set a pre-existing literary text to music is well known. The practice had flourished in the Romantic era with the rise of the German *Lied*, which transferred to France in the 1830s through the pianist Franz Liszt and the tenor Adolphe Nourrit (Tunley 2002: 89). By 1841, Hector Berlioz had set extracts of Gautier's 1838 *Comédie de la mort* to music as *Les Nuits d'été*, and by the 1850s, Charles Gounod was setting texts by Hugo and Lamartine. This interest in setting the poets of the day to music persisted. In 1863, it was Baudelaire's turn: the military band composer Jules Cressonnois wrote to Baudelaire to ask his permission to set 'L'Invitation au voyage' to music, to which Baudelaire consented on 13 July 1863 (Schellino 2018: 396). The song was published that year, and marked the beginning of a sustained interest in Baudelaire's poetry by composers and songwriters.

To date, over 1,700 song settings of Baudelaire's texts have been produced by 700 different artists, in twenty-five different languages and over forty different musical styles.<sup>3</sup> Baudelaire is not unique in this regard. These figures resonate with the tally that emerged from an earlier study of song settings of Paul Verlaine's poetry, which documented 1,558 songs by 650 different composers, spanning twenty-three countries, between 1871–1991 (White 1992: 125–37).<sup>4</sup> Many of these song settings, of either poet, follow the standard model of (male) composer/songwriter setting (male) poet to music, 'a liaison between poet and musician', in a one-to-one collaboration that 'often happens across the centuries' (Johnson 2000: xiii). The product of that collaboration between two artists is typically a song lasting not much longer than three or four minutes. What is distinctive in the Baudelaire song corpus, however, is the proliferation of musical adaptations by pop song writers from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, and how this begins to change conceptualisations of the adaptive

<sup>3</sup> For a full catalogue, see: [www.baudelaire-song.org/search](http://www.baudelaire-song.org/search).

<sup>4</sup> The earliest documented Verlaine setting is *La lune blanche* in 1871 by Jules Massenet (White 1992: 217).

process of poetry into song.<sup>5</sup> As pop artists begin to embrace Baudelaire in the second half of the twentieth century, beginning with Léo Ferré and Serge Gainsbourg in the late 1950s and early 1960s, so too does the adaptive process become a more collective endeavour, in which a whole creative team is involved:

Authorship in popular music [...] does not lend itself easily to a simple one-to-one relationship between composer and text. The author function of popular music text is often shared by many individuals: the singer, instrumentalists, songwriter, arranger, recording engineer, promotional photographer, video clip editor, director and possibly others. (Brackett 1999: 127)

In this more pluralised conceptualisation of the creative process, the relationship between art forms themselves begins to extend, as new intermedial forms such as the pop music video begin to combine word, music, and image:

collective work processes bring the various arts into intermedial and intertextual relations, such as painting and architecture, image and text, text and sound; these relations are personalized as, for example, composer, librettist, conductor, singers and musicians. (Vassen 2010: 302)

The critical conception of the adaptive process of musical setting of words, however, often does little to acknowledge the people who are collectively involved in the creative process. This is especially true of classical song, in which the adaptive process also goes beyond just the poet and the composer, to include singer and pianist, and indeed in some instances, also language coach, vocal coach, recording engineer, and producer. The connection between the art forms becomes at once collective *and* individualised, because the process of intermedial transfer is underpinned by a creative team made up of multiple individuals. Instead, the dominant view remains that the value of the work being adapted is essentialised to the individual who first wrote it, transferring that label to the person who then composes or performs the song (even if there are multiple artists/creatives involved in the process).

Yet Baudelaire's poems remind us that the association between artist and individual becomes ever more protean during the French nineteenth century, with the emergence of a 'preponderance of blurred identities' (Finch-Race and Gosetti 2018: 56). Nicolas Valazza has also demonstrated how in Baudelaire's later verse in particular 'la collaboration y assum[e] une fonction primordiale' (collaboration takes on an essential function) (Valazza 2018: 96), as the poet worked collaboratively with his publisher Auguste Poulet-Malassis and the engraver Félicien Rops. For Daniel Finch-Race and Valentina Gosetti, mid-nineteenth-century French poetic writing is marked by a shift towards a 'heterogeneous collective' which calls into question the integrity of individualised identities (Finch-Race and Gosetti 2018: 56–7). This shift towards the heterogeneous collective enables the de-essentialising of markers of identity that include, for example, gender, class, or wealth (Chatterjee 2015: 17–18). This means that to evoke the collective enterprise of a creative team in building a new work of art derived from a pre-existing literary source is also to talk about the inherent difference that marks each individual involved, the author included. Where Finch-Race and Gosetti call this a 'heterogeneous collective', Ronjaunee Chatterjee, after Rosemary Lloyd (2002: 94), alludes to the distinctive individual who cannot be understood within a generalised group (Chatterjee 2015: 20).

<sup>5</sup> Pop song/pop music is understood here in the straightforward sense of electric or amplified music that emerged from the 1950s onwards.



This is an important conceptualisation of the collective as understood through Baudelaire's writings, chiming with the view of poetry's receptivity 'to identifications with others' which, as Gretchen Schultz has argued, enables male poets of this era to cut through the bias of Romantic lyric poetry that had long operated on 'the opposition of male subjectivity and female objectification' (Schultz 2008: 93). The collective becomes necessarily individuated rather than subsumed into a standardised subjective position or a unified collaborative vision.

Under this lens, it is possible to understand how diversity operates in the adaptive process, and perhaps most especially when adaptations are the work of a collective operation and therefore cut across the tired hierarchy of literary value. This does not mean to say that musical adaptations of Baudelaire's poetry are extremely diverse (of the 700 artists or groups who have set Baudelaire to music, only fifty are female, for example).<sup>6</sup> Rather it is to articulate how collective creativity – understood as heterogeneous and individuated – can unlock ways of resisting essentialised, generic interpretations in favour of gendered individuation invested in collective interaction.

To understand how collective creativity works in practice, this article now turns to consider a set of readings of Baudelaire's complete verse poetry by a directorless theatre collective. The aim is to lift the lid on adaptations of Baudelaire that are multiple, pluralised, and diverse, spanning media forms (word, music, moving image), languages, and time, as well as genders, musical styles, and performance sites. In so doing, the analysis that follows demonstrates how it is impossible to evaluate the reception of Baudelaire in terms of a trajectory based on his poetry alone. Baudelaire's diverse appeal to artists who have little interest in the literary canon reveals the wider impact of his poetry on the modern world. The poetry becomes live music and moving image, promoting collective difference.

### ***Baudelaire in a Box: a theatre collective responds***

Beginning in 2010, Theater Oobleck, a Chicago-based artistic collective, began to adapt 'scoopfuls' of Baudelaire's poetry as a stage production called *Baudelaire in a Box*. They translated the poems into English or Spanish and set them to music, working with visual artist David Buchen who illustrated the poems on long paper scrolls which would then be mounted onto wooden frames and hand cranked to accompany the songs.<sup>7</sup> Over the course of the next seven years, the group developed their 'Cantastoria Cycle' – a song cycle comprising 165 songs from 130 Baudelaire poems, released in ten episodes of live performances in English, French, and Spanish across the United States, as well as two Spanish episodes in Puerto Rico in 2016 using the same scrolling artworks as the English versions (totalling twelve episodes overall).<sup>8</sup> The culmination of the seven-year endeavour was a three-day festival held in Chicago, 4–6 August 2017, in which all of the songs were performed by nearly thirty musicians drawn from Theater Oobleck's own ranks, in addition to well-known bands from Chicago and New York, and a complete troupe from Puerto Rico for the Spanish songs.<sup>9</sup> The decision to set Baudelaire to music so extensively was prompted by an audience member's comment after an early show. As David Buchen and songwriter Chris Schoen outline in a radio interview, they had initially composed just five songs based on Baudelaire poems, after Buchen had begun

<sup>6</sup> The *Baudelaire Song Project* has loosely categorised artists by gender, where these are known. It has not sought to categorise other markers of diversity such as ethnicity or class.

<sup>7</sup> 'What's in the Box?' <https://baudelaireinbox.wordpress.com/baudelaire-in-a-box/>.

<sup>8</sup> Performances were staged in: Chicago IL, Madison WY, Brooklyn NY, Chapel Hill, Raleigh, Durham NC, New York City, and San Juan PR.

<sup>9</sup> In all, about fifty musicians were involved in the composition and performance of the complete cycle over the seven years. For more information, see Adler (2017) and Bova (2017).

some illustrations of Baudelaire's wine poems. Schoen performed the songs live with Buchen on stage turning his hand-drawn scrolls known as 'crankies', after which: 'Some guy came up to us and he said, so are you going to do one for every poem? And we laughed at him, said, that's an insane idea' (Weissman 2017). This was, however, the turning point which led to the more ambitious project. Theater Oobleck set out to create a complete *Baudelaire in a Box*, referencing the wooden box-frame that housed the scrolls of Buchen's illustrations.

The shift from a small-scale collaboration between Buchen and Schoen to a larger collective project also marked a shift in working with Baudelaire's poetry, to encompass a wider network of contributors. This creates a set of contrasting responses to Baudelaire, which are encapsulated in the group's own statement about why they chose to set Baudelaire to music in this project:

Because he would be so irritated. Because he might be charmed. Because the synesthetic imagery of his poems lend themselves so singularly to the conjoined media of scrolled paintings unfurling to music. *Live* music, it is important to add. There is a touch of vaudeville and cabaret in Baudelaire. He tended to go big or go home. Home to his mother.

Because he invented the term 'modernity' and even now no one quite knows what it means. Because he wrote a poetry of immersion perfectly suited to the transience and Now-ness of song and of the Ever-Moving scroll. Because we never had a proper goth phase. Sex and death! For all these reasons, and for the true one that remains just out of our grasp.<sup>10</sup>

The *Baudelaire in a Box* creative team adopt a playful interpretation of Baudelaire which does not resolve into one coherent vision. This refusal to create a singular vision is mirrored in the form that the song-and-moving-image episodes take. Theater Oobleck produce something that combines elements of musical theatre and live music gig but resists the label of either art form. They build a series of shows that use different configurations of musicians at different points in time (typically between one and eight performers on stage at a given moment), shaped by different responses to Baudelaire in each particular song. Songwriters and translators collaborate with the singers and instrumentalists, in line with Theater Oobleck's mission: 'All our works are created and developed by members of the Oobleck ensemble, working in concert to create a collaborative vision without an overseeing director.'<sup>11</sup> Theater Oobleck's 'collaborative vision' does not, however, resolve into a unified response to Baudelaire's poetry. The vision is upheld, instead, through the loosely constructed shared performance aesthetic, with porous boundaries between what is on- and off-stage, giving audiences access to the creative team 'working in concert'. Staging is simple and sets are minimal, typically comprising a plain black or white backdrop, with spotlights on the musicians and the accompanying crankies. Buchen himself hand cranks the scrolls during the performances in a deliberately visible, crunkingly audible, and overtly low-tech fashion. While the vocalists typically use a microphone and some of the instruments are amplified, the music is otherwise raw and unfiltered. The musicians play a range of instruments such as accordion, bass, clarinet, guitar, piano, saxophone, trombone, and ukulele, using combinations designed to fit each specific song. There is no consistent musical style for each of the 165 songs, with the group drawing

<sup>10</sup> 'Why Baudelaire?' <https://baudelaireinbox.wordpress.com/baudelaire-in-a-box/why-baudelaire/>.

<sup>11</sup> 'What is Theater Oobleck?' <https://baudelaireinbox.wordpress.com/baudelaire-in-a-box/who-is-theater-oobleck/>.



inspiration from folk and country to klezmer and metal, shaped by each particular poem text. Common threads running through the *Baudelaire in a Box* episodes therefore remain minimal in a project that has been dubbed 'an act of extravagant artistic idiosyncrasy' (Adler 2011).

The shows are also captured in different formats, extending their life beyond the live staging. Theater Oobleck have released over forty videos of their live shows through their *Baudelaire in a Box* [Vimeo](#) channel.<sup>12</sup> However, one of the challenges of their theatrical staging is that the low-tech nature of the crankie does not translate well into the kind of rich content now standard on twenty-first-century digital content-sharing platforms. As the team themselves have admitted: 'We sometimes talk about crankies being a kind of low-tech proto music video. And that's true! But sadly you can't share them very easily on social media.'<sup>13</sup> This negative perception is echoed in the *Chicago Reader* by reviewer Tony Adler, who comments that this creates a lack of coherence or integrated vision: 'the images and songs exist in separate universes, failing to integrate into a single theatrical statement' (2016). Others view this more positively, such as NPR radio host Dan Weissman who suggests that the combination of present-day media sharing and older poetry means that *Baudelaire in a Box* offers songs that are 'kind of a miniature nineteenth-century music video' (2017). Both critics in fact articulate how *Baudelaire in a Box* resists classification. The combination of words in different languages, music of varying styles, and constantly moving image is further intensified by a proliferation of formats through which the songs can be accessed. So far, the collective have produced two studio albums from the *Baudelaire in a Box* project, *The King of Rain* (2015), which includes music from Episode 7, and *Unquenched* (2017), which includes music from Episode 9. There are also two related spin-off albums, Chris Schoen's *Heaven or Hell or Wherever* (2012), which includes music from Episode 3, and New Town Drunks' split EP with Curtis Eller, *Songs of Anguish* (2015), which includes music from Episode 4. The audio-only albums are not direct replicas of the stage shows, tapping into a more contemporary tradition of artists preparing and releasing different versions of their tracks for different platforms. The use of different technological formats (including the recourse to old-fashioned crankies), combined with the overall ambition of the project (including setting some poems to music more than once, using different languages and/or musicians) indicates that this project is far from a simple adaptation of Baudelaire. *Baudelaire in a Box* is presented through performances which repeatedly challenge conventions of artistic production while never seeming to quite break with convention altogether. The songs are clattery and noisy and messy and imperfect, turning away from the norms of pop music or musical theatre but not doing away with those norms altogether. At the heart of *Baudelaire in a Box* is a kind of honest everydayness, felt and heard through the recordings as much as through the live performances which are neither polished nor over-engineered. Because the project is so multifaceted, yet contained within a collective performance aesthetic that makes the principle of 'working in concert' as visible and audible as possible, the team are able to develop highly inventive interpretations of Baudelaire.

A clear example of one of Theater Oobleck's unconventional takes on Baudelaire's poetry is their setting of 'L'Avertisseur' (The Warner), a poem first published in the *Revue européenne* in 1861 and reused by Baudelaire as one of his *Nouvelles Fleurs du mal* in *Le Parnasse contemporain* of 1866 (Baudelaire 1975–6: 140; vol. 1). An unusual sonnet, the octosyllabic poem places the tercets in the middle, enclosed by the quatrains. The English translation prepared by playwright and actor Mickle Maher for *Baudelaire in a Box* adopts a new title ('The Drag'),

<sup>12</sup> *Baudelaire in a Box* by Theater Oobleck <https://vimeo.com/channels/955825>.

<sup>13</sup> Official Music Video for 'The Drag', released 18 May 2017. <https://baudelaireinabox.wordpress.com/2017/05/18/official-music-video-for-the-drag/>.

ignores the sonnet form, and turns it into a twelve-line text which draws on Baudelaire's imagery but does not repeat it exactly.<sup>14</sup> The second stanza is mostly suppressed, producing a song which, in the words of the *Chicago Reader* reviewer, offers a 'slangy, comic treatment of "L'Avertisseur"' (Adler 2016):

If your heart is not a total fake  
 Inside it sits a yellow snake  
 Saying all you do is a MISTAKE

Just try and make some sexy time  
 With some stone fox, yeah, NEVER MIND  
 The Snake says CHECK YOUR PRIVILEGE, MAN

Go on make babies, plant some trees  
 Hammer out your poetry  
 The Snake says MEH, WHATEVER, MAN  
 Do what you can  
 Until your final sucking gasp  
 There's no let-up from that FUCKING ASP.<sup>15</sup>

The everyday language (*yeah, meh, sexy time, fucking*) mixed with more obtuse images of animals only loosely drawn from Baudelaire (*yellow snake, stone fox, asp*) masks the fact that Maher has suppressed the gender-specific features of a lyric persona in his translated text. In some ways, this mirrors Baudelaire's own aesthetic. As Rosemary Lloyd and others have commented, Baudelaire has a habit of blurring the edges of poetic voices such that it can be difficult to ascertain who is speaking: 'his poems frequently depend for their dynamism on the dichotomy between lover and beloved, but while some are coded for specific genders, others invite, and indeed demand, more complex and nuanced readings' (Lloyd 2013: 25). The different members of the song's creative team offer 'more complex and nuanced readings' which

<sup>14</sup> See <https://creativewriting.uchicago.edu/faculty/maher>. The French poem reads as follows (Baudelaire 1975–6: 140, vol. 1):  
 L'Avertisseur

Tout homme digne de ce nom  
 A dans le cœur un Serpent jaune,  
 Installé comme sur un trône,  
 Qui, s'il dit : « Je veux, » répond : « Non! »

Plonge tes yeux dans les yeux fixes  
 Des Satyresses ou des Nixes,  
 La Dent dit : « Pense à ton devoir! »

Fais des enfants, plante des arbres,  
 Polis des vers, sculpte des marbres,  
 La Dent dit : « Vivras-tu ce soir? »

Quoi qu'il ébauche ou qu'il espère,  
 L'homme ne vit pas un moment  
 Sans subir l'avertissement  
 De l'insupportable Vipère.

<sup>15</sup> Translation of 'L'Avertisseur' as 'The Drag' by Mickle Maher. Reproduced with permission. Available at: <https://theateroobleck.bandcamp.com/track/the-drag>.

play with gender coding.<sup>16</sup> Maher's translation removes Baudelaire's apparently gender-specific opening addressing 'Tout homme' (Every man) (l. 1), replacing it with the more neutrally coded possessive pronoun 'Your' ('If your heart is not a total fake'). The specific address to 'man' is, however, retained elsewhere in the song by Maher, albeit displaced into the second stanza, in the line 'Check your privilege, man'. Maher has omitted much of Baudelaire's second stanza from his translation, in which Baudelaire references nymphs and satyrs. Maher's suppression of the pastoral Greek mythology serves on the one hand to update Baudelaire's language, but on the other, it also cuts out an innovative use of gender-coded language by Baudelaire. In the first of the two tercets, Baudelaire refers to 'Des Satyresses ou des Nixes' (l. 6), deploying an unconventional feminised noun. Satyrs are woodland gods which are half man, half goat. In Baudelaire's version, they become 'Satyresses', half woman, half goat. In subtle but distinct ways, both Baudelaire and Maher reconceptualise tired gender conventions.

This impetus to question gender conventions is further extended as the song's wider creative team work to bring the track to life. Songwriter Ronnie Kuller has used Maher's translation to create an upbeat song which is performed by a group of seven musicians, for which Emmy Bean is lead vocalist.<sup>17</sup> Listening to the audio track alone, the dominance of the female lead vocal invites an interpretation of lines such as 'go on make babies' as inherently gendered (i.e. women must be the ones to 'make babies'). Yet in the live video, this is called into question by the accompanying crankies, which have been cut into the live video in a post-recording edit, and the opening frame presents Buchen's image of what appears to be a man holding a baby surrounded by other seemingly male-coded spectres (**Image 1**).<sup>18</sup>



**Image 1:** *Baudelaire in a Box* Episode 9 'The Drag' live video (opening frame). Reproduced by kind permission of Theater Oobleck.

<sup>16</sup> When Linda Hutcheon writes about the practice of covering songs, she suggests that: 'Some song covers are openly meant as tributes. [...] Others are meant to critique', giving the examples of Holly Cole's homage to Tom Waits (*Temptation*) and Tori Amos' critique of Eminem's misogyny (*97 Bonnie & Clyde*) (2006: 93). The *Baudelaire in a Box* examples – while not strictly speaking cover songs, but following a similar process – cover Baudelaire in a way which sits in between homage and critique, especially in terms of the gender coding and questions of misogyny/the dominant male gaze.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://ronniekuller.com/> and <http://www.beansome.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> From *Baudelaire in a Box* Episode 9. Music composed by Ronnie Kuller, to Mickie Maher's translation of 'L'Avertisseur' by Charles Baudelaire. Performed by: Emmy Bean (vocal, percussion), Angela James (vocal), Ronnie Kuller (piano, percussion), T-Roy Martin (vocal), Chris Schoen (vocal), David E. Smith (saxophone), and Joey Spielberg (bass). Live video uploaded 7 January 2017: <https://vimeo.com/198443404>.

Individuated personae represented through the images invite deeper interrogation of what gendered voicing might mean. This questioning is accentuated by the inclusion of a male voice for the line comprising the imperative command 'Check your privilege, man'. Lead vocalist Emmy Bean does not sing this line, and instead saxophonist David E. Smith rhythmically declaims it. The impulse to assign specific genders to the images and concepts conveyed in the song (making babies, checking privilege) is also nuanced by the moments of collective voicing, when two, three, or four of the performers join together to do backing vocal interjections which include non-verbal 'ooo lalalas' and 'aaahs' as well as repetitions of the song lyrics performed by Bean ('mistake' 'meh, whatever, man', 'that fucking asp').

In the official music video, we get a much clearer sense that the group are pushing against the assignment of specific gender roles.<sup>19</sup> This version, released about five months after the live video, deliberately complicates the conventions of gendering any correlation between what is being sung and who is performing the words. Videographer Cat Jarboe compiles video segments of each of the seven performers in a way that directly plays with such conventions.

First, they deploy lip-synching, with each of the song's performers mouthing the song in a way that does not always 'match' their voice (so we get male performers 'performing' the main female vocal line, and a female performer 'performing' the male backing vocalist sections).

Second, it puts the voice of the track into a resolutely plural mode. By focusing on front-on headshots, filling the frame, the group privilege the multiple voices behind the track as a set of collective voices working in concert to perform the lyrics. In this version of the music video, the declamation of 'check your privilege, man' is the only moment in which gender of the performer and gender of the performed voice is fully matched – the same saxophonist who declaimed the line in the live music video also does so in the official music video. It is both an overt nod towards the question of male privilege, and to the way the group have repurposed Baudelaire so as to participate in debates about gender equality and gender performance. The gender play on multiple levels here challenges the canonicity associated with the male author whose work is at once being revered by its selection for adaptation into song and being pilloried by its reworking into a humorous, light-hearted song in which direct references to a snake or a baby are reinforced – ironically – by directly correlated imagery of a snake amongst grass and a real-life baby.

Third, the use of wigs, false eyelashes, and makeup throughout the video plays with the idea of the opening line which sends out the challenge 'If your heart is not a total fake'. The deliberately messy and imperfect application of lipstick, mascara, eyeliner, eyelashes, wigs, and (sun)glasses to male and female performers alike adds a layer of ironic humour which critiques the function of these beauty products and notionally gendered forms of apparel (**Image 2**).

While Baudelaire himself, in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, privileges the artifice of the male dandy and praises the use of makeup by women, the group take Baudelaire several steps further (Baudelaire 1975–6: 710–17; vol. 2). Building on the group's deliberate gender play throughout the video, we understand that the song's title – 'The Drag' – references not just the drag of daily life, but also the act of putting on or being in drag. The artifice of the supposed fakery of wigs and makeup, intercut with images of the 'real' snake, a real baby, and the real instruments heard on the track (saxophone and egg shaker) intensifies the humour as much as it demands us to reflect on deeper meanings behind the song's lyrics (as they interpret Baudelaire). Rhyming 'fake' with 'mistake' in the opening lines of the song turns out to be an important emblem of how the song deals with the artifice of the visual markers of gender. The word 'mistake' becomes a refrain as it is repeated three times

<sup>19</sup> <https://baudelaireinbox.wordpress.com/2017/05/18/official-music-video-for-the-drag/>.



**Image 2:** *Baudelaire in a Box* Episode 9 'The Drag' official music video (closing frame). Reproduced by kind permission of Theater Oobleck.

at four different instances in the song, with the song even concluding on that word. The emphasis on 'Saying all you do is a MISTAKE' turns out to be an encouragement not to take everything at face value, rather than a form of invective. The whole song thus turns on the questioning of convention, and especially the convention of male privilege, encapsulating in less than three minutes how Baudelaire's poetry can speak compellingly to twenty-first century issues.

In their collective (re)interpretation of Baudelaire, the *Baudelaire in a Box* team have challenged male privilege, connecting individuated performers and distinct media forms in order to do so. By offering multiple performance versions of 'The Drag', as live show, live video, official music video, or studio-engineered audio track, they also encourage us to challenge our own assumptions about the status of the work adapted into song, inviting a re-evaluation of ways of producing art that are more open-ended.

While most of *Baudelaire in a Box's* songs use a diverse cast of songwriters and performers, for 'Damned Women', based on Baudelaire's banned 1857 poem 'Femmes damnées (Delphine et Hippolyte)', Theater Oobleck has an all-female team of fifteen different women.<sup>20</sup> This is unusual for the *Baudelaire in a Box* project, as most other songs use mixed teams of no more than eight performers, unless they are solo songs, such as Ronnie Kuller's setting of 'La Beauté'.<sup>21</sup> In keeping with Theater Oobleck's more egalitarian, non-hierarchical approach to producing their stage music shows, feminine diversity is echoed in the images prepared by Buchen for the crankies which scroll behind the performers on stage. The crankies present women of different ages and in different poses, including one frame that depicts what appears to be a lesbian kiss (**Image 3**).

<sup>20</sup> From *Baudelaire in a Box* Episode 10. Translation by Martha Bayne, music by Andrea Jablonski. Performed with Nora Barton, Emmy Bean, Monica Boubou, Jet Dee, Kate Douglas, Billie Howard, Jet Dee, Angela James, Diane Koistenen, Ronnie Kuller, Katira Maria, Lea Tshilds, and Amy Warren. <https://vimeo.com/254144496>. The translated lyrics are available at: <https://bloomsunbearable.wordpress.com/2017/08/07/damned-women/>.

<sup>21</sup> From *Baudelaire in a Box* Episode 5. <https://vimeo.com/channels/955825/206466468>.





**Image 3:** *Baudelaire in a Box* Episode 10 'Damned Women' official music video (opening frame). Reproduced by kind permission of Theater Oobleck.

This image by Buchen is the only one that overtly references the poem's Sapphism. While it was the extensive lesbian imagery that led to this long poem being banned from *Les Fleurs du mal* following prosecution and trial in 1857 (Baudelaire 1975–6: 152–5; vol. 1), the presence of different versions of femininity in the poem offers a springboard for creative interpretation and individual identification. As Gretchen Schultz has argued: 'male authors who toy with lesbian identification offer prototypes for female readers and poets' (2008: 101). This seems to be the approach taken by translator Martha Bayne and the *Baudelaire in a Box* team. Combining multiple female performers on stage with multiple images of women, referencing both feminine singularity (Chatterjee 2015: 17) and female homosexuality (Schultz 2008: 91), the song offers many different prototypes for female viewers and listeners. Baudelaire's own defence of his banned texts shows his openness to other modes of imagining human interactions, questioning the validity of the established moral framework that shaped a stifling climate of a bourgeois society increasingly prone to censorship under Napoléon III. Baudelaire writes in his notes for his lawyer: 'Il y a plusieurs morales. Il y a la morale positive et pratique à laquelle tout le monde doit obéir. Mais il y a la morale des arts. Celle-ci est tout autre' (There are several moral codes. There is the positive and practical moral code to which everyone must adhere. But there is also an artistic moral code. That code is completely different) (1975–6: 194; vol. 1). The artistic moral code allows for greater exploration of possible iterations of social forms and norms. The impact of 'Femmes damnées' as reimagined by the *Baudelaire in a Box* team and turned into a female ballad provides a powerful statement about assumptions and conventions surrounding female groups. The song was jointly written by two women, with the lyrics prepared in English by Martha Bayne and the music by Andrea Jablonski.<sup>22</sup> However Jablonski, who also performs as bassist in a doom metal band, has previously expressed her ambivalence about the place of female-only performances:

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.seriouslybadasswomen.com/martha-bayne/> and <http://andreajablonski.blogspot.co.uk/>.



I never felt discriminated against as a woman, but I think that's my personality. I don't look at myself – and maybe I should – as a woman in a metal scene. But I've sort of started to lately. More and more women come up to me at shows, and it makes me feel like I need to represent.

I can see why the Ladyfests and all the girl festivals are important – and why they're empowering. But I never felt that women should be segregated into their own festivals or their own genre of music or whatever. (Montoro 2011)

Bringing an all-female cast into the *Baudelaire in a Box* project for this song is clearly not without its complications for the messages this might convey. In Bayne's translation, Baudelaire's description of the figure of Hippolyte as possessing a 'fragile beauté' (l. 12) is repeated twice: 'she is fragile and so beautiful. |Fragile and so beautiful.' The cliché of the woman's vulnerability sits uneasily with the powerful display of an all-female cast. In fact, a critique of this cliché is offered not through Bayne's lyrics but through Jablonski's music. The main vocalist who opens the song declaims the first section of the poem in a speaking voice over a background accompaniment which is entirely static (the music remains on one fixed pedal note). Other women become involved in the piece, starting with a quiet wordless hum which gradually becomes more rhythmic, increasing in volume as additional women join in and they start to sing – more menacingly – the words 'down, down, down'. As a relatively long piece lasting over five minutes, the song proper only starts well over halfway through. For the final minute of the piece, all the women sing together. Building up this female collective into a powerfully audible force overtly incorporates difference, diversity, and plurality, even when it seems to be just presenting one cohesive group on stage (women). It articulates the individuality within the collective. Bayne and Jablonski's interpretation critiques the clichés surrounding ideas of female beauty and fragility by twisting the words of the male poet behind the text and repurposing them. This is not a positive ballad about female power but a critique of assumptions from the past, still felt today, that seem to make requirements of women to be consistent and immutable creatures. Jablonski's use of the static harmonies, using the pedal note C with open fifths in the bass and the backing vocals captures some of the ominous tone that the lyrics convey. The refusal to conform to one view of what women should be in fact echoes the ideas that emerge in 'The Drag', in which gendered positions are multiplied and pluralised into a diverse range of possibilities that might change over time.

Theater Oobleck thus produce thought-provoking versions of Baudelaire which are both edgy and accessible enough to allow in multiple audiences. The *Baudelaire in a Box* team do this through multimodal means which reference old and new technologies, looking back to the past and forward to the future, in an equally non-hierarchical and non-judgemental way.

### **Collective interventions, collaborative visions: the genius paradox**

Making visible poetry's possible images, and making audible poetry's possible musics, the *Baudelaire in a Box* project does not recreate a nineteenth-century French setting, nor does it bring the poetry fully 'up to date'. Instead, *Baudelaire in a Box* exploits the relationship between pasts and presents. By reviving the ancient *cantastoria* performance form involving the theatrical display of images accompanied by sung narration, the *Baudelaire in a Box* team recognise how 'this ancient form has startlingly modern qualities and can easily be infused with fresh content'.<sup>23</sup> Creating fresh content that combines the ancient and the modern is predicated on the different types of media forms that shape their work. This multimedia dialogue between word, music, and moving image is necessarily collective, because it pulls in

<sup>23</sup> 'Banners and Cranks: a traveling cantastoria & cranky festival' <https://bannersandcranks.org/>.

experts from each of the disciplines, whether lyricists, songwriters, or illustrators, or indeed singers, instrumentalists, or performers. The visible presence of these contributors on stage is not always equable, but all are recognised as equal contributors to the creative process. In so doing, this group operates a porous boundary between the 'behind the scenes' work of the creative process and the 'on stage' presentation of that work. The different iterations available, whether through studio audio album releases, live stage videos, or official music videos, also serve to enhance the accessibility of the work to diverse audiences. This openness is to be expected within a group of artists who identify as a collective, since control of the creative process is overtly distributed. Yet for this same reason, works produced by artist collectives continue to raise suspicions about how widespread the collective process really is, and about who is really behind the work.

The acceptability of collective creativity is shaped by the specific media format(s) in which the work is produced. In the context of devised theatre, Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit have sought 'to contest the broadly accepted view of collective creation as a minor phenomenon' (2016: 3) by emphasising the ongoing contribution of women to collective creation, which is all too often overlooked. For literary works, Jack Stillinger has argued that a commonly felt impulse to get to know the person behind the work sits at odds with 'the frequency with which [...] multiple authorship turns up' (1991: 22). The tensions surrounding collective creativity become further complicated by adaptive processes that routinely cross different media, whether word, music, or (moving) image. And so long-held maxims such as La Bruyère's, dating from 1688 – that 'L'on n'a guère vu jusques à présent un chef-d'œuvre d'esprit qui soit l'ouvrage de plusieurs' (We have yet to see a creative masterpiece which is the work of several people) (1897: 9) – appear still to hold sway because of the simplicity of the formulation which privileges the 'one author, one work' model. However, as this article contends, this view is increasingly being shown to be outmoded, in part because of the political shift that underlies modern creative work. Collective creative groups often actively rebel against traditional hierarchies and cultural hegemonies, placing value on more democratic approaches to artistic production, as Alison Oddey has put it (1996: 8). This process, as demonstrated in the examples above, also places emphasis on more gender-individuated approaches too.

In the case of musical adaptations of the poetry of Baudelaire, 100 of the 700 artists who have produced Baudelaire settings are groups (bands, ensembles, or orchestras). Yet only a small portion of those groups have produced collective works in the strict sense: Theater Oobleck's *Baudelaire in a Box* series of 165 songs, as well as one song by the French indie rock collective Petrol Atom Collectif.<sup>24</sup> In their sustained engagement with Baudelaire's poetry, Theater Oobleck's collective stance is expressly political. The group self-define as 'an artistic collective'.<sup>25</sup> They connect individual talent with collective creativity: 'Our aim is to empower ourselves as individuals and as a collective.'<sup>26</sup> In this view, ownership of the songs is distributed, and even Baudelaire himself becomes subsumed into the collective process because each of the creative-performing team are 'free to re-write lines'.<sup>27</sup>

The distinction between a collaborative vision (produced by bands, for example) and a collective intervention hinges on the individuated investment of each member of the group. For collective creation in the true sense to emerge, a process that 'places emphasis on the *groupness*' of creating a new artwork is needed (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 2016: 6). Groupness,

<sup>24</sup> Petrol Atom Collectif's Baudelaire setting from 2014 combines 'Le serpent qui danse' and 'Le vampire': <https://youtu.be/ZHU0RB6ejz4>.

<sup>25</sup> 'Theater Oobleck About' <http://theateroobleck.com/about/>.

<sup>26</sup> 'Notes on Oobleck 95' by Manny Festo <http://theateroobleck.com/soapbox/>.

<sup>27</sup> 'Notes on Oobleck 95' by Manny Festo <http://theateroobleck.com/soapbox/>.

in this sense, actively records the multiple creative inputs. Yet this slippage between art forms that are broadly collaborative and those which are expressly collective is brought into sharper relief when a pre-existing author's work is brought into the creative process. The authority of the established canonical author is distributed amongst the individuals engaged in re-writing the work to bring it to life in a new creative format. What kind of Baudelaire emerges from this kind of collective intervention? Put simply, is it really Baudelaire anymore? We might argue, as Kevin Newmark has (following Walter Benjamin), that Baudelaire's work is productively altered by the collective creative process. Baudelaire's poetry only gains its status 'through its altered repetition, its re-writing by others' (Newmark 2015: 236). This operation at once personalises responses to Baudelaire ('À chacun son Baudelaire, donc' (To each their own Baudelaire, then) (Dedet 1968: 9)) and opens up those responses to collective experience (such as audiences in a specific concert hall or spread across the globe, accessing performances online), which does not rely upon a shared, collaborative vision but an individuated one. If it is true, as posited above, that one of the markers of canonisation is the repeated reuse of an author's work, then that repeated reuse fundamentally transforms the work. As Newmark has put it: 'Whether writing wants to resist or assist the potential alteration to which it will be exposed through reading is merely a matter of degree – to the extent that writing is promised to a future of reading that cannot help but change, or *translate* it into something else, it is a question of only more or less, sooner or later' (Newmark, 2015: 241–2). The inevitability of Baudelaire's poetry being set to music, or of Hugo's *Les Misérables* being reimagined as musical theatre, or Zola's novels being serialised on the radio, does not, however, address the masking of the collective creative process that marks so many of these adaptations.

This article has sought to cast light on the value of collective responses in order to understand the individuated nature of the creative contributions that make up an adapted work. Examining an overtly non-hierarchical artistic collective shines a brighter light on the individuated inputs that are at work in the creative process more broadly. It reminds us that the involvement of creative teams of writers, performers, producers, and sound engineers is usually masked. In a parallel argument to Lawrence Venuti's critique of the translator's invisibility (1995, rev. 2008), in the music industry collaborators are often relegated to the small print buried deep within album liner notes.<sup>28</sup> This convention privileges the role of the 'big name' author or lead singer, as an easily marketable product.<sup>29</sup> Opting to set Baudelaire to music brings with it the inscription of a 'big name' author. Yet this complicates the collective efforts of the adaptive process, by retaining a privileged status in an otherwise non-hierarchical creative process. Even though Baudelaire is being altered in the process, the assignation of literary greatness that accompanies his name means that the attention is directed towards Baudelaire, the big name, rather than the artists collectively involved in bringing his work back to life. It participates in the impulse to ascribe rare qualities to an individual genius. As Ann Jefferson has argued, "'Genius" is an idea that seems to answer a desire to articulate admiration for exceptional human achievement. [...] it invites speculation about its origins and operations, expressed in the question, "How did they do it?"' (2014: 2). Even as we seek to valorise the collaborative work that underpins many types of performance genres, there remains a tendency to prioritise the 'lead' figure, and direct the attention to their work, rather

<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in the context of film adaptation, Linda Hutcheon observes how 'the screenwriter becomes a decidedly secondary or tertiary figure' (2006: 88).

<sup>29</sup> Dominic McHugh has also shown that the Broadway Musical industry, like the popular music industry, tends to 'mask' the team of collaborators. McHugh outlines how 'the Broadway literature has often reinforced the importance of the composer. The very title of Yale University Press's "Broadway Masters" series implies that the composers are the "master geniuses" behind the shows.' This is despite the fact that 'musicals were normally created by multiple "authors" in collaboration' whose 'texts evolved through creative processes leading to performance events, rather than having been conceived as fixed "works" emanating from a single authority' (2015: 606–7).

than that of the team involved in creating it. As Isabelle Marc and Stuart Green have shown, this issue pervades the contemporary popular music industry in particular (2016: 19–20). They highlight a public spat between fans of Beck and fans of Beyoncé when Beck prevailed over Beyoncé at the 57th Annual Grammy Awards in February 2015, winning the award for Album of the Year for his album *Morning Phase* (2014). Marc and Green highlight how a now-deleted anonymous edit to the English-language Wikipedia entry on Beck's page deployed the disambiguation rubric to state that: 'This article is about a man who has achieved 3 decades of musical success mainly by himself. For the woman who needed 5 songwriters and 2 vocalists behind her to achieve any decent level of success, see Beyoncé.' Quite apart from the inherent misogyny conveyed in this statement, Marc and Green demonstrate how the spat 'attests to the continuing prestige of the single figure' (19–20). This highlights the underlying paradox of genius, as articulated in the 'mainly by himself' phrase used in the Wikipedia edit: the 'ethic of rarity' (Heinich 1996: 11) dictates that the modern artist is hailed as a unique figure, even while the collective inputs that have shaped their work remain an essential part of the creative process.

We might conclude, then, that the genius paradox continues to dictate the reception of works that are the product of a collective creative process. Even though, in order to become inscribed within a literary canon, authors rely on constant alterations to their work by individuals working in collaboration with their texts, the status that is afforded to collective creativity remains modest. Recent scholarship draws attention to the tenacity of the myth of the lone genius in fields as diverse as literary analysis, management, and neuroscience. In literary studies, the common view remains that 'artists are loners, outsiders, geniuses, who create the best artworks from within themselves', whereas 'collective creativity and collective art [...] continue to be regarded even today as inferior or even impossible' (Vassen 2010: 299). In management studies, 'most research and writing on creativity has focused on individual creativity, the "lone genius", with little recognition of the social and group factors that influence the creative process' (Paulus and Nijstad 2003: 3). In neuroscience, it is claimed that 'solitude is usually necessary [...] for the [...] creative process to lead to a creative product' (Andreasen 2005: 8). Yet recent qualitative research on jazz music, improvisatory theatre ensembles, and business innovation has led to the assertion that 'all creativity is based in collaboration. Even when you're alone, your ideas come out of your prior encounters and conversations. The lone genius stories we've heard always turn out to be false' (Sawyer 2007: 223).

The light that this article has shone on the collective word-music-image adaptation of Baudelaire's poetry encourages us to reconsider the value premiums we place on canonical works and their authors. If Balzac, Baudelaire, Hugo, and Verlaine each continue to attract the interest of film, music, radio, or theatre adapters today, it is not just because these nineteenth-century French authors are exceptional writers per se, but also because the persistent appeal of their works comes from their being reimagined. We might contend, on the basis of the evidence set out in this article, that adapting these works of nineteenth-century French genius in twenty-first-century contexts serves to shift cultural habits and repurpose their works for the collective good.

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