Groups of adjectives in Poe’s “Ligeia” and Baudelaire’s translation of them: a source-oriented approach

Joan Bertrand
Groups of adjectives in Poe’s “Ligeia” and Baudelaire’s translation of them: a source-oriented approach

In “Ligeia,”* Poe relates the narrator’s fond memories of his beautiful and learned wife, the Lady Ligeia, after whose death he married the unlovable Lady Rowena. On her death, he sees her metamorphosed into the Lady Ligeia. The tale abounds in contrasts of all sorts: to compare the two ladies—the raven-haired Ligeia, the fair-haired Rowena; the Rhine initially, followed by a dreary English abbey; his delight with Ligeia, his desolation at losing her, his moment of folly when he marries Rowena; Ligeia’s open-mindedness to learning, and the stifling huis clos in the abbey’s depressingly dark, Gothic-decorated bed chamber. Descriptions—and hence adjectives—are vital to Poe’s contrastive intention, and their variety, and combinations, of alliteration, melody and rhythm are a factor of unity in the text, as well as a device used to enhance the intensity of the now joyful now desperate passion felt by the narrator. In an analysis of each of these two different stylistic aims in Poe’s use of the adjectival group, we will firstly bring out his emphasis on rhythm and sonority, then his use of adjectives to produce a startling effect. At each stage, a comparison with Baudelaire’s translation will show the lexical, syntactical and stylistic barriers between the languages when a desire to transpose the original intention is at stake.

A key intention of Poe’s throughout is to highlight the extremes of beauty and joy, and of despair. Running through the gamut of possibilities in English for placing adjectives before the noun, he constantly doubles—or sometimes trebles—the adjectives. The groups he forms are:

a) Adjective + and + adjective + noun (A and AN)
b) Adjective + adjective + noun (AAN)
c) i) Adjective, + adjective + noun (A,AN)
   ii) Adjective, + adjective, + adjective + noun (A,A,AN)
   iii) Adjective, + adjective, + and + adjective + noun (A,A, and AN)

d) The/those + adjective, the/those + adjective + noun (the A, the A, the AN)

Poe gives each form a precise role to play, where both the comma and “and” are invested with a deep significance. In each case, it is the context —smooth and harmonious, or hesitant and grating— that dictates the form chosen. We notice firstly that forms a) and b) are used by Poe to give priority to rhythm, sound melody, speed and crescendo possibilities. With forms c) and d), Poe leans more heavily on the meaning of the adjective, and stresses it with a mixture of punctuation and repetition, as we shall see in a second part.

**Poe’s way of emphasising sound**

Adjective + and + adjective + noun (A and AN)

The use of this structure appears in the following sentences —the location in “Ligeia” of the examples given is indicated in parentheses: (page/line)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective + and + adjective + noun (A and AN)</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>thrilling and enthralling</td>
<td>[...] the <strong>thrilling and enthralling</strong> eloquence of her low musical language[...] (122/7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large and luminous</td>
<td>[...] a sentiment [...] aroused within me by her <strong>large and luminous</strong> orbs (128/26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dim and decaying</td>
<td>[...] the lonely desolation of my dwelling in the <strong>dim and decaying</strong> city by the Rhine (138/1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) gloomy and dreary</td>
<td>The <strong>gloomy and dreary</strong> grandeur of the building [...] had much in unison with the feelings of utter abandonment which had driven me into that <strong>remote and unsocial</strong> region. (138/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) remote and unsocial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pallid and rigid</td>
<td>[...] I turned my glances to the <strong>pallid and rigid</strong> figure upon the bed (148/4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is the structure Poe uses to convey not so much semantic meaning (since the two adjectives are not very dissimilar in meaning) as melody and rhythm through repeated syllables, alliteration and a built-in crescendo effect:

- in “thrilling and enthralling”, *thr* is repeated, as is *lling*;
- in “dim and decaying”, the initial *d* is repeated;
- in “gloomy and dreary”, the second syllable, in *y*, rhymes;
- in “remote and unsocial”, the diphthong *o* is repeated;
- in “pallid and rigid”, the second syllable *id* is repeated;
- in four examples, the number of syllables increases in the second adjective.

In the others, the morphology of the words is very similar ("gloomy"/"dreary"; "pallid"/"rigid"), and the number of syllables the same.

Also, the very structure "adjective + and + adjective" (with "and" and no comma in between) emphasises the rhythmic aspect with the strong/weak combination. It is thus the poetic effect attached to the pair of words that takes precedence over the literal meaning. In the third sentence of the first paragraph, there is a telling example of Poe's desire from the start to impress on the reader a feeling of mounting tension and mystery through a musical and chanting play on words, sounds and repetitions:

[...] the character of my beloved, her rare learning, her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence of her low musical language, made their way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive that they have been unnoticed and unknown.

Here is an accumulation of Poe's doubling of words that are almost identical in sound: "thrilling and enthralling"/"steadily and stealthily"/"unnoticed and unknown". From the start, therefore, Poe opts for a more concrete description where each adjective nourishes the tale with the richness of its meaning, as we will see he does later in the story. His aim initially is to mesmerise the reader into a throbbing universe of mystery where one adjective is immediately confirmed and re-inforced by the next, and all at a brisk pace thanks to the fluidity of repeated sounds and syllables, untramelled by intrusive punctuation. Indeed we can't help being reminded of the criticism levelled at Poe by Lowell and mentioned by Poe himself in an appraisal of Lowell: "[Poe] talks like a book of iambics and pentameters". There is undoubtedly in Poe's writing a dominant poetic drive that could be seen to detract from a more profound sincerity: "the heart seems all squeezed out by the mind" (Lowell again). Here, our point is simply to retain Poe's seemingly insuperable attraction to rhyme and melody, whether it reduces his literary seriousness in the eyes of some, or aims to alleviate, by dilution, the depths of despair felt by Poe/the narrator.

The other examples of this structure in the text may lack the element of alliteration:

- [her face was] an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than [...] (124/22)

2. Ibid., p. 149.
- [...] after a few months of **weary and aimless** wandering [...] (138/5)
- I feel how much even of incipient madness might have been discovered in the **gorgeous and fantastic** draperies [...] (138/21)
- the **fair-haired and blue-eyed** Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine. (138/30)

But they nevertheless retain the crescendo effect, and the relative proximity in meaning. Even “fair-haired and blue-eyed” is a rather expected pairing which is almost one entity and is close to the cliché description, all the more since this is the **only** adjectival description we have of Lady Rowena: she is always described by Poe in verbal terms, doing this and feeling that, but the only physical detail given of her is “fair-haired and blue-eyed”, which of course in itself is the only one we need to have since it aptly underlines her as being the antithesis of Lady Ligeia, who sports “raven-black tresses”.

The A and AN structure, in all the cases above, contains two adjectives that again are not very far apart in meaning. Poe, however, is concentrating on producing an **effect** — of airiness, tedium, gorgeousness or fairness — where the context calls for an accumulated building up of similar notions rather than succinctness of expression. With the joining and, Poe thus uses a lilting rhythm that is geared to lulling us into a more privileged connivance with the narrator. An interesting illustration of the use of both structures a) and b) comes at the start of “The Fall of the House of Usher” with Poe’s description of his arrival in a house with “the vacant eye-like windows” — a haunting reminder of the first reference, but also a repetition that has gone mysteriously out of kilter on the second mentioning. The aim is not so much to impart information as to create a hypnotic, rhythmical atmosphere of apprehension, mystery, and creeping bizarreness. One cannot therefore underestimate the value that Poe the poet and craftsman attaches to such adjectival groupings.

Baudelaire’s translations for this adjectival grouping involve presenting the adjectives together in front of the noun, together after the noun, and one before, one after:

### i) The two adjectives before the noun in both languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E. A. Poe</th>
<th>Baudelaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the thrilling and enthralling eloquence of her low musical language</td>
<td>la pénétrante et subjugante éloquence de sa profonde parole musicale (122/7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>her large and luminous orbs</td>
<td>ses larges et lumineuses prunelles (128/26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gloomy and dreary grandeur of the building</td>
<td>la sombre et triste grandeur du bâtiment (138/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>into that remote and unsocial region</td>
<td>dans cette lointaine et solitaire région (138/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the pallid and rigid figure upon the bed</td>
<td>la pâle et rigide figure allongée (148/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies</td>
<td>ces splendides et fantastiques draperies (138/21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ii) The two adjectives after the noun in French

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E. A. Poe</th>
<th>Baudelaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>an airy and spirit-lifting vision</td>
<td>une vision aérienne et ravissante (124/22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after a few months of <strong>weary and aimless</strong></td>
<td>après quelques mois perdus dans un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wandering</td>
<td>vagabondage fastidieux et sans but (138/5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the fair-heared and blue-eyed Lady</td>
<td>Lady Rowena de Tremaine, à la blonde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowena Trevanian, of Tremaine</td>
<td>chevelure et aux yeux bleus (138/30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iii) One before, one after in French

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E. A. Poe</th>
<th>Baudelaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the <strong>dim and decaying</strong> city by the Rhine</td>
<td>cette sombre cité délabrée au bord du Rhin (138/1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In i), the translation of the two adjectives in front of the French noun may surprise some. Since such a structure exists in French, it can be used by Baudelaire to underline a certain strangeness which undoubtedly exists in the story. Grévisse writes that the epithet in French is normally placed after the noun, but that “il peut le précéder s’il a beaucoup de force affective”. He adds that “la prose littéraire et la langue poétique changent souvent la place ordinaire de l’épithète pour produire des effets de style fort variés”. There is therefore in Baudelaire’s placing of two adjectives before the noun a reminder of the subjectivity of the narrative, of a haunting presence hovering over the story.

As far as losses and gains are concerned, here Baudelaire imparts to this structure in French an added force compared with English, since in English the position of adjectives before the noun is the norm. As far as Poe’s plays on words are concerned, Baudelaire finds some equivalents: the rhyme of “subjugante et pénétrante”; the alliteration in “larges et lumineuses”; the same last syllable in “lointaine et solitaire”; the mounting number of syllables between the first and second adjective: “larges et lumineuses”, “pâle et rigide”, “lointaine et solitaire”, “splendides et fantastiques”. On the other hand, some might find a build-up of excitement in “thrilling and enthralling” that becomes pedantic and awkward in “pénétrante et subjugante”. However, if we consider that Poe’s intention is to impress us with the sound and rhythm of words, then Baudelaire

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can be said to have respected this on the whole as far as possible by staying close
to the original without stretching the credibility of French.

In ii) and iii) Baudelaire has been more intent on translating meaning than
sonority, placing the epithets after the noun as is more common in French,
but at the same time missing the more colourful emotional input and the unex-
pectedness of the French epithet-plus-noun form. Why he makes this choice
involves, perhaps, points like lightness of touch and lexical niceties, which both
may preclude following the English form, but in some cases, there is no choice
in French — two structures in the examples above would sound very unusual
before the noun, namely the past participle “délabré” and the past participle
“blue-eyed” made from the noun “eye”. French has to put these forms after the
noun, especially since “blue-eyed” has to become the prepositional phrase “aux
yeux bleus”, losing its strictly adjectival aspect.

**Adjective + adjective + noun (AAN)**

The same fluidity, minus the phonetic and melodic aspect, exists in the tale
with the AAN grouping, as in:

- the [eloquence] of her low musical language made [its] way into my heart
  (122/8)
- the dear music of her low sweet voice (124/19)
- the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave
  (132/23)
- the phantasmagoric effect was heightened [...] by a strong continual cur-
  rent of wind behind the draperies (142/11)
- and spoke, in an earnest low whisper, of the sounds which she then heard
  (144/27)

The lack of a comma or “and” between the adjectives encourages a run-on
effect, and thus a speed which has the meaning of the first adjective running
into that of the second, resulting in the second adjective being practically “qua-
lified” by the first. There is no barrier between the different notions expressed
in the adjectives, which indeed are in no way so close in meaning as were those
in the first group we looked at: each adjective has a full meaning in its own
right, distinct from the other in the pair. However, the structure used coaxes us
into blurring the distinction and merging the two into a uniform shroud that
envelops the noun.

When Baudelaire translates the AAN structure, he comes up against the
impossibility of following the English into French. As Grevisse remarks:
“Quand le nom et l’adjectif ne forment pas une sorte de groupe, il est assez rare
qu'on accole au nom deux ou plusieurs épithètes successives sans particule coordonnante ni virgule”4. The problem therefore is one of French expression. Rendering the smooth succinctness and run-on effect of the English has to be tackled in a more roundabout way, to avoid a collision of the two adjectives:

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<td>la pénétrante et subjugante éloquence de la profonde parole musicale (122/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>her low sweet voice</td>
<td>sa voix douce et profonde (124/19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave</td>
<td>les pâles doigts prirent la couleur de la mort, la couleur de la cire transparente (132/23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a strong continual current of wind</td>
<td>un fort courant d'air continu (142/11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and spoke, in an earnest low whisper</td>
<td>me parla à voix basse, dans un chuchotement anxieux (144/27)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is without doubt the English structure that poses the greatest problems if one wants to maintain the totality of semantic and stylistic effect between one language and the other, since staying close to the English is unthinkable. English offers here a construction where the usual hierarchy of adjectives by meaning and length is tampered with in order to insidiously take the reader by surprise. The closest one can get to a blending in French is to house one adjective before, and one after, the noun, as Baudelaire does with “sa profonde parole musicale”, and “un fort courant d'air continu”. Despite the blending, there is nevertheless, unlike in English, a separation and a semantic regrouping of adjectives which obviously shifts the emphasis and cancels the “unifying” effect of this succinct formation in English. Baudelaire has made quite a mouthful out of “an earnest low whisper”, but again, the smooth brevity in English here presents an almost insurmountable challenge for a translator wishing to maintain the same effect.

**Poe’s way of giving priority to meaning and effect**

**Punctuating the terms**

i) Adjective, + adjective + noun (A,AN)

ii) Adjective, + adjective, + adjective + noun (A,A,AN)

iii) Adjective, + adjective, + and + adjective + noun (A,A, and AN)

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Whereas the first two structures we looked at provide the reader with speed, melody, rhythm and a certain reassurance in a strange environment, the opposite effect is produced when Poe inserts a comma between the adjectives, in:

- I believe that I met Ligeia [first] in some **large, old, decaying** city (122/22)
- the mouth [...] the triumph of all things heavenly [...] the **soft, voluptuous** slumber of the under [lip] (126/10)
- did I feel [...] that delicious vista, [...] down whose **long, gorgeous, and all untrodden** path I might [...] pass (139/9)
- I saw [...]. upon the golden carpet [...] a **faint, indefinite** shadow of angelic aspect (146/7)
- It became **evident that a slight, a very feeble, and barely noticeable** tinge of colour had flushed up within the cheeks (148/25)

Each adjective stands out in its own right, is given room in which to display the whole weight of its meaning. The result is a slowing down of the rhythm at crucial moments of the story, in order to heighten suspense, to linger over a delicious moment and encapsulate it for as long as possible, or to prompt us to ponder over the starkness of each word picked out individually.

On looking closer at meaning, interestingly enough we find in fact not always that much difference in the paired adjectives, despite Poe’s highlighting effect via punctuation: “a faint, indefinite shadow” and “a slight, a very feeble, and barely noticeable tinge” again underline Poe’s priority given to rhythm — or in this case, **breaking** the rhythm— where the structure in question would normally leave all this room for imposing, contrasting, meaningful descriptions rather than almost redundant, repetitive adjectives. Poe’s needs of the moment, however, cry out for interruption in the train of thought, and a fragmentation of descriptive words into semi-tones of nuance, even when the underlying blandness of “large”, “long”, “old” or “soft” would normally have them blend more discreetly into an unpunctuated pairing with another adjective. Again “The Fall of the House of Usher” comes to mind, where in the first halting line we read “During the whole of the **dull, dark, and soundless** day in the autumn of the year, [...] I had been passing alone [...]”. Here, as in “Ligeia”, the punctuation slows down the tempo and shores up the attempt to detach each element of meaning for greater effect.

Given the possibilities of groupings of adjectives in French, Poe’s separating off of adjectives is less problematical for Baudelaire:
Where in English the separation is made before the noun with commas, Baudelaire translates either by separating the adjectives, placing one before, one after, or both, or even all three, after. The punctuation in French serves a similar purpose to Poe's producing, overall, a comparable effect.

**Punctuating and repetition of the article**

The/those + adjective, the/those + adjective + noun (the A, the A, the AN)

Poe takes this emphatic use of punctuation even further in sentences such as:

- and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses (124/40)
  - Those eyes! Those large, those shining, those divine orbs! (128/7)
  - She, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia (130/16)
  - to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed (142/23)
- the wan and the misty-winged Ashtophet of idolatrous Egypt (124/8)
- I revelled in recollections of [...] her lofty, her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love (154/15)
  - the fair-haired, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena (152/37)
  - These are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes —of my lost one (154/15)

Here the intensity inherent in the repetition of the article, demonstrative, and possessive, the interruption of the comma, and the accumulation of descriptive words, push the effect to a climax approaching the limits of expressive capacities. The narrator seems at a loss to portray the ineffable and has recourse to the repetition of the demonstrative in an attempt to define the divine Lady Ligeia with the banal words of the layman laced with a structure that guarantees impact and emphasis. Again, the plainer the words, the greater the effect, as in the last example above, the last sentence in the story, where the eyes of the

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<td>in some large, old, decaying city</td>
<td>dans une vaste et antique ville délabrée</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under [lip]</td>
<td>l'air doucement, voluptueusement reposé de la lèvre inférieure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that delicious vista, [...] down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path</td>
<td>cette longue avenue, splendide et vierge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect</td>
<td>une ombre faible, indéfinie, d'un aspect angélique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a slight, a very feeble, and barely noticeable tinge of colour had flushed up within the cheeks</td>
<td>une coloration légère, très faible, à peine sensible, était montée aux joues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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...dying Lady Rowena become those of the Lady Ligeia and are described by the simplest of monosyllables, given the shock Poe wishes to convey at that instant.

In other examples (124/40, 128/7, 142/25), the narrator, with the same structure, seeks to show how in awe he is of Ligeia’s beauty and nature, employing a verbal crescendo that sifts out each adjective, giving them a glory of their own. The example (152/37) illustrates the point from a different angle. When we were first introduced to the shunned Lady Rowena, she was described as “the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena” in a jaunty, brisk manner, with one adjective running into the other. In the last paragraph, when the horror of Lady Rowena’s apparition as the Lady Ligeia sends the narrator into “a tumult unappeasable”, he picks out “the fair-haired” and “the blue-eyed” as separate, haunting entities tinged with dread for the narrator —especially since the eyes are about to turn into “the full, and the black, and the wild eyes” of Lady Ligeia. So, what initially was only —and indeed scant— physical description of Lady Rowena is structurally modified by Poe at the end to emphasise the ponderous, ominous implications of “the fair-eyed, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena”. In this most intense of moments, the structure of the adjectival phrase supports, and engenders, the desired effect of sheer petrification in front of the inexplicable and the supernatural. The overall effect of this adjectival structure is to slow down the reader, to stop him in his tracks, in order to convey the awe, or fear, or admiration felt by the narrator, depending on the episode.

Where each adjective is given an individual role to play, Baudelaire’s translation is:

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling</td>
<td>et puis cette chevelure d’un noir de corbeau, lustrée, luxuriante, naturellement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tresses</td>
<td>bouclée (124/40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those eyes! Those large, those shining, those divine orbs! §</td>
<td>ces larges, ces brillantes, ces divines prunelles (128/7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia</td>
<td>elle, la toujours placide Ligeia, à l’extérieur si calme (130/16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed</td>
<td>vers Ligeia, l’aimée, l’auguste, la belle, la morte (142/23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the wan and the misty-winged Ashtophet of idolatrous Egypt</td>
<td>la pâle Ashtophet de l’idolâtre Egypte, aux ailes ténébreuses (124/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I revelled in recollections of [...] her lofty, her ethereal nature, of</td>
<td>[...] dans sa haute nature éthéréeenne, dans son amour passionné, idolâtre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>her passionate, her idolatrous love</td>
<td>(142/25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the fair-haired, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena</td>
<td>Lady Rowena [...] à la chevelure blonde, aux yeux bleus (152/37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes —of my lost one</td>
<td>voilà bien les yeux admirablement fendus (sic), les yeux noirs, les yeux étranges de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mon amour perdu (154/15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only in two of these examples does Baudelaire maintain the English order and formulation with the demonstrative and the definite article: in (128/7), Baudelaire follows closely Poe's semantic and syntactic crescendo, with the demonstrative adjective repeated and the same halting punctuation. Perhaps the relatively light and uncomplicated nature of "larges", "brillantes" and "divines" permits this construction in French; and in (142/23) we have: "N, the A, the A, the A, the A" which Baudelaire reproduces as such, admittedly with less difficulty than in (128/7), since the "article plus adjective" groups placed by Poe after the subject "Ligeia" turn "the A" into an adjectival noun in English, where "one" is understood, as is often the case in French. In both cases, then, Baudelaire can provide a translation that carries equal clout.

In three examples above, Baudelaire compensates in different ways for the rising intensity inherent in Poe's use of this structure. In (154/15), "the A, and the A, and the AN", the noun appears first in French, though Baudelaire maintains the definite article, and repeats, unlike in English, the noun: "les NA, les NA, les NA". Rhythmically the translation provides an equivalence with the English despite having to undergo a necessary syntactical inversion. In examples (124/8) and (152/37), where we find the order "the A, the AN", the difficulty of maintaining such a structure is complicated by an AN grouping where A is double-barrelled on the "adjective plus noun-ED" model: "misty-winged", "fair-haired", and "blue-eyed". Translating into French here involves placing the adjectival description after the noun, thus losing the impact of the repeated definite article in English. In the translation of (152/37) above, "the fair-haired, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena" — where the difference in presentation of Lady Rowena is so important —, the double appearance of "the" is lost in French, and the repetition "adjective plus noun-ED" with the light monosyllables also. Baudelaire does however clearly mark the different presentation of Lady Rowena: the first time she is "Lady Rowena..., à la blonde chevelure et aux yeux bleus" (138/30), whereas, in (152/37), he follows Poe's altered second description with: "Lady Rowena..., à la chevelure blonde, aux yeux bleus". Where Poe differentiates with the repetition of "the", Baudelaire compensates via punctuation and the changed position of the adjective "blonde". The evolution in the reference to Lady Rowena is therefore clear in English and in French, though the tactics employed differ.

In the remaining 3 examples above, however, Poe's use of "the", and the possessive — in (124/40), (130/16) and (142/25) —, more strongly resists Baudelaire's strategies. The impact of Baudelaire's translation of (124/40) fails to pick out "lustrée, luxuriante..." as much as in "the glossy, the luxuriant...". In (130/16), the translation of "the outwardly-calm, the ever-placid Ligeia" stays
close in literal meaning, but this entails avoiding the repetition of “the” with “la
toujours placide Ligeia, à l’extérieur si calme”. In (142/25), where Poe repeats
the possessive “her” in “her A, her AN, of her A, her AN”, the repetition is also
suppressed: Baudelaire’s translation of “her lofty, her ethereal nature...” as “sa
haute nature éthéréenne” presents a concision and fluidity where Poe’s inten­
tion was to weightily draw out the adjectival grouping as part of his slow
“recollections”.

Clearly, then, Poe’s repetition of the/this or the possessive in front of the
noun meets, in the passage into French, syntactical, and in some cases lexical,
barriers which oblige Baudelaire to be resourceful in compensating in the ways
we have seen. Where Poe invests in stylistic effects involving the article and
punctuation, there is often no “direct parallel”, only compensatory strategies
which on the whole maintain Poe’s intentions.

In Poe’s meticulously crafted and structured short story, the effect produced
by various groupings of adjectives is vital in conveying the suspense, the
delight, the awe, or the dreariness felt at different moments. The musical qua­
lity and rhythm he imparts to his adjectives carries us along at a steady pace,
or has us reading haltingly. Moments of throbbing dramatic intensity are inter­
spersed with passages of skipping tempo, where several syntactical forms come
into play, among which the adjectival groupings are essential. Translating Poe
into another language has to take all these original stylistic intentions into
account. In French finding the equivalent number of layers of meaning and
sound in one English word or phrase may require *dilution* in order to avoid
awkwardness, or *expansion* in order to express the same set of elements or
sidestepping tactics to compensate for inexistent syntax and modes of expres­
sion. The study of Poe’s adjectives in “Ligeia” shows these strategies at work.
Baudelaire will often try to compensate, for example by exploiting the relative
strangeness attached to the double adjective before the noun in French, or
some attempt at rhyme. Thanks to Baudelaire’s poetic fibre, there is minimal
loss. What loss there is, is mainly on the level of fluidity and pronounceability
(especially in part one in the present text), but can also be put down to his
desire to transfer the totality of meaning when it is not always a priority for Poe.
Making Poe’s priorities the same as Baudelaire’s pushes translation to its limits,
but also throws up questions about rhythm and sonority from one language to
another, and perhaps their relative untranslatableness. Given even the poet
Baudelaire’s awkward grappling with certain adjectival forms in English, the
common mortal might be justified in wondering how possible it is to translate
such a structure as adjectival groupings, plus the multifarious ripples of mea­
ning they share with native-speakers, in such poetically-driven prose as Poe’s.